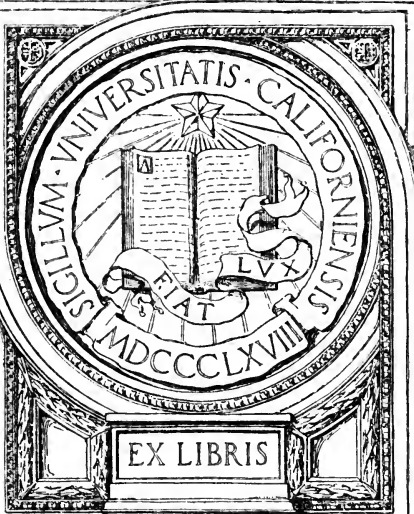


The Son of the Prefect

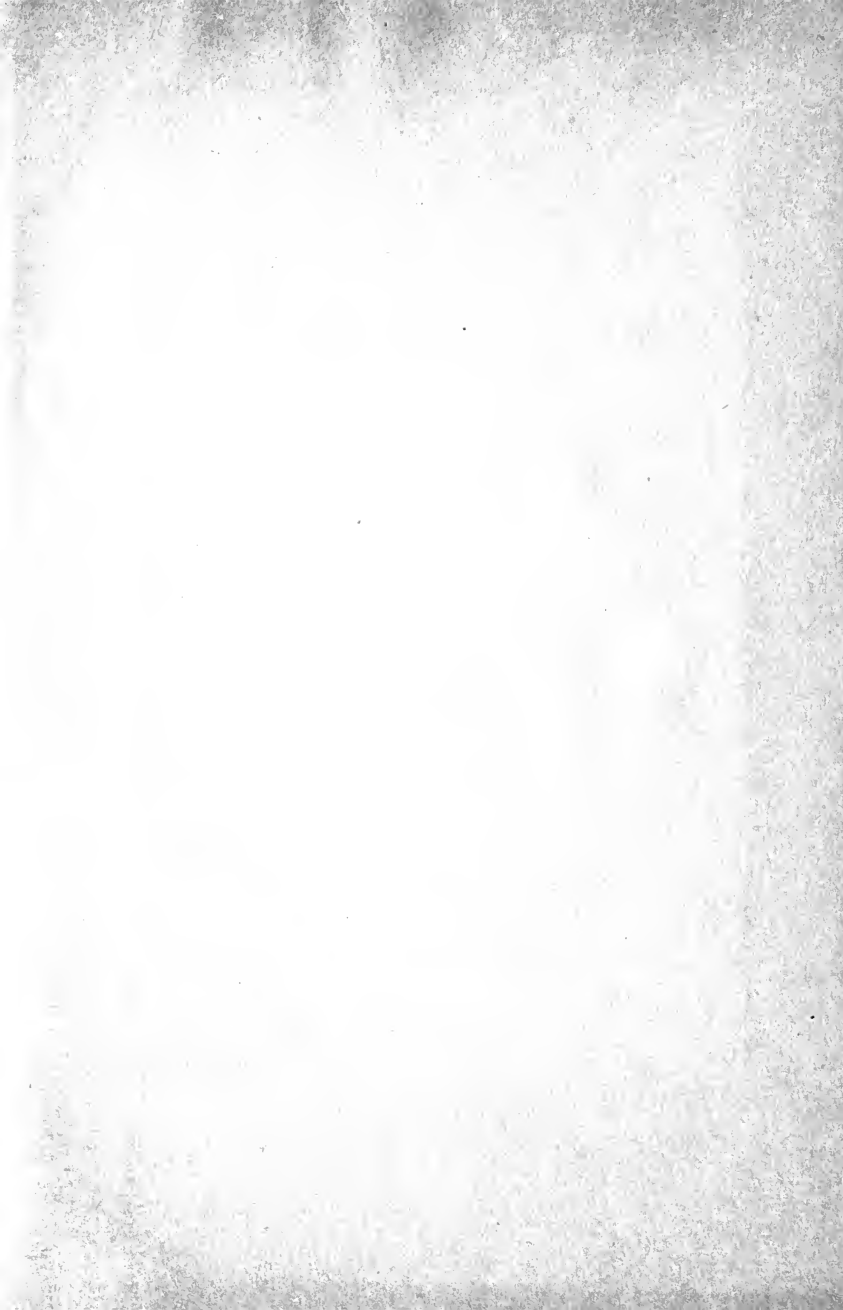
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THE SON OF THE PREFECT

*A STORY OF THE REIGN
OF TIBERIUS*

BY

EDMUND HAMILTON SEARS



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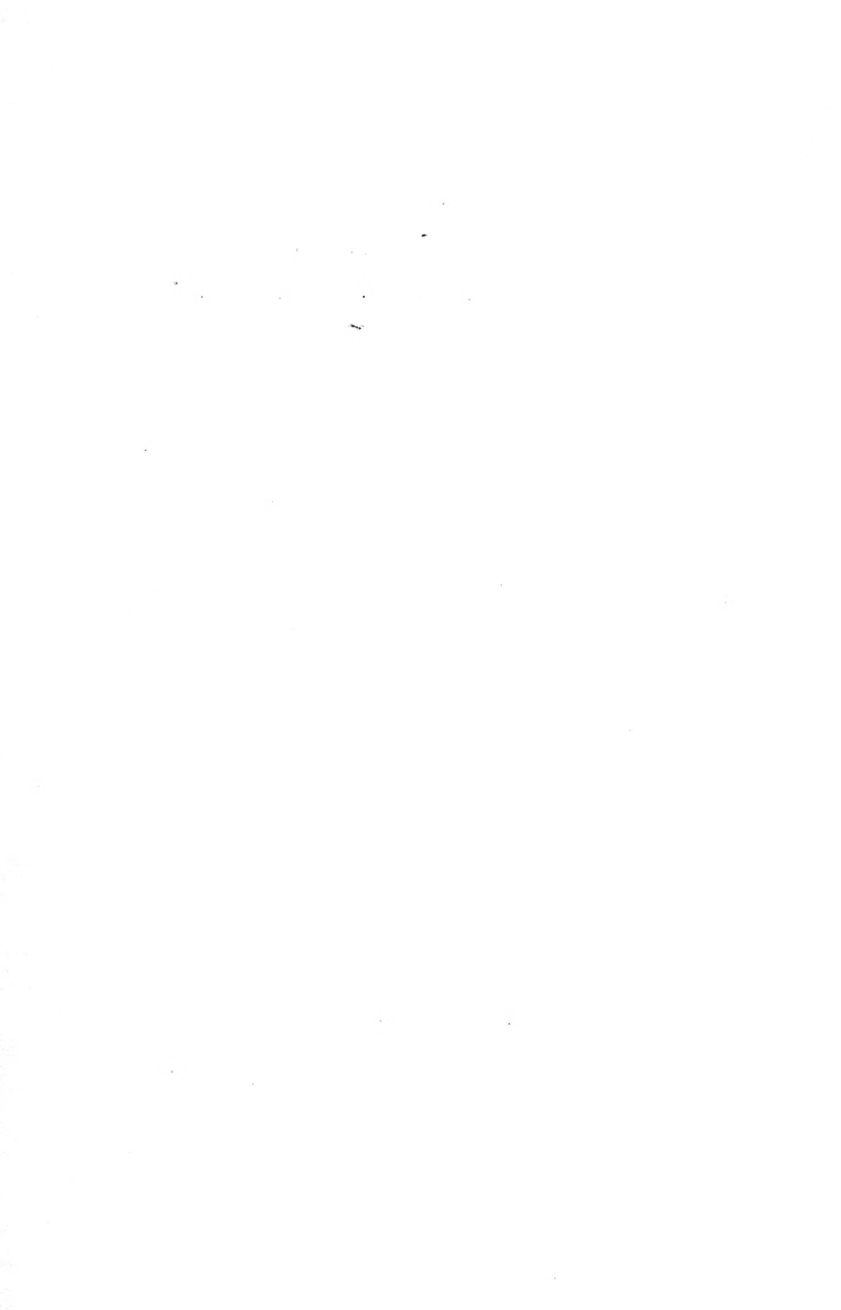
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TO THE MEMORY
OF
MY BROTHER FRANCIS
WITH WHOM I FIRST SHARED THE LOVE OF
ROMAN THINGS



THE SON OF THE PREFECT

THE SON OF THE PREFECT

I

THE great dining hall in the mansion of Cornelius Veltrius was ablaze with light. A hundred could dine in it with comfort, yet it gave the impression of sumptuousness even more than of space as its costly furnishings reflected the glow of its innumerable lamps. And costly indeed they were. The rugs were thick and their coloring was rich; the triclinium and the chairs were of woods handsomely inlaid and of bronze elaborately designed; bronze and marble statues stood like a serried rank of soldiers all around the walls; and the wall spaces and the ceiling were covered with a series of paintings artistically conceived and harmonious in tone.

Yet the effect was garish rather than beautiful. To a severe taste it would have been displeasing. The Romans of Tiberius' day loved splendor and barbaric magnificence. Their wealth was like a sea. They dipped it up and dispensed it with lavish hand. And of these money-getters and money-spenders Veltrius was one of the most prodigal. His gains were enormous. He had plundered provincials; he had bargained shrewdly; his vessels brought him rich returns from every Mediterranean shore. And he amassed

but to spend. He gave princely banquets; he fed a host of poor retainers; he filled his house with the costliest art treasures the world could show.

No wonder then that his great dining hall was splendidly furnished and adorned. No wonder that its array of objects was bewildering to the eye. Yet beautiful, rarely beautiful, were many of these costly possessions. There were bronze castings on the chairs and the triclinium that only a true artist could have designed; there were statues and busts of the most perfect Grecian workmanship. And the paintings showed that fine sense of form and color which is to be seen in the wall paintings at Pompeii and in the House of Livia on the Palatine. They all had a common theme. They traced out the wanderings of Ulysses, and showed with the same admirable touch the grotesque and gigantic Cyclops and the hound expiring at the sight of his old master.

And in keeping with this parade of artistic treasures were the preparations for the approaching feast. The triclinium, which was arranged for the customary eight guests and the host, was invitingly strewn with richly colored cushions and coverlets. Altogether fresh and attractive they looked. Had they just come from the fuller or had they been newly purchased for the occasion? But the eye of the epicure would not have lingered on them for all their alluring appearance. It would have glanced on to the table in the center which was even thus early burdened with costly and delicious viands. Most conspicuous was a huge silver bowl of wine, iced and sufficiently diluted to pre-

vent too early intoxication. Flanking it were the delicacies which Rome, mistress of the world, gathered daily from all parts of her dominions. Almost everything that the earth, the air and the sea could offer was there — fish, flesh and fowl and the most luscious fruits that grew in sunny climes or in the colder northern lands. The palms of Africa and the orchards of Asia Minor had contributed dates and juicier products of the tree; from Lake Copais in Bœotia had come the eels which the epicure pronounced better than any others; fish that had swum in Grecian waters, pheasants that had been snared by Dacian hunters, and boars that had roamed the Apennines helped to make the table attractive and luxurious; and rich old wines from the choicest vineyards in Italy awaited the connoisseur — and what well born Roman was not a connoisseur in those days of riotous living?

Such abounding good cheer was not infrequent in the dining hall of Veltrius; yet the present occasion was an unusual one. It was at the command of his son Milo that these lavish preparations had been made. For Veltrius was unstintedly generous to his two children. If he gave costly banquets himself he allowed Milo to outdo them; and on his daughter Julia he showered jewels and costly apparel and all the articles of finery that are dear to the heart of a young and beautiful woman. But though Milo had often entertained his friends in royal fashion, he had never given so sumptuous a feast as this. It was to be in honor of his friend and boon companion Marcus Agrippa, son of the City Prefect, and this day reaching the dignity, if not neces-

sarily the wisdom and the discretion, which a man is expected to attain on beginning his twenty-first year. Three years earlier, when Marcus had put on the *toga virilis*, Milo, his elder by two years, had feasted him quite bountifully; but this banquet was to put to shame all that had ever been given in that luxurious hall. It was not merely that the wines and viands were of the rarest and the costliest; the appeal to the eye was also to afford an altogether full and unusual gratification. Rome had been ransacked to provide the most skillful artists in every species of diversion which can give enjoyment to a company of young men growing riotous over their cups.

The banquet was to begin at sundown. A half hour previous, Milo repaired to the dining hall to be ready to meet any early-arriving guests. Good-humored, genial, and mentally well endowed, he was a youth whom Socrates would have delighted to confound by remorseless questioning and to force into steady, serious activity. For he had drifted into the indolent ways of that pleasure-loving period as naturally as an unguided skiff follows the current of a rushing stream. Tall, finely featured, with black hair and the aquiline Roman nose, he carried himself with true manly dignity; and in the days when Rome was contending for her very life against the mighty Hannibal he would have shown himself fully a man. It was his misfortune to grow up in a time when duty gave no clarion calls and under a roof where from childhood his every wish had been gratified.

Not greatly resembling him either in person or in

character was the guest who first arrived. Lentulus was ushered in by a swarthy Egyptian, who like the other servants of the house was clothed in spotless white linen, and was warmly greeted by his host. He was shown his appointed place on the triclinium, and the slaves whose task it was brought him water in a silver basin and a napkin. Such ablutions as the warm July evening prompted having been performed, Lentulus, who was nothing of a sybarite, left his comfortable cushions and joined his host in conversation. Walking slowly up and down the hall together, the two formed an interesting contrast. Lentulus was a head shorter than his host and slightly corpulent. His hair was red, his features were plain and of the Socratic cast. His carriage betrayed the thinker, for he walked with a slight stoop and kept his eyes, which were honest and kindly, fixed upon the ground. He was indeed a Stoic and was thoroughly true to his creed. Books of philosophy were his main delight and moral questions always interested him profoundly. Characteristically he stopped in his leisurely pacing before a painting that showed Circe turning the comrades of Ulysses into swine and said to his companion that the picture illustrated the truth of Horace's comment upon Homer, namely that his poetry proved him a better teacher than philosophers like Chrysippus and Crantor.

Before Milo could reply three more guests were ushered in and heartily welcomed. The welcome was none the less cordial because the newcomers were of the convivial sort and could contribute little to the in-

tellectual side of a symposium. Bibulus, who headed the three, was a heavy drinker; Curio, who followed next, was one of the most noted epicures in Rome; the third, Caius, hot-brained and lacking in moral sturdiness, was yet much liked by Milo's circle for his warm-heartedness and his staunch loyalty to his friends. All three took their places on the triclinium and there remained, the table with its load of dainties being a more attractive sight than the objects of art which were ranged about the hall.

It was quite otherwise with Cethegus who was the next to arrive. He was a man of thirty, tall and slender, with a keen eye and sharp features that denoted an active and discerning mind. Cynical and opinionated, he was not without kindly feeling and a high sense of honor; and his wit was so clever and searching that he was much sought by the gay and lively circles of Roman society. Joining Milo and Lentulus, he talked with them a few moments and then turned his attention to the statues, his interest in sculpture being as pronounced as was that of most cultivated Romans of his time and his eye thoroughly trained.

"Milo," he said as he stopped before a marble and surveyed it critically, "I am more than ever convinced that that Apollo was the handiwork of Scopas. The dealer that sold it to you may have been honest when he told you it was by Praxiteles. The works of the two are easily confounded, their styles are so much alike. But in the modeling of the brow and the features I see just a suggestion of the earlier severity which Praxiteles would have toned away."

“You may be right,” answered Milo good-naturedly. “But as neither Scopas nor Praxiteles can be called on to testify, I am afraid the question will never be decided.”

Just here two more guests were ushered in and Marcus alone was now wanting to make the company complete. But Marcus was the guest of honor, and the feast could not well begin without him. Yet delay was not agreeable to Curio and others who had brought a well fostered appetite to what they knew would prove a surpassingly rich and sumptuous entertainment. They demanded that the banquet begin at once.

“Why wait for him?” asked Bibulus, to whom the cool depths of the silver bowl were overpoweringly attractive. “He has no right to make us suffer because he is twenty-one to-day.”

“It is just like him to be late,” cried Caius. “He is such a wild fellow you can never count on him. Like as not he has got himself into a scrape on his way here and will not appear till everything is spoiled.”

“That sounds well from you,” said Lentulus. “You are always so cool and steady!”

“If my memory does not fail me, he served you in the same way, Milo, just three years ago to-night when you gave a dinner in his honor,” remarked a pale, slender youth, Bibrax by name, who was sure to contribute some reminiscences to an occasion of this kind.

“Oh, your memory doesn’t fail you,” drily observed Cethegus. “It never does. All the more unfortunate we!”

The laughter caused by this sally did not still the

clamor of the more insistent banqueters who demanded that at any rate all should take their places on the triclinium in order that the feast might be under way the very moment the belated guest appeared. To this Milo assented. He and Lentulus and Cethegus took the places that belonged to them; and hardly had they done so when there were heard in the corridor adjoining the sound of hurrying feet and exclamations of impatience. Then the heavy hanging that shut off the passageway was thrust aside in unceremonious fashion, and Marcus came striding into the hall, followed closely by the crest-fallen Egyptian whose crumpled linen showed that his well meant endeavor to announce and escort this lively guest had brought him a rough handling.

Indeed, a slight push or buffet from the young giant who was now entering would have been quite enough to cause the discomfiture of any ordinary man. Marcus was a model of manly strength and activity. His frame was massive, his shoulders broad, and his limbs large and splendidly developed; but his unusual height and his perfect proportions gave to his whole figure an aspect of elegance, and unless he stood with other men his vast stature was not easily realized. Yet his strength was prodigious and the mightiest athletes who frequented the gymnasiums¹ of Rome could not vie with him in feats of power and endurance. From his

¹ By the gymnasium is really meant the bath. The Romans did not have separate gymnasiums like the Greeks; nor did they cultivate the varied and graceful forms of bodily activity of which the Greeks were fond. Exercise was to them a means of acquiring strength and endurance, and they took it in connection with the bath.

boyhood he had been passionately fond of exercise, and the work of the gymnasium was to him nothing but a recreation and a pleasure. He handled every weapon with a skill that equaled that of the seasoned gladiator; and possessing untiring strength as well as skill, he had more than once defeated hardy veterans in bloodless contests with the pike and sword. Hardly an athlete in Rome was willing to don the *cæstus* and face him, so incessant and terrific were his blows. Yet his finely chiseled features and his intellectual forehead showed that he was no mere healthy animal rejoicing chiefly in the possession of uncommon strength. Nor was it that physical prowess that men are so prone to overvalue that made him a prime favorite with his companions. He was quick to read and understand others, witty and ready at repartee; and he was also kindly, prompt to show sympathy, and usually genial and good-natured. Yet all his associates knew that his wrath was fierce when it was once aroused. His features were Grecian rather than Roman, for his mother's family came of Greek stock in Southern Italy. His eyes were hazel and unusually far-sighted; and his hair which was long and curly was of a light chestnut brown.

With this abounding vitality Marcus was apt to create a breeze wherever he went. Hence, Milo and his guests were more amused than surprised to see him stride into the room ahead of the Egyptian and announce himself by crying out as he entered,

“ I've sinned again, Milo. I've sinned again. It's a crying shame I'm so late, but I've had a strange ad-

venture."

But all were quite taken aback when they saw their unceremonious comrade throw himself down in his appointed place by the side of his host, motion a slave for a beaker of wine, drain it instantly and then lie flat on his back and gaze motionless up at the ceiling. Milo himself would have humored his friend, not minding his disregard of conventional ways. But not so the rest. Whatever the reveries of Marcus were, he was not allowed to continue them undisturbed. His ears were at once assailed by a chorus of cries which were designed to arouse him from his unseasonable fit of abstraction.

"Who was she, Marcus?"

"Tell us her name!"

"Where did you find her?"

"Did you follow her far?"

"Were there any broken heads?"

"Was she fair or dark?"

"How many kisses did she give you?"

Marcus had listened unmoved to the first few bantering remarks, but the last one brought him to his feet as if he had been hit by an arrow. Jumping from his couch, he glared about him savagely and cried out in wrath,

"Who talks of kissing? Don't give low tastes to others because you have them yourselves! Does a man never look at a maid without wishing to taste her lips?"

But this protestation only made its author the mark for new jibes and fresh bantering. Few of the ban-

queters had any deep respect for woman, and a man who has ceased to honor womanly purity and virtue is slow to believe that others reverence what he has lost faith in. So instead of silencing his noisy questioners, Marcus only aroused them to fresh activity.

“It was a she!” “It was a she!” cried several triumphantly, while others insisted more clamorously than ever on knowing who the damsel was. And some there were who ridiculed Marcus for the virtuous tone he had assumed which they regarded as out of keeping with his usual standards of conduct.

“Since when have you been so scrupulous?” cried one.

“You didn’t kiss one of the maids in Delphium’s wine room the other day. Oh, no!” said another.

“And you never flirted with Scipio’s pretty slave, Canidia,” remarked Bibrax; while Curio, the epicure, who spoke seldom and then in a high-keyed drawling voice, made the embarrassing inquiry,

“Have you seen Charmion, the flower girl, lately? I tried to get a kiss from her a few days ago, but she said that since you had kissed her she had no favors to give to a homely fellow like me.”

Great was the merriment over this last thrust, and Marcus, thoroughly out of sorts, threw himself down on his couch again and lay with his head supported on one hand, sullen and dumb and utterly averse to eating and drinking or to taking any part in the gayeties of the evening. Ordinarily such taunts as he had received would have made him throw back at his companions the similar improprieties of which they were all,

with the exception of Lentulus and Cethegus, only too often guilty. But he had had an experience that touched him deeply and roused feelings that were offended by the levity of his comrades. So he lay in a mood of dejection that promised ill for the evening's entertainment and stirred those who were most intimate with him to interfere in his behalf. It was Lentulus who called out in a sharp authoritative voice that silenced them all,

“Come, come! This has gone far enough, fellows. Remember, Marcus is the guest of honor this evening.”

And Milo added, “You are here to eat and drink, good friends. Prove to me now that your appetites are as keen as your wit, and that you are no more afraid of stout old Falernian than a Roman veteran is afraid of a raw barbarian. Here's to Marcus, friends! All of you drain a cup to the bottom in honor of Marcus! You may say what you like about him, but he's the best man among us to-night.”

The toast was drunk with such hearty good will that Marcus' resentment was softened. While the feasting went on he ate and drank, though sparingly; and when he was addressed he answered readily and pleasantly. But he volunteered only brief and infrequent remarks and was strangely quiet and repressed for a man of his merry wit and abounding vitality.

The feast was a protracted one, for the table as the guests first beheld it contained only a portion of the delicacies that had been provided for the occasion by the skillful cooks of Veltrius' spacious and well appointed kitchen. The immaculately clad servants

brought on pasty after pasty, each filled with some rare game, spiced and seasoned to perfection; and these were succeeded by a variety of confections and jellies, cast in artistic molds specially designed for this banquet and composed of the costliest syrups and the daintiest sweets that the markets of Rome could furnish.

Even for a midsummer evening in Rome it was warm. Hence, as the banquet progressed and the slaves ran to and fro on their never-ceasing rounds, their white linen tunics, smooth and spotless in the beginning, became badly soiled and discomposed. But the guests dined in comfort notwithstanding the heat; for Nubian slaves waved huge fans over them and thus kept them in a never-failing and refreshing breeze.

But a man who is sated can not be tempted even with dishes that would command an epicure's approval. The time came when the guests could eat no more. Even Curio, who was such a habitual glutton that he sometimes resorted at feasts to the indecent Roman practice of taking an emetic in order to attack savory viands with renewed appetite and vigor, had had enough. The wine was still alluring and, already freely partaken of, was yet to give added heat to brains that were even now too inflamed to think with soberness. But the feasting was over. The slaves, who had been bringing on the numerous courses, all withdrew, and the spectacular entertainments which had been anticipated now began.

II

AT one end of the dining hall a stage, which had been specially constructed for the first performance of the evening, now called for the attention of the guests. The opening scene in Plautus' *Mostellaria* was to be given, and in the background had been painted on a canvas the two houses in front of which the action of the play takes place. The plot of the comedy is simple and, as is so frequently the case in the plays of Plautus, it centers about a witty slave who tries to prevent an irate father from discovering the vicious practices of his degenerate son.

In the *Mostellaria* the father has gone abroad, and in his absence his son squanders the paternal substance on gay and not wholly unblemished young men and women. While he is entertaining a group of these triflers in front of the house, the slave, ever faithful to the interests of his young master, announces that the father has unexpectedly returned and will shortly appear. The revelers flee into the house, leaving the slave to fool the father in any way he can. This he tries to do by pretending to the old gentleman that his own house is haunted and must not be entered or approached; but that his son has bought the adjoining house in order to provide a home. Of course the clumsy trick is discovered in the end, and the father, angry at being duped, has to be pacified. But at Milo's

banquet only the beginning of the play, which shows the gay young men and women making merry over their cups, was exhibited; and as the performance was not a public one, the usual methods and restrictions of the theater were set aside. The female parts were impersonated by comely young slave women and no masks were worn. The scene is a very lively one and it was acted with a good deal of spirit. The half-tipsy revelers were not restrained by any sentiments of delicacy either in their actions or their speech, and the very license of their behavior made a strong appeal to Milo's guests, who were sufficiently excited by their frequent potations to wish that they were enjoying companions equally fair, with equal freedom from the restraints of propriety. More than one loud exclamation of approval was evoked from them as a telling witticism was uttered or as the minor actors, who had no part in the dialogue, contributed to the spirit of the scene by the sheer wantonness of their behavior. Loud and long was the applause when the slave came on in haste and trepidation to announce the unexpected and unwelcome approach of the father and the revelers beat an ignominious retreat, thus intimating that this part of the evening's entertainment was ended. But although Milo's riotous guests did not feel sorry to miss the remaining scenes of the play with its comparatively tame intercourse between the deluded old man and the tricky slave, they were by no means reconciled to the disappearance of the lively slave girls who had amused and edified them by the sprightliness and the license of their conduct. Some of the bolder

spirits clamored for their return and even abandoned their couches and ran toward the stage to find them and bring them back. But Milo somewhat sternly reminded them that it was for him as their host to order the evening's programme and not for them to take matters into their own hands. So, still protesting that they should not so suddenly have been deprived of that which was giving them pleasure, they once more took their places on the triclinium.

The next show was a sham gladiatorial combat. Two old retired soldiers gave a skillful exhibition of thrust and parry with dull and pointless broadswords, but it met with little favor. "We want blood," and "Marcus could do it better," were the cries that were heard; and the two crest-fallen veterans were shouted off the stage, but not until Lentulus, honoring both their skill and the scars they had received in fighting Rome's battles, had hurried forward, given each of them a coin, and praised them for their mastery of the Roman soldiers' most formidable weapon.

Six Numidian acrobats were now introduced, who showed extraordinary nimbleness and agility in balancing, tumbling and forming pyramids. They were lithe, highly trained men in the prime of life, and for a short time their feats held and interested the assembled company. There is something in the perfect control of the bodily powers that fascinates the mind and causes a thrill in the spectator, who pays unconscious homage to the self-denial and the long weary hours of practice by which alone the muscles can be brought into perfect obedience to the will. But the

spectators who were gazing at these admirably trained men, who did the most difficult feats with the utmost ease and without a sign of nervousness, were Romans, and youthful Romans, accustomed to the bloody exhibitions of the arena and made thirsty for excitement by wine. Before the performance of the Numidians was over, they grew weary of it and clamored for something more thrilling. "Away with them, Milo! We've seen enough of them," they shouted. "This is too tame. Show us something that will stir the blood!"

Their freedom in criticizing and in making demands of their host in this dictatorial fashion was not displeasing to Milo. He knew only too well what kinds of entertainment would be acceptable to his guests; and their dissatisfaction with what had been already offered assured him that what was to come would secure their hearty approbation. To the servant who was chief overseer of the entire household and who was superintending and carrying out the evening's programme he gave the necessary signal, and the band of Numidians gave way to three Greek female tumblers who were trained to do feats of real danger to the music of the flute.

This performance was given on the floor of the dining hall, close to the triclinium, that it might be viewed to the best advantage. With the girls came the flute player who employed and had trained them; also a boy who brought with him a box containing a number of sharp-pointed swords with their hilts securely fixed in square blocks of wood. Eighteen of these swords he

placed in a circle which had a diameter that was about half as much again as the height of a tall man. As the girls stood still during these preparations they were much admired by the banqueters. They had regular and very beautiful features, thoroughly Grecian in character; and their shapely limbs were shown to advantage by that scanty costume which may be seen on Greek vases and which is indeed necessary in order to give that ease and freedom of motion which the performance of perilous feats demands.

When the swords had been placed, the girls, one after another, vaulted lightly over the bristling points into the ring. They landed on their hands and, so balancing themselves, walked several times around the circle, just inside the line of swords. It seemed as easy for them to walk on their hands as on their feet. Then the boy attendant contracted the circle of swords considerably, and while he was doing so two of the girls stood close together face to face, in the center of the ring, with their arms tightly twined about each other, and the third climbed lightly upon their shoulders. The two who supported her were sturdily built, of equal height, and their resemblance to each other plainly showed them to be sisters. The third was more slenderly proportioned and not quite so tall.

All through the performance the director had been playing a rather slow air upon his flute. He now played still slower, and as he began to do so the slenderer girl mounted on the heads of the other two, standing first on one foot and then on the other, while the sisters turned round and round keeping time to the

music. Very gradually the measures of the flute grew more rapid, and as they became so the two sisters turned proportionally faster. Meanwhile, the balancer stepped down upon the shoulders of her supporters and from that position placed her hands upon the heads of the two and balanced herself upon them with her legs in air, while the sisters continued to turn about. After she had maintained herself thus for a short time, the director ceased playing and gave a short sharp whistle. The sisters stopped turning and braced themselves; and the balancer launched herself forward into the air by a quick and powerful movement of the arms and landed on her feet outside the ring of swords.

The last feat performed by the tumblers was an exhibition of head balancing. The swords were placed in two rows about three feet apart, and one of the sisters walked between the two lines, supporting at the same time the balancer, who skillfully maintained her equilibrium with her head resting on that of the one beneath her. Half the distance down the two lines of swords was safely completed, when the spectators were seized with horror; for the girl who was being carried, lost her balance, cried out in fright, and, in spite of all efforts to save herself, began to fall. But quick as a flash the third performer, who had been standing some ten feet away, sprang to her assistance, caught her by the feet as she fell and lowered her gently to the floor, safely outside the row of swords.

A cry of relief came from several of the young men, and the impulsive Caius declared that he had never

had such an anxious and unhappy moment in his life.

"You needn't have been anxious," said the ironical Cethegus. "It was planned beforehand. It was all a part of the performance."

"Cethegus always has to play the cynic," drawled Curio, whose indolent nature had really been roused, in spite of the pasties he had eaten, by the beauty of the girls and their astonishing skill. "That slender one was a little darling, and my heart gave a loud thump when she began to fall. I believe she had a narrow escape. If she had fallen on one of those swords I shouldn't have eaten for twenty-four hours."

"Say twelve, Curio," said Lentulus. "The grief that would keep you from eating longer than that is something that none of us could imagine."

"Why don't you marry her, Curio?" said Milo. "I don't believe you ever saw a girl before who could weaken your appetite for even half an hour."

"Jupiter preserve me!" cried Curio. "What could I do with a wife?"

"Feed her," shouted Bibulus, to the amusement of the company; for this seemed all that Curio, with his limited mental range, could do by way of entertainment.

"But come! let us drink to the pretty ones!" cried Bibulus. "Why, bless me, they've gone away while we've been talking. By Pollux, I'm sorry. I meant to share a cup of wine with that tall one who had the curly golden hair and the bright blue eyes. Say, bring them back, you scowling disciple of Pan, or I'll break your flute over your ugly mouth! Bring them back, I

say! We'll do them no harm."

"No, no!" said Milo, moved more by regard for decency than by principle. "If you want mischief of that sort, Bibulus, you know where to go for it. You shan't get it here."

"Well, they were dears at any rate," said Bibulus, "and I don't believe a word that dried up mummy of a Cethegus said about the balancing girl's fall. It was pure accident, pure accident. Go to Egypt, Cethegus, and get into a tomb! You'd pass for a mummy any day. You haven't the flesh and blood of a man."

"Perhaps you have too much flesh and blood to think well," said Marcus, whose long mood of apathy had not prevented him from watching all that took place. "Cethegus was quite right about the fall. It was no accident."

"How do you know that?" cried Bibulus.

"They were all too free from excitement," answered Marcus. "Our friend the flute player did not show the slightest concern. And the girl who caught the balancer was on the right side of the sword row and just far enough away to make it seem thrilling, but quite near enough to save her friend. Do you dare to say no to this, you rogue of a flutist?"

The flute player had lingered to pay his parting respects to the company and perhaps to hear a word of praise about the performance. For such a question as was thus roughly put to him he was unprepared; but his Grecian quickness of wit and readiness to dissimulate did not fail him. He bowed low, smiled and said suavely,

“The performance is very dangerous. It is easy for accidents to happen.”

“That’s all we shall get out of him on that score,” said Milo. “But tell me, my good fellow, are these girls Athenians?”

“No, good master. I get them from the mountain villages where they grow up hardy and strong.”

“Have you trained others?”

“Yes, many.”

“How long does it take?”

“Three, four, or five years; sometimes from childhood.”

“Why so long?”

“Such great skill comes very slowly, and then strength must be developed very gradually or they would break down.”

“Do you pay them well?” asked Lentulus.

The flute player shrugged his shoulders. “They eat well and sleep well and see the world. What more could anyone wish?” Then he bowed low once more and left the room.

An Egyptian snake charmer now came upon the stage, bringing with him a basket with a tight fitting cover. With him came another performer on the flute, who carried his musical instrument in one hand and in the other a bag of stout cloth. Intense interest in the performance that was to take place was roused by the announcement of Milo that the charmer was to handle Egyptian asps whose fangs had not been drawn. Very reluctantly and only for a very large emolument had he consented to run this risk.

"How do you know he is not fooling you?" inquired Marcus.

"He will first of all give proof that the serpents are deadly. That is part of the agreement."

Marcus said no more and the performance began. Out of his bag the flute player drew two small and ill-conditioned dogs, one of which he held by the neck in each hand. Then the charmer opened his basket, gave a sharp continued hiss, and straightway two asps crawled forth. No sooner had they reached the floor of the stage than the flutist threw a dog at each so forcibly that the asps were enraged and buried their fangs viciously in the defenseless animals, who yelped piteously and showed the utmost terror. The very instant that the jaws of the snakes had closed upon the flesh of the dogs, the charmer and his confederate sprang upon them. Each of them seized an asp by the throat and, apparently not without difficulty, pulled the exasperated reptile from its victim. The asps were now put back in the basket, and the dogs, who had utterly collapsed, were passed to the young men on the triclinium. Their bodies were warm but they were quite dead.

"You see how poisonous the serpents are?" said Milo to Marcus.

"I see," answered Marcus without farther comment.

The charmer waited a few moments in order that the asps, as he explained, might become quiet, and then gave a signal to his partner who began to play a slow soothing air upon his flute. Again the charmer opened his basket; again the asps showed themselves and

crawled slowly forth upon the floor. The charmer grasped one of them very gently with his thumb and forefinger just behind its ugly triangular head and, raising it slowly and cautiously, let it coil on the top of his head. There it remained for a while, vibrating its head and neck to the rhythm of the flute. The flutist played faster. The serpent quickened its vibrations accordingly. Then the time of the music became exceedingly slow, and the asp now crawled down, coiled round the charmer's neck, moved about over his arms and shoulders, and was finally lifted up again gently by the neck and deposited in the basket.

The charmer now took up the other serpent, which lay coiled upon the floor listening to the music, and succeeded in coiling it also upon his head. But the animal seemed to resent being disturbed and showed its excitement by dilating the loose skin on its neck, like the hooded cobra of India to which it is related. A moment later, to the dismay of those who were watching the performance, it crawled down, coiled itself on the man's shoulder and bit him viciously on the cheek. The man gave a scream, dropped upon the stage and lay still, as if he knew he had met his fate and submitted to it with true oriental resignation.

His confederate, however, sprang forward, removed the angry serpent and, acting with great care, secured it in the basket; while Milo and his guests rushed to the stage to see what could be done for the stricken man. They all crowded about him and some of them earnestly inquired if there was no remedy that could save his life.

“There is none,” said the flute player. “My friend will be dead in a very short time. No man can be bitten by an Egyptian asp and live. Let your steward, good master, pay me the money that was promised, and let your slaves carry my friend outside. I will take him home in my cart.”

“I will pay you double what I agreed,” cried Milo, full of remorse. “This is a sorry business. I had no right to make a man risk his life to please my friends.”

“Not so fast,” said Marcus, who had been closely watching the prostrate man. “Some of you keep guard over that rascal and his basket while I examine this fellow.”

Thereupon he knelt down, looked closely and intently at the features of the charmer, put his ear to his heart and felt of his pulse. Then he arose and gave the man a vigorous kick.

“Get up, you knave!” he said. “You will live to be a fraud for many a long year yet. This is all a sham,” he added, turning to his companions. “The poison of the asp acts quickly, almost instantly; but this man’s features are not swelled, his color is natural, his breathing is regular and easy and his pulse is good. He’s a cheat, as I felt sure from the beginning.”

Meanwhile, the charmer had got upon his feet, looking very sheepish but by no means ready to acknowledge that the performance was the sham that it appeared to be.

“Your pardon, good master,” he said, turning to Milo. “I admit that I have deceived you, for I did not take the risk you thought I did. The serpents are

deadly, but long ago I discovered an antidote to their poison which no one else, not even my friend here, knows anything about. I have taken this antidote for many years, and my system is so full of it that the poison of the asp does not affect me at all. Yes, I have deceived you, and I ask your pardon a thousand times. But I have given you the excitement of seeing me handle the most poisonous serpent in the world. So, please give me my money, good master, and let me and my friend go away."

This was all so plausibly said that Milo was inclined to think it true and to do as the man requested; but before he could reply, Marcus said sharply to the charmer,

"You are lying. There is no antidote to the poison of the asp. The fangs of the serpents were certainly drawn."

"The master is pleased to use hard words," said the Egyptian very suavely, "but I am telling the truth. I swear it by Isis and Osiris."

"You may swear it by all the dirty gods and men of your dirty land, if you wish; but you are lying."

"Then why did the dogs die, master?"

"Because you killed them."

"That was not possible, master," replied the Egyptian, still retaining his bland, oily manner and not betraying the slightest irritation. "You would have detected us."

"True enough, Marcus," said the good-natured Milo. "I fancy there is some trickery here, but we can not prove it. I think I will pay the fellow what I

agreed and let them both go."

"I can prove it and I will," answered Marcus. Thereupon he rushed to the basket, and before his companions could divine his purpose and stop him, they saw him open the basket, seize an asp, blow hard in its face to irritate it and then offer his bare arm to its bite. The enraged reptile instantly plunged its teeth into his flesh. With perfect unconcern, Marcus then threw the creature back into the basket, closed the cover and said to Milo,

"You see I have proved it."

"Yes, if you don't die in ten minutes," said Lentulus, alarmed and anxious.

"Oh, I shan't die. When those two rogues took the asps off the dogs, I saw just for an instant a tiny flash, as if from some bit of polished metal. Each of them had, beyond a doubt, a needle-like dagger in his left hand and stabbed the dog in the brain or the heart as he took away the asp. You will find the wound somewhere if you choose to examine the dogs carefully. I took no risk in letting the snake bite me. These rascals think too much of themselves to play with poisonous asps. Give them no money and send them packing at once."

The two impostors needed no further hint. They saw their trick was fully exposed and were only too glad to get away with a whole skin. The guests resumed their places, and Milo announced that the final entertainment of the evening, to be afforded by some Syrian dancing girls, would now be given unless they had all had excitement enough for one evening and

wished to go home.

“Go home when we can see dancing girls?” cried Bibulus. “We are not children in arms, Milo. Why don’t you ask us if we want milk to drink?”

So the girls were summoned and twelve of them came dancing in, their gauzy costumes of varied and pleasing colors, their motions full of poetry and grace. They did not mount the stage, the space of which was altogether too contracted for their breezy and expansive movements. Now each one danced seemingly as she willed, and the whole spacious hall was alive with motion as the whirling figures rapidly glided from one end of it to the other so lightly and airily that their passage seemed more like the flight of winged creatures than the more cumbrous advance that is acquired by contact with mother earth. Again, they grouped themselves and went through intricate figures with unfaltering precision, constant flux and change and never ending variety. Indeed, their ceaseless activity, never violent and always full of grace and charm, seemed like those soothing and continuous activities of nature which, quiet though unresting, give to the wearied senses a feeling of repose. They seemed like the steady falling of snowflakes on a windless day; like the sighing of a summer breeze through waving branches; or like the gentle murmur of a quiet sea as it breaks upon the shore.

“The Greek maidens were clumsy compared to these dainty creatures,” remarked the ever impulsive and enthusiastic Caius.

“Yes,” said his neighbor, Bibrax. “Skillful

though the Greek girls were, I am now wondering how I ever admired them."

After a number of figures had been given the group dissolved, and once more the whirling dancers moved singly about the room. Sometimes they passed very close to the youths upon the triclinium, and several, in a spirit of sauciness and audacity, would wave a salutation as they passed or make an alluring motion; but before the pleased and excited youth could respond, the dancer would be far away and utterly oblivious of his presence and his signals.

Two of the twelve had for some reason put on masks, and one of these two passed close to Marcus several times and lightly touched him with a fan as she went by. Ordinarily he would have responded readily to such an advance, but his present moodiness, which had not been shaken off in spite of the exciting experience with the snake charmer, caused him to be annoyed rather than pleased by the attentions of the dancer. But her repeated endeavor to rouse his interest finally made him at least curious enough to watch her closely as she again approached. This time, seeing that his eyes were upon her, she gave a signal to indicate caution, slowed her steps as she neared him and dexterously thrust a billet under his sandal as she passed by. The act was quite unobserved by Marcus' neighbors, so cleverly was it done and so intent were they all in watching the dancers, and Marcus possessed himself of the folded missive and read it without attracting attention. It said: *The lady Julia has bidden me give you this and she hopes that you will wait on her to-mor-*

row.

The dancing now grew more rapid, losing thereby some of its charm but appealing all the more strongly to the revelers, especially to those who had drunk without moderation. The more riotous spirits among them watched the dancers with growing excitement and, losing control of themselves, began to leap from the triclinium and pursue the whirling figures. But the girls had anticipated this attempt to break down the barriers of decency. In response to some signal known only to themselves they had assembled near the stage, and thence they glided rapidly out of the room.

The desperate youths would have pursued them, but Milo, assisted by Lentulus and Marcus, blocked the way. "Bring them back! Bring them back, Milo! We will have them back!" shouted Bibulus and Caius and others equally wild. But Milo positively refused, and the intoxicated revelers drowned their disappointment by further potations. They rushed to the wine bowl and drained beaker after beaker, till they could but throw themselves down upon the triclinium utterly bereft of their senses. Some of them, indeed, fell upon the floor and dropped at once into a heavy sleep. These were with difficulty conveyed home by their slaves. Marcus, Lentulus and Cethegus thanked Milo for his generous entertainment and unaided sought their respective abodes.

III

THE political tyranny of the Orient was barred from European civilization by Marathon and Salamis. Its household tyranny was not so easily confined to Asiatic shores. That petty despotism was so far exercised in ancient Greece and Rome as to keep women in seclusion and to prevent the free intercourse of the sexes that prevails in the modern western world.

Against this seclusion the women of Athens made protest, as the plays of Aristophanes bear witness. At Rome the barriers were actually beaten down, but the freedom that was gained was terribly abused. Women were not content with passing beyond the domestic threshold and sitting in the theater. They contested in the arena and openly indulged in wanton and shameless living.

But with all this freedom the restrictions that had long existed could not be wholly set aside. Not even under the lax usages of the Empire could the sexes meet unrestrainedly. The widely varying functions that bring men and women together to-day were not even conceivable to the Roman mind in the days of Tiberius. The lawn or garden festivity, the social reception, the club dinner, the ball attended by both sexes, to say nothing of the more solemn assemblages gathered by organized philanthropic effort or by re-

ligious zeal, were foreign to the whole spirit and structure of Roman society. Still the leaven of unrest and innovation was at work. Traditions were defied by the unprincipled and the audacious. Men and women mingled on occasions when usage and convention would have kept them apart.

Such occasions were created especially by the ambitious, who tried to gain social prestige by defying the restraints under which the adventurous and the morally easy-going were now chafing. And such an occasion had been made by Latinus Latiaris about a month before Milo's banquet in honor of his friend Marcus took place. This unscrupulous man, who afterwards showed his depraved character by bringing the knight Sabinus foully to his death, invited members of various well known Roman families to come to an evening entertainment at his house on the Esquiline. The entertainment was to be partly literary, and Remmius Palaemon had been chosen to edify and instruct the assembled guests. This rhetorician of unsavory character possessed a remarkable memory and a unique power of expressing himself extemporaneously in meter. Even a Roman audience, thirsting for excitement, could for a short time be held and charmed by his fluent speech. But Latiaris knew well that he must provide other gratification than poetry and rhetoric. Accordingly, the clever master of verbosity was to be followed by dancers and other performers who ministered to the senses rather than to the mind. Women as well as men were included in the invitation; and women of all ages gathered on the

appointed evening at the brilliantly lighted atrium in the house of Latiaris.

There were elderly dames, obese, painted and powdered, whose dull faces were only animated by a beady and malicious eye. There were patrician matrons whose clear-cut features showed even in age the stately dignity of an imperious race. There were wives of wealthy plebeians, richly gowned and richly jeweled, who moved joyously but clumsily through the brilliant throng. No little satisfaction did they take in elbowing the haughty descendants of the men who had brought the Gracchi to a bloody end. There were women whose one delight was in scandal and whose taste found abundant gratification in those licentious times. Instinctively these grouped themselves together, and the animated whisper, the murmurs of astonishment and the suppressed laughter over the witty and salacious story, gave evidence of unworthy enjoyment. There were fond mothers with no eye for any but their own daughters; and there were daughters themselves, graceful, stately, fair at all times, and now radiantly fair as their eyes sparkled with the glow of joyous youthful womanhood.

Palaemon was about to speak. The guests began to seat themselves. Among them was Cethegus, with whom the reader has already made acquaintance. He found a place in the rear where he could survey the whole assemblage to his satisfaction. Scarcely had he taken his seat, however, when he was eagerly accosted by an acquaintance, Calvius Tubero by name, who pointed to a tall and strikingly beautiful girl and de-

manded to know who she was.

Cethegus was bored. Calvius he regarded as an empty-headed coxcomb, and he was not pleased to find that he was to have such an uninteresting person as his neighbor. He did not, therefore, show a responsive spirit to the excited mood of his questioner. Amused and at the same time disdainful, he looked for a few moments at the youth's well oiled and perfumed locks and vacuous face. But though caustic and cynical, he was not unmannerly and he presently replied,

"That is Julia, the daughter of Cornelius Veltrius."

"By Pollux, she's a peacock! I tell you she's the handsomest woman here to-night."

"You needn't speak as if you were trying to set some one right. There is no one who will gainsay you."

"How tall and magnificent she is! That quarrelsome wife of Jupiter couldn't vie with her. Why, she moves about like a queen."

"She's likely to be one sometime."

"What do you mean?"

"She is very ambitious, and ambition helped by such beauty can win anything. She may be an emperor's wife some day."

"You know her then?"

"I know her brother Milo. I go to her father's house."

"Cethegus, I want to know Milo too. Make me acquainted!"

"Thank you! I fear I must decline the honor."

“ But why? ”

“ Milo has friends enough. If he had to know all the young men who would like to meet him on account of his sister, he would have to imitate the politician and get a parasite to go about with him and whisper the names of those he saw approaching.”

“ But I must know him. I must get acquainted with that beautiful sister of his.”

“ What for? To make her an offer of marriage? ”

“ Why not? I’m a decent sort of a fellow, as I told you; and I’m rich as Crassus was.”

Cethegus looked about him. The chairs in which he and Calvius sat were so placed that their conversation could not easily be overheard. All around was the buzz of people busily talking, for the rhetorician had not yet been presented to his audience. Apparently there was still a brief opportunity for further speech. So he turned to his tiresome companion and said,

“ Calvius, let me give you a word of advice. Julia, the daughter of Veltrius, is the most beautiful woman in Rome. She is as clever and accomplished as she is beautiful. She is only twenty, but she has the mind and the maturity of a much older woman. She has read and studied much. She knows all that Euripides and Ovid and Horace can teach about men and women, and all that Aristotle and Cicero have to tell us about the state. Yet her heart is not in such things. She wants power and greatness. She seeks knowledge simply to use it for that end. And she will use it with rare skill. She is high-spirited, audacious, witty, and

quick to read other people. She is by no means without heart and her affection once given will be like an oak tree whose roots are deep enough to make it stand against the storms. But it will only be given to a man who can win for her the things she wants. Take my advice, then, and don't try to get acquainted with her family with a view to winning her unless you have a good deal to offer her besides money! And to speak plainly, my perfumed friend, I don't think you have very much. If you should find means of knowing her, she might amuse herself with you. She would very likely use you if she saw that your wealth gave you influence. But she would not think you were anything better than a joke. So, unless you can go to her with a note from Tiberius, saying that he has decided to make you heir to the Empire, you will do well to keep away from her altogether. Even your decency would count for little with her. She likes men who can do things, and honestly she would like you better if you had been the undoing of many a pretty maid and were considered the most dangerous man in Rome. A man of that kind she would take some pride in bringing to her feet. But I see that the disciple — shall I say of Homer or of Plato? — is about to begin and I must stop. But if you are half as wise as you ought to be, I have said enough."

Palaemon's facility in expression was so great that he succeeded in amusing his audience for the better part of an hour. At the end of that time he was clever enough to see that his hearers were beginning to long for the less intellectual and less refined enjoyments that

had been promised them. He therefore brought to a summary close a brilliant but highly flavored parody of Ovid's charming story of Pyramus and Thisbe, into which he had worked many fancies of a decidedly salacious character; but so subtly were they suggested that open criticism could not well be made upon them. He was followed by dancing girls, whose performance was received by most of those present with much favor and was not indeed immodest. Many of the women there would have resented any rude affront to their sense of decorum, and Latiaris was too wise though by no means too high-minded to offend them. But there were a few of the guests who found this bald appeal to the senses rather tiresome than enjoyable, and among these were Cethegus and the daughter of Veltrius. As the company had begun to circle about somewhat freely after the rhetorician had stopped speaking, these two soon chanced to find themselves face to face, though possibly the footsteps of Cethegus had been guided less by chance than by intention.

"Our host is liberal," said he, after they had exchanged greetings. "He has drawn freely upon the Muses for our entertainment."

"Muses? Muses? Do you mean to tell me that those scrawny creatures ever footed it with Apollo upon the slopes of Helicon?"

Cethegus looked critically at the dancers and shook his head. "Impossible," he said. "Apollo had taste. He could not have endured such intimacy."

"Where are your Muses, then?"

“Where Publius Ovidius Naso is, perhaps. He was with us to-night, but we did not see him.”

“You evade me very adroitly, but I will be answered. What Muses are here to-night, if only as ghosts?”

“Can you ask after hearing Palaemon’s varied and wordy feat? Polyhymnia surely taught him rhetoric; Clio, the art of narrating tales with touches that make Herodotus and Livy seem tame; none but Calliope could have shown him how to imitate Vergil; Euterpe it must have been that suggested those amusing parodies of Horace’s lyrics; and that spicy account of the amorous Pyramus and his beloved Thisbe could only have been inspired by Erato. Hence, you see that five of the Nine Erudite Ladies have already contributed to our amusement; and you have only to look at those dancers to realize that Terpsichore has also been pressed into service for the occasion. Six Muses altogether have been called upon. Was I not right, therefore, in saying that our host had provided liberally for us?”

“Yes. The pears, I admit, are abundant. Do you like their flavor?”

“I should not swallow them whole and be choked, like poor Drusus.”

“A victim to gluttony. What an ignoble end!”

“No, a victim to sport. He was simply trying to play ball with his mouth.”

“I am sure it was gluttony. We Romans are all so greedy.”

“There are exceptions. I for one do not gulp my

pleasures."

"A shining exception you, who go with the most riotous youths in Rome."

"One of the leaders of them being your own brother."

"Milo! He only condemns you. He has no ambition."

"And would only be a mark for the informers if he had."

"*Ἄπαντα γὰρ τοι τῶ φοβουμένῳ φοφεῖ.*' Read Sophocles and be ashamed."

"That means, does it not? 'The timid man hears noises all the time.'"

"Yes, and he also sees 'a scorpion watching under every stone.'"

"I must search my memory for a stichomuthia, though it is long since I have looked at Sophocles."

"No, there has been stichomuthia enough between us already. Search rather for the will to rise. If you rise high enough, the informers cannot touch you."

Julia passed on and Cethegus tried to be amused by the diversions, chiefly spectacular, that one after another were presented. Two Greek jugglers, who kept a large number of colored balls in the air at the same time, he found entertaining. A Chaldaean astrologer, who made a clever attempt to predict the futures of some of the guests, really interested him by the adroitness of his guessing. But he was rather pleased than sorry when the company dispersed shortly before the midnight hour; and as he wended his way homeward, he found himself wondering what the men who crushed

Hannibal would have thought of the evening's entertainment, with its mingling of the sexes, its ostentation, and its appeal to the lower emotions.

IV

CETHEGUS had accurately pictured Julia to his 'perfumed friend.' Tall, stately, with perfect features, dark lustrous eyes, and a brilliant complexion set off by abundant raven black hair, the daughter of Veltrius might well be considered the most beautiful woman in Rome. She was fully conscious of her beauty. She was conscious, too, that she had wit and cleverness, and she was eager to know the world. She had only to know it, she felt sure, to subdue and to command it. Her one constant longing was for power.

Yet, as Cethegus had affirmed, she had a heart. She was passionately attached to Marcus, and she was growing impatient because he did not show unmistakably that he returned her affection. Willful and exacting, she was beginning to manifest her impatience without due caution and reserve.

That her feelings were not well regulated and her temper was imperious was not altogether her own fault. From childhood she had been petted and humored. Her mother was a patrician of illustrious family and was excessively proud of the daughter who gave such unmistakable signs of distinguished lineage. Her father was of humbler origin and he was even more exultant over the fact that a strain of high breeding was strikingly apparent in his offspring. So

both parents indulged Julia's every whim and unconsciously did all they could to make her self-willed.

For all that, she was by nature too womanly, too self-respecting and too proud to betray easily her most profound and sacred feelings. But she had a peculiar sense that Marcus had belonged to her ever since she had known him. Their acquaintance began when she was fifteen and he a year older. Even then, so rapidly had she matured under the glowing sun of Italy, she was not too young to feel deeply and to cherish soaring ambitions. In Marcus she saw a youth destined for large achievement. If she could stand at his side, what might they not win together? His intimacy with Milo brought him often to her father's house. Very adroitly she cultivated his acquaintance and established a relation of sympathy and friendship. The sympathy was indeed genuine, for they had much to share; and on her part it soon deepened into a profound regard and affection.

This affection she felt it natural that Marcus should reciprocate. She was sure that she was the one woman in the world fitted to stand at his side and help him attain the supreme success that belonged to him. But time passed and Marcus gave no sign that he also felt this to be true. Accordingly, she tried to secure for herself a larger place in his thought, considering it a not unwomanly part to fan into a flame the sparks that she felt sure had been already kindled.

And in truth Marcus was not indifferent. His temperament was ardent. As events were soon to show, he was ready to be profoundly swayed by passion.

But so great was his longing for action that his thoughts were not upon marriage. He had a wild and restless craving to do dangerous and daring deeds. Moreover, he was sensitive to the charm of womanly reserve and delicacy. Hence, Julia, in her confidence that the affection she yearned for really existed and only needed to find its channels of expression, was making the mistake that a woman almost invariably makes when she takes the initiative in dealing with what is at once the most profound and the most complex of all the emotions. She was making Marcus less inclined to seek her society.

Naturally, therefore, he was not pleased to receive her summons at Milo's banquet. For a particular reason he was decidedly displeased. Still, he did not for a moment think of disregarding the request. Accordingly, the day after the banquet found him making his way to the mansion of Veltrius on the Aventine Hill.

Accustomed to have her way in all things, whether or not she ran counter to the ideas and conventions of her times, Julia received her friends of either sex in a parlor of her own. It was a richly furnished and decorated room that was entered from the atrium and also from a private corridor that led to her own apartment. Here Marcus was shown; and, familiar though he was with the room, he gazed searchingly about him while he awaited her coming. The two entrances were closed with crimson hangings. The walls were decorated with reds that shaded into yellow; but spaces had been reserved for paintings that

had been laid directly on the walls with the brush; and the ceiling had been adorned in a similar way.

The pictures all had a common theme. They represented women in action. On the ceiling was depicted Antigone throwing dust on the body of her brother. On the walls were representations of Nausicaa playing ball with her maidens by the river, Artemisia guiding her vessel at Salamis, Camilla contending with Æneas, and Cloelia swimming the Tiber. The paintings had all been cleverly designed and they had been executed with admirable skill. Hence, their respective subjects were easily understood and their quiet tones were in pleasing contrast to the sumptuousness of the room. Strong color met the eye when it was directed to the floor, where lay a large purple Babylonian rug; while statuettes of marble and bronze, tables of onyx, and chairs with elaborately designed bronze legs resting on silver feet gave the apartment an air of luxury and of lavish ornamentation. Easily might one have a feeling of oppression after lingering long in it.

Quite in keeping with the tone of the apartment was the appearance of Julia herself when she entered it after Marcus had waited for her a few moments. She bore herself like a princess and she was arrayed like one. Her loose garment well revealed her lithe and sinuous figure. It was of crimson silk, richly embroidered and bordered with a broad band of white. About her neck was a chaplet of pearls; and rubies, emeralds and sapphires flashed from the bracelets on her uncovered arms and from the gold ornaments

that bound the massive coils of her hair. Animated at all times, she had now that peculiarly winsome and joyous expression which a woman wears when she meets the man she loves. Her eyes sparkled with pleasure and she was bewitchingly and gloriously beautiful as she advanced to meet Marcus with stately step, yet with her face wreathed in smiles, her hand outstretched and her whole presence betokening welcome. Almost would Marcus, despite himself, have clasped her in his arms and uttered the words of endearment which his heart assured him would not be unwelcome, had he not had in his mind a sweeter and purer vision of womanly loveliness.

Somewhat coldly he went forward to meet her, and his greeting, which was formal and constrained, gave no response to her own expressive and animated manner. Deeply chagrined by his reserve, she yet maintained sufficient control over her feelings to prevent him from seeing any outward evidence of the wound he had given. She had not, indeed, the power to conceal her emotions long and to suffer and give no sign after being exasperated by slights and by continuous failure to gain her cherished ends. But she could fight a woman's battle with energy and spirit and, in spite of Marcus' reserved manner, her own greeting had no lack of cordiality and heartiness.

"So you really deigned to come," she exclaimed as she seated herself near him and spoke in a tone of lively raillery. "You were so moody last night that I wondered whether your high and mighty lordship could so far forget yourself as to give a lady and an

old friend the privilege of seeing you.”

“How did you know I was moody?”

“How did I know? Didn’t I — didn’t Milo tell me the whole story of the banquet? Didn’t he inform me how you came in late, how unsocial and quiet you were, and yet how you had your wits about you and saw through the trickery of the snake charmer? Oh, what a splendid thing it is to be a man, to have the will and the strength and the courage of a man! But how could you do it, Marcus? How could you run such a fearful risk just to expose a worthless Egyptian impostor?”

“I ran no risk. I watched the fellow’s movements too closely. I was never surer of anything than I was that those two asps had been made harmless.”

“Yes, but you acted on your conviction. Any other man, even if he had worked it out correctly in his mind, would have been afraid to act. You are a man among men, Marcus. You will do great things some day. Perhaps you will be Emperor. Who knows? But I want to know why you were moody. I want to know what trouble you are in.”

“I am not in any trouble.”

“But you were not yourself last night.”

“What of that? We all have our quiet moods.”

“But you don’t. It isn’t like you to be quiet. Those dancing girls — how bewitching they were! Your companions were as fascinated by them as Ulysses was by the Sirens; but you, dull man, hardly looked at them. Why, I thought, when Milo told me about it — really, Marcus, you must have some burden on

your mind."

"What was it you thought, Julia?"

"What did I think? Why, I've thought innumerable things at innumerable times and places that were never worth thinking at all, much less inquiring about. But just now I am thinking that you are a very impertinent fellow for wanting to know what I thought. A lady's thoughts are her own, sirrah!"

"How about a man's?"

"A man's? Dear me, how deep and crafty you are! You mean to turn the tables on me and to adopt my own excuse for covering up what is on your mind. But I am going to pull your house down about your ears. Have you lived twenty-one years, my dear Marcus, and never yet learned that a woman is not to be treated like a man, that her mind isn't made like that of a man, and that it may have things in it that must never be known by a man?"

"Supposing we change the subject," said Marcus abruptly. "Who taught you to dance, Julia?"

"Who taught me to dance? Now, why do you wish to know that?"

"Never mind. Who was it?"

"One of the masters of the art. My father engaged him. He has given me lessons here in the house for two or three years."

"Perhaps he is the same one that trained the Syrian girls and hires them out."

"Perhaps he is. How should I know?"

"In the ordinary way."

"What is that, pray?"

“Simply by using your eyes.”

“You masterful man!” said Julia, looking at him fixedly, her eyes flashing fire. “You’ve found me out. I won’t be questioned and cornered like a child. I’ll own up to my doings at once. Yes, I was one of the dancers last night. I wore a mask. I was the one that passed you the billet. But how did you suspect? Change the subject, indeed! You changed it just to carry your point with a real man’s persistency. Talk about a woman’s curiosity! It is nothing to a man’s. But tell me, how did you know?”

“Many things suggested the idea to me. Your ceaseless movement last night could not wholly disguise your carriage. I was suspicious when I received the billet. Then you tripped twice in your speech just now and began to speak as if you yourself had seen and heard what I and the others were doing last night.”

“Say no more and do not add to your offense by asking how I came to do it and lecturing me as if I were not my own mistress! You’ve wormed my secret out of me. Let that satisfy you! If you think I did a wild and foolish thing, keep your opinion to yourself! I have no apology to make. My dancing master is the same one that hires out the Syrian girls. I got him to teach me all the steps and figures they were to use; and I made one of the girls mask herself that my own mask might not be too conspicuous and excite curiosity. Why should I not have done it? It is easy for you to criticize — you, a man, with a man’s freedom, a man’s power to go out and do things in

the world. But supposing you had your own spirit and energy and a woman's body — how cramped and straitened and wretched you would feel! It is such a poor, petty, narrow and one-sided life that women lead. I have to spend much of my time with books for lack of other ways of occupying myself, and I could repeat the whole of Horace's ode to Neobule which pictures so well the little, confining and stupid tasks that make up a woman's lot. This is my own pet room, you know, decorated and furnished to suit my own taste. You have noted often the pictures I have had painted on the walls and the ceiling. They speak for themselves. They show you what I think women ought to do and be. Why, it would be worth something to be as free as Nausicaa and just go out by a lonely river side and play at ball. But enough of this! You made me show what I was trying to hide. Now I mean to know what is on your own mind. What made you so moody last night? What makes you so dull to-day?"

Marcus did not answer, but seemed to be thinking Presently Julia added,

"I'm glad, at any rate, that you don't put me off with a weak, evasive answer, as most men would do. If you were to be changed into one of the Gods, it wouldn't be that sly, cozzening sneak of a Mercury, who never could do a direct, straight-forward thing. You are just thinking whether you will tell me or whether you won't."

"Yes, I am thinking whether I will or whether I won't."

“ Why do you hesitate? ”

“ If I told you, you would not be pleased. ”

“ Why not? ”

“ I think on the whole I will tell you and let you find out for yourself. Yesterday afternoon I was coming back late from the gymnasium, where I had lingered so long that I had only just time to arrive here at the hour Milo had set for the banquet. A pretty flower girl stopped me as I was hurrying along the Vicus Patricius and asked me to buy the last bunch of roses that she had. She asked me in an arch, roguish way and she was most pleasing to look upon. She was bare-headed and bare-footed, but she was neatly clad in a fresh-looking light brown tunic, her hair, of very much the same shade, hung down in long curls to her waist, and there was a merry, appealing look in her large brown eyes. Her mouth — ”

“ No more details, if you please. I think I can picture the creature perfectly. You kissed her, of course. ”

“ No, but I tried to, and that was what brought on a curious experience and made me late to the dinner. I took the posies, but I hadn't an *as* about me. So I took her hands in mine and said: ‘ I can't give you any money now, but I'll give you a kiss; and if you will find the house of Agrippa, the city Prefect, and inquire for his son Marcus, you will be rewarded handsomely. ’ With that I stooped down to touch my lips to hers; but to my surprise she wrenched her hands free by a sudden effort and started away on the run. Now I didn't care a straw about the kiss — ”

“Of course not,” said Julia in an extremely sarcastic tone.

“Oh, save your sarcasm for what is coming!” rejoined Marcus. “This is only a beginning. No, I didn’t really care about the kiss, but it piqued me to have a girl take fright at me, as if I was a monster. So I ran after her —”

“As I have always said, you are a man of action, Marcus.”

“Overtook her with a dozen steps,” continued Marcus imperturbably; “took her hands in mine again, held them fast and tried to reason away her timidity. But the foolish creature had been so thoroughly alarmed that she would not be pacified. She stood, the very picture of terror, with the tears streaming down her cheeks. Now, I am never willing to be defeated in anything I undertake —”

“Even though it be such a great and mighty end as kissing a flower girl on the street,” Julia could not refrain from remarking, with irony still unveiled.

“And though I no longer had any thought of exacting the kiss, I was determined not to leave her till she had become quiet and reconciled to me. But before I had had time to make any impression upon her, I heard a sweet low voice close beside me say,

“‘This struggle seems unequal. A very weak girl against a very powerful man. May I not take part in it?’

“Still holding the hands of the flower girl, I turned and saw standing right at my side a girl of wonderful beauty. She was tall and slender, not more than

twenty years old, and her features, her accent and her whole manner told plainly that she was of alien birth. Noting her frail figure, her small delicate hands and her strangely quiet bearing, I said with a touch of sarcasm,

“ ‘You? Pray tell me how?’ ”

“ ‘That you surely do not need to ask,’ she answered in the same absolutely calm, unruffled tone. ‘Release the girl’s hands, please.’ ”

“ I gazed at her in wonderment. Her whole demeanor was modesty itself, but she looked me fearlessly in the eye and, low and sweet as her voice had been, there was a tone of authority in it. Amazed at myself and hardly willing to believe that I was actually giving up my own will at the bidding of a stranger, I dropped the hands of the flower girl without for a moment glancing at her, but with my eyes fixed all the time upon the unknown who had so daringly interfered with my actions.”

“ No wonder you were moody last night, Marcus. You, the man of courage and iron resolution, to be ordered about by a low-bred foreign girl whom you had never seen before. I didn’t know you could be so weak and childish.”

As before, Marcus took no notice of the interruption with its biting taunt, but went calmly on with his story. “ The flower maiden, on being released, darted at once to the girl who had so effectually protected her and poured forth her gratitude. The stranger smiled sweetly upon her, said a few kindly words to her and then started to go upon her way.

“ ‘ Stay! ’ I cried.

“ She turned about, eyed me again with the same indescribable blending of modesty and fearlessness and said gently,

“ ‘ What do you wish? ’

“ I did not at once reply, I was so impressed, dazed I might fairly say, by her exceeding beauty, her large, dark, lustrous eyes, her delicately molded features and her abundant black hair which made more striking the unusual paleness of her face.”

Anger rose in Julia’s heart as she listened to this description of another woman’s attractions, but, not without difficulty, she kept back the spiteful comment that came to her lips. Her instinct told her that she had already injured herself in Marcus’ estimation by her displays of irritated feeling.

“ As I did not speak she was turning away again, when I came to my senses and exclaimed,

“ ‘ Do not go! I have really something to say. I want to know what it all means. I am not in the habit of submitting like this. How was it all done? ’

“ ‘ It is very simple,’ she answered. ‘ It is because you have a good heart.’

“ ‘ How do you know that? ’

“ ‘ It is very easy to see it.’

“ ‘ But this girl did not see it, and yet I was speaking kindly to her. I meant to do her no harm.’

“ ‘ What did you try to do to her before I found you together? ’

“ I was too embarrassed to answer, and she continued,

“ ‘ Yes, you have a good heart, but you do not always let it rule you. If you did, you would not terrify innocent young girls upon the street.’

“ Once more she turned to go, but I called to her again and said,

“ ‘ Who are you? What is your name?’

“ Facing me and again eyeing me with that same calm, unshrinking gaze, she replied,

“ ‘ I am a Hebrew. My name I cannot tell you.’

“ ‘ Why not?’

“ ‘ My father would be grieved indeed if I told him I had given my name to a stranger on the street.’

“ ‘ May I not see you again?’

“ ‘ It is not likely that we shall ever meet again. But I shall think sometimes of the young Roman who so readily did what I asked of him, and I shall think of him pleasantly.’

“ Then she went on her way, and no entreaties of mine could make her turn again. So I walked slowly here, arriving the last one at Milo’s banquet and able to think of little but this strange and beautiful Hebrew girl.”

Marcus ceased. He was too keen and discerning a man not to know how unwelcome and exasperating the story was bound to be to his listener. But it was because it would irritate her that he had told it. He had, indeed, no clear-cut purpose in his mind. He was simply acting on the defensive. Inclined to resist Julia even while he admired her, he was more than ever so inclined since his meeting with the fair young alien. Hence, he told the story of the meeting be-

cause it was sure to cause some withdrawal on Julia's part. The barrier which her own maidenly sense did not build up around her, he adroitly erected by showing her that he had rendered to another woman a homage he had never paid to herself.

If Julia could have been perfect mistress of herself, the barrier might have been removed. Now was her time to win Marcus by displaying a generous spirit where he looked for pettiness. But she spoiled all by her captiousness, and she was enraged with herself because she could not help seeing just how she failed.

But she was not resourceless. She could appeal to his Roman pride, even if her manifested annoyance rendered it impossible for her to make her own qualities of mind and her own personal charm more potent to him than the spell that had been cast upon him by the Hebrew stranger. She could not here and now make her own attractiveness irresistibly alluring; but she could make him feel what his birth, his opportunities and his father's honorable career demanded of him.

All this she could not reason out in her ill concealed and ungovernable passion; but, with a blind instinct as to the vulnerable point of attack, she began,

"So the son of the great house of Agrippa can be beguiled and ensnared by a low-born Hebrew maid! Perhaps she is a slave. 'Tis more than likely. Marcus, whose father is the City Prefect, Marcus, whom Tiberius looks graciously upon and who can climb to any height of fame and greatness in the Roman Empire, would throw himself at the feet of a beggar and

forget what he owes to his lineage, his country and his Gods. I think I have heard that these Hebrews have some strange religion which scorns and vilifies those august deities who have made Rome great and glorious. Perhaps you will adopt that, too, and turn your back altogether on the land that gave you birth, the land that has nurtured you, the land that offers you wealth, power, renown, and everything that an ambitious mind can crave. All these things, the things that make many a man lie awake in the night and plan how he can get them — all these things are of no account because you have looked into the black eyes of a girl whom you would be ashamed to bring under your father's roof, whom you would never dare to take into our great Roman houses where is to be found the blood that has mastered the world, the blood that has flowed down from the kings and heroes who founded our imperial city so many hundred years ago. Shame on you, Marcus! I did not think you could so far forget yourself."

Marcus betrayed no sign of irritation as this fiery and wrathful denunciation was hurled at him. The one feeling uppermost in his mind was that his story had accomplished exactly what he had wished it would. When Julia had finished, he said quietly,

"Your eloquence deserves a better theme, Julia. Reserve it for facts. Don't use it to shake down air castles. I have not cast myself at the feet of any maid and I have not forgotten myself. Good-by."

V

NEVERTHELESS, Julia's words made a deep impression upon Marcus' mind. He could not deny that there was force and logic in her pleading. All the more powerful was the plea because it was not to his reason chiefly that it was directed. It touched his Roman pride, exactly as Julia had meant it should, and but for the potent counter influence it might have made him see in Julia the one woman who could help him to win greatness.

But his mind was turning constantly to the dark-eyed alien girl. He found himself wondering who her father was and what was his position and his influence among the people of his own race. He wondered about the Hebrews themselves and he determined to find out what their habits and characteristics were. And who could inform him better than his own father? The Prefect of the city was bound to know of all that went on within its limits; and this office Lucius Agrippa, the father of Marcus, had held for several years. He had come to Rome from Sicily six years before the opening of the story, had been made consul and then had been appointed by Tiberius to be City Prefect, an office which only a consular could hold.

This office was in name quite an ancient one; but with its present powers and functions it had been created by Augustus at the suggestion of Maecenas and

was practically a permanent position. There was, indeed, good reason why it should be permanent; for the effective discharge of its onerous duties called for experience as well as native ability. Upon the city prefect now devolved the whole responsibility of maintaining order in the seething capital, with its swarming population, its excitable and poorly fed proletariat, its many aliens, its cut-throats and its dissipated and debauched young men. But Agrippa was equal to the task. He was now a man of fifty, with a clear gray eye, clean-shaven face that showed his firm, well-shaped mouth, iron gray hair and a quiet manner, behind which, however, plainly dwelt a resolute will and a power of quick decision. He weighed his words carefully, spoke tersely and to the point, and was yet easily approached, free from arrogance, and, in spite of the caution engendered by long experience in handling weighty matters, remarkably free in giving advice on subjects about which he was well informed.

His relations with Marcus were cordial and indeed affectionate. His wife, to whom he had been devotedly attached, had died when the lad was but ten years old, and ever since he had given him all the care and all the companionship that a busy man had been able to give. Marcus was his only child, and naturally he had watched his growth and development with no little solicitude. But as the years passed and the boy's character unfolded, his heart swelled with pride and his pleasure and satisfaction were deeper than he ever expressed. Marcus was so frank, so fearless, so keen-witted and so self-reliant that his

father felt sure he would do things out of the common and win for himself a post of honor and distinction. But wisely he gave him, along with occasional timely counsel, a very large measure of freedom; and when the lad's eighteenth birthday came and he put on the *toga virilis*, he spoke his final words of advice and exhortation:

"You are now a man," said he, "and I shall leave it to you to come to me when you want counsel or encouragement. You know what it is to be a man. Be one. You have the qualities to make you one. You have, too, the energy, the vehemence and the hot blood of youth. You may do wild things, but never do low things. Never do anything that would shame and sadden your mother if she were living. And whatever acts of folly you may commit, be sure that they harm no one but yourself. Never make others pay for your own misdoing."

Agrippa was as good as his word. He never again offered advice or suggestions unless Marcus asked him. But Marcus was in the habit of consulting with him freely and he invariably found him a very sage and a very kindly counselor.

The house of Agrippa was on the *Vicus Longus* where that thoroughfare began to pass between the Viminal and the Quirinal Hills. It was a small house, modestly, almost barely furnished; for neither Agrippa nor Marcus had luxurious tastes. Close to the entrance was a waiting room into which the Prefect's numerous visitors were ushered. Near the waiting room was an apartment devoted to official uses in which

Agrippa spent many a laborious hour. Beyond this was a very unpretentious atrium, and opening out of it was the dining room which again was altogether lacking in stateliness and was furnished with extreme simplicity. At a time when the Romans were having the walls of their houses decorated with highly finished paintings and their rooms richly provided with bronzes and marbles, Agrippa preferred the bareness of an earlier and simpler age. There was in him a vein of austerity. Objects that appealed alluringly to the eye were an offense to him, for they suggested that luxury which he feared was undermining the morals of his countrymen. Yet his mind was cultivated and his sympathies were broad and liberal. Of books he had always been fond, and, busy though he had been ever since he had begun active life, he had found much time for reading both the Greek and the Latin authors. In one of the rooms of his house was a well selected library.

In the unadorned dining room of this modest house Marcus found his father the morning of the day that followed his disquieting interview with Julia. Agrippa was eating his simple breakfast of barley cakes, honey and dried fish as Marcus entered, and he was at the same time perusing a report upon a vicious quarter of the city which one of the *milites stationarii*, whose duties were very much like those of the policemen of to-day, had given him. But he laid the report aside the moment that Marcus appeared and greeted him heartily. Though not so invariably punctual at the morning repast as his father was, Marcus seldom

failed to present himself before it was over. This was indeed their one regular time for friendly intercourse and good comradeship.

“ Good morning, my son,” was Agrippa’s greeting. “ You are barely late this morning. Was the parasite at Bibulus’ dinner so tiresome that you came away early and had in consequence a long night’s sleep? Or is it that your host’s friends drank so freely that they got into trouble on their way home and need my offices? The prefect of the city is hard put some times to keep law and order and at the same time to satisfy the demands of friendship.”

Marcus smiled as he helped himself from a dish of dried dates. “ Caius and Curio,” he replied, “ were not modest in their potations; but the truth is, they were so entirely overcome that they could commit no improprieties on their way home.”

The morning meal was never hurried unless there was a special reason for it, as father and son both liked to make the most of this opportunity for pleasant converse. On this particular morning they chatted upon various trivial matters in the same light vein that was shown in their exchange of greetings, and then Marcus turned the conversation upon the different alien peoples in the city. Though usually without any reserves from his father, he was on this occasion quite unwilling to show what was on his mind. He therefore made inquiries about Gauls, Greeks, Egyptians and other peoples before he alluded to the Hebrews, asking in regard to each race what characteristics it showed, how well it observed the laws and how large

a representation it had in the city. When the discussion finally turned upon the Hebrews, Agrippa admitted that as city prefect he could not but approve of them.

“They live,” said he, “crowded together in two short streets on the eastern side of the Esquiline, and they are supposed to number about two hundred. To my subordinates they give no trouble. They never disturb the peace. They commit no crimes. They do no wanton acts. Yet as a Roman I have little that is good to say of them.”

“We Romans are not inclined to speak well of other races. Yet you have, though it would seem not altogether willingly, given these dark-skinned foreigners a good character. What have you that is really evil to say of them?”

Broad minded though Agrippa was, he shared inevitably the Roman prejudice against foreigners, and his opinion of the Jews was influenced by the fact that those who had settled in Rome were for the most part but poor specimens of their race. They represented its mercenary rather than its religious instincts; its greed but not its spirituality. Horace's oft-quoted and contemptuous phrase, “Let Apella the Jew believe it,” well reflected the estimate that the better class of Romans had formed of this indomitable people. Hence, Agrippa answered Marcus' question by enumerating vices which to a very large extent he took for granted, but which he honestly believed to be a matter of common observation.

“I have much,” he replied, “that is discreditable.

to say, if not positively evil. These people seem to be devoid of the pride and self-respect that are to be seen in even the low-born Romans. They are sordid, mean-spirited and fawning. They live for money. They seem to care for nothing else. The Jew hates and despises every race but his own. If he can cheat an alien, he thinks he is honoring the strange God whom he worships and whom he calls by a name that sounds like Ja-wa. In manners he is coarse and disagreeable, ready to cringe when you meet him and to sneer at you behind your back. If you want money of him, he will be all pleasantness and lend you all you wish on good security at a high rate of interest; but when the time for payment comes, he is as cruel and merciless as the wild beasts that devour the criminals in the arena."

Not in the least suspecting what was in Marcus' mind, Agrippa yet thought it well to put him on his guard against a race with which he would have been loath to see his son have dealings. Marcus, however, could not help feeling that the picture was strongly, perhaps unfairly, colored; and he answered deprecatingly,

"You say the Jews are mean-spirited and even the low-born Romans self-respecting. But surely no persons could be less self-respecting and more thoroughly despicable than the parasites in our own city who eat the bread of the rich and then hold them up to ridicule."

"That is justly said. This age of wanton living has produced a vile rabble which did not exist, I am

sure, in those self-denying days when Rome was warring with the Samnites."

"But it exists now, and it would be unfair to judge the Roman character by it. Is it not equally unfair to judge the Jews by the sorry specimens of their race we see here in the city?"

"That I hardly think, for wherever I have lived I have found that these qualities I have named have been ascribed to this singular people. At the same time I do not really mean to condemn the whole nation. Indeed, I did once meet a generous and honorable Jew, and he did me a great service."

"When and how was that?"

"It was at Smyrna nearly thirty years ago. It was a curious and a very interesting experience. I do not know why I have never been moved to tell you about it. I had then the rank of centurion and I was one of the immediate attendants of the praetor, Manius Paulus, who was governor of the city. One day I was strolling about the streets of Smyrna with a brother officer who had taken enough wine to make him quarrelsome. We met a young Syrian who did not readily make way for us in a very narrow street. My companion demanded an apology. The fellow was unusually stubborn and spirited for one of his race and refused to give it. In an instant, before I could divine my comrade's purpose or interfere, he drew his sword and thrust the poor fellow through. Then, thoroughly frightened, he ran away. I bent over the fallen man and tried to save him. It was all in vain. The sword had passed through his lungs and his end was near. Just

as he passed away, two other Roman officers appeared. Everything looked as if I had done the murder, and when questioned I declined to speak; for I expected the investigation to clear the matter up, never doubting that the guilty man would then come forward and confess what he had done. But before the investigation took place, he came to me privately, said with tears in his eyes that his career as a soldier would be ruined if the truth were known, and implored me to let the deed pass as mine. My good record, he claimed, would ensure me a light sentence. His poor record — his fondness for the cup being well known — would bring him the severest possible penalty. Furthermore, he promised that if I would do this for him he would never taste wine again.

“Very rashly and very foolishly I consented. I say very rashly and foolishly, because it is always a mistake to cover up the wrong a man has done instead of letting him face the consequences of his actions. You do not help to make a man of him by shielding him from punishment and from public disgrace. But I was young then and had the false notions about honor and loyalty to a comrade which young men so commonly have. So I did what he asked, but matters did not go as we hoped and expected they would. I received a very severe sentence, for the father of the murdered youth clamored for vengeance, and Paulus, the praetor, was a stern disciplinarian, bent upon keeping his soldiers and officers in check and preventing disorder and bloodshed in the city. I was condemned to a year’s imprisonment and degradation to the rank

of common soldier.

“There was nothing to do but submit, for I had given my word. So to prison I went, much broken in spirit. But the very day after I was committed I was visited by a Hebrew merchant of the city, a middle-aged, tall, full-bearded man, with a stately carriage and an aspect of distinction. He asked me why I had allowed myself to be thus severely treated and almost hopelessly disgraced, when I was innocent?”

“‘How do you know I am innocent?’ I inquired.

“‘I happened to see the whole occurrence from a window near by.’”

“‘Then why did you not come forward and testify?’

“‘I had no right to do so, for I saw you must have some reason for taking the blame upon yourself. What is your reason?’

“‘I can not tell you.’

“‘I insist on knowing. I am much older than you. I have a mature judgment. I can not thus see a brave and honorable man suffer for the misdeed of another when he may be acting wrongly and unwisely.’

“‘But if I told you the whole truth, I should be violating a confidence.’

“‘No matter if you do. I promise not to reveal what you tell me without your permission. But if you refuse to tell me, I shall go directly to the praetor, give him my evidence, and then the real facts will have to come out.’

“I saw there was nothing to do but make him acquainted with the whole story, and I told it to him.

After thinking for a short time he said,

“ ‘For your own sake first of all, but also for the sake of the man for whom you are making this sacrifice, things must not be left as they are. You ought not to suffer severely for a deed you did not do; your brother officer ought not to be helped in a way that will make him selfish. Leave it all to me! I will tell the story to the praetor, first exacting secrecy from him, and we will find a way of restoring you to liberty without exposing the guilty man.’

“ ‘But the father of the murdered youth?’ I exclaimed. ‘How is his demand for justice to be met and satisfied? He is angry and bitter, and very justly so.’

“ ‘Leave that also to me! I know how to appease him,’ he said, shrugging his shoulders.

“ ‘Yes, and I know how you will do it,’ I cried. ‘You will give him money, and that I can not allow.’

“ ‘It is not your affair. I am rich and I have a right to spend my substance as I please. Now, with your permission, I will go directly to the praetor.’

“Somewhat unwillingly I gave permission, for he had an air of authority which, youth that I was, I could not resist. But I insisted at the same time that he had no right to make me his debtor by paying out money in my behalf. He made no answer to my demands, left me, and before the day was over I was released and restored to my office. This much the praetor had been more than ready to do when he learned the facts, but my Hebrew friend had found it very difficult to keep him from arresting and punishing the real of-

fender. The culprit was indeed summoned to the praetor's presence, informed that his guilt was known, though not through me, and sternly warned that any future misbehavior, even though slight in character, would be punished with the utmost severity. No penalty, however, was visited upon him; and, to cover up my own sudden release and restoration to favor, it was given out that a witness had unexpectedly appeared who proved conclusively that my action was done in self-defense. This patched the whole matter up very poorly and by no means satisfied the curious; but it seemed the best way out of a difficult situation.

“As soon as I could I sought out my benefactor, who was one of the leading merchants of Smyrna and whom I found without trouble. I thanked him with all my heart for what he had done for me, and then demanded to know how much he had paid to the father of the murdered man and said I should consider it a debt of honor till it was paid. He laughed me to scorn, refused absolutely to tell me the amount, and declared he had as much right to help a man whom he admired and honored as I had to shield a man who was guilty. He was so wholly uncompromising about it that I was obliged to yield; and to this day I do not know whether the wretched affair cost him much or little. I saw him only two or three times afterward, for I was soon ordered away from Smyrna.”

Both sat in silence for a while when the story was ended. Finally, Marcus said,

“If there could be one Jew like that, why may there not be many?”

“Possibly there are, but not here in Rome. The Hebrews here are as I have described them. Through my official position many accounts of them, as of all other races and peoples, come to me. They are a low and degraded lot. Romans can but shun them and let them alone. And from their own country of Judaea are brought the tidings that Pontius Pilate is finding them a disagreeable, willful and rebellious people.”

“But you say they are tame-spirited. How is it then that they have the courage to be rebellious?”

Agrippa looked at his son inquiringly. Marcus' interest in this alien people and his inclination to defend them had begun to seem to him a little singular.

“Have you met any of this race?” he asked. “Are there any among them that you wish to be informed about? You seem bent on getting all the knowledge of them you can; also on taking as favorable a view of them as possible.”

“I like to see the good in all people,” replied Marcus, “and I think our own race is too apt to scorn and despise all who have not Roman blood in their veins. Think how slow we were in granting citizenship to the other races of Italy, who surely were nearly akin to us. But I shall not want you to have inquiries made about any Hebrews in particular. Tell me all you can about them in general and I shall be satisfied.”

This answer was truthful, even though evasive, and Agrippa went on without suspecting Marcus' inner thought.

“The Hebrews are tame-spirited,” he answered, “when the power and greatness of Rome over-awes

them. In their own land, where they see a small number of soldiers supporting our authority against their own almost innumerable thousands, they seem to forget that the whole might of Rome is behind that little band of soldiers and to grow wanton and insolent."

The conversation ended without convincing Marcus that all the Jews in Rome were vulgar and sordid because the majority of them evidently were so. That the girl he had met had been delicately nurtured in a home of thorough refinement, he could not doubt. Perhaps she had friends and kindred in Rome who were as free from coarseness as herself. Not easily governed by prejudice, Marcus did not feel that aversion to this alien people which seemed to be shared by his father and by all Romans of rank and social position. But he *was* governed by that indomitable pride which had helped to make the Romans the conquerors of the world. He realized fully what was due to his father's exalted rank and station; and he resolved to keep away from the Jewish quarter however much it might cost him to do so.

It cost him a good deal. His heart had not been touched by the lovely Hebrew. That was scarcely possible, for their interview had been all too brief to kindle deep emotion. So what he was cherishing was hardly more than a vision. But it was a vision of such rare beauty that it did not fade from his mind.

VI

IF Agrippa had carefully inspected the quarters of the Hebrews in Rome instead of relying upon the opinions of his subordinates, he would have found that they were not all as he had painted them to Marcus. Eliud Merari, by far the wealthiest of them and profoundly respected by them all, was neither sordid nor mercenary. He was a man of powerful intellect, unspotted integrity and large benevolence. But there was nothing about his unostentatious life to bring him to the notice of those who governed and disciplined the Roman capital.

His house was in the heart of the Hebrew colony. Beyond the fact that it had a broader frontage than the surrounding dwellings, it was in no way conspicuous or imposing; but within, it showed on every hand the signs of a cultivated taste which never stopped at expense in order to secure comfort and elegance. Everywhere there was indeed a suggestion of the splendor and magnificence of the Orient and yet withal a harmony of coloring and an evidence of restraint which prevented garish and bizarre effects. The furniture was of bronze, onyx, or richly carved eastern woods inlaid with gold and silver, but there was not too much of it. The rugs and hangings were pleasing to the eye, their hues being rich and soft but never brilliant. There were in every room enough inviting cushions

to provide for comfort, but not enough to suggest the luxury of the sybarite. The coloring on the walls and ceilings was so quiet as to give a sense of repose. And the polished silver mirrors were placed for convenience and not for show. Of statues in bronze or marble not a sign was to be seen; for such things savored of idolatry to the reverent worshiper of the dread Jehovah.

On the evening of the day on which Marcus reached the age of twenty-one and at the very time when Milo and the other guests were awaiting his arrival at the belated banquet, a girl who could hardly yet have reached her twenty-first year was seated on a cushion in one of the retired apartments of Merari's house. It was indeed her own living room and was connected by a curtained entrance with her sleeping room adjoining. The living room was about fifteen feet square and gave evidence of a refined taste. The heavy effects given by the extensively used Pompeian reds and yellows were wanting here. The walls and the ceiling had been colored with a soft creamy tint. The rugs and the hangings were pale blue. The cushions were of the same hue and were embroidered with silver. The furniture, which consisted of a low divan, a table and several chairs of different shapes and patterns all artistically designed, was of box-wood inlaid with silver. On one of the walls a panel had been painted blue and in the center of it an octagonal silver mirror had been hung. Writing utensils, all of silver, were to be seen upon the box-wood table.

Yet no one who looked closely at the occupant of

the room would have said that its pale subdued tones had been chosen by her to enhance her wonderful beauty. The pallor of her face seemed to be heightened by her dark eyes and her abundant, loosely flowing black hair; and a richer and warmer coloring for the room would perhaps have afforded a more effective setting for features that quite lacked the ruddy tints of youth. Hardly was it vanity that had adopted such a quiet scheme of decoration. But the beauty was so rare that it needed no setting. The features were regular and exquisitely modeled; and though they indicated the nationality, they were of the Greek rather than of the pronounced Hebrew type. The mouth was small, with finely cut lips, and showed, when open, regular white teeth. The forehead was broad and low. The eye was of such brilliancy that it was sure to attract and hold the attention before the beautiful contour of the face and its mingled spirituality and intellectual force had made their due impression.

Somewhat in oriental fashion, the girl had seated herself, with her feet crossed, upon a cushion on the floor. In her hand was a harp, and to the music which she drew from its strings she sang, "I will lift my eyes to the mountains from which comes my help," and the other sublime verses of the one hundred and twenty-first Psalm.

When she had finished she placed the harp gently upon the floor and sat with folded hands, while a wistful look came over her face.

"Shall I never see thy hills again, dear land of my birth?" she said musingly. "Ah, well can I under-

stand how my people felt during those long years of captivity when they looked every day toward Jerusalem and wept because they could not see her pinnacles and the mountains round about her. Well might they say, 'How shall we sing the song of Jehovah in a strange land?' And yet how could they help singing the Lord's song? How could they help singing about the great Jehovah who delivered them out of Egypt, fed them in the wilderness, destroyed their enemies, and did such deeds for them as have been done for no other people on the earth?

" 'He has not so dealt with any nation.' Oh, how true that is! And surely all those wonderful promises are true which tell us that great and glorious days are to come again and Jehovah's chosen people are to be more flourishing and prosperous and powerful than ever. Oh, how I long to see Jerusalem again! It may be those great days are coming now, and to miss seeing them would be hard indeed.

" Five years it is since I have been in Jerusalem; five years since I have seen the home of my childhood, right in the shadow of its walls, where I used to play among the olives and pick the sweet-scented roses and listen to the song of the birds. And here I can do and see so little! I should be happier if I could go about and see something of this great city and these proud Romans who are conquering all the world — so grandfather tells me at any rate. But there he is now. Oh, how glad I am to see him again! "

At the entrance leading into the atrium of the house a knock consisting of two low distinct taps thrice re-

peated was heard, and hardly had the glad "Come in, grandfather!" been uttered before the hanging was thrust aside and a venerable and stately man entered the room. His long flowing white beard betokened advanced age, but his erect carriage, his alert mien, his vigorous step and his keen dark eye showed that years had not quenched the fire and the energy of youth. Plainly he had passed the allotted three score years and ten; but plainly too a large and ripened understanding, a disciplined will and an undeviating respect for the moral law had protected him from the weaknesses and the encroachments of senility.

"I am rejoiced to see you, grandfather," cried the girl, as she ran forward to meet him, her every feature beaming with happiness. "But how late you are! Have you only just returned from that dreary place where you bargain all day long?"

"Only just returned, Naarah," said the old man, kissing her tenderly on the forehead. "Azareel the Syrian wished me to double the loan I had made him on the cargo he is bringing from Ephesus, and it took him some time to provide the securities I demanded."

"How shrewdly you bargain, grandfather! I believe you were never caught in a foolish transaction in your life."

"Nor in a dishonest one, my daughter, which is the only thing an old man like me should be proud of. The wisest of us err sometimes in judgment; no one needs to do a wicked or a lying deed. But tell me of your day, my dearest one. Quiet and uneventful as all your days are, I suppose. Sometimes I think they

are a little too quiet for your well-being and happiness."

"Not quiet for once, grandfather. This has been a day for me to remember. I have had an adventure."

"An adventure? How strange! It must have happened outside, for no one could intrude into this well-guarded house to cause trouble and excitement. So you went upon the street, then? I trust you did not go far. Our Hebrew maidens have always been taught that seclusion is a woman's best protection; and alas! many evil things happen in the streets of this great city."

"No, my dear kind protector; not very far. I could never forget the many warnings you have given me. I went with Deborah to the house of our cousin, Kemuel, whose little daughter Naomi has been sick for ten days, as you know, with intermittent fever. I found her more comfortable, but craving sleep; and I knew I could get an herb that makes a soothing draft at the shop of Mattathiah who lives a short distance away from our Hebrew quarter. He has found custom among the Romans and so he has planted himself among them, though not so far away as to lose the trade of our own people. I got the herb I wanted and was returning with it when I came upon a young and pretty flower girl struggling in the grasp of a tall and powerful Roman."

"A youth, I suppose," commented the old man, who was listening intently. "It is usually the hot blood of youth that prompts to such folly."

"Yes, a very young man and a man of high station,

too. He was the son of Agrippa, the city Prefect."

"How did you discover that? You surely did not accost him or ask his name?"

"He had told the flower girl who he was and she afterward told me."

"I am sorry to know it. His father is a good and honorable man. But the youth must have good blood in him and perhaps he will turn out well in the end."

"I am sure he will. Indeed, I told him so."

"You told him so? You astonish me, my daughter. Tell me all that passed between you."

Naarah told the whole story. The old man listened with no other expression than that of deep and absorbed interest. When she had finished, he said quietly,

"You did well, my daughter. You were not prudent; yet you did well. I believe that God still gives wisdom to the pure in heart, even as He called to the child Samuel of old. Yet he might have been an evil man and laid violent hands upon you. You see that it is unwise for you to wander far from our own quiet streets."

"Yes, I realize it. I know how careful I need to be. And yet I can not help sighing because I have no freedom. Why is the world so wicked? Why must I keep within such narrow bounds when I long to roam where I will, just as the caged bird longs to use its wings? Oh, shall we never go back to our own dear land? Shall we never again kneel down in the temple at Jerusalem and worship the God who was so good to our people? Shall we never again see the hills

where He did his mighty acts and made us know that we are all as the dust before Him? ”

“ In good time, Naarah. In good time. I am planning even now to complete my transactions here and go back with you to the home where you were so happy as a child. Ah, how glad I should be, and how glad you would be, my dearest Naarah, if we could find there my good son and your lovely mother! But I am glad they lived long enough for you to know and remember them well.”

“ Yes, my memory of them is clear and very precious. I was ten, you know, when my father died and twelve when my mother passed away. Father looked like you, grandfather, though he was not so tall and did not bear himself in such a stately way.”

“ He was a good son and a good man. So you, Naarah, are all I have; for my daughter died when she was very young and I had no other son. You know that I am living for you and all that I have will be yours.”

“ But you have more than enough already. Why spend more time in this alien city, among people who bow down to graven images and break the commandments which the mighty Jehovah has given? ”

“ They sin in ignorance, dear Naarah. Let us not censure them. We will soon break away, just as soon as the ventures to which I am committed will allow. I fear however that it may take a year to bring them to success.”

“ A year? A whole year? That seems a very long time. Let me see this great and splendid city then

meanwhile. No, grandfather, I could never be actually unhappy while sharing a home with you; but you do not quite realize that this life I lead is a dull and narrowing one for a young girl."

"Is not Deborah a kind and unselfish companion?"

"Kind and unselfish, yes! But oh, so tame, so quiet, so wholly unable to understand and appreciate the things I love! She cares nothing for my harp. If I read to her one of the wonderful stories of our Scriptures — how Abraham was prevented from sacrificing Isaac or how Joseph recognized his brethren in Egypt — she goes fast asleep! Why, grandfather, just when I get to the most thrilling part, I hear her snoring!"

Eliud smiled faintly at this picture which was given with a spirited young girl's liveliness; but he was too much troubled to be really amused.

"I can see, my child," he said gravely, "that Deborah is not the person to share your interests and feelings. But I have always thought of you as happy in studying the wonderful history of our own nation and the rich and beautiful literatures of the Greeks and Romans. In their writings there is so much that is noble; in this luxurious city there is so much that is evil, so much that I should grieve to have you see and that you would shrink from seeing. Surely you do not want to see their street processions, their theaters and their public games?"

"Why not, dear grandfather? Why should I not see all the great and splendid sights which the Romans love? Some of their plays, such as the *Rudens* and

the Captivi of Plautus, have nothing of evil in them. And there are games and chariot races that are not bloody. Some of these things I might look upon without seeing anything that would shock or hurt me; and I do so long to see something of this great, full, stirring life that is going on all around me!"

"You argue your case well, Naarah. I admit there is truth in what you say. Perhaps I will take you to a play, if one that is clean is ever presented, or to the Circus to see the contests of the athletes. I will watch and take note, for I want you to be contented. I fear my affection for you has been a selfish one. Since your father and mother died, my one ambition has been to make you happy. But, ah, me! I forget that I am an old man and but poor company for a young, joyous, spirited girl. I am dwelling among the evening shadows while you want the fragrant air and sunshine of the morning. Forgive me, Naarah! I will try to bring more brightness and freshness into your life."

"I have nothing to forgive, dearest grandfather. No girl ever had a better, kinder, truer friend than I have in you. Forget what I said. I was thoughtless. I would rather sit with you in the evening shadows than see the fairest morning that ever gladdened the earth."

VII

CETHEGUS was ready to advise Calvius to dismiss all thoughts of winning Julia. None the less, he cherished this ambition for himself. That she cared for Marcus, he was sure. Still, he had hopes. His keen eye had seen no signs that Marcus reciprocated the affection. He believed in himself. Something might happen in his favor. True, a woman of Julia's ardent nature would never bestow on any other man the intense regard she had given to Marcus. But he was not ardent himself and he was very ambitious. He was cautiously planning and working to obtain a high office in the city. If he could secure it, Julia, with her cleverness and beauty, would help him to win power and influence in discharging its duties. And the authority and state so gained would go far toward making her satisfied and happy. Of this he felt quite sure; for, as he had represented to Calvius, he knew that she too was exceedingly ambitious. And, without using fine moral discernment, he yet felt instinctively and with much justification that he could gratify this ambitious mood better than Marcus. Marcus would win and use power quite unselfishly. Julia craved it for personal even more than for patriotic ends. So Cethegus never allowed hope to die out in his heart and visited Julia from time to time.

She always received him with friendliness. He interested her. She admired his cleverness. Her woman's intuition told her that he had a deeper regard for her than he was as yet ready to show. She thought it possible that she might some time make him useful. She was not displeased, therefore, when he came to see her the very day after she had passed such a strenuous hour with Marcus. She felt that after such an exciting encounter she could positively enjoy the comments of a keen dispassionate mind like that of Cethegus. He was sure to be entertaining. She would encourage him to run on as he pleased, asking such questions herself as occasion might prompt. She was sure that in this way she could get at things worth knowing. So she received Cethegus in her own parlor, greeted him pleasantly, though without warmth, and seated herself in the mood of one desiring to be amused. To listen now to Cethegus' droll and easy speech would be like sitting by a babbling brook after watching the breakers in a storm.

"What have you to tell me, Cethegus?" she began. "I have not heard anything interesting for days and I want to be amused."

"Rare news. A great storm is brewing. The men of the city are about to revolt because the women have too much liberty."

"How unspeakably stupid of them! They pattern after the very ones we wish to put down. That is just what the women of Athens did four hundred years ago, unless the picture Aristophanes gives us was drawn wholly from his fancy."

“But that was a feeble and senseless movement, bound from the start to fail.”

“Absurd! If it ever took place, it ought to have succeeded. Explain yourself!”

“No, it had to fail because there was no reason for it.”

“No reason for it? Then why did the women rise?”

“The sensible women did not. It was only the ungainly sharp-tongued and sour-visaged ones that rebelled. They were thoroughly out of sorts because the men paid them no attention. The gracious and beautiful ones always got everything they wanted and were perfectly satisfied.”

“Your view is flattering but not well borne out by Aristophanes, whose two plays that deal with the subject I fancy you never read. Let us come back to Rome! What man is so stupid as to say that the women here have too much liberty?”

“I was but jesting.”

“Truths have a habit of hiding behind jests. What was it you had in mind?”

“Don't force me to be sententious like Cicero. I hate his discussions about the state.”

“I will know your mind. What did you mean?”

“The old days were better when women lived in seclusion. Now they are seen too much, heard too much, talked about too much.”

“How, pray?”

“They are loud and unmannerly at the theater and the circus; they throng the streets and gaze shame-

lessly at our most indecent holiday shows; they intrigue in state affairs; they hold down their thumbs when a gladiator falls; it is said that some of them are even training to fight in the arena.”

“These are abuses. I admit it. But they do not affect the great body of Roman women and they are but the natural consequence of shutting women up for so many hundred years.”

“You can’t shut them in. It would do no good if you did. They have always had their own way and they always will.”

“What a monstrous theory!”

“I can prove it by facts.”

“Prove it then. I challenge you.”

“There’s no jury.”

“I will be the jury.”

“Your mind is made up. Arguments won’t affect it.”

“No, I will be fair. But I shall interrupt you as much as I please.”

“Very well. Women, I say, have always had their own way. That is shown by the fact that they have had a hand in everything of consequence that has ever been done.”

“Instances. I demand instances and many of them.”

“To begin with, Helen brought on the Trojan War.”

“Poor Helen! How often that has been brought up against her!”

“The war fairly begun, Achilles made it drag by

skulking in his tent, and all because Agamemnon robbed him of his fair captive."

"It was his bad temper that was to blame. Don't put it on the woman!"

"No, you are evading the point. I told you arguments would have no weight with you. Achilles' evil temper would not have been roused if they had not taken Briseis from him."

"Very well. I grant it. But more instances. Two prove nothing at all."

"Woman, as I say, must have a hand in everything, even in war, wretched business though it is. There were the Amazons. Those doughty leaders of theirs, Penthesilea and Camilla, were no match for Achilles and Æneas, but they did their best."

"It is only a myth. I do not believe they ever existed."

"Truth hides behind myths as well as jests. Isn't that Artemisia I see painted on the ceiling?" and Cethegus gazed gravely upward as he spoke.

Julia flushed, but she could not help laughing at Cethegus' quick-witted method of turning the tables upon her.

"It is she. I can't deny it," she exclaimed. "But I believe I will have her painted out to-morrow and let the artist put a picture without a woman in it—Solon before Cræsus perhaps—in her place. I never thought she would so humiliate me. Go on!"

"And then—alas that I should have to say it—it is not on the battle-field only that women have done others to death."

“What an outrageous assertion. You never can maintain it.”

“I can do so easily, but the case demands that I sacrifice gallantry to facts.”

“Very well. Put gallantry aside and state your facts if you can.”

“To begin with, there was Agamemnon, poor man. He had barely crossed his threshold after a ten years' absence before he was laid low by his own wife.”

“Poor man, indeed! The wretch would have let his own daughter die on the altar. I don't wonder Clytemnestra killed him.”

“Excuse her if you please, but that little episode of Iphigenia proves again how the woman's hand is always showing itself. Then there was that very unpleasant lady whose mind was more set on dragons' chariots than on bringing up her children.”

“Don't name Medea's hideous deed! She was just a witch. She wasn't a woman.”

“Well, the same cannot be said of the Danaids. Think of it! Forty-nine husbands gone in one night. I wonder that any man dared to marry after that.”

“At any rate the fiftieth Danaid was faithful.”

“But she had to lie in order to be so.”

“All the more credit she deserved for that. Horace calls her a ‘glorious liar.’”¹

“For another case — spying is an odious practice, I admit; but it is hard to be torn in pieces for it —”

“You needn't name Pentheus, and you needn't say any more. You would go on and pick out case after

¹ Splendide mendax.

case from myth and history where a woman's work and influence are undeniable. But I could bring forward ten times as many in which woman does not appear at all. I am the jury and I say you are more badly beaten than Æschines was when he was foolish enough to argue against Demosthenes."

"Not half so foolish as the man who tries to argue against a quick-witted woman. I admit defeat. Yet even in being vanquished I have proved my point. A woman who can conduct a case so well deserves no sympathy. The world will refuse her nothing that she wishes."

"Very well. My present wish is that, as you have shown yourself a master in the art of flattery, you give no more of it but tell me something interesting. What is really going on in the city? What choice story is Corbo the parasite relating now? What are you and those hard-working friends of yours doing? Anything besides eating and drinking? I suppose you could not even describe a banquet without trying to prove how the 'woman's hand is always showing itself.'"

"Assuredly not. Did not Milo tell you how Marcus came late to the dinner that was given especially to him?"

"Milo? Of course not. I get little out of him and that only by hard questioning. What was it that made Marcus late?"

Cethegus was not without suspicion that Julia was better informed about all that happened at the banquet than she was willing to admit. Yet he told the

story with some appropriate modifications. He was indeed pleased to have the opportunity of doing so, for he wished to see how the mention of Marcus affected Julia. He was not malicious or unfair. He related the facts of Marcus' late appearance at the banquet as they really were, without coloring them so as to make his rival appear in an unduly discreditable light. With his habitually calm and calculating temper he was simply seeking information that was important for the accomplishment of his most cherished ends. Accordingly, while he spoke he watched Julia as closely as he could without making it manifest. She on her part was endeavoring to appear as unconcerned as possible.

"So," Cethegus concluded, "the woman's hand showed itself at the very beginning of the feast; and I fancy it would have been apparent at the end could we have known why two of the dancers wore masks."

"Wore masks?" queried Julia, still preserving her manner of indifference. "How was that? Why should any of the dancing girls have wished to disguise themselves?"

"Why indeed? My suspicion is that they were ladies of rank who amuse themselves in this way but do not wish to have it known and talked about. The figure of one of them was strangely familiar. Perhaps I should have recognized her if I had looked hard enough. But to tell the truth, I was more interested in watching Caius, who was as excited as a dog that has scented a rabbit."

"Why do men like you and Lentulus and Marcus

consort with gluttons and tipplers? ”

Watchful and keenly discerning as he was, Cethegus felt that he was, if not making new discoveries, at least confirming previous impressions. It did not escape him that Julia named Marcus last, as if she were trying to make it appear that she was not interested in him especially. But his countenance did not give the smallest clue to his inward satisfaction as he replied.

“ I should really be glad to know. If I did not belong to the circle myself and were to meet them all for the first time, I should say it was a case of eagles flocking with crows. ”

“ What pains you take to appear modest! With what species, pray, would the observer class himself? ”

“ With the domestic fowls, perhaps. My tastes are not for war or plunder. ”

“ No. As you claim so little for yourself, I will class you with the eagles. But are you three eagles always going to fly with the crows? Why don't you soar? ”

“ Just to try our wings? ”

“ No, to view the country and make nests for yourselves. ”

“ I must not say it would be dangerous because the eagle is a good target and the arrow of the informer is deadly. If I did, you would quote Sophocles again, as you did at Latiaris' entertainment. I will claim to be ambitious and say that some day may find us soaring. There are nests that would suit me very well and I may secure one. I might become a Maecenas. Who knows? ”

"And who in that case would be emperor?" inquired Julia with the air of entire innocence.

Cethegus was vexed beyond measure with himself. He had fallen into a trap which his own hands had laid. It was exasperating to be forced to extol his rival; yet the true Roman courage that was in him made him face the situation manfully, gaining Julia's respect thereby, though that he did not quite realize.

"I should rather it would be Marcus than Tiberius," he replied.

"And how about Lentulus?" was Julia's further query.

"Lentulus? Why, he is a Stoic."

"But what does he do? What will he do?"

"Do? He won't do anything. He will just be a Stoic."

"He was made to do something. He shall do something. There are things enough for men like him to put their hands to — oh, too many of them."

"Perhaps you will help him to find the particular thing that is waiting for him."

"I? What, pray, could I do?"

"The most clever and beautiful woman in Rome asks what she can do. As much as she chooses. More in these changeful days than Aspasia accomplished so long ago."

"No more flattery. And the future Maecenas — I suppose he too would be pleased to receive a helping hand."

"It would make any ambition possible."

"Admirable. The Goddesses may well look to

their laurels. I seem to be Venus and Minerva all in one. I shall be discreet, then, like the Goddess of Wisdom and, however much disposed I may be to help any wandering Ulysses that may be in need of guidance, I shall not make promises that I might be utterly unable to keep."

VIII

MARCUS could not help feeling that in the end he should yield to Julia's potent charm and to her passionate endeavors to kindle his ambition. But inasmuch as his heart was not really touched, this consciousness only increased his restless mood. His longing to find distraction through lively and absorbing recreation became intensified. He exercised long and severely at the gymnasium. He missed no spectacle at the Circus or elsewhere. He went with his friends to resorts both innocent and questionable. Especially did he seek the wine room of his old acquaintance, Delphium.

This clever woman, of winsome manners and easy virtue, he had known years before in Sicily. For three years his father had been stationed in that island to stop the depredations of the natives in the mountain districts. His home during this period was in the town of Catana. Next door to him dwelt a family of Greek origin, consisting of a fruit dealer, his wife, and their daughter Delphium. When Agrippa settled in the island Marcus was twelve. Delphium was two years older. Proximity made the boy and girl intimate. They were both so young that little restriction was put upon their intercourse. But when after three years Agrippa was called back to Rome, Marcus bade his playmate good-by and thought with

a boy's lively but transient sorrow that he should not see her again.

Two years later Delphium's mother fell a victim to an epidemic of fever. For her husband this was a deep grief; for Delphium it was a calamity. Her father was a blameless man without force of character. Her mother was a woman of clear intelligence, resolute will and uncompromising principle. Her mental shrewdness and her strength of will Delphium had also; her invincible integrity she lacked. Her feelings were ardent; her nature was self-indulgent. She needed guidance and control at the very time when she was deprived of it. For her mother's death aroused in her the desire to seek her fortunes, and her father could not restrain her. In spite of his protestations and entreaties she left her home with only a handful of silver in her possession. With this scant supply of money, which was all her father could spare from his slender resources, she journeyed toward Rome. An adventuress at heart, she was conscious that her beauty would be a fertile resource where wealth was abundant.

And this she had an opportunity to realize before she had proceeded very far on her way toward the dissolute capital. One evening just before sunset she stopped at an inn in Lucania not far from the town of Tegianum. Here she soon saw that she was in dangerous company and she had an exciting adventure to be hereafter related. The upshot of it was that she nursed a wounded man to health and did not leave him till she had acquired a sum of gold and parted

with her self-respect.

Her journey toward Rome she now steadily pursued; but before reaching it she once more found that the path of the adventuress easily leads to the gateway of adventure. Arriving at Lavinium on the Via Appia, she chanced to meet a wealthy Roman patrician who was instantly captivated by her beauty. This ingratiating but unprincipled youth, Ahenobarbus by name, had tired of the gay life of the capital and had built him a villa in the hills a few miles from Lavinium. Here he devoted himself to his books and to his favorite pastime of hunting. But he considered it a bit of rare good fortune that he should have encountered Delphium, and without much difficulty he persuaded her that the air of his mountain residence was better than that of the swarming city on the Tiber.

For a whole year she remained there. Of the gay alluring capital she got one passing glimpse; for Ahenobarbus once took her to Rome and spent a few days with her there. But of the tone and manners of Roman youth she gained a considerable knowledge. When he wanted diversion Ahenobarbus invited a group of his friends to visit him; and on such occasions Delphium saw much without herself being seen. She could indeed have mingled freely with the guests of the house had she wished it. Ahenobarbus would have been glad to have her do so. He had no thought of ever marrying and of decorum and appearances he was utterly regardless. On the other hand he was not hard or ungenerous, and he would not urge Delphium to do that which was condemned by her

judgment and by her sense of modesty which she had indeed badly wounded but not utterly destroyed. To be the only woman in a company of carousing men was distasteful. To be known by youths who had a wide acquaintance in Rome was imprudent.

At the end of a year she saw that Ahenobarbus was tiring of her. She determined therefore to leave him and make her way to the capital to which all along she had felt so strongly drawn. She was rather glad than sorry to leave. The handsome young patrician had inspired no passion in her. Agreeable though she had found him, she had longed for a gayer life and a varied companionship. Her mind had ever been turning to the games and shows of the great imperial city and to its endless opportunities for lively intercourse with men and women.

Ahenobarbus made no serious effort to detain her, but he frowned upon her scheme for bettering herself. Correctly reading the lesson of her own turbid experience, the far-sighted girl of twenty had determined to abandon the path into which she had been so easily lured. She was sobered by Ahenobarbus' indifference. Evil was a quagmire. She would turn from its quaking depths before it was too late and plant her feet on the solid ground of respectability.

"But you cannot leave this road you have chosen," said Ahenobarbus. "No woman ever can."

"Why not?"

"You ought to know."

"But I don't know and I don't believe it."

"When a woman has done what you have done,

she cannot leave it behind her, any more than she can make her stola white after it has been dyed purple. Her past clings to her and becomes known."

"It needn't be known. You, I am sure, would not wish to betray me. You would have no occasion to do so, for you go very little to Rome; and when you do go, please keep away from me. As to your friends, I have not let myself be seen by the men you have brought here. If I go to Rome no one will recognize me."

"Not a single one of them has never marked or noted you?"

"I did come face to face once with one of them. But he might not recognize me and I might never meet him."

"Suppose you did not. I still say that the real truth about you would come out. It always does when a woman has once lived as if she were married although she is not."

"I am not going to be daunted by such forebodings. I am going to Rome and I am going to mingle with people who are respected and make them respect me."

"What are you going to do? Sit still and wait for Fortune to pour all the things you wish into your lap?"

"No. I am going to open a wine room."

Ahenobarbus threw up his hands in despair.

"The very worst thing you could do," he exclaimed. "It would draw about you drunken evil-looking men — yes, and women too. Besides, women don't con-

duct wine rooms. It isn't the sort of thing a woman is fitted to do."

"It will have to be my father's enterprise; but in his name I am going to do it and I am going to keep it decent. Man though you are, you do not know as much about things as I do. You do not know, for the reason that you have never used your will and found out what you could do with it. You are thoroughly indolent. You read, you hunt, and you carouse. You never yet worked for anything with a fixed unconquerable determination. I am going to leave this muddy road I have been walking in. I don't altogether like it, and the mud will sometime get too deep. I can see that and I am glad I have seen it in time. So I am going to step out and walk on the grass. You say I can't. I say I can and will. Yes: I tell you, I will, I will, I will. We can do anything if we make up our minds that we can. I will prove it to you."

"You have made up your mind to do a thing that can't be done. But you have my good wishes, and if you are determined to open a wine room I will see that you have the means to do it with."

Ahenobarbus was as good as his word. He gave Delphium an ample store of gold and jewels when she left him; and, that said, he may be dismissed from consideration. He will not again appear in these pages. His kindness and generosity had won from Delphium a liking that might have ripened into affection had his own feeling for her been deep and lasting. As it was, her parting from him cost her no pang and she eagerly found her way to the great center of gay-

ety and pleasure.

The first thing she did on arriving there was to seek out a disreputable knave named Euthro whom she and her family had known in Sicily. She had no thought of letting him compromise her. She went to him simply to use him. He kept a vicious resort which drew pleasure-lovers of various types and classes; and in those days to know the pleasure seekers of Rome was to know Rome. Through this panderer to debased appetites Delphium learned much without revealing any of her own lapses from virtue. Indeed, she made it very plain to Euthro that the wine room which her father was about to establish was to be kept free from unclean orgies and all manner of reproach. Euthro was, like Ahenobarbus, incredulous that this could be done; but he readily helped her to carry out her scheme and gave her all manner of information about Roman youths and their doings.

From him she learned about Marcus and his circle of friends and what she heard determined her not to seek out him and his father and make herself known to them. She had half intended to do this. She was sure they would receive her kindly. But what she was told about Marcus made her certain that he would find his way to her when the resort was opened. And this would be better than to make approaches herself. He would have more respect for her if he found she was helping her father to make his livelihood and that they were not in need of assistance. Moreover, if she went to him before she carried out her plan, he and his father would both discourage it

as Ahenobarbus had done. If he found the plan successfully working, what could he say in opposition to it?

Delphium's father fell in with her wishes. He came to Rome and started the wine room, though he was quite broken in health and was very soon obliged to leave the conduct of it largely in her hands. To carry out the project she secured a house on the Esquiline in the rear of which she lived with her father, three serving maids, and a truculent character named Gugon, a native Sicilian who had at one time been employed by her father and whom by a fortunate chance she had stumbled on in Rome. It was largely indeed through him that she kept the resort free from gross excesses. For Gugon had unusual strength, an ugly temper and the courage of a mastiff. Surly to others, he was attached to Delphium and faithful to her interests. His rage was easily excited, and even the insolent Roman youths did not care to provoke an encounter with him. He allowed no unseemly rioting, and if they found the resort, which soon came to be known as Delphium's, too tame they sought wild and unrestrained pleasure elsewhere.

In the front part of the house was a spacious room where wine was served and two smaller ones, known as *vici* or saloons, for the accommodation of groups who wished to converse and make merry together. One of these two became a favorite gathering place for Marcus and his friends. Very early after the wine room was opened they found their way to it; and it was during his first visit there that Marcus found

himself face to face with the playmate of his boyhood.

"Why, Delphium!" he cried on recognizing her. "When did you come to Rome?"

"Only two months since," was the reply. "This enterprise is not one of long-standing, as I think you know."

"But how came you to leave Catana? Are your father and mother here too?"

"My mother died more than a year ago. It was sad and lonely in the house. I thought we could better ourselves and find living less dull and tiresome here. So I came and looked about me and then sent word to my father to come too. I saw this means of making a livelihood."

"But why did you not come to my father and me?"

"I am a woman, Marcus. I thought it better you should find your way to me."

"And perhaps you learned enough about me to feel sure that I should do so. Well, I am here and I am pleased to see you again. But I should have been only too glad to help you if you had called upon me. So would my father have been. Yet you do not really seem to have been in need of help. Has your father been prospering lately?"

Marcus looked around him as he asked the question. He seemed to be wondering where the money could have come from that was needed for such an ambitious enterprise. Well did he know that when he lived in Sicily the fruit-dealer's substance had been of the scantiest. Anxious to say something that would allay any rising suspicion, Delphium answered hur-

riedly and thoughtlessly.

"No, his trade was always poor. It was with money left me by an uncle who died in Syracuse that he established himself here."

"And his venture is successful?"

"Quite so. His wines are good. Many find their way here. He is prospering."

"That is well. But remember that both my father and I should be glad to help you and him if ever you should need advice or any kind of assistance."

The wines were in fact excellent. Marcus and his friends found the resort attractive and went to it habitually. Seeing Marcus often, Delphium became deeply interested in him. When she parted from him in Catana he was a boy. Now he was a man with all the qualities that appeal strongly to a woman. It was not strange therefore that her feeling for him grew till it became an over-mastering passion. The slumbering fires in her nature which Ahenobarbus had failed to rouse had now been fully kindled. But they glowed with a lurid flame. She was too wise, and even in spite of her missteps too self-respecting, to reveal the fierceness of her passion; yet fierce it was and capable of turning into treachery and hatred if ungratified.

Was there any possibility that it could be gratified? Could she win this magnificent young Roman who had all the world before him, who could seek alliance with one of the illustrious families of Rome and climb to almost any height he might aspire to? She was not without hope. She read him easily. She knew well that for a woman who had won his heart he would

defy the world and make any sacrifice. And so far she felt sure that he had given his affection to no other woman. That his heart had been touched she saw no signs, and she was watching for them carefully. But it was still more patent that he had not the smallest sentimental regard for herself. He had resumed his boyhood friendship in a genuine whole-hearted way that was characteristic of him. He always greeted her with marked cordiality. Once in a while he showed himself to be no mere wine-room acquaintance by making his way into the domestic apartments in the rear for a brief chat with her or with her father. But the relationship showed no signs of ripening into intimacy, much less of encouraging sentiment.

It was not easy therefore for this clever and designing woman to find any point of attack. But she was steadily watching to find one. She relied much upon her personal charm; for the rose of her complexion, her golden hair and her regular features made her fair to look upon. That Marcus had seen more regal types of beauty she did not know. She relied too upon her wit and her power to use the wiles with which an unscrupulous woman compasses her ends. So she hoped and believed that time would bring her opportunities to further this one passionately cherished scheme. Quite confidently she hoped it, for the adventuress is bound to believe in her own star. Yet all the while she had an uneasy feeling that those facts in her life which she was trying to keep hidden might become known. Nor was this foreboding a mere indefinable dread that was due to an erring past. For

she had found herself confronted in the wine-room by the very man who had seen her once at the villa of Ahenobarbus. The man was Cethegus. Had he recognized her? Yes, the peculiar look he had given her made that only too apparent. Would he betray her? That she hardly thought, for he seemed to be free from malice and petty feeling.

IX

IT was to Delphium's wine room that Marcus wended his way the evening of the day that followed his perturbing interview with Julia. It was not his purpose to spend the evening there. The diversion that he craved he intended to seek in another place. But at Delphium's he was confident he should find his intimates assembled, and it would be pleasant to exchange greetings with them. Perhaps one or more of them would accompany him to the ultimate destination to which he was bound.

He was right in conjecturing that he should find his circle at the wine room. The members of it had indeed assembled there before him. In the *vicus* that had become their usual evening rendezvous were seated Caius, Milo, Cethegus, Bibulus, Curio, and others who knew Marcus and admired him. They found their cups of Falernian grateful on the warm July evening; for the wine had been made cool to the palate even if it was not cooling to the blood. They were cheered and pleased too by the presence of Delphium. For this was a boon so infrequently and charily bestowed as to make it highly appreciated when given. Ahenobarbus' warnings had impressed the shrewd Greek woman even though they had not turned her from her purpose. For a woman to conduct such an establishment as hers was not in itself certainly a

title to fair fame and respect. But with true Greek craftiness and subtlety she argued that she might make it a title by a peculiarly circumspect behavior. To move among roisterers and hotbloods and compel them to show her deference was a triumphant vindication of her womanly modesty. And this deference she knew how to command. She showed herself but little in the wine room and its two adjoining saloons. She never remained in any of these gathering places very long at a time. She was never without the company of one of the attending maids and she never sat down. Civilities she exchanged, but undue familiarity she did not countenance. At the first word that carried even the suggestion of it she left the merry-makers to themselves. And one or two lessons of this kind were sufficient. Her society was considered so desirable that the lively spirits who frequented her establishment were willing to restrain themselves in order to secure it.

With Marcus and his friends she was on less formal terms than with other visitors; for the very fact that she was an old acquaintance of Marcus made them all treat her with civility. Still, not even from them did she ever accept an invitation to be seated. On the evening in question she had appeared before them after they had had rather a dull time in discussing cock-fights, escapades more or less unsavory, gladiatorial contests and other well-worn themes that dealt with daily happenings. All were missing the companion who was apt to be the life of their gatherings when they caught sight of her. Her presence seemed at

once to give them new life and spirit.

"Delphium, have you seen Marcus lately?" inquired Caius.

"No," was the quick response, "but I wish I had. I've seen no one half as clever or half as much of a man."

"Well said, Delphium!" cried Bibulus. "Let us drink to Marcus, yes, and to Delphium too! Here's to Marcus and Delphium! All drink to Marcus and Delphium!"

"No, no!" said Milo, not altogether pleased that his friend's name should be coupled with that of a woman like Delphium. "Let us drink to Marcus and the Unknown!"

"Yes, yes! Marcus and the Unknown!" cried several who had been present at Milo's banquet. "The Unknown by all means. But we must find out who she is. We had forgotten all about her."

The toast was drunk and no sooner was it done than Caius put the query,

"Who is she, Milo?"

"How should I know? Marcus is a man who keeps his own counsels."

"Ask Delphium," suggested Cethegus.

"Yes, tell us, Delphium!" cried the livelier spirits. "You know all Marcus' secrets."

"Having never before heard of the lady, I can't say who she is," said Delphium rather shortly. She was not pleased to learn that there was an Unknown, nor had it been altogether agreeable to her that the toast had been changed just as the visitors had been

about to drink to her and Marcus.

“ We must find out.”

“ Worm it out of him, Delphium.”

“ He’s moody all the time now.”

“ He thinks of nothing but a pretty mouth and a pair of black eyes.”

“ I’ll wager he’s tasting those pretty lips this very minute.”

“ It’s some low wench his father would never let him marry.”

“ He shall tell us. We must get it out of him.”

Such was the chorus of cries that arose just as the heavy curtain that screened the entrance was flung aside and Marcus himself entered the room. Before he could seat himself or say a word of greeting, he was assailed by vociferous shouts from the whole company.

“ Just in time, Marcus. Who is the Unknown? ”

“ You shan’t hide it any longer.”

“ How could you bear to leave her so early? ”

“ Did she shut the door on you? ”

“ Who is the villain who has cut you out? ”

These and many more such were the boisterous cries that greeted Marcus’ ears. Scarcely indeed could he distinguish what was said, so deafening was the din; for already the heady Falernian, which some had drunk undiluted, had begun to make the company hilarious. And Marcus and his doings always awakened their liveliest interest, such was the force of his commanding personality. But they had to learn again what they had been taught so often, that though he was, in his brighter moods, the merriest and most genial of them

all, he would never be led or influenced against his will. Instead of answering their clamorous demands, he stood still and gazed steadily at them, a slight curl of the lip and lowering of the brows showing plainly that he viewed their efforts to force his confidence with entire contempt. At first the riotous company was too excited to realize the full meaning of his attitude and continued its noisy queries. But speedily the cries grew fainter, and in a very short time they died away altogether. Even the boldest of the questioners turned again to their cups with the muttered comment, "Oh, he's moody. Let him alone! We'll find it out when he's in a better humor." The clamor ceasing, Marcus seated himself, remarking quietly,

"You have a noisy company to-night, Delphium."

"Will you have wine, Marcus?"

"Not I. You seem to be serving a heady mixture this evening. I fear it might make me like the rest of your visitors."

"No danger of that. But don't think it was my wine that made these friends of yours so lively. You caused it yourself. They were merely showing their liking for you. Why, they drank to you just now."

"Indeed! And perhaps also to the Unknown they are so curious about?"

"You are sometimes annoyingly acute, Marcus. Your perceptions are as quick as a woman's. Now, what put that thought into your head?"

"Considering the way I was greeted when I came in, I should have been very dull not to think it. I was only putting two and two together."

"Yes, but we women do not expect men to put two and two together, and one who can always do it is dangerous. He upsets our calculations and we have to beware of him."

Marcus laughed. "You flatter me, Delphium. I am not so clever as you think me. Cethegus is the man of keen and nimble wit."

"Thank you, Marcus," said Cethegus who was sitting near by. "In that case I will put my mind on the fair Unknown and guess who she is."

"Do so by all means!" replied Marcus. "I hope you will be successful and tell me, for I don't know myself. I'm going now, Delphium," he added. "The mood of your visitors to-night does not tempt me to linger. I think I will visit Pluto's Cave and see if I can find anything to amuse me there. Will you go with me, Milo?"

"Not to-night, Marcus. I'm in a lazy mood and I find myself too comfortable here."

"I'm not altogether flattered, Marcus, that you prefer Pluto to me," said Delphium. "Perhaps it is Proserpine that you expect to see, though I don't remember whether this is her season for being below ground or not. If you do see her, pray tell her that though I have heard she is beautiful, I don't like her lodgings and I am in no hurry to make her acquaintance."

"I have an idea," exclaimed Cethegus. "Why may not Proserpine be the strange lady who has captivated Marcus? He may have run across her as she was making one of those occasional trips between

Hades and Olympus. To be sure this midsummer time would not be the regular date for the lady's passage. Don't you remember, Delphium, that she spends the summer season with her mother and the winter months with Pluto? But no doubt Pluto takes it hard that his married life should be so interrupted. I always wondered that he consented to the arrangement at all. Probably he sends for her now and then when his head aches or he wants to hear the latest gossip from Olympus. Yes, I think it is extremely likely that Marcus ran across her while she was making a special journey down to Hades to comfort her pining spouse; and that is why he can not tell us who the fair nymph is that has cast such a spell upon him. Of course he would not recognize her. We have not any of us as intimate an acquaintance with the lady as we shall have some day."

This sally drew a laugh from all, the company taking a slightly malicious pleasure in making merry at Marcus' expense; for they were a little resentful of his refusal to gratify their curiosity about the Unknown. Marcus himself smiled good-naturedly and was turning to leave the room when Delphium detained him with the query,

"But tell me, pray, where you are really going, Marcus. Pluto's Cave suggests Hades, but I don't suppose you are actually on your way there."

"You know the place but not by that name. It's a room where the gladiators drink."

"How came you to give it such a name?"

"Ask Cethegus. It was his invention."

"Oh," said Cethegus without waiting to be questioned, "because it's a beastly, evil-smelling hole; and the crew that haunt it, those gladiator friends of Marcus, are all sure to be killed very soon and take permanent lodgings with Pluto."

"I don't like to hear you say that Hades has a bad smell," remarked Curio. "It would get into the food. How do you know anything about it? Perhaps you are the one who has been seeing Proserpine and getting information out of her."

"No," replied Cethegus, "I have never had the honor of meeting her; but I am sure her habitation is not fragrant and inviting. Don't they say that the birds drop dead when they fly over the entrance?"

"Why do you go to such a place, Marcus?" inquired Delphium. "Those gladiators must be a coarse, unclean and disagreeable set of men."

"Well said, Delphium!" cried Cethegus. "They are indeed a sorry and disgusting lot; but Marcus seems to like them."

"Yes," said Marcus. "I like men who face death and have no fear of it."

"Oh, the animals in the arena do that."

"True, but they do not know that they are facing it."

"Well, what are these gladiators but animals?"

"Some are brutes, it is true. Some have the hearts and feelings of men."

"Styrax the Thracian doesn't," observed Milo. "He is a murderous fellow. Beware of him."

"He is more like a wild beast than a man. But

Hacho, the big Phrygian, has intelligence and a kind and generous heart."

"But most of them must be dull and stupid," said Delphium. "What in the world do you find to talk about with them?"

"They tell him sickening stories about hacking men to pieces," said Cethegus, who took a manifest enjoyment in giving an edge to his comments. "Marcus couldn't stand it if he weren't a born fighter himself."

"There is a good deal of bloodshed in their talk," admitted Marcus; "but their accounts of the battles they have taken part in are often thrilling, and some of them while hunting have had stirring adventures which I love to hear about. Many a poor fellow too speaks of the home he has left far away in a manner that rouses my sympathy."

"Who serves them?" Delphium asked. "Do they help themselves and are they allowed to drink as much as they please?"

"By no means. If they were, they would get wild, and mutiny and bloodshed would be the consequence. Three waiting girls serve them and three cups is the allowance of each man for a single evening."

"Wine and girls to serve it," commented Delphium. "Quite like princes they live, it seems to me."

"Princes!" said Marcus with a smile. "Very stately and magnificent princes they, who have to fight and be killed for our amusement, and by way of compensation are allowed to drink a few cups of thin sour wine and to snatch a few kisses that have no meaning or affection in them. Their lot is to my mind a sad

one. They have to work hard and they are ruled with a rod of iron. You fancy, perhaps, that they learn to enjoy their bloody conflicts before the multitudes, but sometimes they have to be driven into the arena with whips and hot irons. And at some of the schools they are so rough and unruly that they are kept in irons a great part of the time. But that is not the case at the school to which I go not far from the Porta Salutaris. This is one of the Emperor's schools and is under the charge of Piso, a very rigid governor but a kind-hearted man who has a genius for dealing with these wild fellows. All gladiators are well fed that they may have the strength to fight with spirit. Not all, by any means, have wine to drink. The room which Cethegus has named Pluto's Cave was arranged by Piso to give these brutalized, hard-working men a little comfort and solace. It is a big, rude, poorly lighted place, half underground; and you would not think it was badly named if you saw it."

"But how do you get admitted?" Delphium inquired. "Surely, not everyone that wishes is allowed to visit gladiators and drink with them."

"Oh, I know Piso well; and then I am the son of the Prefect. Few doors in Rome are closed to me. And now I will go and drink with these princely friends of mine, who are alive to-night and may be dead to-morrow."

X

HALF an hour later Marcus found himself in a low-ceiled room, about fifty feet square, lighted by four feeble lamps, one of which was placed on a bracket in each corner. So deep were the shadows in the obscurer portions of the apartment that it was not easy to discern at once what forms or objects were half hidden there. Irregularly placed about the room were a few wooden tables and chairs; and along its sides extended a seat which consisted of nothing more than a board supported on wooden props and fastened also to the wall. In the side opposite the low vaulted entrance was a door that opened into a small inner apartment, also dimly lighted and containing several casks of poor thin wine. The door was kept open, but by it sat a single soldier charged to see that none but the girls in attendance passed through to the inner room. One such sentinel was enough, for a century of soldiers was within easy call.

Marcus found a place on the broad seat close by the entrance and proceeded to make his eyes familiar with the obscure light and to see what was passing. Near him he was pleased to observe Hacho, the big Phrygian, with whom he exchanged a handshake and a hearty greeting.

“ Ah, Hacho, good friend! I scarcely made you out in the darkness. And you are always so quiet and

still. Have you had your wine? ”

“ Not yet, master.”

“ Then come to one of the tables with me, and we will drink together.”

They seated themselves at a table near by. Marcus clapped his hands and one of the young women came promptly to serve them. Hacho handed her a thin, rudely stamped metal disc, three of which were given to each one of the gladiators who were allowed on any particular evening to seek this poor make-shift for a resort of pleasure. Marcus, however, needed no disc. He was a familiar figure here and his father's office and authority were well understood.

Wine was brought them in two wooden cups. As they drank they pledged each other, Hacho employing the gladiators' well known formula, ‘ Doomed to die, I give you greeting.’

“ No, no, Hacho! Don't say that!” exclaimed Marcus. “ Those big strong arms of yours have carried you through many a hard fight safe and sound, and they will do it yet for many and many a day. Why, I don't believe there is a man living who could get the better of you.”

“ I'm thinking you might do it yourself, good master.”

“ I? Nonsense, Hacho! I haven't your strength or skill.”

“ Perhaps not my strength, master, though you are better put together than I, even if not so large. But your skill is greater than mine.”

“ No, no! You flatter me, Hacho. You have had

such a long experience in the use of every weapon that you know many a trick I am ignorant of."

"Well, at any rate, my time is bound to come before very long, master. Every man is sure to meet his better in the end."

"Shall you be glad or sorry when that time comes, Hacho?"

"Not very sorry, good master. Life is sweet, but it isn't really living to fight men and kill them. Ah, I always feel so badly when the people hold their thumbs down and I have to put a brave man to death. Often do I wish I was back in my Phrygian mountains."

"I wish with all my heart you were, my good brave Hacho."

They said no more. Hacho was by nature reticent. Marcus, who could talk with almost anyone, would have drawn him out, but his listless mood was still upon him. His visit to Delphium's had not shaken it off. He had indeed come to this gathering place of rough and savage characters in the hope that something might occur that would stir his blood. And he was not to be disappointed. His spirits were effectually roused before the evening was over.

Relapsing into silence, he looked carefully about him and noted all who were in the room and what they were doing. About a dozen gladiators were present, not more than that number being allowed to come on one evening, as a safeguard against brawls and uproar. There was, accordingly, a lack of that stir and tension that are sure to come when many rude and boisterous spirits are crowded together. The scene was, indeed,

rather a dull and depressing one. In spite of the warm July weather, the men had been drilled and worked severely; and, wearied with their exertions, several were fast asleep. They lay at full length on the broad seat, snoring loudly. These had had their three cups of wine and for them the pleasure and the special interest of the evening was ended.

But at a table not far from Marcus five were engaged in earnest conversation, and their gestures showed that a man who sat at a little distance from them, near the entrance to the store room, was to some extent the subject of their talk. Looking intently through the gloom and the shadows, Marcus perceived that this was no other than Styrax, the brutal Thracian, against whom he had been warned. Like all the other gladiators present, he was as scantily clothed as decency allowed; and even through the obscurity Marcus could not but note the air of ferocity and the enormous brute strength of the man. Being quite familiar with the fellow's features, he could picture what he could not clearly discern and could see mentally how his small fierce eyes, his thick nose and lips, his retreating forehead and protruding chin consorted with his bull neck that was well revealed by his closely cropped red hair. Nor did the limbs and body belie the animal aspect of the neck and face. The Thracian was short, massive, thick-chested and broad-shouldered, with arms that were long for a man of his stature and enormously strong.

Always ill-natured, he had taken his present seat, as Marcus soon saw, for a spiteful and malicious purpose.

He was so near the doorway of the wine room that every girl who went there to fill a cup from the jars had to pass within his reach; and each one that did so received some annoyance from him. The girls were coarse, large-limbed creatures, with sensuous faces, who, if they were at all decently treated, really liked the life they were leading. Indeed, they were selected from the various nationalities who made up the Roman populace, for that very reason. To them a gladiator was a hero, and to be kissed and praised by one was a pleasing attention and nothing more than a natural reward for the service rendered in bringing the ordered cup of wine. But the attentions of Styrax were by no means gratifying. As they went by he pinched their legs and arms, slapped them so that the noise resounded through the apartment, pulled their hair, and if he kissed one of them he contrived to put his arm round her at the same time and tickle her so as to make her scream with misery. One of the bolder girls became so exasperated that she forestalled him by a quick and unexpected movement as she approached him, and gave him a sounding slap on the ear; but he uttered such a growl of wrath and glared so fiercely at her that she ran frightened into the wine room; and no one after that dared to retaliate when persecuted.

Wondering why the soldier present did not stop the petty tyranny, Marcus went to him and asked him to interfere. But the man positively refused. "I am here," he said, "to see that these fellows do not get into the wine room. The wenches must look out for themselves. This kind of fooling is what they expect. It's

give and take every night between them and the men."

So Marcus went back to his seat determined to stop the ill-usage himself if it continued. But before he had decided to act, his ear was caught by words that came from the group seated not far away. What they said was so significant that he determined to catch what he could of the conversation. They talked in low tones, sometimes in whispers; but his hearing was acute and he could get the substance of what they said. As they talked in a jargon of their own which was about half Roman speech and half the slang of criminals and desperadoes, they assumed that Marcus could not understand them, if indeed they had really noted him and observed who he was. But Marcus had mixed with the gladiators enough to make out their dialect. The conversation which he heard ran as follows.

"He has a foul stroke and he means to kill us all by it, one by one."

"Let's kill him before he kills us."

"How can we do it?"

"Right here this very night."

"Not where he is sitting now. The guard would see us."

"Right. We must get him away where we can do it in the shadows."

"But we have no knife. Weapons, you know, can't be brought here."

"I have one," said the man who spoke first. "I stole it from the armory and hid it under my shirt. It is sharp as a razor."

"Will you stick him?"

“Yes, if the rest of you will get him into a dark place and stand all around him.”

“I don’t like the business,” said one. “It means torture.”

“No, for they will never find out who did it.”

“They will torture all of us.”

“No. What do they care if one more gladiator is dead? What are we for but to be killed, any way?”

“I think we had better do it,” said one who seemed to have spoken less than the others, “but not here in the room. You, Harpages, who have the knife, you lurk behind him and stick him just as he gets outside when we go to our quarters.”

“Yes, that is best,” said another; and one or two more repeated, “That is best.”

Styrax was a vile brute, but Marcus was not willing to let him be murdered. He was considering how to foil the plan of the assassins — whom after all he did not blame, for they seemed to be acting in self-defense — when something occurred that brought him to his feet for prompt and instant action.

Not satisfied with tormenting the serving girls in the various ways mentioned, Styrax had resorted to a new method of causing vexation. As one of the girls passed hastily by him with a full wine cup in each hand, he thrust out his foot, and tripped her so that she fell heavily to the floor, her face and clothes splashed with the spilled red wine. She was not much hurt, but her mortification was great; and, bursting into tears as she picked herself up, she ran back with much haste and trepidation into the store-room.

Marcus had no longer any doubt that the time had come to act, and his action was as energetic as it was prompt and unexpected. He ran hastily but noiselessly to Styrax, seized the surly ruffian before he had the least idea of what was coming, lifted him from his seat and dashed him with great force to the floor. There he pinioned him and called Hacho to his assistance. Hacho was, however, already at hand. He saw that trouble was coming the moment Marcus rose from his seat, and he had followed at his heels to support him in whatever he attempted to do. Stronger, much stronger even, than Styrax, he easily held the infuriated bully fast while Marcus turned to the astonished guard.

"Soldier," he cried, "take that man away and lock him in a cell! Hacho will give you all the necessary assistance. To-morrow he will be dealt with."

The man began to demur, but Marcus cut him short.

"Do as I say, or you will be dealt with, too. You know who I am. My father never spares men who refuse to do their duty."

The man hesitated no longer. He placed himself beside Hacho to conduct Styrax away; but before they could move the burly Thracian he turned upon Marcus, fairly frenzied with wrath, and called him every vile name to be found in the vocabulary of men of his desperate type. When he had exhausted the language of scurrilous epithet, he added,

"You shall pay for this. You won't fight with me, you coward. Oh, no! I am only a gladiator and you are the son of the Prefect. You could not soil your

hands by crossing swords with me. I understand the wretched excuse you would trump up to shield yourself, you white-livered, black-hearted patrician. But no man lays the heavy hand on me without paying for it. I'll be even with you. I'll have your heart's blood, though the Prefect and the Emperor himself protect you. So beware, you scurvy son of a vile and scurvy race!"

"Take him away!" said Marcus, quietly but authoritatively; and he followed the three to the door to make sure that Harpages did not skulk after them and do his murderous deed. But Harpages and his band had been quite overawed by what had happened, and Marcus had saved the life of the very man who had showered him with curses.

XI

MARCUS could under almost any provocation retain his self-control. He had not been betrayed into any outward manifestation of excitement when Styrax emptied upon him the vials of his wrath. But his apathy had wholly vanished. Unconsciously he walked with an accelerated step as he went homeward, and the disturbing experience through which he had passed was active in his mind. The fighting instinct in him had been thoroughly aroused. It humiliated him that he had been obliged to turn over to military discipline the man on whom he had laid a rough hand. He was swayed by the feeling which makes every man of spirit dislike to deal a blow without standing to receive the returning buffet. The man was only a gladiator; "But what of that?" said Marcus to himself. "He's a man, and I should like to face him as a man with sword or cæstus and give him the satisfaction of a man."

His homeward path carried him through a street which connected with the one on which Delphium's house was situated. As he came to the point where the two streets met, a sudden impulse seized him to go to Delphium's again, refresh himself with a glass of wine, and quiet himself by thinking calmly over the disturbing experience he had just been through or by relating it to some of his chosen comrades. Even

when important matters had to be settled he was not apt to hesitate; in trivial things he decided instantly upon a course of action. No sooner therefore did the inclination to make a second visit to the wine room come to him than he obeyed it. The question of going or not going seemed to him to be of the smallest consequence; in reality it was the turning point of his life.

It still lacked two hours of midnight when he appeared at Delphium's door. He expected to find his friends still sitting at their cups. They had however already departed. They had not lingered long after his own withdrawal, for no one seemed able to enliven the flagging spirits of the company. Accordingly, when Marcus brought the surly Gugon to the door by his knock, he was told that the wine room was deserted. Gugon indeed, refused to admit him. He declared that no more wine was to be served that night and that it was too late for anyone to enter. Marcus however had put his foot in the slight opening which Gugon made when he opened the door a little way, and by main strength he now pushed his way in. He had no clear intention in his mind when he did so; but he was never willing to be foiled in anything he attempted, whether it was kissing a flower girl or overcoming a churlish door-keeper. Once inside, he looked with quiet amusement at the humiliated Gugon, who prided himself on his strength and was much chagrined that he had been so easily worsted. He was, indeed, an ill-looking fellow. The straggling beard that covered his face was not heavy enough to disguise his harsh,

repulsive features. Even a glance was sufficient to take in his ugly chin, broad coarse mouth, flat nose and small black piercing eyes. From his low forehead rose a thick short growth that seemed more like bristles than human hair and helped to give his face its mingled expression of ferocity and cunning.

"Go and tell your mistress I am here!" said Marcus, after gazing at him for a moment.

"Go and tell her yourself! You seem to think you own the house," replied Gugon snappishly.

"Don't bandy words! Go and deliver my message!"

"That I shall not."

"I think you will."

And straightway Marcus seized the fellow's right wrist, carried it behind his back and twisted it till he writhed with pain. Strong as Gugon was, he was but a child to the man who towered above him.

"Promise me that you will go at once and tell your mistress that I am here!"

"Let go and I will see about it."

Marcus gave the wrist another twist. Only pride kept Gugon from shrieking under the torture. "I promise," he said sullenly and Marcus released him. His face glaring with hatred and his tones more like those of a snarling wild beast than a man's, he said, "You shall pay for this some time. Yes," he repeated, shaking his fist in Marcus' face, "you shall pay for this," and departed on his errand.

"Two enemies made in one night," said Marcus to himself as he found his way into the carousing room.

"It is well that I am strong and not timid. I wonder how they think they are going to pay me back? I believe each of them is knave enough to run a knife in me from behind if he gets the chance. No matter. I can take care of myself."

Gugon would hardly have resisted Marcus' entrance had he realized how welcome it was to his mistress. "My opportunity has come," she thought when she learned that Marcus wished to see her. He had never before come at such an hour when the house could be kept free from intrusion and the languorous quiet of approaching midnight could make its care-freeing suggestions and invite tranquillity and repose. But with true Greek subtlety and with the self-command that is born of an alert and scheming selfishness, she determined to use her opportunity wisely and not abuse it. Too much must not be staked on a single hazard.

Marcus had waited for her in the larger of the rooms where wine was served. Entering it, Delphium greeted him cordially, yet with a certain dignified reserve that seemed to suggest surprise that he had summoned her at an hour when the wine room was deserted.

"Is it wine that you have come for?" she asked hesitatingly.

"Hardly. I thought I should find my comrades here. Not finding them, I might have gone away without entering at all had not your servant Gugon resisted me so stoutly. I do not like to be baffled, you know."

"That I learned years ago in Sicily. As to your difference with Gugon, I knew of that without your

telling me. He came to me with a face like a thunder cloud and he muttered fiercely to himself. But I will soothe him and he will forget all about the matter tomorrow. He is my watchdog, you know, and he will growl a little sometimes."

"He growled at me so savagely that I do not think he will forget his grievance right away. But let him cherish it. I care not. I am sorry, though, not to find my friends here. I had a stirring time at Pluto's Cave and I wanted to tell them about it. As they have gone home, suppose I tell it to you."

"A story? That would be charming. But I can't listen to it here in the wine room. Come back to the part of the house we live in. I have a cozy little apartment there where you can have a cup of rare wine such as is not given to those who are served in the wine room; and there you can tell me all about this exciting experience you have had."

This was by no means what Marcus had expected when he had forced his way into the house; but he was not unwilling. His story was one he would naturally have preferred to relate to the men in his circle of friends; still, he was so eager to find a hearer that he was glad to tell it to Delphium. So he followed her readily and was shown by her into a room which Delphium had carefully prepared with a view to giving it a specially inviting character. It was small and daintily furnished. The walls and the ceiling had been tinted pink, but the frescoes and borderings relieved them of bareness. The furniture was of ebony, but it was so richly inlaid with ivory that it quite lacked

the somberness that naturally belongs to that somber wood. It consisted of a table in the center, a cabinet in one corner, and three or four divans and chairs which were bountifully strewn with soft cushions of variegated but subdued colors in keeping with the tone of the walls and the ceiling. Upon the floor was a rug in which dull pink tones predominated. The apartment was lighted by four lamps which stood on brackets placed in the four corners of the room; but the light of each was softened by a screen of thin pink cloth, which made the room seem to be not so much illuminated as pervaded by a faint and tranquillizing glow. Everything in the little salon suggested dreaminess and rest.

And well was the suggestion borne out by Delphium herself. Her abundant coils of hair showed attractively in the rosy light which played upon her clear and delicately tinted complexion only to give added charm to its natural beauty. Her large blue eyes always had a soft velvety look which now seemed to be enhanced and rendered more alluring. Even her smile, which always had a radiating quality that captivated her admirers, gained now an added sweetness. Lithe, slender and graceful, she seemed, as she moved airily and noiselessly about the room in a white robe richly embroidered with pink and green, to vitalize the languorous atmosphere of the apartment and give its slumberous appeal to the senses a magic force and efficacy.

On entering she had motioned Marcus to a divan, where he half sat and half reclined among the cushions.

But she did not allow him to begin his story without ministering further to his comfort and increasing the soothing influence of his surroundings. Going to the cabinet she took from it a cup and an amphora and said,

“ You must not say a word, Marcus, till you have drunk some of the wine I spoke of. This is a kind I cannot produce for those who come here to drink with their friends. They would never be satisfied with any other after they had tasted this, and I could not supply it in quantities. It is an old choice vintage, a little of which my father is able to get from Grumio, the dealer, because he gives him so much patronage. I don't suppose you feel excited in spite of your evening's experience; for nothing really does excite you. But if you are even a little perturbed, drink two or three beakers of this and you will feel as refreshed as you do in the morning after a long and dreamless sleep.”

She handed him a silver cup that had been filled with the soothing potion to the brim. Soothing indeed it was, and for a reason she had not considered it discreet to mention. In it she had placed a small quantity of a costly drug which she had obtained from a merchant from Damascus and which caused a delightful feeling of exhilaration quite different from that occasioned by ardent spirits. It lulled the mind into a dreamy complacent activity, and though soothing was not provocative of slumber till one or two hours had elapsed.

Marcus slowly quaffed the palatable liquor, not has-

tening to drain the cup and begin to converse, so pleasant did he find it to sit in quiet and enjoy the soothing influences of his surroundings. When he had finished it, Delphium filled it again and said,

“Drink one more beaker and then begin. I am getting very impatient to hear what has happened.”

Marcus drank the second cup as slowly as the first. He then gave an unadorned but quite vivid account of his evening's experience. The tale was sufficiently absorbing in itself, but it was listened to with far deeper interest than Marcus suspected. Delphium was bent on using the incident to her own advantage if possible. If by giving Marcus valuable advice or help she could render him her debtor, she would materially advance her scheme of proving herself necessary to him and making a conquest of him in the end. By the time he had finished she had decided to make him a startling suggestion — a suggestion indeed which showed invincibly the selfish character of her love.

“No wonder,” she said, “you want to give him the satisfaction he craves. That's the way with men of courage like yourself. And it would be a good thing to put the beast out of the way. So, why don't you do it?”

“Why don't I do it? Why don't I fight a gladiator? Why, simply because it is impossible.”

“No, it is not impossible. I see a way it can be done.”

“Tell it to me and I shall be your debtor for life.”

“It is very simple. Meet him in the arena.”

“In the arena? Absurd! You don't know what

you are saying. I am a Roman citizen and the son of the Prefect."

"No one need know that you are a Roman and the son of the Prefect."

"But they must. They could not help it. I am known everywhere. I am unmistakable."

Delphium shook her head. "No," she said, "nobody need know you. You could be disguised."

"How?"

"I will show you."

Leaving the room, she soon returned with a small cedar chest from which she took various articles by means of which a face could be effectually disguised — beards of various colors and small well secured jars of staining fluids and cosmetics.

"You could wear a false beard like this," she said, holding against his face one that matched his hair fairly well. "Or you could color your face and neck and arms with this," and from one of the jars which she had unsealed she poured upon a bit of white fabric a few drops of a dark shining liquid. As could be discerned even in the rosy artificial light, the fabric became a rather dark brown.

"There!" she cried. "By using that you could make yourself a Nubian or perhaps an Egyptian."

"How came you to have such things, Delphium?" asked Marcus, his mind diverted for a moment from the question at issue by pure curiosity.

Delphium looked at him archly for a moment and held up a playful warning finger, as if he were encroaching on forbidden ground. Then with a smile

that seemed to mean that she could not resist telling him anything he wanted to know, she said,

“ I have had to fight my way in the world, Marcus. I can't help sympathizing with men whose lives have been nothing but a fight, even if it is the law they are often contending with. Once in a while such a man comes here, though of course he doesn't sit in the room where you and your friends gather; and who is harmed if I help him out of a scrape? But I mustn't be telling more of my secrets to your father's son.”

Marcus smiled as he answered,

“ If I told my father about all the shady deeds I have seen done and about all the shady people who do them, I should have been murdered in some narrow alley long before this. But to the point. What you propose is very hazardous. It is not that I fear anything for myself. Ever since I learned to use a sword I have longed to use one in grim earnest and make the red blood flow. If my own flows also and my life goes with it, never mind. It is a good manly way to die. No, it isn't that I care about. It is the risk of being known that makes me hesitate. My father would never get over the disgrace of it. He would never forgive me. And I would not grieve him for the world.”

“ There is absolutely no danger of discovery, Marcus. No one could possibly recognize you under a beard or with your face stained.”

“ I won't wear a beard, any way. It is cumbersome; and besides, the gladiators are clean shaven.”

“ Well, the staining fluid will disguise you so that

your own father would not know you three paces away."

"Oh, yes, he would. And then my figure would betray me. I am so big."

"Some of the gladiators are huge men. Your size would occasion no comment."

Marcus was not convinced. Still, the action was one he so much wanted to take that he decided to set caution at defiance. After thinking a few moments, he said with decision,

"I will do it. I will do it if I can persuade Piso to help me out, and I believe I can. Yes, I will do it: But may Castor and Pollux help me. I do not shrink from being wounded or even killed in a fair fight, if only I am not hurt so as to be discovered and bring humiliation on my father."

"Castor and Pollux won't help you. It is your own strength and skill, and above all your wit, that will carry you through. You need fear nothing in a fair fight. But the question is, will it be a fair fight? The knave has a foul stroke. That is the only thing that may undo you."

"I will practice fencing with the gladiators, and I will watch Styrax myself and also consult with Hacho. A foul stroke can do nothing against watchfulness and skill. I am not afraid of it."

"How soon is the meeting likely to come off if Piso is willing to arrange it?"

"Not immediately. I must practice a while first and master all the tricks which the best swordsmen use. There may be some I haven't learned yet."

Marcus said no more. There was nothing he wished to add, and he was not given to talking for the sake of making conversation. And yet he found himself little inclined to go. The soft light, the comfortable divan, the stillness of the hour, the dreamy mood imparted by the medicated wine, and the subtle and pervasive charm of Delphium's presence as she quietly fanned herself or moved with languid grace about the room, all combined to generate the insidious suggestion that positive action of any kind was a rude and unwarrantable interruption of a prevailing harmony. With fine artfulness Delphium ministered to this mood which, with her quick penetration, she perfectly understood. She saw that Marcus no longer wished to talk, and she refrained from making any further observations for fear that she might seem to be trying to detain him. Yet she was not willing to sit still, for if the two remained seated without speaking, Marcus would quickly realize that the situation was an unnatural one. So she busied herself by gliding softly about the room with a purpose that seemed suggested by the objects at hand. She looked at the lamps to see if they were burning properly. Then, after seating herself and plying her fan for a short time, she rose and put back in their chest the beards and the other articles used for disguise. That done, she turned her attention to the cabinet and its various contents. As there remained nothing else to busy her, she once more resumed her seat and languidly plied her fan.

Many men would have lingered a long time before breaking the spell. But Marcus was never self-indul-

gent, and mere inaction for the sake of the gratification it afforded was foreign to his nature. Very soon he seemed suddenly to realize that he was doing something for which no satisfying reason or motive could be found. The thought was enough to make him act on the instant. He rose abruptly without comment or excuse, bade Delphium a hasty but cordial goodnight, and left the room.

As she heard his retreating footsteps, Delphium said softly to herself,

“He will come again. He will come again. I have made a good beginning.”

She had made an excellent beginning, but she did not realize how difficult it is for the adventuress to make her star shine with a steady and unclouded light. A past not free from reproach is like a marsh that is ever generating noxious vapors; for it sends up mists that not only obscure the sky but also create a bewildering fog in which the adventuress herself loses her way. Not wholly wise had Delphium been in producing the articles of disguise. To Marcus' unsuspecting mind they had carried no evil suggestion. He had indeed secretly admired the proof they seemingly gave of a kindness not limited to the pale of respectability. So the hasty and unguarded act was not likely to prove a fatal downward step. Yet how quickly might it have called forth embarrassing questions had Marcus not been so generous a friend. True, Delphium had dropped all relation with Euthro. She was far too shrewd to go near him, for she knew that her reputation might be wholly ruined if she went even once to

his evil haunt. But some of the lawless spirits who frequented it had discerned that at heart Delphium was their friend. Now and then they made their way to her wine rooms, and these were the men she admitted to Marcus she sometimes helped out of a scrape. The plain truth was, she too inevitably gravitated toward vitiated natures to keep wholly clear of them. And with such allies and such a past, would she not some time take unwittingly a step that would hopelessly compromise her? Though the production of the disguises had not wrought mischief, the impulse that guided her in this case might in the end lead her to do or say some thoughtless thing that would prove her undoing.

XII

THE following morning, as Agrippa was eating his simple breakfast, Marcus appeared and joined him in accordance with his usual custom. They greeted each other and exchanged a few commonplaces, and Agrippa then gave his attention afresh to an important document which he had been studying when Marcus entered the room. But he did not become deeply absorbed in it, for he expected to be interrupted. Thoroughly acquainted with his son's moods, he was satisfied that Marcus now had something on his mind. He was not surprised, therefore, when he presently received the inquiry,

“Have you ever noted Hacho, the big gladiator?”

“Yes, I have watched him practicing among his fellow gladiators, and I have observed him also in the arena where he does not seem to find his match. But I suppose his turn will come some day. It is a pity, too, for he is a splendid specimen of a man.”

“Why couldn't he be saved from such a fate?”

“Why, for that matter, shouldn't they all be saved? I am sure they would like it. But unfortunately our Roman populace thinks there is no amusement equal to that of seeing men kill each other.”

Having just made up his mind to enter the arena himself and contribute to this bloody sport, Marcus naturally refrained from making strictures on this

form of entertainment. The subject he was pursuing was a personal, not a general one. Indeed, his own resolve of the previous evening forced him to take a somewhat apologetic tone toward gladiatorial shows.

"Perhaps," said he, "a good many of them love the life. They are rough brutal fellows who like the excitement of it, and they wouldn't know how to turn their hand to anything else. But some of them are decent, manly men, and why should they be killed in cold blood to please a grinning multitude? Why not save the best and bravest from such an ignominious end?"

"It would make the rest ugly and vicious. And how could the line be drawn?"

"I suppose it couldn't be; but I do not see why everyone of them should be doomed because it is hard to pick out the sound oaks from the rotten ones."

"In other words," said Agrippa with an amused smile, "you think Hacho ought to be saved from a gladiator's death."

"Yes," said Marcus, smiling also, "that is exactly what I have in mind. I know him well. He is kind and gentle, and he has a good heart. He is worthy of a better fate than to fall wounded on the sand, look up for mercy and see a great throng of cruel people holding their thumbs down. The light of the sun is as pleasant to a gladiator as it is to you and me."

"So you know Hacho well. I see, then, that you still keep up your practice of going to the gladiators' school and crossing swords with the men there. You must be a master of the art by this time. Sometimes,"

Agrippa added with an attempt at pleasantry, "I almost think I shall see you in the arena itself. You have the soldier's unconquerable love of fighting. But when you are older, I will send you against those blood-thirsty Germans. They are always going to war and giving us trouble. As to Hacho, what do you really know about him? Is he always well-behaved?"

"Always. He helps to quiet the unruly ones. He never stirs up trouble. Piso would speak as well of him as I do."

"Where did he come from?"

"From Phrygia."

"What is his story?"

"He was captured by a band of roving soldiers while he was out hunting. He lived with his father and mother and his brothers and sisters in the mountains, where the people seem to make hunting their only occupation. I should judge from what he has told me that they are by no means a savage or cruel lot, but a very wild one. The poor fellow did not resist when the soldiers fell upon him. He couldn't. It was one against twenty. But he once said to me that if he had known the life he was coming to, he would have fought till they killed him."

"What is to be done with him if he is released?"

"He ought to be a soldier, he uses weapons so well; but he need not be in active service. Why not make him a special body attendant, to live here in the house and wait on you and do your errands?"

"And yours too perhaps," said Agrippa, with a

shrewd and humorous glance at Marcus, for he knew he was reading his son's mind correctly. "Very well. I will think the matter over. I do not now see any objection to what you propose."

The following morning Marcus and his father again ate their breakfast together; and as they did so they conversed on various topics suggested by their own personal experiences or by the larger happenings of the time. To Hacho, however, Marcus did not refer; for he knew that if his father saw fit to act in the matter at all, he would act without further prompting and would be displeased if the subject were pressed or urged upon him. Immediate action he had not expected, for Agrippa was one of the busiest men in Rome. He was, therefore, surprised to hear his father say as he rose to leave the room,

"I saw Piso yesterday and arranged with him to have Hacho come here and be a special body servant. But he hasn't been told yet. We agreed that it was best to leave that to you."

And before Marcus could express his appreciation of this prompt attention to his wishes, his father was out of the room.

Without any delay he went to the gladiatorial school, found Hacho and said to him,

"Hacho, how would you like to leave this place and come and live at my father's house?"

"I should like it better than anything in the world, good master," answered Hacho, his eyes shining with joy and gratitude.

"Better than going back to your own home and

people? ”

Hacho grew grave and thoughtful and seemed to measure his words as he replied,

“ Perhaps not better than that, and yet I am not sure. I do not know what has happened since I left my home. Some of my people may be dead. Some may have gone away. And it is all so rough and wild there! I should miss the city and the things that are done here. No, master. If I can give up being a gladiator and killing men, I think I shall be glad to stay in Rome.”

“ Then you will be glad to come and be a servant in my father’s house? ”

“ More glad than I can tell, and I will serve you and him with all my heart.”

The change was made that very day, and Hacho proved so willing and faithful that he soon became invaluable. But how great a service Marcus had rendered to himself in doing this act of mercy and kindness, he was not immediately to learn.

XIII

IT was with very great reluctance that Piso fell in with Marcus' scheme and consented to pit him against Styrax in the arena.

"Impossible!" he said at first. "It would be known and I should be degraded. Your father would never forgive me."

"No, I should disguise myself so effectually that no one would recognize me."

"The gladiators would have to know it."

"That need not be. It could be contrived that only Styrax should know whom he was fighting against. Besides, the gladiators live apart by themselves, and what was known to them would not have to reach the ears of others."

"It is very unsafe. Supposing you fall and are killed?"

"I don't mean to be. I am going to send that brute down to Hades. He's a pest that you should be glad to get rid of."

"He's a pest. I admit that. I should be glad to see him beg for mercy from the populace and get none."

"Very well. I will rid you of him. Have no scruples. No one will ever suspect who I am. Dismiss all fear on that score from your mind."

So Piso unwillingly consented, overborne by Mar-

cus' insistence and the air of authority which he easily wore; and it was agreed between them that about a month later the two should confront each other in one of the gladiatorial contests which the Romans so passionately loved.

Marcus, accordingly, began at once a most vigorous course of training. He engaged in long and furious fencing bouts with the gladiators and exercised even harder than usual in the gymnasium. Notwithstanding the assurances he had so readily given to Piso, he was himself in a feverish and excited state of mind. He could not be certain of the outcome of the fierce and bloody contest he was to engage in, and he found himself much more harassed by the fear of exposure than he had thought possible. It was the feeling that he had put up a barrier between himself and his father that troubled him and preyed upon his mind. He found it difficult now to be natural when he met his father at the morning meal and at other times. There had never before been what could be called a secret between them; and the consciousness that one now existed so worried him that he was sometimes tempted to abandon his project. But the man in him made him unwilling to do this, as such a course seemed to savor of cowardice.

His strenuous exertions at the gymnasium were noted by his friends, particularly by Milo and Lentulus who often accompanied him there. The former asked him one day why he exercised with such fierce and persistent activity; but Marcus put him aside with a half-serious comment to the effect that his big body

was getting too bulky and he had to work hard to keep it in proper condition. But Lentulus was not so easily satisfied. He possessed a discernment almost as keen as that of Marcus himself; and his uprightness of mind gave weight to his words. There was no one among his acquaintances whom Marcus so thoroughly respected; for Lentulus was absolutely free from the vicious forms of self-indulgence that were almost universal among the young Romans of that time. He never drank too freely at banquets. He went to no evil haunts, and he even kept clear of Delphium's house where the moral atmosphere was at least misty even if not charged with murkiness. Familiar with the history of Greece and of his own country — for he was a reader and a thinker — he held up to himself such characters as Pericles, Socrates, Epaminondas and the Scipios as worthy of imitation; and the worldly-wise but clean and genial philosophy of Horace he studied constantly and unswervingly followed. So greatly did Marcus esteem him that he would take suggestions from him he would take from no one else, and for his judgment he had ample respect.

Lentulus had noted Marcus' ardent and almost unremitting exertions in the gymnasium, and he knew that the explanation Milo had elicited was pure evasion. So the very next day he questioned Marcus quite searchingly as they sat together after a season of vigorous exercise with the *pila*; and Marcus told the whole story after first binding his friend to secrecy.

"I wouldn't do it, Marcus," said Lentulus, slowly shaking his head. "It is hazardous and it is needless.

Your indifference to the actual danger I understand and appreciate, but the very thing you fear is likely to come about. If you are worsted, your father will know all; and he is too proud to get over the humiliation of having his son classed with the gladiators."

"But I shan't get worsted. I am more than a match for that brute of a Thracian."

"In bodily strength, in intelligence, and in ordinary skill at the fence, yes. But I still think the odds are with Styrax. Actual experience in the arena teaches a man a hundred tricks that mere practice cannot give. And in a fight to the death I believe that fellow's animal cunning is worth more than your cleverness and quickness; for your powers of mind will not find their fit opportunity in such a low test of skill and courage."

"You underrate me, Lentulus," said Marcus with a careless laugh. "Mind is and must be superior to brute force, and I have the force also as well as the higher intelligence. The truth is," he added in a tone of playful raillery, "I am Ajax and Ulysses all in one, and I can't fail to win."

"Well, be wary at any rate and look out for that foul stroke of his."

"I don't believe he has any and Piso doesn't think so either. It's mere brag to frighten the other men."

"I doubt it. I suspect he will make a tricky attempt to get at an unprotected part of the body. Remember that and be on your guard."

"Oh, yes, I will watch him carefully and be ready to meet all his feints and thrusts. I am quick of eye and quick of limb. If he tries to get at me in any foul

or unfair way, I shall foil him. Be sure of that."

"But it is all so needless! The man should be killed, but you ought not to be the one to kill him. It's a dirty job and not one for you to soil your hands with. As for your feeling that you owe him a chance to get even with you because you laid rough hands upon him, that is sheer folly. Does the centurion who flogs a soldier feel bound to stand up against him afterwards with sword and shield in order to make amends?"

"Ah, you haven't the love of battle in you, and you can't understand how I feel. I have mingled freely with these men, crossed swords with them and drunk with them. I have not met them as an officer to order them about, but as a man who had the love of fight in him and who liked to go round among them just because fighting is their trade. The fellow was brutal and rough and I laid him sprawling for it. I didn't do it as having authority, but simply because I wouldn't stand by and see the ruffian use his coarse strength against the girls who couldn't defend themselves. He called me a coward because I had him locked up instead of fighting it out with him. I want to show him that I am all ready to fight it out, man to man."

"Well, be watchful and see that he doesn't run a knife into you while you are fencing with some other gladiator. I'll protest no more, for I see that your mind is made up."

"Yes, it is made up. The truth is, I want the excitement of it. I find life rather tame. I wasn't

made to spend my time at gymnasiums and banquets, or to keep steady as you do by reading Horace. You and he would have had a rare time together at his humdrum Sabine Farm, but I should have led a dull and weary existence there. I want to do things, not to sit down and see others do them and then talk them over with my friends. The blood boils and riots in my veins. You can't imagine how I've longed to rush down into the arena myself and fight when I've seen the gladiators at their wild and bloody work. Yes, I crave stir and tumult and conflict, anything to fire the brain and make the pulses leap. But I can't do the vile, wanton things that the youths of Rome are doing all around us. The fire in me burns fiercely, but I don't care to feed it with the stuff that will make it flare up for a little while and then go out in smoke that has an evil smell and leaves nothing behind it but ashes."

"Why aren't you on one of our frontiers, fighting the barbarians?"

"I really ought to be. Perhaps before very long I shall be. I have suggested it to my father once or twice, but he doesn't seem to think the time has come for it yet. Strong and self-controlled as he is, I believe he can't quite make up his mind to part with me. If he thought I should get into mischief here and do evil or disgraceful things, you can be sure he would send me to one of our outposts without a moment's hesitation. But he knows very well that though I often go where the pots of mischief are boiling, I don't drink any of the foul broth. He and I have had many

a talk about that. I'm inclined to think he wants me to take up his work sometime and govern this city as he is governing it now; and he believes all the knowledge I am getting of its shady haunts and the men and women that seek them will be of great value to me when I am in authority. Before I take an office under him, I suppose I ought to have a year or two in camp; but that can come by and by. Meanwhile, here I am in the old city that Romulus founded, making a part of its gay and merry life but doing nothing that is really worth doing, nothing that is better than what these fops and giddy drinkers do all around me every day."

"Don't be impatient, Marcus. You are only twenty-one and in good time you will do something that will not be soon forgotten. Perhaps it will be in war; perhaps it will be right here in the city. But you must keep this wild feverish mood of yours as quiet as you can till you have met that dirty ruffian and got the matter off your mind. Join Milo and the rest of us and go and see the play to-morrow. It's a pleasing one, the 'Rudens of Plautus.' It's to be given at the Theater of Marcellus."

"Very good. I will join you. I suppose I shan't see you at Delphium's to-night."

"No. Fruit that is overripe is better than what is spoiled; but I have never cared for it."

"Fruit that is overripe? Why do you use such a phrase in speaking of Delphium? She is simply making an honest living and her wine room is always decent."

“ I have nothing to say against Delphium, and her rooms, I have no doubt, are as decent as they can be considering what reckless, tipsy youths go to them night after night. But I like better to read about such merrymakers in Plautus than to join their revels.”

“ Come, come! You are over-nice. You will soon be cutting those lively friends of ours, Bibulus and Curio and Bibrax.”

“ No, no! I like them for old acquaintance' sake and I laugh at their follies. They help to make our dinners entertaining. But too much spiced food is cloying. I don't want it at every meal I eat, and I don't want to know too many men that get riotous over their cups.”

XIV

NOTHING occurred to make Marcus suspicious of Delphium's true character and her wine room continued to be the resort most attractive to him. The evening that followed his conversation with Lentulus found him there with Milo, Cethegus and the rest. His mood was wild in spite of Lentulus' words of caution. With wonder and admiration his comrades noted his flow of spirits. Even Delphium, who understood as they did not what was passing in his mind, was not free from astonishment. She had entered the room as if by chance soon after he had come in, having been informed by one of her maids of his presence. Through these servitors she always kept herself fully acquainted with everything that was passing in the public rooms of her establishment.

"Your best wine, Delphium!" Marcus cried as soon as he saw her enter. "Your very best! I believe this stuff was made from rotten grape skins with some wretched dye poured in to give it thickness and color. Come, humor us to-night! We may not be here to-morrow. We are all on our way to Hades, and what poor thin beverage that churl of a Pluto will serve us no one can say. He's a shabby fellow or he never would be satisfied to live in such a rat-hole of a place."

“Don't be so gloomy, Marcus!” said Curio. “I'm not going to Hades to-morrow, if you are. I'm going to have many a good dish of turbot and capon and drink many an amphora of Delphium's wine before I take that unalluring journey. I don't want to take it at all, but I suppose I shall have to some day.”

“May you live to eat capons without number and drink whole cellars of wine! Here's a health to Curio, friends; and when he crosses the Styx, may Pluto welcome him with a platter of fried eels in one hand and in the other — ah, but I can't name the contents of the other without first telling you a story. While Proserpine is still sleeping, Pluto calls her one morning —”

“You are getting mixed, Marcus,” said Cethegus. “Aurora doesn't visit Hades.”

“You really must have visited the region sometime, Cethegus,” Marcus replied. “You are the one who named Pluto's Cave because you were sure the place resembled Hades; and now you say there is no sun-rise there. But we really can't accept any statement of yours about the sun-rise, above ground or below, for you never see one.”

This thrust at Cethegus' well known habit of lying in bed till noon was much relished. After the merriment it caused had subsided, Marcus continued,

“At any rate, there is a time for rising in Hades, whether it is morning or not; and as it draws near one day, Pluto wakes up Proserpine and says to her,

“‘Dear daughter of Ceres, you must get up and kill your pet peacock.’

“ ‘What, Carissima, that I have fed with my own hand?’

“ ‘Yes, Carissima must die.’

“ ‘Does Jove require this sacrifice?’

“ ‘Jove? Do you think I allow Jove to meddle with my affairs and dictate to me in my own domain? No, no! He may do what he likes up on Olympus, but I am king down here in Hades. It isn’t Jove but Curio that makes us give up our pet, in the name of hospitality.’

“ ‘Curio? Who is Curio?’

“ ‘Have you never heard of Curio? Why, he is the doughtiest eater and the most accomplished epicure in Rome. He is about to arrive and he really must have the best when he comes. We shall never receive another guest who would appreciate Carissima so much. So your pet must go!’ ”

“ You understand now, friends, what dish Pluto will have in the other hand when Curio makes his appearance in that dimly lighted kingdom. And close behind her lord will come Proserpine with a beaker of dark rich red wine.”

“ Oh, no, Marcus! Oh, no! You are surely wrong there,” cried Caius. “ That will be for Bibulus.”

“ For Bibulus? One beaker of wine for Bibulus? No, no! They know him better. When Bibulus arrives there, he will find two long lines of ghosts waiting for him, each with a full amphora of wine. And Bibulus will march slowly down between the lines and empty all the amphoras, one after another, as

they are handed to him."

All laughed at this, and yet the laughter was not hearty and ringing. Everyone present was somewhat taken aback at the audacity of Marcus' speech. The Romans of that day had no robust or assuring faith. Religion lived on as a ritual but had no vitality. With very many the gods were nothing more than names, and these young men at Delphium's had not yet the slightest element of real devoutness in them. Nevertheless, they did not feel altogether easy and comfortable to hear dreaded names mentioned in such a familiar and sacrilegious way, even though they admired the wit and boldness of the speaker.

There was a short pause after Marcus had finished. Then Milo, who had, more from timidity than anything else, some religious scruples left even if they were not ingrained convictions, inquired,

"Have you no belief in the Gods at all, Marcus? Do you think that Jupiter and Juno and Neptune and Pluto and all the rest are nothing but names?"

"I believe they are nothing but names and I believe that most Romans think so; only they are not as honest as Lucretius and do not dare to say what they think. Did you consider my little story about Pluto and Proserpine a bit shocking? Well, turn to the poets, from Homer down to Aristophanes and our own Ovid, and you will find plenty more that are just as free-spoken and a good deal more racy. Some day the wit will rise who will turn the whole system into ridicule and make it such a laughing-stock that men will all cast it aside like a toga that has been worn to

tatters.”

“What do you think about it all, Delphium?” inquired Cethegus, out of pure curiosity to see how a woman like her would meet such a question.

“Oh, I’m a Greek,” said Delphium quickly, “and the women of Greece were never allowed to think. The men did it for them.”

“Seems to me Aspasia and certain friends of hers did a good deal of thinking,” replied Cethegus, with a slight emphasis on friends and a searching glance at Delphium. But this fling at the women of her class did not embarrass the astute and nimble-witted Greek.

“I believe,” she replied unhesitatingly, “that Athens did have its golden days partly through the influence of Aspasia and her *friends*; but not all men have been as generous to woman as the great Pericles.”

“But Marcus,” cried the dismayed Caius in a wailing and distressful tone, “I don’t want to think that there are no Gods. I want to believe in Pluto and go somewhere when I have lived my life here. Hades may be a pretty poor sort of a place, but it is better than nothing. Don’t you believe in it? Don’t you expect to go there?”

“I have hopes,” answered Marcus, “but no belief. I do not believe there are Gods on Olympus who are able to rule men and laugh at them even though they do not lead a decent life themselves. I do not believe an angry old man with a trident ever stirs the ocean; and I do not believe we mortals are led down to Hades by a tricky and lying God to meet Pluto and live forever in darkness. Why should men like Soc-

rates and Plato go down into a dim and shadowy realm? Why should they not go up into the light? Something within me tells me that they do, that we all do, and that what is to come is better than what is here. But that is all hope. What I see and know is that Rome has lived for nigh eight hundred years and, spite of things we see and deplore, is greater and mightier than ever to-day. You and I shall perish but Rome will last. We are sure of this life at any rate, and every Roman knows how to give it for his country. A man can be as brave as Socrates was when he drank the hemlock, no matter whether he goes to dwell among the stars or has no other home than the urn that holds his ashes.

“But what strange talk is this for an evening over the wine cups? No more of it! More wine, Delphium! More wine! We have to-night. We may not have to-morrow. We are all going somewhere, it may be up into the skies, it may be down below the earth, it may be into the funeral urn to stay there forever. But we are all going. You did not dare to say you would one day *die*, Caius. Romans are brave, but they do not like to use the word ‘die.’ They leave that to the poor gladiators and make them say it before they fall upon the sands and look for the last time at the light of the sun. But we are all gladiators. We are all having a hand to hand fight with Death, and some day he is going to lay every single one of us low. So I give you the gladiator’s greeting, Delphium. ‘We who are doomed to die salute you.’ Drink, I say, to Delphium! Drink, Curio! Drink,

Caius! Drink, Bibulus! Drink, each and every one! Let there be no cowards here to-night! She's a woman, but she may make the best and bravest fight of any of us and still be living when Death, the tireless old gladiator, has dealt all the rest of us a fatal thrust. So here's long life to Delphium and a merry life to all, whether we die to-morrow or live to totter and drivel and know no other joy than the rich red flowing wine! Drink, drink! I say. We have to-night and we may not have to-morrow, for we are all of us doomed to die."

XV

THE Theater of Marcellus, which was situated not far from the Tiber and near the base of the Capitoline Hill, was begun by Julius Cæsar and finished by Augustus twenty-seven years before his death. That austere but by no means unfeeling ruler had dedicated it to the memory of his nephew Marcellus, of whom Vergil wrote so touchingly. Into this vast pleasure resort, which held twenty thousand people under its canopied top, came Marcus and his friends the day after the hilarious evening at Delphi-um's wine room. Interested rather more in watching the audience than in following the play, Marcus seated himself far from the stage in one of the highest rows of benches. Lentulus and the others, who almost invariably followed his leadership without demur, took their places beside him. They had purposely come early, and from his commanding position Marcus observed and studied the mighty human throng that poured steadily in through the many entrances of the theater. It represented every class in Rome and reflected all the diverse conditions of life that existed in the great cosmopolitan city. For Rome first in the history of the world drew within her walls such differing human elements, from lands far and near, as to become truly a metropolis and to be the gathering place of all the nations — a city not of one country but

of the world, a cosmopolis. From her palaces, her stately mansions, her crowded tenements, her counting houses, her streets and squares and alleys, and even from her countless dens of vice, came the unending human tide that filled the benches of the capacious structure of stone. Pleasure had become the god of the Roman populace. One hundred and thirty-five days of every year were devoted to amusement, and every opportunity for enjoyment was eagerly welcomed by the insatiate rabble. So into the theater now flocked the holiday multitudes to satisfy their hunger for recreation and excitement.

Obeying the deep human instincts that are eternally bringing together those of like tastes and interests, the people as they came in took their places among their peers. Small indeed was the group that gathered upon the *tribunal*, or raised platform, on the left of the audience; for this was reserved for the President of the performance and his friends when not used by the Emperor himself. The Emperor was not there on this occasion, and, just before the performance began, appeared Vipsanius, who was a wealthy patrician and a Curule Aedile, with a few favored ones whom he had invited to share with him his august post of observation. In the *orchestra*, their own special precinct, assembled the Senators, who maintained their state though they had been shorn of their power, and who sat in their white togas as self-important as if the burden of Empire still rested on their shoulders. Beyond them, in the fourteen rows of the great *cavea* that were nearest the *orchestra*, were to be seen the

Knights, many of them broken down and impecunious but all of them animated by a pride of station that gave even to the most straitened a dignity which mere circumstance could not destroy. Higher up sat the patricians, whose ranks Augustus had recruited not without difficulty and who, even when bloated with wine and bestialized by shameless living, still wore the arrogance of the privileged man who deems it his native right to despise his low-born fellows. In that one of the great wedge-shaped sections that was reserved for their sex only, sat the women, whose brilliant costumes gave life and splendor to the scene. For even though the glaring noonday light was softened by the canopy above, their flashing jewels, their brightly colored fans that were waved unceasingly, and their robes of brown, pink, orange, crimson, blue and green, caught every roving eye. But more pleasing to the modest was the small group of Vestal Virgins, who were seated in the raised *tribunal* that was on the right of the spectators and directly opposite to that which held Vipsanius and his friends. For here indeed was something to remind the Romans that the austere virtue of their fathers had not yet wholly disappeared. Here there was no waving of gayly colored fans, no brilliancy of garb, no wantonness of look or speech; but purity, reserve, and a noble womanly dignity which the dissolute manners of the time had not touched or soiled.

Still higher up than the Knights and the patricians sat the ranks of the proletariat — noisy, turbulent, made wanton by idleness, fawning upon wealth but

back-biting the very patrons whose bread they lived upon, coarse of manners, foul of speech, in garments of every hue and every shape, and some in rags that preserved only the mere vestige of respectability. And on the highest tiers of benches were the foreigners, not too few or too insignificant to attract notice, though they had seated themselves in this retired position and directly opposite the stage, where they were the least likely to be molested and jibed by the insolent Roman rabble. On these benches there were to be seen Greeks, keen-eyed, curious, and plausible of speech; Hebrews who had brought even from Jerusalem all the power to acquire and the power to endure that has ever characterized their race; Phœnicians, with crafty eyes and sensuous faces; Gauls, fair of skin and large of limb; Egyptians, Nubians, and other Africs bronzed by scorching wind and burning sun; and many more gathered from the innumerable lands and climes of the mighty Roman world.

Marcus had not placed himself and his friends among those of his own rank and station. For a Roman of birth and position he was strangely indifferent to those deep-seated laws of caste which rule with an iron tyranny all civilized societies. His friends, with perhaps the exception of Lentulus, were not pleased with their surroundings. Marcus, in the same spirit that he showed in consorting with gladiators, glanced with amusement at the ill-kempt figures he saw nearest him and gazed with real interest and curiosity at the ever increasing multitude. But he was not aware that he was observed while he was observing.

His seat was near the *cuneum*, or wedge-shaped section, in which the women sat; and on one of the highest benches in this section was Julia. She too had come early with one of her attendants, and in casting her eye around upon the gathering assemblage she soon descried Marcus. She could not help glancing frequently in his direction, for he interested her far more than the audience or the play could possibly do. She was a little higher up than he; hence, looking at him a little from behind, she was in no danger of catching his eye and attracting his attention.

Marcus was indeed interesting, but he became doubly so as she turned her eyes toward him very shortly before the performance began. In the woman's section, between herself and him, a very striking-looking girl had taken her seat; and she also, when Julia first noted her, was eyeing Marcus quite intently. When she looked at him, her line of vision was the same as that of Julia; and so she too, as well as the daughter of Veltrius, could gaze at the stalwart young Roman without danger of drawing a returning glance.

The moment that Julia perceived this young girl and saw that she had her eyes on Marcus, she surmised that she was looking on the fair stranger who had figured so conspicuously in the episode of the flower girl. She therefore began at once to watch her and study her closely. Her suspicions were soon confirmed. The girl was not more than twenty. She was strikingly beautiful. Her eyes, as Julia was able to see when the girl was moved by curi-

osity to glance around the theater and take in the strange imposing scene, were dark and very brilliant. Not familiar with the varied foreign types of countenance, Julia could not surely determine her nationality; but she saw plainly that she was of alien race and she felt sure she was not mistaken in pronouncing her a Hebrew. "It is she! It is she!" she said to herself with mingled curiosity and aversion. "I will watch them both and see what passes between them." Mastered by jealousy and hatred, she could not for a moment think that the two were there, so near together, without collusion; and she could hardly for an instant keep her eyes away from them. That she herself was closely watched while she was thus observing, she was not aware.

The performance began and the audience turned its attention to the stage. The opening piece was a clumsy and boisterous farce, full of coarse buffoonery, but not indecent, and amusing to the indiscriminating. The senators laughed moderately at it. The knights, though plainly amused, maintained a self-satisfied Roman dignity. Waves of unrestrained merriment occasionally ran through the ranks of the patricians; while the proletariat at first gave vent to uproarious shouts and cries of approval and encouragement. But as the piece progressed and it became plain that it was free from ribaldry and uncleanness, the multitudes grew dissatisfied. They clamored loudly for the indecent display and the nauseous humor for which they had acquired an appetite through the demoralizing stage performances given every year during the car-

nival season of the Floralia. So the end of the farce called forth more jibes and disparaging comments than applause.

“What brave and noble spirits!” exclaimed the ironical Cethegus, looking disdainfully around him. “Would these jeering vulgar Romans be always ready to die for their country, Marcus?”

“Those poverty-stricken knights would. Many of those boisterous, purple-faced, half-tipsy patricians would. So would some of these boorish plebeians near us, who are shouting at the top of their voices. Don’t sneer so much, Cethegus. Let them shout and make merry if they will! A man may shout and bellow and be a man. Come, I’ll show you how myself when the play begins.”

The *Rudens* is one of the most beautiful dramas that has come down to us from antiquity. Vipsanius, using his influence with the other Curule Aediles — their body having the control of public shows — had had the play produced in honor of the eighteenth birthday of his daughter. Very naturally he had chosen a thoroughly unobjectionable drama and he had also seen to it that the farce was not shocking or outrageously vulgar. But the dissatisfaction caused by its freedom from scurrility was not likely to be appeased by the *Rudens*; for this drama quite lacks the salacious humor which so abounds in the comedies of Plautus. It is the charming and romantic story of two innocent young girls who are shipwrecked close to a villa upon the sea, claimed by a ruffian as his slaves, and finally proved to be of good birth and breeding

and hence delivered from his clutches.

So pleasing was the opening scene of the play that for a time the audience showed nothing but enjoyment and satisfaction. The mansion and temple by the sea afforded an unusually beautiful stage setting and the situation had its strong human interest. The rabble on the higher benches greeted the old man Dæmones, who owned the seaside villa, with some good-natured banter and jeered a little at his slave Sceparnio. The youth Pleusidippus won their approbation, as he seemed fitted to play the part of a lover; and the two shipwrecked damsels elicited loud applause when they appeared. But Labrax, their greedy and miserly owner, was received with a storm of abuse; and from this time on the proletariat and the livelier spirits among the patricians were unruly and broke forth now and then in loud and riotous demonstrations. Tempestuous indeed were the cries when the *lorarii*, thong in hand, brought in Labrax as a captive and handled him roughly because he had been trying to drag the two girls from the altar of Venus to which they clung for protection. The *lorarii* were told to lash Labrax into shreds, put out his eyes and mutilate him in ghastly and horrible fashion. It was plain that the debauched taste of the spectators demanded coarseness and indecency instead of beauty, charm and the appeal to the higher emotions.

Quite unconscious that more than one pair of eyes were watching him, Marcus responded to the uproarious mood of the audience and indulged the restive spirit that for days had ruled and possessed him. He

would not indeed have started the clamorous demonstrations of the audience. Ordinarily his sense of dignity would have prevented him from joining in them. But he was one of twenty thousand; the wild mood of the preceding evening was still on him; and he delighted in shocking the fastidious Cethegus. Accordingly, after the tendency to jibe the actors became general, he too shouted at them with the merriest and, without making himself generally conspicuous, amused the occupants of the neighboring benches by the pungency and the aptness of his comments.

Yet there was one of those that heard him who was not amused. Julia kept her eye quite constantly upon him, but with a view to seeing what might pass between him and the Hebrew — for that the young girl who frequently looked toward Marcus was the Hebrew she grew absolutely sure. But to her surprise there was not the slightest sign of intercourse or recognition between them. Marcus never looked in the direction of the fair alien. She glanced occasionally toward him during the farce and the earlier scenes of the play. When he became loud-tongued and boisterous, she looked more fixedly at him than before and her attitude expressed surprise. Presently she turned her attention to the stage again, but she had a troubled appearance and her mind did not seem to be upon the play.

“What does it all mean?” said Julia to herself. “He does not act as if he knew she was here; yet he has taken a seat near her in a part of the theater where he would not naturally go. There must be some un-

derstanding between them."

But her speculations came to a sudden end, as did also the performance. The vast audience was still watching the stage with interest, with the exception of a few who were now making their way out to avoid the inevitable crowding and confusion at the end. In particular, some of the occupants of the topmost benches were beginning to go down the stairways that led to the outside entrances below. They were of the kind who think always of themselves and not of others; the spirit of mischief had been let loose by the unruly doings of the audience; and one of those who had gained the head of a stairway and was secure of an easy exit for himself was moved to precipitate a scramble. Shouting at the top of his voice, "Run for your lives! The gladiators are loose and are almost here!" he fled down the stairway and made his way outside to see what happened.

Far worse things happened than he had anticipated. Only a portion of the vast audience heard and understood his reckless words. The cool-headed among these realized almost instantly that the scare was a hoax. But before they could use their influence to quiet the excitable and prevent a stampede, the unreasoning and uncontrollable mob spirit invaded the huge gathering of people. The timid who had heard the cry took alarm and rushed for the stairways. Others quickly followed them. The whole assemblage was terrorized and eager to escape. The exits became choked; frightened throngs climbed frantically up over the rows of benches; the stairways were soon

packed, while surging toward them was a dense mass of human beings so closely crowded together that some fainted for lack of breath and were held up, not by their own strength but simply because there was no space for them to fall down. Others again were trampled down in the less congested places and suffocated by the persistent pressure of struggling and spurning feet.

Julia had been so intent in observing Marcus and the young girl who was watching him that she had not started for the nearest stairway as quickly as those around her. The pressure about her became great and she grew alarmed. The instinct for self-preservation drowned all other voices and motives in her. In this furious struggle for life who could help her like the man who had long ruled her heart? With great difficulty she mounted upon a bench. She looked where Marcus had been sitting and saw him towering above the throng that was surging round him. Anger, jealousy and suspicion were forgotten. She stretched out her hands to him and loudly called his name.

He saw her and instantly fought his way toward her. Heeding not the angry cries he occasioned, caring not what resistance he encountered and knowing not what injuries he inflicted, he elbowed, squeezed, pushed and crowded through the writhing mass and called to Julia to stand firm if possible till he reached her. More than once he lifted a man clean out of his way and hurled him to fall where he might in the straining throng. By these frantic efforts he got as

far as the spot where Julia had stood, but she meantime had been swept away like a pebble rolled by the surge. His great height availed him, however. He saw her only six paces distant and once more her cry for succor reached his ears. Still exerting his enormous strength ruthlessly, he fought his way to her side, lifted her up and held her with one arm while with the other he forced a passage down the nearest stairway.

The crush was tremendous and he still carried Julia on his arm as he pushed forward to an exit that would take them out into the open air. As he reached it, he found himself face to face with a young girl who had also succeeded in making her way thus far in safety through the press of maddened human beings, made inhuman by the wild fierce battle for life. He looked down at her and at the same moment her eyes were raised to his. It was the Hebrew girl.

"You?" he exclaimed in astonishment.

She made no reply, gazed for an instant at Julia who gave her a fierce disdainful glance in return, forced her way through the entrance and was lost in the crowd; while Marcus, moving no longer by his own volition but pushed on by those behind him, tried vainly to follow her with his eyes.

"Where is your lectica?" he said somewhat absently to Julia as they gained the street.

"Put me down at once!" answered Julia with energy, "and I'll find my lectica. There seems to be someone else who needs your attentions."

XVI

“**Y**OU have had your wish, Naarah. You have seen a Roman spectacle. You have seen the ways and manners of the Roman people. I hope you are now satisfied. I hope you do not wish to see any more sights like that of yesterday.”

So said Merari to his granddaughter the evening following the presentation of the Rudens. They were talking together, as they frequently did in the evening, in a simply but richly furnished apartment, well retired from the street, which Merari had appropriated for his own special use. It gave evidence of his nationality and of the religious faith of himself and his fathers. The table and the chairs were made of cedar of Lebanon. A cabinet of the same wood stood in one corner, and in it were most of the books that make up the Old Testament and voluminous commentaries upon them. On the wall were several parchments on which Scripture texts had been beautifully printed in Hebrew. In a conspicuous place was one that read: IF I FORGET THEE, O JERUSALEM, MAY MY RIGHT HAND FORGET ITS CRAFT. On the floor was a purple rug that had been brought from Babylon when the captivity ended and had ever since been preserved as a family heirloom.

“I do not wish anything that does violence to your feelings, dearest grandfather,” Naarah replied; “but

really, why should I be satisfied? I saw what was pleasing and interesting, for the play was a beautiful one. Why should I not wish to see more?"

"The play was inoffensive, but—the jeers, the noise, the coarse comments of the spectators! And then that cruel hoax at the end which caused such terrible excitement and lost, I am sure, a number of lives. I never passed more distressing moments than those in which I was wondering if you were safe and was powerless to reach and help you."

"And I was so anxious about you that I think my heart almost stopped beating. But the merciful Jehovah who remembers His own people watched over us both and restored us to each other. Ah, how often have I thanked Him already in my heart, and in the night watches I shall praise Him for his mercy."

"He is mighty to save, mightier by far than the proud children of men. My prayer rose to Him in that awful struggle, and I was sure that for thine own sweet sake He would deliver me."

"Yes," said Naarah slowly and thoughtfully, "He is mightier than the children of men. Yet a strong right arm is no mean help in such a frantic crowd when a weak maiden is like a chip floating on an angry sea. It was well that the proud Roman lady had the Prefect's son to call upon, or she might have gone down in that furious struggle and have been trampled to death. Yes, a stalwart arm is an aid and a comfort in such an angry time."

"I read your thoughts, my dear," said Merari, with a smile that seemed to suggest sadness and resignation

rather than pleasure. "I am an old man and can not give you the protection that deep down in your heart you long for. Your longings are right and womanly. Some day they will be satisfied. The gracious Jehovah who was so kind to the fatherless Ruth remembers all. From what you have told me I judge that that fair Roman girl has found her protector and the Prefect's son will be her life companion."

"It would seem so, and yet I hope it is not true. She is not worthy of him."

"How can you be sure of that? You saw her but for an instant."

"An instant sometimes tells much to a woman who is looking into another woman's face. I felt that I could read her very soul as I gazed into her eyes. I saw selfishness, spite and the fierce passion that does not belong to a noble nature."

"I was watching her myself before the play began and from time to time during the performance. I must be slow to condemn one whom I do not know; and yet I can not help thinking you are right. Her actions did not please me. The excited attention she gave to you and to the young giant she so plainly cares for did not seem to me womanly. But how about the man himself? May she not be worthy of him? His own behavior was boorish and unmannerly."

"That is true. He seemed to be wild and lawless but I believe he has a good and generous heart. I am convinced that there was no occasion for interference when I saw him with the flower girl. As she told me the story, I saw that she had been needlessly frightened.

He meant nothing but kindness."

"I trust you are right. His father is said to be a good man and the son ought to be like him. May he find a worthy helpmeet among the proud and comely daughters of his nation. Many pure and modest Roman women there must be, though there are many, unhappily, who flaunt their shamelessness before our very faces. Ah, they are not like the daughters of God's chosen people. How could it be expected? They are Romans and the Roman race is evil-mannered, coarse and brutal."

"So you say frequently, dear grandfather, and I suppose you must be right. Yet their sins are hardly greater than those committed by our own nation, which rebelled so often against Jehovah. Let us be just, then; and even though we condemn the Romans on account of their wickedness we must not forget all the abominable things done by our own people. We shall not be very much longer in Rome. Why, then, may I not see what goes on in this great city while we live in it? I do not want to see things that are indecent and vile. That you do not need to have me tell you. But before I go back to our own land where women live a narrow and secluded life, I want to see what men and women of the great world really do instead of sitting in my little room and reading about it. I did enjoy the play. Oh, it was delightful even if the people did banter the actors and jeer at them; and such a wicked trick as was played at the end would not be repeated. It was the heedless thought of a mischievous but not an evil mind. I am always willing

to do as you wish, dearest grandfather. I will remain cooped up in the house with Deborah and my books for the rest of the time we are here in Rome, if you say so. But you don't know how I long to know the wonderful things that are done in this great city which is ruling the world."

"Very well. You shall see and know them if your heart is set on it. It is true that grander and more magnificent things are done here than are now done anywhere else on the earth. Rome is evil, but it is very great."

XVII

HOW often, since the cranes caused the murderer of Ibycus to reveal himself, has the theater been the scene of more significant happenings than those witnessed on the stage! The jealous lover sees his successful rival in the box he fain would occupy, and the end is a stiletto thrust. The fan of the coquette waves encouragement that only means the prolongation of misery and the supreme folly of suicide. A beautiful face kindles hope in the man who had cast all hope aside. Looking down upon a sea of faces, the victim of injustice marks that of the enemy who had long eluded him and plans a deadly and far-reaching vengeance.

Not vengeance, but hatred and contempt filled Julia's heart as she watched Naarah at the Theater of Marcellus and beheld her face to face at the place of exit. The sudden meeting had roused her evil and jealous temper. She spoke scornfully to Marcus and dismissed him and carried a heart full of bitterness to her home. She knew she had injured herself in Marcus' esteem. She was chagrined and self-reproachful that she had again showed petulance where serenity and self-control would surely have won for her some gleams of that sunlight she was craving.

Nor was she wrong in thinking that she had turned Marcus from her by her exhibition of ill-feeling. As

he carried her down the stairway he was mastered by the protective instinct which so powerfully draws a man toward a woman he is shielding. The fire of passion was beginning to burn in him when he suddenly looked into Naarah's eyes and then heard Julia's bitter speech. All was immediately changed. The old distrust of Julia revived, and he could not dismiss from his mind the beautiful face he had thought never to see again. Destiny, he felt in spite of himself, had made the winsome Hebrew stranger cross his pathway once more. But how had Julia known who she was? That she did know, he was certain. The scorn that she put into her words was proof of it. But he ceased to wonder about it, for Julia's quickness of apprehension might well have made her divine the truth on the instant. However that might be, he brooded much over the strange meeting; and his resolve not to seek and find the beautiful young Hebrew cost him another battle with himself.

That Naarah too had carried away from the theater disquieting thoughts has already been shown. Marcus had taken a strange hold upon the imagination of the young girl. When she turned away from him after their encounter in the street, she had not supposed their meeting would linger in her thought and memory. But she could not dismiss it. She was not romantic or sentimental; but her heart was lonely and she could not keep her mind from dwelling on the magnificent young Roman with his dark kindling eye, his imposing stature and his frank manliness. In spite of his boisterousness at the theater she believed him upright and noble; and

the thought that he was likely to marry the disdainful beauty who had stared at her so insolently was disturbing. With true insight she had read selfishness in Julia's look and manner, and she was pained as she reflected how a lasting union with one not wholly worthy might strain and weaken a great nature.

There was another who had carried away discomfoting thoughts from the Theater of Marcellus. Delphium had been there. She had marked Julia, noted her frequent glances toward Marcus and seen that she was interested in him. She had been keen enough to discern Naarah's interest in him also, but this alien woman she dismissed from her mind as not worth thinking about. Was she possibly the Unknown mentioned by Marcus' companions? No matter if she were. Marcus himself had said he did not know who the Unknown was, and it was therefore plain that he could not be seeking her society. But this beautiful young Roman woman was a rival and beyond question a dangerous one. All the more did she feel this when she saw her appeal to Marcus in the mad scramble for safety and obtain his powerful and eagerly bestowed assistance. Here was a danger and a threatening one. She must act. She must use every opportunity to gain an ascendancy over Marcus' mind and bring him under a spell that he would not try or wish to break.

So Vipsanius did far more than he expected when he had the Rudens presented in his daughter's honor. It had been the means of injuring terror-stricken men and women. It had been the means of helping divers life currents to mingle for good and ill.

XVIII

MORE restless than ever after the incidents at the theater, Marcus sought strangely differing means of diverting himself and quieting his mind. He sought Lentulus and he sought Delphium.

Lentulus was the one man in Rome who gave him a true companionship. Born for action, craving action, Marcus was yet a thinker. He had trampled on tradition and the outworn creeds of paganism, as his bold utterances at Delphium's showed. But he longed to believe. He had torn down, but he would fain build up. He was living on negations and they did not satisfy him. Especially at this time, when his life was soon to be in jeopardy, did they utterly fail to satisfy him. Two days after the presentation of the Rudens he determined to visit Lentulus in his home on the Pincian Hill. There the young Stoic lived in absolute simplicity, in rooms furnished only with books, manuscripts, a table, a rude couch and two or three by no means luxurious chairs.

But his unquiet mood made him wander first to the Forum. There he could at least read the story of Rome's mighty deeds. There every stone would speak to him of the unconquerable will that had made the seven-hilled city supreme among the nations. And it was not without awe that he surveyed the scene where many

a thrilling word had been spoken, many a high resolve had been made, and many a shout of triumph or of execration had risen from the thronging multitudes. What a cry of desolation had rent the air when the awful slaughter at Cannae was here made known! How welcome had been the news of Carthage's final overthrow! What mingled joy and dread had been awakened when it was learned that Cæsar had crossed the Rubicon! And what had the Gods been doing through all these great days of the nation's history? There stood their shrines and temples, stately and beautiful. On this very spot they had been unceasingly honored with costly sacrifice and solemn vows. Had they seen and heard? Had they guided the people in their hour of triumph and raised them up when they were faint and fallen? Had Castor and Pollux really appeared on their immortal steeds and led the wavering Romans on to victory at Lake Regillus? No! Marcus could not feel that it was so. It was the invincible Roman courage that had made Rome invincible and great. The Forum taught him fortitude; it did not teach him faith. Sadly he turned from it and made his way to Lentulus' abode.

He was heartily welcomed, but he refused the invitation to sit down. It better suited his perturbed mood to pace the room while he talked.

"Lentulus," he began, "I am putting out into a stormy sea. If my craft sinks, what will happen?"

"In other words, if Styra kills you, what will become of you?"

"Exactly."

“What did Socrates say when he found that his craft was really going down?”

“That he might sleep forever; that he might wake up again. In either case it would be well.”

“Your memory is correct.”

“Is that the best that can be said?”

“The very best. No one can know. Lucretius does not even lead us to hope.”

“I want to know. I must know. I am not satisfied.”

“You can not know. But you can hope. Socrates argued for immortality. Cicero has done the same. Both argue well. Believe what they say.”

“Do you believe it?”

“They can not prove their case. If they could, I should not be saying that to know is impossible. At best they make immortality seem probable, not certain.”

“I want proof. There ought to be proof. If there are Gods, why don't they show themselves? If men live after death, why don't they come back and tell us?”

“You are asking the same questions that have been asked by every generation of men. No one has ever had an answer.”

“Some God, Apollo or whoever it was, used to speak through the priests at Delphi.”

“And through dreams and omens and through soothsayers like Tiresias and the Sibyl. Cicero has given all the evidence. The arguments are good. They are not convincing.”

“Well, I want proof and I am going to find it some-

where. I believe it exists. Why, I am a proof myself. So are you. So are all men. How came we to be? Someone must have made us. Someone must have made the world we see."

"An old argument. Perhaps the best there is. Only it isn't knowledge."

"I believe it is. I am going to hold it till I find something better. As for Jupiter and Venus and all those easy-going people on Olympus, I have done with them. So has every person who thinks. Horace wrote odes to them, but if you had asked him if he ever expected to see them, he would have given you a sly wink and said nothing. But I was not brought into the world just to pass a few pleasant years and then have my life snuffed out like a candle. What, toil to get wisdom all one's life and then sink into nothingness just as the eye has learned to see and the brain to think! Why, it is like teaching a boy to use the broadsword and the pilum and then shutting him up in a closet!"

"No, no! You are wrong. Men serve their use like the fields of grain, and when they have served it they pass like the sheaves that have been threshed and give place to a new harvest."

"You are a mere thinking machine, Lentulus. You never feel. I have that in me that tells me I am to live forever. Before I die I believe I shall see and understand it all more clearly. Now I will leave you to your meditations. May you have joy in them! To me they are very much like moonlight on a frosty night."

All the more because philosophy failed to give him the assurance he was seeking did Marcus, with his full

intense nature, crave the soothing influences of Delphium's cozy room. Yet he realized that the craving could not be freely gratified. He recognized no lover's passion in it. He must therefore act with self-control. He could not repeat the late visit he had made so unpremeditatedly after his encounter with Styra. But the evening of the day on which he had held the above conversation with Lentulus he made his way to Delphium's but found that none of his friends were there. The larger serving room was also without guests. The few that had come had not lingered. An opportunity this that was not to be passed by. So he made the surly Gugon announce his presence, and when Delphium appeared Marcus intimated that a cup of the rich rare wine would be acceptable. Delphium was only too ready. Concealing her intense gratification, she conducted him into the inviting apartment with its dim rosy light and its rich furnishings. There a full beaker of the mellow soothing wine was given him.

This was Delphium's opportunity to find out who was the beautiful girl Marcus had rescued at the theater and what his relations with her were. But she approached the subject artfully. She let Marcus sip his wine for a little while in silence and then asked him how soon he was to meet Styra and whether he still felt entirely confident about the issue.

"Entirely so," said Marcus. "So much so, indeed, that I wish we were to fight to-morrow and not fifteen days hence. To tell the truth, the matter has begun to bore me."

Delphium felt this to be strange and determined to

get at the cause of his indifference.

"You are an extraordinary man, Marcus," she said in her suave tranquil way. "It is safe to say, no other man in Rome could have such a terrific task on his hands and not consider it the only thing worth thinking of or talking about."

"Ah, but I was born to be a soldier, Delphium. The danger and excitement of conflict seem like a native air to me. They don't keep me agitated and uneasy. They have rather a quieting influence."

"Even so much so that they bore you," continued Delphium with a quiet laugh. "You would make a strange soldier, Marcus. A great battle is to begin. Your general says to you, 'Now charge with all your might and the day is ours!' And you yawn just as you did a moment ago and say, 'I should like to if I were not so terribly bored.'"

Marcus could but laugh at this singular picture of a soldier performing his duty. Delphium's quiet drollery, her smooth soft manner of speech, the pleasant subdued light, and the appealing influences of the still evening hour, were giving him exactly the gratification which he craved and which Julia's waywardness and petulancy never afforded him.

"Still," she resumed, "the soldier's life is the right one for you, Marcus. I have seen that very clearly. But it would bring you sore disappointments. You would expect your men to be glad to be held up to your own strict standards of discipline; the truth is they would resent it. The officers you would take to be men who shared your own love of what is just and

honorable; but you would find them coarse, petty, jealous and intriguing. You see there is such a thing as having too rigid an idea of duty and becoming needlessly discouraged by trying to do too much. It isn't wise, you know, to attempt the impossible."

"If I were a soldier, I could not do less than my full duty. I should be a traitor to my country if I gave it only half my loyalty and my devotion."

"You would do your full duty to your country, if you made your men so devoted to you that you could always count on them. And that you would best accomplish by humoring their whims and recognizing that the life of the camp can not be as clean and decent as that of men like — like you and Lentulus."

"Lentulus? What do you know about Lentulus? He never comes here."

"No. I wish he did instead of some of the wine-bibbers, for I know how upright and honorable he is. But he thinks he would smirch his toga if he swept it through my doorway. Ah, me! How many there are who like to sit on Rhadamanthus' seat and judge us all before we go down to Pluto! How very wise they must be! I should not myself know where to begin and where to end. But I believe I would trust you to do it, Marcus. I know you would always be just."

"I thank you for your confidence, Delphium, but I have no desire to sit on Rhadamanthus' seat, if he really has one. I should not know any better than you where to begin and where to end; and I should be pelted off the seat with stones before I got very far. I should put gladiators in high places and send senators and

magistrates off to punishment. Some of our high-born dames who turn down their thumbs in the arena I should set to work, and some of the women they look upon with loathing I should clothe in purple. No," he added with a laugh, "I should never do for a judge at all."

"It is just because you would do such things that you would make a better one than any other man in the world. And in time you will have a sense of duty that is as broad as your judgment of men. It will make you see that you must take men as they are and use them as they are if you wish to accomplish anything. That was Julius Cæsar's way. Ah, he was wise!"

"So wise that they killed him at the last."

"You perverse man! They killed him because he was too scrupulous. He should have made himself emperor, brushed all the objectors out of the way, ruled with an iron hand, and then done all the good things for Rome he had it in his mind to do. He could have done them then after he was firmly fixed in power and surrounded by soldiers to whom his word was law. But he did not want to shock the Romans by using the name of King and so he came to grief. He was too scrupulous, I say. And that is what you will be, Marcus, unless you learn that you can not apply your rigid ideas of what is just and right to men and women as you meet them any more than you can find a measuring rule that will tell you whether or not their hearts are evil."

"Unless I learn? I wonder who is to teach me? I have always been thought to have a mind of my own."

“Teach you?” cried Delphium, throwing a cushion on the floor at his feet and looking up at him as she seated herself upon it. “Who said anything about teaching you? Who in the world would think of trying to teach a man like yourself? You will be your own teacher. You will never have a deep or stirring experience without seeing what lesson it contains for you. You will never come in touch with a subtle and discerning mind without drinking from its wisdom. You will study all the people you meet and learn from them more than they ever dream they are giving. But I should be sorry for the person who set up to be your teacher.”

She had all the while been gazing at Marcus admiringly as she sat at his feet. Now, she seemed to look dreamily above and beyond him as she continued,

“And yet the best and greatest men have teachers. Socrates listened to the daemon that told him what to do, and Pericles was not above heeding the counsels of Aspasia. What a wonderful intelligence she must have had to influence a man like Pericles! Did he go to her all the time, I wonder; or was it that questions came up so intricate, so delicate, so perplexing that he found his own clear discernment illumined by the flashes of her quick, unerring insight and her sensitive understanding? When a man finds such guidance as that, he makes the most of it. His is still the master mind. It plans, it builds, it takes what quickens and helps it; it rejects what will clog and belittle it. But with such a delicate wisdom to inspire it, it soars like an eagle that sails with the breeze; while without it, it may be like

the same bird beating vainly against the gale.

“And perhaps this very help is to be yours, Marcus,” she went on, now looking directly at him again as if thinking intently of his own good. “In that awful crush at the Theater of Marcellus the other day I heard a woman calling to you to come and save her. I wondered who she was. I wondered if she were one to walk at your side and help you solve all the baffling problems you are sure to encounter as you go on and do the large things you are fitted to do. But I hope at any rate that you saved her? I hope she was not hurt?”

“She was not hurt,” said Marcus. Then he added with unusual slowness and deliberation, “She was an old acquaintance whom I value, but she would hardly be an Aspasia to a Pericles. Goodnight, Delphium.”

As the two parted, Delphium said exultingly to herself, “I have found out what I wanted to know. He does not care for her.” The uppermost thought in Marcus’ mind was that Julia would be quite irresistible if, with her beauty and spirit, she could give him the sympathetic companionship he found with Delphium.

XIX

AS the day of the conflict with Styra drew nearer, Marcus realized that he had been over-confident. His mental agitation had engendered a defiant mood and a spirit of bravado. But his sense of duty now steadied him. He owed it to himself, still more to his father to do his best. So he exercised regularly, fenced at the gladiators' school every day, and was once more genial and natural with his companions.

To Delphium's he continued to go frequently. There he found deep satisfaction in the companionship of his intimates, even though he drank but sparingly; and there he passed many a pleasurable moment in Delphium's own society. Their talk seemed to be nothing but the lively chat of two old friends. None the less the clever adventuress was never for a moment losing sight of her cherished purpose. She was using all her arts to make herself indispensable to him. And she seemed to be succeeding. More and more did Marcus give her his full confidence. So freely did he talk to her and so contented did her presence always make him that she felt sure his thoughts were not turning to the beautiful woman whom she regarded as a rival. That a more formidable rival existed she did not dream.

Yet a more formidable rival there was, for Marcus was by no means forgetting Naarah. That strange second meeting would not pass out of his mind. Holding firmly to his resolve not to seek this foreign girl

who so intruded upon his thoughts, he yet clung to the idea that he was fated to meet her again. Superstition and hope are very ancient allies. What is at heart desired is half expected.

But this depth Delphium quite failed to sound. Her spirits rose as she found Marcus responsive to her own bright moods; and she was pleased to see how carefully he was preparing for his desperate encounter. In this seriousness of purpose she strongly encouraged him, and she made him agree to come to her to be properly disguised before he took his place with the gladiators to enter the arena.

As the appointed day approached, Marcus took Hacho into his counsels after binding him to secrecy; and from him he obtained all the advice and instruction that this experienced contestant was able to give.

Hacho was much concerned when he learned of the risk that Marcus was to run. Loyal and kindly by nature, he had served both Agrippa and Marcus faithfully and had shown such intelligence and trustworthiness that he had already become one of the Prefect's most valued body servants. But while he was attached to both and grateful to both, he knew well it was to Marcus that he really owed his freedom; and to him he was absolutely devoted.

His skill with the sword made it profitable to Marcus to fence with him; but his advice was more profitable still. These were his final instructions the day before the duel was to take place.

“Styrax is a fierce fighter, but a very wary one. You must be wary too.”

“How can one be fierce and wary at the same time?”

“Not quite at the same time, though that is more possible than you suppose. The old gladiator, even when he is pressing his enemy the hardest, is never really off his guard. He is always expecting an attack. But real caution is best shown in studying the enemy and finding out all his tricks before you rush vigorously upon him.”

“But if Styrax is a wary fighter, he won't show his hand. He will try to make me show my method of attack instead of letting me see his.”

“Exactly. You understand it all perfectly. That is just what he will do. Now, which ought to outwit the other, Styrax the rude Thracian, or Marcus the Roman?”

“You know how to pass a compliment, Hacho, as well as to serve and fight,” said Marcus with an amused smile. “But Styrax is cunning even if he is a rude Thracian, and he will not easily allow himself to be outwitted.”

“He is cunning, but he is also savage and wild; and it is just there, I think, that you will get the advantage of him and beat him. Cunning is of no avail when a man loses his temper.”

“I see. I see. It isn't wit against cunning. It is wit and self-control against cunning and blind rage.”

“You put it just right, master. Keep your temper and you will win. He will lose his because he hates you.”

“Yes, he hates with the blind fury of a wild cat.

Poor fellow! I begin to feel sorry for him. He is like a beast led to the slaughter."

"He would be only too glad to slaughter you. Don't forget that, for if you are in a pitying mood and off your guard for an instant, he will make an end of you."

"I will think before I begin the fight how cruel he was to the girls in the gladiators' wine room. That will make me eager to put him where he can do no more harm."

XX

NOT many hours after the conversation between Marcus and Hacho took place Merari was seated in his private room diligently studying a roll that contained the Prophecy of Hosea. A silver lamp stood on the table by which he sat, affording a not brilliant but sufficient light; and by it the old man read slowly from the inspired words which he seemed to weigh and consider with much care. But his studies seemed to give him scant satisfaction. After a time he laid down the roll with a troubled expression, leaned back in his chair and clapped his hands thrice. Almost instantly an old woman, with white hair and bent form but with an eye still bright and a nimble step, stood before him.

“ Ah, Tirzah,” he said, “ you are as prompt as ever to do my bidding. Many, many years have you served me. You nursed my daughter Miriam whom God was pleased to take from me in her childhood; and you nursed my dear grandchild Naarah, who has proved a second daughter to me. Well were you named Tirzah, for you have brought nothing but ‘ pleasantness ’ into my house. May you long continue to be a joy unto us! Will you please go now and ask Naarah if I shall come to her own apartment or wait for her here; for I desire to speak with her.”

Tirzah, whose face had beamed with pleasure while

Merari so kindly addressed her, disappeared. She had been gone but a moment or two when Naarah threw back the hanging at the entrance to the room, entered, hastened to the old man's side and greeted him with warm affection.

"It is so good of you, dear grandfather, to let me come here and share your thoughts," she said as she flung a cushion on the floor and seated herself at the old man's feet with her clasped hands resting on his knee. "I was feeling a little lonely, and you are always such good company. But how can you bear to give up your books and your deep meditations to talk with an ignorant young girl like me?"

"'And a little child shall lead them,' " he said gently as he looked fondly upon her and stroked her hair. "The young do not always know what stores of wisdom God places in their pure untroubled hearts. Your thoughts often instruct me, Naarah. I doubt not they help me as much as mine help you. I fear my poor old brain is withered. Yours is fresh and strong."

"It is good of you to say all this; but I am only a young maid that knows neither books nor the world. And you know both. Everywhere among our own people you are revered and admired; and Tirzah has told me that the most learned elders in our own land listen with deep respect to your comments on our sacred books and weigh them carefully."

"I believe that they do," said the old man with a sigh, "yet I doubt whether they are wise in doing so. I have prided myself on my learning, but I fear I have been presumptuous. Our books are profound. I find

them puzzling. The longer I study them, the less sure I am that I read and interpret them aright. A pure young heart may yet see what I, with all my long meditation, have failed to grasp."

"It would make me very happy, grandfather, to help you understand our Sacred Books. But your thoughts about them are so deep and grave, while I can not help seeing things that are amusing in some of the stories that are found in them."

"Amusing? That is a strange word to use regarding God's own revelation to His chosen people. I fear you are not learning to regard it with true reverence and respect."

"Oh, I assure you that I am. But some of the incidents have a comic side when you stop and think about them. It isn't always what is said but what is unsaid that makes me laugh when I think it over. That picture of Laban searching for his gods in Jacob's tents has always amused me greatly. There was the crafty Rachel sitting on them and deceiving her own father; and Jacob was so indignant that Laban should have suspected him! He talks so solemnly and has such an air of injured innocence, when he was guilty all the time if he had but known it. What do you suppose he said to Rachel when he found her out?"

"Words of sorrow, no doubt. Her deceit must have been painful to him."

"Now, grandfather, I don't believe it pained him a bit. I am much more inclined to think he smiled shrewdly and commended her for her cleverness. He had cheated Esau out of his birthright by a sharp trick;

and when he made his vow, after seeing the ladder with the angels ascending and descending upon it, he looked out for himself very carefully. He said the Lord should be his God if He would be with him and keep him in the way he should go and give him bread and raiment. No, I don't believe it was in him to find fault with Rachel because she had tricked her father, seeing that he himself had tricked his own father and cheated his brother at the same time."

"But think of his kindness, Naarah, and his great tenderness of heart! Think how he mourned for Joseph, and respect his memory! The Lord prospered him and he was one of the fathers of our nation."

"I think of him with all reverence and respect, dearest grandfather; but I can not help seeing all the strange and curious things in this wonderful story of our people. So many wild and fearful things were done in those far away days, and the record of them is so wonderfully told! The pictures stay in the mind. You can not forget them. Now, I don't believe you know who was the first strong man before Samson."

"I do not seem to remember that any such was mentioned, child. Certainly I could not give his name."

"Oh, but there was one. There was more than one. The first was Ehud, the Judge who killed Eglon the king of Moab. He stabbed him with a knife that was a cubit long, and yet he smote so hard that he drove the haft into Eglon's body and he couldn't pull the knife out again. The story is so vividly told that you can almost see it all done. Then, there was the Judge who came after him, named Shamgar. He must have been

almost as strong as Samson himself. Samson killed a thousand Philistines with the jaw-bone of an ass; but Shamgar slew six hundred of them with an ox-goad."

"I am not surprised that you want to see the Roman games, Naarah," said Merari, with an amused expression. "I did not know that you were such an admirer of brave men and their deeds."

"We maids are all alike, if you did but know it. You do not understand us, because, with your kind, generous, noble heart, you think too well of us. Now, there is one person mentioned in our Scriptures that a learned man like you would waste no thought upon, but a woman would think of with a little envy in her heart. I will venture to say, grandfather, that you couldn't guess who that is if you tried a hundred times."

"I am sure I shouldn't if I tried a thousand times. So I won't guess at all."

"It is Absalom, the son of David. He had his hair cut once a year, it got so heavy on him. And no wonder it did, for it weighed two hundred shekels. Only think, grandfather! Two hundred shekels! It seems a waste for a man to have such a head of hair as that."

"No, I shouldn't have guessed it, Naarah. I should never have guessed it. It is surely as you say. The woman's mind has its own points of view. Old man as I am, I have seen that all my life; but I never had it brought before me so pointedly and so strikingly."

"And with your close attention to the profound things in our Scriptures, you never thought of being amused at anything in them, and you are a little shocked that I should be. But I can not help being, and the

passages about Absalom are some of those in which I find a suggestion of irony and humor. This young man, who was said to be without blemish from head to foot, was evidently very proud of his beauty. Think of a man's letting his hair grow for a whole year till it reached down to his waist, perhaps to his very feet, just in order to be looked at and admired! No doubt he expected all the young women to whisper to one another as he went by and wish they had such a head of hair as that. And then, to think it was this very hair that proved his undoing! If he had only kept it cut, he wouldn't have lost his life. But he would have it long; and so, when he had wickedly stolen the hearts of the people and roused them to rebellion, his hair got him into trouble. He was beaten in battle and fleeing for dear life on his mule, with his long thick tresses streaming behind in the wind. A stout oak branch catches them. Round and round it they twine and pull him off his mule; and there the poor fellow hangs till Joab finds him and thrusts him through the heart. Do you suppose he thought, as he was hanging there, that he would have done well to be less proud of his beauty and to keep his hair close cut?"

"I shall leave such inquiries as that to the woman's mind, Naarah. If it is natural to women to raise such questions, I fear they will have to answer them. You must read our Sacred Books in your own way and draw your own lessons from them. I see that you have a woman's heart and a woman's understanding. I shall make no further objection to your seeing in this great city where we sojourn such things as you think it best

to see. God Himself watches over such as you and keeps their hearts virgin and unsoiled. We will go to-morrow, if you wish it, and see the games at the Circus. Indeed, it was to tell you that that I desired to see you."

"Most surely I wish it, grandfather. Oh, how exciting it will be! Will there be chariot races? I do so want to see a chariot race!"

"Yes, there are to be races and many bloodless games and contests, and then gladiatorial combats at the end. But those we will not witness."

"No, surely not. It would be terrible to see men hurt and kill each other. But how happy I shall be in watching the races and the games! I can hardly wait for the hour to come."

XXI

THE August sun shone fair upon the multitudes that filled the Circus Maximus at Rome. Beneath its burning rays sat high dignitaries, consuls, knights and senators in their appointed places, while patrician and plebeian, citizen and alien seated themselves promiscuously, too eager for the approaching spectacle to be nicely observant of the distinctions of caste and race. The jaded appetite for pleasure, which was satisfied by the tame entertainment of the theater only as the thirst for strong drink is satisfied by water, was glutted by the dangers of the chariot race and the deadliness of the gladiatorial strife. When wheels and cars and poles were all heaped together in one mass of wreckage, when steeds lay mangled and moaning and their drivers could not rise after being hurtled through the air, when the gladiator sank on the ground weltering in blood and the victor looked to the spectators for the sign of mercy or of death, and when the air shook with the roar of ravenous beasts let loose upon defenseless criminals, the Roman multitudes experienced the thrills of pleasure which their vitiated natures craved.

From the day of small beginnings when a puny band of Romans scarpred and bastioned the hills beside the Tiber, this proud and masterful people had been animated by the spirit of conquest and dominion. Not on

the sunny Italian peninsula was to be repeated the tragic story of Grecian struggle, aspiration and failure. Here there was to be no short-lived dominance of a people that could keep its supremacy only as the exultant gladiator keeps it, drunk with victory to-day but prostrate to-morrow on the blood-stained dust. Warring ever, Rome was victorious ever. The conflict was stubborn and bloody, but the call for retreat was seldom sounded and defeat only armed this giant among the nations with the prowess that proved invincible. The Roman boundaries widened unendingly as the centuries wore away. All Italy became Roman soil. The might of Hannibal could not save Carthage from overthrow. Spain, Gaul, Greece, Syria, Egypt, the entire Mediterranean territory and inland countries that were never swept by the vivifying breezes of the sea, rendered homage to the imperial city that waxed proud and wanton on her seven hills.

Wanton indeed, and perhaps inevitably so. For very early in its history Rome began to pay the price of incessant bloodshed. The death-grapple does not teach compassion. The human shambles do not exalt the dignity of manhood. Even in fighting for self-preservation Rome had made war a butchery. Multiplying and threatening tribes, like the Gauls and Germans, had been not merely conquered but wiped out of existence; and the captives who swelled the long triumphal procession were not human beings entitled to sympathy and pity, but creatures who existed simply for Rome's benefit and who suffered the fitting penalty for daring to defy the mistress of the world.

Small wonder, therefore, that sport never became among the Romans the ennobling pastime that it was in Greece. The Greeks perfected the human body because it was to them a thing of beauty. The Romans made it strong and serviceable that it might be equal to the arduous task of strife and subjugation. Their multitudes could not be roused to enthusiasm by the mere prowess of the clean-limbed athlete, whose proportions seemed to the Greeks almost as noble as the marble image of the god who inspired him to victory. A sport to be edifying to the Romans must reflect their own blood-stained history and gratify senses that had been coarsened by long years of conquest and of indifference to its revolting horrors. The sack of cities, the wail of women, the slaughter of babes, the shrieks of the wounded and the agonizing appeals of the helpless, had brutalized because they had been unheeded and had planted the love of cruelty deep in the Roman heart.

And what practice and experience had sanctioned religion only confirmed. The ancient cults did not recognize the spirit of human brotherhood. They but reflected the intolerance that was one of the natural consequences of isolation, imperfect intercourse, and the primitive instincts which make every man see an enemy in a stranger. The gods of a nation were but the creation of its instincts of self-preservation. They encouraged it to overthrow and destroy its enemies. They did not rebuke the lust for rapine and bloodshed. Rather did they rejoice when they saw it wipe out opposing hosts without mercy or compunction. Hence,

their worship engendered hatred, jealousy and love of mastery instead of charity and friendliness; and hence, too, the Romans who had grown brutal in conquering the world were not humanized or softened by the gods they professed to serve. Neither Jupiter, Mars, Apollo, Diana, Venus or Minerva bade them pity the unhappy men and women who were led through their streets in triumph, or respond to the appeal of the wounded gladiator as he looked up to them with pleading eyes from his gory couch upon the sand. Some kind, gentle, pitying hearts there were in those cruel days. The Romans, debased though they were, were yet not savages who took a fiendish delight in suffering and torture. Civilization must civilize. It must cultivate the finer emotions and broaden the horizons of the mind. Even while Rome had been growing shameless and bestial, it had produced the humane Cicero, the enlightened Augustus, and the gentle, sensitive and spiritually-minded Vergil. And such spirits, if rare, were by no means solitary. In cruel, selfish, egotistical Rome, that sat wrapped in darkness even as a great light was about to dawn on the far away Judaeian hills, there were women who were made tender and compassionate by the holy instincts of motherhood and by the very sweetness of their own natures; and there were men, like Marcus and his father, who shrank with loathing from everything that was inhuman, foul and mean. But such natures were the exception that proved the rule. The Romans who gathered to see the shows in the days of the Empire were for the most part a brutal multitude, athirst for excitement, pitiless and wanton, and a prey

to all the unclean emotions that dominate the idle mind.

It was on such a multitude that Naarah gazed as she took her seat in the Circus by the side of her grandfather the day after the conversation with him recorded in the preceding chapter. Although the Circus was already well filled, the two found seats very close to the arena from which they could command an excellent view of the various happenings that were appointed for the day. No sooner were they seated than Naarah cast her eye about her with intense interest and curiosity. She had come to observe as well as to be entertained. She had come to watch and study this Roman populace which had filled the Theater of Marcellus with such diverse elements and had received the beautiful drama of Plautus with such curiously mingled approbation and displeasure. A strange people she had thought them when she saw them condemn as insipid what was giving her unalloyed delight. She wished to see for herself what kind of an entertainment it was that would satisfy their morbid craving for excitement.

It is usually the mature and jaded mind that brings the critical and reflective attitude to a stirring scene of pleasure. But Naarah was by nature thoughtful, and her secluded life had encouraged in her the habit of forming her own independent judgments. She had made herself thoroughly familiar with the story of her own people; she was well versed in Greek and Roman history and literature; for, with a native gift for languages, she had mastered both the Greek and the Roman tongues. And as she had read, she had compared and studied and thought. Her own people, rebellious,

perverse and sinful as they had often been, had had such a wonderful history! They had been so plainly called by the Divine voice and guided by the Divine hand! Such marvelous things had been wrought for them! What was there in Greek or in Roman history like the passage of the Red Sea or the destruction of Jericho? And such mighty men had been raised up to lead and teach them! Who among the great men of Greece and Rome could be compared with Moses and Elijah and Isaiah? Not for an instant could this young girl, with all her love of pleasure, her desire to know the world and her remarkable readiness to recognize the good in an alien people, forget that she herself belonged to God's chosen race. She had come to see the holiday multitudes of the mighty imperial city; but she had come with a vivid sense of the august and unparalleled story of her own nation — the nation that had witnessed the most sublime and awful spectacles even seen by human eye.

Yet the multitude was really too vast to gauge and measure. Here were all the differing elements that had filled the Theater of Marcellus, only, if possible, more numerous, more complex, more diverse. Here were patrician and commoner, clerk, magistrate, man of letters, man of business, petty trader, parasite, spendthrift, coxcomb, the lean, ragged, hungry proletariat masses, and aliens from innumerable climes and of endlessly varying garb and aspect. One thing only this mighty mass had in common, a fierce craving for the coming spectacle. Differing incalculably in religion, in aspiration, in hereditary and national proclivi-

ties, in every day tastes and in interior thought and purpose, this vast heterogeneous mass could yet be unified for a few brief moments by the lust of the eye and the tingling demands of nerves long fed with excitement. A holy and purifying thought would have inspired infinitely varying emotions in those countless thousands; the clash of sword on shield engendered in all alike a gratifying thrill.

Naarah could not but note the difference in feeling between this gathering and the one she had made a part of in the theater. The people in the theater were like a dog that is offered bread. The people at the circus were like a dog that smells meat and knows that the food he is ravenous for is forthcoming. There was everywhere manifest an air of excitement. The whole assemblage was alive with eager expectation. They could not sit in patience. As the appointed hour drew near, loud calls arose on every side from restless spirits who demanded that the show should begin without further delay; and the wag, who abounds in every aggregation of human beings, began to be noisy and facetious.

"The horses, the horses! Why don't they bring out the horses?"

"No, no! The gladiators. We want the gladiators."

"No, not the gladiators first. By Pollux! do you eat your peacock before your relishes?"

"They say the lions have eaten the horses. There won't be any races."

"That's good for the criminals. The lions won't

be hungry for them.”

“ Oh, the lions will always eat criminals, they have such a spicy flavor.”

“ Then they ought to like Tiberius.”

“ I wish one of them would eat him.”

“ I should pity the lion. He would have the stomach ache for the rest of his life.”

“ I wish the lions would eat all his spies.”

“ Lions won't touch spies. They don't like tainted meat.”

Such was the cheap wit that was thrown about by the bold and insolent rabble. They were made audacious by the vastness of the multitude and by their own personal insignificance. It was practically impossible for the spies of Tiberius to detect them in such a densely packed assemblage, and it was not their class of which the suspicious monarch was afraid. Political plotters did not issue from their ranks. Hence, some of the more reckless of them did not spare the occupant of the imperial throne as they uttered their coarse taunts and jibes. The spy system had created an animosity which even a liberal dispensation of shows did not heal.

Naarah and her grandfather were not far from the awned and luxuriously cushioned seats which were reserved for the Emperor, his family, and his friends. Tiberius himself, however, was not present. He disliked to show himself in public and he was now in retirement at Capraeae. But the Court was well represented by brilliantly costumed men and women, all of whom gazed about them with an air of insolence and

disdain that fitly characterized Rome's attitude toward the world she had subdued. Toward these favored personages all eyes were now and again directed. Especially did those who occupied the adjacent benches study carefully their attire and their attitudes and try to catch fragments of their conversation. The springs of curiosity are not dried even on the eve of the most intense excitement. But those who basked in the imperial sunshine cared little for the pale light of popular regard and interest. Indifferent to the multitudes around them, they awaited the coming spectacle.

"What a wonderful sight and what a wonderful people!" said Naarah to her grandfather after she had gazed about her for a few moments. "To think that these wine-bibbing, pleasure-loving patricians have conquered the world! To think that they have conquered our own nation which Jehovah made victorious over its enemies through the long, long years!"

"Yes, they conquered us. But that dominion must end. Our day of greatness must come. Jehovah has promised it."

"If it comes it will surely be through Him. We cannot with our own strength defeat these Romans in battle. But if He smites them, they will perish as the Egyptians perished in the Red Sea or as the hosts of Sennacherib passed away in a single night."

"And it will all come to pass. It will all come to pass. My mind misgives me at times; yet the promises have been given us and they cannot fail. In one short hour the walls, the temples, the palaces and all the costly pleasure haunts of this proud city might

crumble, even as the walls of Jericho crumbled at the bidding of Jehovah. And Jerusalem would then be the mistress of the world! Kings and princes would bow down before her. All the nations of the earth would bring her tribute —”

But while the old man was speaking there came a flourish of trumpets, and all knew that the sports were to begin. A sudden hush succeeded the dull murmur of human voices, and every eye was turned to the *carceres*, or stalls, where the horses and chariots were. Through the open-work wooden gates that confined them their presence could be just barely noted; their character and their appointments it was impossible to discern. Great was the curiosity, therefore, when the gates were pushed open at the given signal and the chariots issued forth. Three there were that came rapidly forward and stood in even line before the white cord that checked them at the beginning of the course. To Naarah's inexperienced eye the spectacle afforded nothing but delight. The chariots were elegant; the steeds well-groomed and shapely. So brave an appearance gave promise, she felt sure, of as exciting a contest as could be desired. But the old-time spectators who had watched innumerable chariot races around these very goals knew better. They knew that the best was always reserved to the last; and, trained observers that they were, they saw that the drivers lacked nerve and daring and that the horses were not of the staunchest build or the highest mettle. And the race itself, interesting and enjoyable to the uninitiated, was tame to such as had witnessed nerve-racking con-

tests in which life and limb were deemed as nought compared with the coveted triumph. For the drivers handled the reins with caution, collisions were carefully avoided, and without difficulty the fastest pair obtained a decisive lead even before the final seventh round was run.

The next race was more exciting. Two *quadrigae*, or four-horse chariots, came forth from the *carceres*, drew up for a moment before the white cord, and then dashed down the course at headlong speed as the trumpet peal was heard. Side by side they careered along the *spina*, or low wall that divided the course into halves, passed in rapid succession the three conical wooden posts which served as goals, and were still nearly abreast as they whirled down on the other side. In similar fashion they completed the first six rounds of the race. Neither chariot could gain a decisive lead. The seventh round was begun with one of the two only a length ahead. The spectators, who had become much interested, looked to see an exciting finish. But as the goal posts were reached for the last time, the driver whose chariot was in the rear made too sharp a turn. His car collided with that of his rival. Both cars were wrecked; both drivers were thrown to the ground. Naarah gave a cry of pity, but was relieved to find a moment later that the drivers were but slightly hurt and the horses not at all.

“What did you expect?” inquired Merari, a little amused at her sensitiveness. “You have, no doubt, read Sophocles’ *Electra* and you know what deadly mischief a chariot race can cause.”

“And what needless mischief. Why are those drivers so reckless and so ungenerous? Can they take no pleasure in any success but their own? It would be so much nobler to see a rival win than to hurt him and wreck his chariot!”

“Nobler by far. But do not expect to see men like our Samuel or Elisha driving the chariots.”

And now a stir of eager expectation ran through the assemblage. As was frequently done, lists of the steeds that were to take part in the important race, with their names and colors, had been handed about. For the next race, which was the final one, was to be the real contest of the day. As choice a pair of steeds as the Italian peninsula could generate was to be matched against rival pairs from other lands. These Italian bred horses were sure to be the favorites of the Roman populace, and large sums had been staked by patricians and plebeians alike on their success. At the same time the rival pairs had found backers and not merely among the aliens who were present. The horse race is not a good school for patriotism. The greed it inspires is stronger far than pride in the fatherland. But from whatever motives, whether from patriotism, cupidity, or mere love of excitement, the vast concourse was clamorous for the final race to begin. Intense, almost painful, therefore, was the interest when the gates of four of the *carceres* were thrown wide and four chariots ranged themselves before the starting rope. Again the trumpet sounded. Again the cord was dropped and the rival pairs flew down the course.

For a moment the multitudes were silent; then thunderous cheers arose as the Romans saw their own color forge ahead. It was a pair of cream-colored horses from sunny Calabria on which they rested their hopes. They were decorated with purple ribbons and their driver wore a tunic of purple. Well might the Roman faction in the crowd of excited spectators look with favor on these beautiful steeds. They were full of fire and spirit, with gracefully curving necks, elegant limbs, long bodies and a breadth of chest that betokened strength and endurance.

But fleet and formidable were the other three pairs that were matched against the Calabrians. Two splendid grays from Boeotia, decked with pink, commanded the admiration of all by their admirable action and the evidence of power they afforded to the experienced judge. They were heavier than was usual with racers, but their tread was light and in every attitude and motion they manifested the qualities which the grueling contest they were engaged in unsparingly required. Even though the grays were at first outdistanced, those who had staked money on them were well satisfied with their appearance and were confident that the final issue would justify their expectations.

More captivating to the eye of most was a milk-white pair from Persia whose color was pale green. On the rich Iranian plateaus, with their clear health-giving atmosphere, these beautifully proportioned animals had acquired their daintily modeled limbs, their compact bodies, their spirit and their easy gait which seemed so effortless that it was hard to think of it as

becoming slack or heavy. No small number of the spectators had selected this pair as the winners and pledged their purses to support their choice. No regrets now disturbed them as they noted carefully their favorites' pace and mettle.

Less appreciated were two jet-black Arabians, which, docile rather than mettlesome, shaped for endurance rather than for beauty, did not so manifestly possess the points that please the ordinary eye. Yet those in the assemblage who had a nice discernment shook their heads as they observed how easily these desert coursers carried themselves, how their feet seemed to spring from the earth as if the very contact with the soil supplied them with strength, and how the forward thrust of the neck and the long, perfectly shaped body gave promise of marvelous speed when they stretched in full career adown the sand-strewn course. Well did all these experienced judges know that the Calabrians would be sorely taxed to outstrip this sleek and shining pair, driven as they were by a crafty Syrian whose every motion betokened confidence, strength and skill.

"He looks like one of our own nation," said Naarah, as the chariots whirled for the first time past the point where she was seated, "I hope he will win. How handsome he is, with his clear swarthy skin and his curly hair! Why, it is as black as the coats of his horses! And that light, yellowish costume — it makes me think of the stretches of desert sand. I like it better than the others. It has a friendly look. Yet the other colors are pleasing. Do they have any meaning,

do you think?"

"The purple of the Roman chariot," said Merari, "is one of those shades obtained from the Tyrian murex. They are all supposed to be the emblem of royalty, and no doubt this has been selected for the Roman driver to symbolize the imperial power of Rome. As to the pink of the Boeotian and the pale green of the Persian, I doubt if they have any special significance. They are distinguishing marks, nothing more."

"Arabia is nearest my own dear land. We could almost look on its sandy stretches from our high mountains. It makes me think of the darling home of my childhood to see those beautiful black horses that came from so near by. Oh, how I hope they will come in first! But what a glorious sight a chariot race is, and how glad I am that you brought me. I haven't been so happy since I was a little girl. No, no!" she added quickly as she realized that the last words must have given pain. "I do not mean that. I only mean that it gives me joy to see what is so rich and splendid and appealing."

The old man gave her a pleased and grateful look. Then they both turned their eyes intently upon the course; for even to the old man the sight of the four chariots dashing madly down the sands was an altogether absorbing one. To Naarah the spectacle was positively thrilling; and the most seasoned and jaded of the onlookers found the excitement that they craved. The drivers were all as daring as they were skillful. They did not fear to put their steeds to the top of their

speed. Nor did they always hold their coursers in as they made the dangerous turns round the ends of the *spina*, and the goal post was in very truth 'barely avoided by the glowing wheels.'

While watching the previous races Naarah had learned that the full circuit was made seven times. She had noted, too, how a servitor took down from the *spina* one of the *ova*, or conical shaped balls, at the completion of each round, and the process had amused her.

"One of those egg-shaped pieces is to be taken down every time a round is finished?" she inquired as Merari explained the practice.

"Exactly so."

"What stupid people, not to be able to count seven!" she exclaimed. But the excitement of the present struggle was sufficient to show the wisdom and convenience of the custom. So absorbed were the faculties in watching the race that the count of the rounds was difficult to keep.

Exciting the contest was from the outset. Though the Calabrians obtained the lead at the very beginning and called forth the plaudits of the assemblage, they did not long maintain it. The Persians turned the goal post just behind them at the completion of the first round and then outstripped them by a burst of speed. Never slackening their pace, they put a clear distance of three chariot lengths between themselves and the cream colored coursers; and this lead they maintained through the second round and the first half of the third. Then the Calabrians slowly gained on them

and passed them in the beginning of the fourth, to the unbounded delight of the greater portion of the spectators. Plainly the milk-white horses were feeling the strain. They had been put to their best too early in the race. The grays from Boeotia also passed them before the fourth round was at an end and almost drew abreast of the Calabrians.

The fifth round was an exciting contest between the Calabrians and the grays. Now the two pairs were neck and neck; now one pair forged ahead only to be overtaken a moment later and outdistanced by the other. But as the round neared its end, it became apparent that the grays had the superior wind and bottom. They obtained so distinct an advantage over their rivals that they were able to take the inside of the course, close to the *spina*. Their driver fairly grazed the goal post as he made a dexterous turn at the end of the round; and he began the sixth round so well in advance of the other three that he had good reason to think that the race was his. His horses were not tired. He could maintain his present pace to the end.

"The fifth *ovum* is down. Only two rounds more and the Arabians are far behind," cried Naarah in despair. "Oh, what a stupid driver! I believe those beautiful Arabs are the swiftest of them all if they were only put to their mettle. But it is too late. The race is really over."

"Perhaps only begun," observed Merari. "The driver is wiser than you think. If I am not mistaken, the whole situation will be changed before this heat is

finished."

Merari's prophecy was quickly justified. It had been part of the Syrian's plan to allow all the others to outstrip him. Just before him were the plainly defeated Persians, tired but still running gallantly. A little distance ahead were the Calabrians, vainly endeavoring to overtake the grays who, however, stretched along the course so furiously that they did not yield a foot of the lead they had gained. But as the Syrian completed the fifth round by a skillful turn of the goal post, he bent forward and gave a shrill whistle. Instantly the Arabians quickened their pace. Easily they passed by the Persians. They gained on the Calabrians so rapidly that the driver of the cream colored horses began to ply the lash. It was all in vain. The fleet Arabians tore past him and were able to take the inside of the track before this first half of the round was completed and the first goal post turned. Passing it dexterously, the Syrian whistled again and the obedient blacks began to close the distance that still separated them from the seemingly tireless grays.

Gallantly did the pink clad driver struggle to maintain his lead. He urged his horses to their utmost. They responded to his call, but, already heavily taxed, they could not materially quicken their pace. Steadily the Arabians gained. Now the two pairs were neck and neck. Now the blacks drew ahead, took the inside of the course and rounded the goal in advance of their rivals.

All through this sixth round the spectators had watched in silence. The tension was too great to allow

any general manifestations of feeling. But now there burst forth a storm of approving cries, jeers, and exclamations of rage and disappointment. For while the majority of the spectators were won by the dexterity of the Syrian and the fleetness of his steeds, there were many Romans whose pride made them angry and bitter, there were others who had staked such large sums on the Calabrians that they waxed wrathful and malicious now that their defeat seemed sure.

But was it sure? These malcontents, who had wagered larger sums on the cream colored coursers than they could afford to lose, had not left the result to mere fleetness of foot and skill in handling the reins. Trickery is the ally of the evil-minded; and where did trickery ever find a more alluring field than the race-course? Even while the Syrian swept down the sands and completed the first half of the final round, strange things were happening on the other side of the *spina*. The grays, so at least it seemed to the excited concourse of spectators, had become unmanageable. They careered wildly about. They did not turn the goal post so as to begin the seventh and final heat, but, after plunging in various directions, careered back over the course they had just traversed. Apparently startled at seeing one of the chariots dashing back upon them, the Persians became unmanageable, too, and likewise turned about in their tracks. The Calabrians, however, steadily pursued their way, rounded the goal and began the seventh circuit some distance behind the black Arabians.

Both of these pairs completed the first half of the

final round without incident, for they had the course all to themselves. The only noticeable feature of this phase of the race was that the Arabians slightly increased their already considerable lead. It was when the goal had been turned for the last time that the Syrian driver found trouble was in store for him. Not that there seemed to be anything threatening in the situation. The grays and the milk-white Persians had now become manageable. Both pairs, though out of the race, were moving slowly and quietly toward the first starting point, the one on the extreme left of the course, the other on the extreme right. A perfectly simple and easy matter it appeared for the Arabian pair to dash rapidly between these two defeated chariots and go thundering on with such a lead as to rob the finish of excitement.

Exactly this the Syrian tried to do. It was the natural, the only thing for him to do. But in attempting it he found himself obstructed. Before he could pass the Boeotian and the Persian chariots, they closed in upon him and so rapidly as to make the wreck of his own chariot seem certain. Foul play was manifestly being employed against the matchless Arabians and their driver. For this was the pair which discerning judges had seen to be superior before the race began. They must therefore be defeated by shameful means if they could not be outstripped in honorable rivalry. The immense sums at stake as well as the prestige of Rome demanded this. Hence persons of high rank and station who had offered odds on the Calabrians and who had seen in the Arabians the most formidable

obstacle to the success of their own plans, had bribed the drivers of the Persians and the Boeotians to combine against the Syrian driver in case they found that they could not win themselves.

The Syrian seemed lost and a thrill of satisfaction ran through the fickle crowd of spectators. Even those who had just applauded his nice judgment and his perfect command of his horses now turned against him. They gloated over the prospect of a catastrophe, and for trickery they had no righteous indignation. Their Roman pride would be gratified if the Syrian were sacrificed in a collision and the cream colored steeds were thus enabled to snatch victory from defeat. Breathless they watched the two hopelessly vanquished chariots close in upon that of the Syrian and waited for the crash of collision.

But the crash did not come. Just at the instant when it seemed unavoidable the Syrian uttered three loud guttural sounds in close succession. With marvelous quickness his horses brought the chariot to a standstill. With equal celerity and precision they darted forward again at his prompting. The two chariots that had tried to wreck his own barely avoided crashing together, and before the two outwitted drivers had taken in the situation the Syrian had passed by them on the left, which was always the inside of a Roman race-course, and was flying after the Calabrians which were now to the fore. For the driver of the cream colored horses had made the most of his opportunity at the moment when the Arabians had been brought to a halt to avoid disaster. He had thun-

dered by triumphantly and, now clearly in the lead, he felt almost sure that treachery had won for him what the merit of his coursers could not have gained.

The Syrian was, to be sure, only three chariot lengths behind and his black steeds were unquestionably of better wind and fleeter pace. But the line that marked the finish was very near. Could those desert coursers overcome that decided lead when the terminus was only three hundred feet away? The exulting spectators were sure that they could not. A thunderous roar arose from the maddened concourse as, like one man, it vented its joy in the anticipated triumph. "The Calabrians!" "The Calabrians!" "Rome forever!" were the cries that rent the air and drowned utterly the loud beat of the iron hoofs.

But the cheering died almost as quickly as it began. For the last time did the Syrian bend forward and give that low shrill whistle; and in spite of the vast strain that had been put upon their powers the gallant steeds were able to respond. Steadily they gained upon the cream colored coursers. They were almost abreast of them. They were neck and neck. They were gaining still — but the finish line had been passed, and which had won? In a tense breathless silence the spectators had watched the ending. Now, loud queries rose from every side. They were followed by curses and cries of rage when it was noised everywhere that the Arabians had won by a neck. Yet when the excitement had cooled, not a few fair-minded persons lauded the skill and resource of the Syrian who had so fully merited his victory; and his success filled Naarah with un-

bounded enthusiasm. Her enjoyment was as spontaneous and hearty as that of a child, and was so contagious that her grandfather could not help sharing her lively satisfaction.

“You make me feel so young that I am ashamed,” he said to Naarah. “That I, an old man, should forget my books and all the deep meditations of years and watch galloping horses with the interest of a child. I did not think it was in me to be so foolish.”

“You will be all the wiser for it in the end, grandfather. You said your brain was withered and I am sure it will feel fresher after this. How I should laugh if you told me to-morrow morning that you had been dreaming of horse races in the night! The Prophets would feel badly, I fear. If Jeremiah were to come to earth again, he would have to write a new Lamentation.”

“Ah, Naarah, Naarah! I fear that long hair of Absalom’s has spoiled all taste you might ever have had for the Prophets.”

The races were followed by athletic contests and trials of skill and endurance. Some powerful Greek wrestlers gave an exhibition of their art which Naarah might have enjoyed had not the falls been sometimes, as it seemed to her, needlessly rough and violent. Wonderful skill with the javelin was displayed by a troop of Mauretanians; slingers from the Balearic Isles and archers from Crete also showed rare mastery of their respective weapons. But these pastimes, which were so easily kept free from the elements of danger and sensation, did not satisfy the Roman taste

unless they involved peril to human life. After the Cretans had shot at an ordinary target and riddled it with arrows, several thieves were brought into the arena, tied to planks with ropes and told that they could have their liberty if they did not lose their lives while the archers cut their bonds in two with sharp pointed arrows. This savage form of entertainment was vastly pleasing to the populace; but Naarah covered her face with her hands while it lasted. She was much relieved when her grandfather finally told her it was over and that no one of the men was killed, though one of them seemed to be rather badly wounded. No more could she bear to look upon the boxing with the cestus; for even though not as barbarous as the contest so graphically described by Vergil, it was by no means free from brutality.

At its conclusion a long and loud flourish was sounded on the trumpets, and the assemblage knew that the spectacle most dear to the Roman heart was now to begin. The gladiators were to enter the arena.

XXII

A MOMENT of stillness followed the blare of the trumpets. Then there were approving shouts and bursts of applause, as the two gladiators who were to begin the bloody sport marched into the arena. They proceeded directly to the seats assigned to the imperial circle. In front of these they halted, gave the gladiators' well known salutation, and placed themselves for the fray.

As they entered the arena Merari reminded his granddaughter that it was time for them to go. Naarah, however, insisted on remaining till the gladiators had made their salutation. She wished to have just one good look at them in all their bravery. She was seated so near the imperial company that she was sure to see them to advantage. As they began their march, she gazed at them with mingled wonder and pity. As they came opposite to her, she fixed her eyes intently upon one of them, a swarthy Afric who towered above his broad-shouldered but low statured companion.

As the two saluted, Merari rose and looked at Naarah, not doubting that she would leave her seat without being bidden and accompany him. To his surprise she continued to gaze searchingly at the two gladiators and seemed quite oblivious of him.

"Come, Naarah!" he said somewhat impatiently. "We really must not linger any longer."

"I cannot go, grandfather," she answered, glancing at him for an instant with a face that was as white as the robe she wore. "I must stay and watch."

"Impossible, child! Impossible!" cried Merari, both puzzled and vexed by this utterly incomprehensible change of mind. "You know it was fully understood between us that we would not stay to see the gladiators contend."

"I know it was," replied Naarah, with her eyes still on the two gladiators, "but I must stay. I really can not go."

Merari was deeply disturbed. That Naarah should remain was intolerable to him, yet he knew not how to compel her will. He would make one more appeal.

"I beg of you to come away," he said. "In the name of your father and mother I ask you not to remain and witness this bloody sport."

Naarah looked at him with a face full of grief and sorrow.

"I cannot explain here, grandfather," was her answer, "but I must stay. Do not say any more!"

Merari submitted and took his seat again. He did not know what else to do. The colloquy had already excited some interest and attention, and he was unwilling to cause further comment. He had spoken in the Syro-Chaldaic dialect, then used in Palestine, after Naarah's first refusal; but his tones and attitude plainly betokened that he was meeting with resistance to his wishes, and to insist further was to make a scene. So, most unexpectedly and with no little chagrin and wonder, he found himself witnessing a spectacle he had

never thought to look upon.

That the tall gladiator who passed as an Afric was Marcus, hardly needs to be said. He was carrying out the suggestions made by Delphium in every particular. With her aid he had disguised himself. Side by side with Styrax he had marched into the arena, and he was now to lay the Thracian low or himself meet an ignoble end. His contest was the first one called. Piso would gladly have arranged it otherwise; for he knew that this would be the most spirited and desperate encounter of the day and would excite the deepest interest, and it was the custom to reserve the fiercest duels to the last. But Marcus had imperatively demanded that he and Styrax should be the first to close. So the two had marched into the arena together when the trumpet first rang forth its summons.

Styrax knew well who it was that was pitted against him. The moment Marcus appeared among the twelve gladiators who were to furnish the martial sport of the day, he recognized him and his fierce eyes gleamed with satisfaction.

"Aha, my dainty patrician!" he exclaimed. "So you were not content with laying me sprawling but thought you would have my life-blood also. Well, take your last look at the sun, you vile dog! You'll never see it again."

"You called me a coward," answered Marcus. "I am showing you I am not one. No more words will I have with you."

They took their places in the arena, and the combat was on. The only weapon allowed them was the

short, two-edged, sharp-pointed sword, which the Roman legionaries used with such deadly effect in their encounters with poorly armed and poorly disciplined adversaries. It was, indeed, the most murderous weapon ever devised for close combat on the battle-field; for every time it found its mark it meant almost certain death. The Roman soldier was trained to grasp it and use it as a huge dagger. He stabbed; he seldom hewed. Hence, if he broke through his enemy's guard and fleshed his weapon, he inflicted no mere annoying or disabling surface wound. He reached a vital part and drew his sword out of a dead or a dying man. It was with this terrible implement of destruction that the Romans sometimes converted a battle into a massacre, as when they annihilated the Cimbri and the Teutons on the Raudian Plains or wiped whole tribes of Gauls and Belgians out of existence. For these brave peoples could not parry the deadly thrust of the disciplined and hardy Roman legionary after their formation was broken up and battle became little more than an unending series of hand-to-hand encounters.

The defensive armor allowed the gladiators was the same that the Roman soldier habitually wore. He had a helmet, greaves, and a round metal-covered shield. Sometimes a shield alone was given him in order that the conflict might be shorter and more savage. But Piso was a humane man and did not require the gladiators to engage in their furious contests without affording them all the protection which the traditions of the battle-field warranted. Hence, the task of

the gladiator was the same as that of the Roman soldier when he met the enemy in close combat. It was his aim to get past his opponent's guard and bury his weapon in the body by a well delivered thrust. But if he could previously disable him or make his movements slow and cumbrous by inflicting one or more serious flesh wounds, his ultimate purpose would be more easily accomplished.

Now, it took Marcus only a moment to see that this was the intention of the wily Thracian. The first thing he noticed when he stood facing him was that Styrax was holding his sword, not to thrust but to slash and hew. It was plain, therefore, that he would begin the conflict by trying to maim Marcus, so that he could no longer be master of himself. Then it would be no very difficult thing to get past Marcus' guard by a quick and sudden attack and inflict a fatal wound. To carry out this cunning scheme, so Marcus reasoned, Styrax would strike at those parts of the body which did not cover vital organs and which were not easily protected by the shield. That the Thracian would strike at him below the waist he was convinced; and against such an assault he determined to be on his guard.

Each of the combatants was so intent on fathoming the other's strategy that for a short time there was nothing but feinting. Styrax in particular rushed forward again and again with sword uplifted, but he dodged back so quickly that his stroke had no force and was parried almost without effort. To these sallies Marcus sometimes responded by a similar feigned

aggressiveness that was void of real force and positive menace.

“Coward!” hissed Styrax. “You don’t dare to come at me like a man.”

“Come at me yourself,” replied Marcus, “if you really mean to fight. A word to Piso and I can withdraw from the encounter at any time.”

This threat infuriated Styrax, as Marcus intended that it should, and he now came on like a maddened wild beast that has been wounded and has lost all caution. Crouching low and well protected by his shield, he darted forward, smote hard, retreated the very instant his stroke was given, and then came on again with only the briefest respite. His eyes, which gleamed with savage hatred, were constantly fixed on those of his adversary, and he gave no clue to his point of attack as he leaped forward again and again and wielded his sword with terrific and undiminished power. Above the shield of Marcus and below it, to the right of it and the left of it, the blade of the Thracian flashed and hissed; and the clang of the swords as the desperate swinging strokes were parried was like the ring of an anvil under an unceasing shower of blows.

But parried they all were. With untiring arm and never failing skill, Marcus always met the sweeping blade of his opponent with a defense so firm that to wear it down seemed like trying to mow down a giant oak with a scythe. And yet a vigorous defense was all that Marcus found himself so far able to attempt. Styrax had taken desperate chances, and in parrying some of his wildest swings, Marcus could have pressed

his own blade home before his furious opponent had an opportunity to recover and continue his fierce assault. But the counter stroke was never given. To his own surprise, Marcus found that the lust for battle and blood was not in him. Now that it was too late, he realized that Lentulus had viewed the whole matter rightly. It was well that the Thracian should be killed, but Marcus was not the one to kill him. He was an evil brute. He cumbered the earth. Yet to slaughter him was a butchery and Marcus had no heart for it. He could have rushed against the enemies of his country with a passionate joy and raged upon the battlefield as Diomed did when Athene fired his heart and nerved his arm, or as Achilles did to avenge the death of Patroclus. But he felt no animosity toward the savage Thracian. He felt nothing but disgust with himself that he had undertaken the miserable task of killing him. He disliked to strike him down, and even his defense, skillful as it was, lacked energy and spirit.

To Styrax his conduct was quite surprising. Utterly unable to understand or appreciate Marcus' scruples, he naturally attributed to timidity what was due to an elevated mind and character. Therefore, after resting a brief space from his first furious onslaught, he resumed the attack and if possible with even greater fury. He now felt sure of success, and the thought elated him and nerved him to put all his strength into every stroke. And his elation seemed in a measure justified. Skill alone will not make an entirely successful defense. A vigorous assault must be met with equal vigor or the lack of balance in the

contending forces will cause the advantage to rest with the side that has the preponderance of will and energy. Less impetuous than his adversary, Marcus was no longer unfailingly alert in avoiding him. Twice the vicious blows of Styrax were imperfectly parried, and Marcus received a flesh wound between the knee and the thigh and a gash below the temple which caused one side of his face to be covered with blood. But still the Thracian was unable to inflict a disabling wound.

Unexpectedly baffled, he now determined to resort to trickery. Thus far, Marcus had met with no method of attack which he was not readily able to fathom and counter. But Styrax now advanced rapidly, stretched to his full height and with sword lifted as high as possible, as if to deliver a terrific down stroke on the shoulder or the head. The down stroke, however, never fell. With the quickness of the panther or the serpent that strikes from his coils, the Thracian dropped close to the ground, darted underneath Marcus' guard, passed by his right side and delivered a vicious swinging back-stroke at the upper portion of his leg.

Nothing but Marcus' extraordinary agility saved him from receiving a wound that would have settled the combat. He leaped to one side as Styrax dropped suddenly earthward and so far evaded him as to receive only another severe flesh wound instead of a cut that would have reached the bone and severed an artery. But he was now bleeding in three places, whereas his opponent was as yet untouched. And this

third wound, inflicted as it was by an attack that would not pass as fair and legitimate, had at last excited his ire. The battle frenzy had been roused in him. He was eager to smite and slay, if slay he could when facing such a tireless and vindictive adversary.

Styrax, accordingly, found that he was meeting a new antagonist when the two closed once more. It was Marcus who now took the aggressive. His eye flamed with the lust of conflict, and the Thracian quailed under the terrific blows which the young Roman giant rained upon him. He did succeed in getting past Marcus' guard and dealing him a wound in the breast; but he received a deeper one in return and was conscious that superior strength and superior skill were now employed against him. His hope lay in craft and cunning, and he still had one trick at his command that he had used with entire success when practicing the fence with his only intimate associate among the gladiators. Could he employ it against such an adroit and powerful opponent as the young Roman? Eagerly he watched for an opportunity and the desired moment came. In parrying an ineffective stroke, he dexterously contrived to catch his opponent's blade between his own sword and the rim of his shield, and by a sudden and powerful twist he sent it flying into the air. In an instant, before Marcus could quite realize what had so unexpectedly happened, Styrax was standing over the weapon and facing an unarmed and seemingly defenseless antagonist. His moment for vengeance had now come. His eyes were lit with a savage joy, and with a shout of triumph he launched

himself upon his foe, now for the first time clasping his sword like a dagger to give the fatal stab.

Marcus seemed doomed, but, quick-witted as he always was, he saw one slight chance of saving himself. If he acted merely on the defensive, he was surely lost. Hacho's advice, to be the aggressor and force the fight, flashed into his mind, and he determined to assume the offensive now. It was a forlorn hope, a man with only a shield against an opponent who had both shield and sword; but it was his only one. Tightening the hold he had upon his shield with his left hand, he also seized it firmly by the rim with the right and launched himself against his oncoming foe with all his force.

The shock was terrific. Shield clashed against shield almost as a battering ram would strike against an iron door, and it was the less stable bulk that had to give. The stab that Styrax intended was indeed delivered, but it was shorn of its power and only inflicted another flesh wound, and this time a very slight one, in the breast; while he himself was hurled several feet backward and fell supine, the combined shock of the concussion and the fall causing his own sword to pass from his grasp. Marcus seized it before the Thracian could recover himself and possessed himself of his own weapon also. Then, while the vast crowd of excited spectators burst into loud cheering and thunders of applause, he grimly handed Styrax his weapon and faced him for the final round of this protracted but fierce and deadly conflict. Final it was bound to be, for each man was sure to fight with the grimmest resolution and the fixed intent to kill.

Again Marcus assaulted with tremendous energy, and again StyraX resorted to craft as the only means of countering his opponent's skill and force. But Marcus read his intention. He saw the Thracian change his grasp upon his sword so that he could slash and cut with it instead of thrusting, and he knew at once that this meant another attempt to pass below his guard by a low and sudden stoop. The attempt was made and it found him prepared to meet it. He stepped nimbly out of harm's way and, turning upon the Thracian, laid him low by a powerful thrust through the back. In the earlier stages of the conflict he would not have been willing to strike his adversary from behind. Indeed, he would have scorned to do so, but his patience was exhausted. He had shown the man magnanimity and he had met with trickery in return. He did not scruple, therefore, to end the affair in any way he could.

StyraX was mortally wounded, but neither he nor Marcus realized it. The dying man looked anxiously up to the sea of faces and stretched forth his hand in dumb pleading for compassion. He saw only the hard vindictive look and the long lines of down-turned thumbs. His unscrupulous methods of fighting had turned the whole body of spectators against him. Without a groan or a murmur he resigned himself to his fate, fixed his eyes on Marcus with a malignant expression and said,

"Strike, you cur! But know that I hate you still."

But Marcus had no will or inclination to strike. The battle rage had wholly died away in his heart and

he felt nothing but pity for the wounded man who lay helpless before him on the ground. He looked up to the spectators, but he saw only the down-turned thumbs and the relentless faces; and loud shouts of "Kill!" assailed his ears. He raised his sword irresolutely and then let it fall; for it was not in him to do the brutal deed. Again he looked to the benches, and this time, to his astonishment and horror, he got sight of Naarah, sitting near him and gazing at him with a blanched and pitying face. The emotions that were roused by this startling vision and the long strain of the combat with its drain upon his life-blood, proved overpowering. The sea of faces became blurred and faded from his sight. He reeled for a moment, dropped sword and shield, and fell upon the blood-stained sands.

XXIII

“SO, Naarah, you think the big African, who treated his enemy so generously and then dealt him a death-wound was no other than the son of the Prefect.”

“I am sure of it, grandfather,” answered Naarah, as the two sat together in her apartment the evening after the gladiatorial contest. Naturally they could think and speak of little else than the thrilling spectacle they had just witnessed. Yet it was Merari who broached the subject. Naarah responded readily to his queries, but was more inclined to brood in silence over the exciting events of the day than to speak of them.

“It seems hardly possible,” resumed Merari. “Why should a Roman of his birth and station demean himself by fighting with a coarse and brutal ruffian and taking his life before the greedy, shouting populace?”

“That I can not explain. Yet it seemed to me that the two men had a private quarrel which they were settling in that terrible way.”

“That would be strange. But if quarrel there was, it was settled forever. No man could outlive that terrific blow which the defeated gladiator received. But it served him right. He fought like a wild beast, not like a man.”

“But are you sure he was wounded to the death? He pleaded for mercy and I think the Roman feigned faintness as the only way of sparing him.”

“He did not want to stab a dying man. But he must have known the man was dying. If he had aught against him, he had terribly avenged himself. But why are you so interested in him, Naarah? You do not really know him.”

Naarah smiled faintly as she answered, “Don’t ask a maid to explain things she can not explain herself! No, I do not know the young Roman. Most surely I shall never meet or see him again. But when I saw that he was to fight and that he might be killed, I could not come away till I knew how the matter ended. It would have been such a dreadful thing for a strong man like him to be cut down in his prime. I believe there is much good in him.”

“And much evil, too, I fear. A youth who kisses girls upon the street and fights in the arena in disguise must have a wild and vicious strain in him.”

With this disquieting suggestion, Merari dropped the subject. It did not occur to him that Naarah could have any sentimental regard for a man of an alien race who seemed like a huge and untamed savage and whose career was likely to be marked by many a riotous and stormy deed. But he could not refrain from giving a veiled warning; for Naarah was young, and what emotions will possess the heart of a generous and spirited girl the wisest can never foresee.

Marcus and the dying Styrax were borne at the same time from the arena. The Thracian breathed his last

just as Marcus came fully to his senses. Hacho, with another trusty soldier, bore his master to his home, where he lay on his bed for the greater part of a month while his wounds were healing. The wounds were not indeed dangerous or very severe. Marcus could have been on his feet again in a shorter time, had he so willed. But the terrible experience with its strange closing episode had greatly depressed him. He waited till he had no excuse for waiting longer before he resumed his activity.

He told his father everything. He had, indeed, no choice in this. His disabled condition had to be explained, and Marcus was too honorable to make such an explanation untruthful or evasive. At the same time he would have made a full confession had he come out of the encounter without a scratch. He had beforehand resolved to do this unless his own death in the arena should prevent him. Agrippa heard the story in silence and betrayed no emotion while it was being told. When Marcus had ended, he said very quietly,

“What did you think I would do if I knew your purpose?”

“I thought you would prevent the fight from taking place.”

“How?”

“A word from you to Piso would have been quite sufficient.”

“In other words, you thought I would use my official authority to keep you from risking your life.”

“Yes, I thought exactly that.”

“You do not yet know me. What would you say

if I told you that I knew all along what you had in mind?"

"Impossible! You surely do not mean what you say. How could you have found out? How could you have been satisfied to say nothing about it?"

Agrippa smiled as he replied,

"You mean, how could I have set so little value on your life, seeing that you are my son and my only one? It would have been sad indeed if you had been cut off in your prime in a conflict which I can not help pronouncing an ignoble one. But you are a man. You deliberately planned to go into the fight. I should have considered that I was making a poor use of my authority if I had employed it to destroy your freedom of action."

"But surely you were not indifferent?"

"So far from it that I have had no easy hours for the last month. I was at the Circus. I watched the duel from beginning to end with an interest so intense that it was agony. But although I think what you did was not worthy of a true Roman, it was not dishonorable nor, in my judgment, disgraceful, though many would deem it so. Had I looked upon it as dishonorable, I should at least have gone so far as to remonstrate with you and try to dissuade you. As it was, I suffered; but I could only suffer in silence."

"I am ashamed and humiliated. I shall always think of the affair with horror and loathing. It was more like butchery than honorable combat, and it brought a season of pain and grief upon you. Yes, I am more thoroughly ashamed that I can tell. But

how in the world did you first find out about it?"

"Piso told me the very day after you forced him to consent to your scheme. I praised him and reproved him at the same time. I told him he had done right in coming to me with the story, but altogether wrong in aiding and abetting you in doing what he knew would not meet with my approval. He was very much crest-fallen when I informed him that his action was too late and that I should not interfere."

"Is he to be punished?"

"No. Why should he be? Men should be punished for their good, not vindictively; and he has learned his lesson. I think he has been as miserable as I. His attachment to you has made him anxious and troubled, and he has had to reproach himself for bringing this load of anxiety on me."

"How well you manage men! How did you learn?"

"By my mistakes, as all men must."

"But a man who learns only by doing things wrong will never do things wholly right. You have not been doing things wrong all your life. You have done them right. How do you do it?"

Agrippa thought for a moment and then said,

"I think you know as well as I. It is by making impulse wait on judgment. This you will do when the hot blood of youth has cooled a little. This is what the great men do who achieve great things."

"But some of the greatest things have been done through love of country, and that is pure feeling."

"And very foolish things, also, as when Brutus and

his fellow conspirators murdered Cæsar. The truest patriots are the men of sound judgment who think before they act. Epaminondas did not wait for the Spartans to cut his army to pieces and then think he could have beaten them by massing his men fifty deep. He thought out his problem beforehand, and when the time came, he massed his men fifty deep and drove the Spartans off the field. But enough! I think you have learned a lesson that is worth more than any words of mine could be. Perhaps this miserable duel was worth while. It has taught you a lesson you will not soon forget."

The lesson was not, indeed, forgotten. It had been too bitter and humiliating. But Marcus, with his native energy and buoyant spirits, would soon have thrown off the depression caused by his mortifying experience had it not been for the grief-stricken face he got sight of as he sank upon the sands of the arena. That face haunted him. He had no thought of breaking his resolution. He would take no steps to find and know the girl who seemed so strangely destined to cross his path. Yet it tried him sorely to think that she always saw him at his worst. Their first meeting had not been under auspicious circumstances. He felt sure she had witnessed his boisterous conduct at the theater. And she had looked with pity upon him as he was nerving himself to stab a dying man.

Why should he care if he was never to see her again? But that was the disturbing question. Would he not see her again? He felt sure that he should. Where is to be found the consistent disciple of pure reason?

Who is not ready to believe in a guiding star? That the dread Sisters were actually spinning the thread of his destiny, Marcus did not for a moment think. He would not again embrace discarded superstitions in order to nourish his hopes. But neither would he stifle hope at the dictates of naked, uncompromising reason.

His friends visited him freely while he was convalescing. More than once Lentulus came and sat by his bedside. Only a day or two before Marcus began to go about again he appeared and congratulated him that he could now dismiss his encounter with the fierce Thracian from his mind.

"I can not dismiss it," said Marcus. "My wounds are about healed. My mind is not well."

"You are the last man in the world to have an abiding mental sore. Your will is too sound. What is the matter?"

Marcus did not reply immediately. Presently he said,

"Was it naught but reason and sound judgment that guided Ulysses? Was Pallas Athene nothing but an idle fancy?"

"Not altogether an idle fancy. A beautiful one for a poet to make use of. Homer would not be entertaining if the gods and goddesses and nymphs were left out. But fancy is not fact. Ulysses had nothing but his own wits to depend on when he got into trouble."

"And when Nausicaa met him at the river side after his shipwreck, it was just chance?"

"Nothing more."

"I don't believe it."

"Because I can see you want to believe the opposite. Well, believe in Athene, or Neptune, or the three Fates with the distaff and the shears, if you will. But it isn't reason. You are humoring your will at the expense of judgment."

"Perhaps you would do the same if your feelings were ever strong enough to be riotous and unruly. Do you remember how I came late to Milo's banquet and the company twitted me about an Unknown?"

"Perfectly, though I do not need to tell you that I did not join in their silly raillery."

"Of course not. Nonsense and you live far apart. Well, there was an Unknown. She was a beautiful Hebrew girl. She was as lovely as she was beautiful. If she were a Roman, I should try to win her and marry her. But I can not seek her. I would not do it in a trifling spirit. I must not do it in a serious one. Yet I have seen her twice since I first met her in the street; once at the Theater, once at the Circus. Just before I fell upon the sands after fatally wounding Styra, my eye met hers. She knew me in spite of my disguise. I feel that I shall meet her again."

"And if you do, will it be chance or what?"

"I do not know, but I am sure I shall see her again."

"Perhaps you will, but you are not acting like yourself. Your will is strong. Your conduct has always been governed by energy and decision. Now you are drifting. Don't drift any longer. You are quite right in thinking you can not marry the girl. It is out of

the question. It would ruin your career to tie yourself to an alien woman. So, give her up absolutely and put her out of your mind altogether."

"That is to say, I must take pure reason as my guide and not allow inclination to make even a suggestion! Do the sages always do that? How about Socrates and the dæmon he followed?"

"I can't explain what it was that guided him. I certainly believe he was honest in what he said about it. But we do not all have dæmons. I have none. You have none. You have a sound judgment, though, and you would best follow it."

"I am not going against it. It is because I yield to it that I do not seek this girl whom I can not help thinking about. No doubt you are right in saying that marriage with her is out of the question. My own pride tells me so. I got the same view, strongly put, when I questioned my father one morning about the Hebrews. So you see I am doing just what judgment bids me do. But I believe I shall see the girl again."

"What if you do not?"

"Then it will be plain that there was no dæmon in the case and that her life and mine are to be separate."

"How long are you going to wait?"

"I do not know. That is a thing not to be decided beforehand."

"I should advise you not to wait very long. It was purely by chance that you met the girl at all. It was a strange chance that brought you face to face with her in the Theater, a still stranger one that you should have seen her at the Circus. It will be altogether ex-

traordinary if you ever meet her again. I do not believe you will. Accordingly, as you will most certainly not come across her again and as you have resolved not to seek her, I advise you to take the one simple means of forgetting her — marrying someone else.”

“You are always the philosopher, Lentulus,” said Marcus laughingly. “Reason never had a more thorough-going follower than you. But some day feeling will master you and you will have to sit down and make your theories all over! It is only time that can make me forget this beautiful face — quite the loveliest I have ever looked upon. And before time can work its cure, I feel that I shall see her again. It may be chance, but I tell you I shall see her again.”

Marcus’ feeling was to be justified, but it was hardly chance that was to bring the two once more together. The next meeting was to be a strange one indeed and was to result inevitably from the way in which he ordered his own life.

XXIV

JULIA as well as Naarah had recognized Marcus at the Circus. A woman is always keen to penetrate the disguise of a man she loves. With agonized feelings she watched the dubious strife. When Styrax assailed fiercely or foully, her heart sank within her. What if one of those terrific strokes should lay low this magnificent young Roman, the hope of his country she firmly believed? And if he should be terribly wounded, would the bloodthirsty populace spare him or would they hold down their cruel thumbs while he lay bleeding and helpless on the earth? Surely they would spare one who was so splendidly made by nature and who waged such a gallant fight. And then what? Should she see him if his end were near or if he hovered between life and death? Ah, what joy it would be to ease his pain and soothe him with tenderest touch!

The conflict over, Julia learned from Milo the extent of Marcus' injuries. And this was all the satisfaction that was possible for her. She could not see him. He sent her no kindly message. So from day to day she chafed and fretted as she reflected upon the past and wondered about the future. What had made this superbly gifted Roman so recklessly risk his life in a savage and brutal fight in the arena? Would

he ever grow ambitious? Would he ever do the things he was fitted for? And if he did, would he ask her to stand at his side to give him help and counsel?

She tried to get a clue to his motives from Milo.

"Why," she asked him a day or two after the duel, "did Marcus choose to fight in the arena with a beast of a gladiator?"

"To show how well he could do it, I suppose."

"Nonsense! Marcus does not do things for show."

"True. But he did the business so well that I do not see any occasion for asking why he did it. A man who can fight like that has a right to fight if he wants to."

This was all the light that Julia could get from Milo and all indeed that he had to give. Marcus' depressed mood had prevented him from talking about the duel with any of his friends but Lentulus; so none of the circle excepting the young Stoic knew what had led to the savage encounter with the Thracian. Under these trying circumstances, Julia was pleased to have a visit from Cethegus while Marcus was convalescing. This astute youth thought that the disabled condition of his rival gave him an excellent opportunity for pressing his own cause. Might not Julia's pride be offended by Marcus' undignified action? If he talked discreetly and entertainingly, Julia might begin to think him a more agreeable acquaintance than a man whose fierce barbaric instincts drove him to shed blood before a howling populace.

And entertaining indeed he was. He gave Julia a highly flavored account of a marriage ceremony at

which he had recently been present; repeated with spicy additions of his own the latest jokes of the best known parasites; retailed the current gossip; and showed up with inimitable drollery the peculiarities of some of the notable characters of the city. That Julia was highly amused he could not help seeing; but the self-congratulatory mood which her mirth aroused in him was soon succeeded by chagrin and vexation. Very easily and naturally she brought the conversation round to the encounter between Marcus and Styrax and put to Cethegus the same question she had asked of Milo, Why Marcus should have wished to fight with a gladiator?

Annoyed as Cethegus was, he concealed his vexation.

"How can I say?" he answered. "I am not in his confidence. Why not ask him himself when he comes to see you? His wounds are healing and he will soon be out again."

Julia could not help coloring, and Cethegus, who had shaped his answer with a purpose, at once divined the truth. Julia was trying to draw information about Marcus out of him because she was being neglected by Marcus himself and had no assurance that she should see him soon. Pleased with this state of things and not wishing to excite Julia's resentment by noticing or increasing her embarrassment, he did not wait for her to answer but continued his own remarks with entire ease and nonchalance.

"It really amuses me sometimes to think what genuine children of Romulus and Remus we Romans are. I fancy the she wolf really did suckle those two famishing

orphans. I don't believe many of the old stories, but I do believe that one. It is the only way of explaining why the Romans are such savages. They have a wolfish craving for blood, and there is nothing they admire so much as brute strength and skill with the sword. Now, if they were all told that Plato had come to life again and was talking in the Forum, I have no doubt half of them would say, 'Plato? Who is Plato?' And when they found he was only a philosopher, they would think he wasn't worth looking at. But if they heard that Achilles had come up from Hades and was going to carve a few gladiators into small pieces just to illustrate how he avenged the death of Patroclus, even the Circus Maximus would not begin to hold the people that would want to see the sport.

"A big, stalwart Roman patrician has a quarrel with a gladiator — Apollo knows what it was all about; I don't, though I have heard more explanations of it than there are scandal mongers in Rome — and the two fight it out in the arena. It was a furious and bloody fight and it pleased the populace immensely. But when it was found afterwards that the victor, who had stained his skin to look like an Afric, was really the son of the Prefect, the whole city went wild. People could talk of nothing else; and so everybody in Rome is asking everybody else in Rome just what you have been asking me, What made Marcus fight with a gladiator?"

"It is really too bad. How can a poor fellow like myself get famous and be talked about? I can't fight gladiators. I should be killed so quick that there

would be no more interest in it than in watching a butcher wring the neck of a chicken. I can't do anything that would interest these countrymen of mine the least bit in the world."

"You can talk, Cethegus."

"The very thing they don't care a whistle for. Cicero was the last of the talkers and he talked his own head off. I would rather keep mine on. It isn't safe to talk in these days. And what could I talk about? I don't happen to be putting down a conspiracy, or wiping out tribes of barbarians, or killing a Cæsar, or carving up the Empire and taking the lion's share of it. And surely the Romans would not care to have me tell what I had for dinner."

"I am not so sure of that. As you describe them, I should say that is just the sort of thing they would care about. And I am not saying you misjudge them. I think you understand them very well. And because you do, you have designs upon them. You have brains. These pleasure-loving people have little or none. You are going to make their ignorance and stupidity the stepping stone to your own ambitions. Go on and do so! But I shall always laugh when you tell me that you have no way of becoming great and famous because you can't fight gladiators."

Little more was said. Cethegus went away at once hopeful and disappointed. That Julia had given her heart unreservedly to Marcus, he could not help seeing. But if Marcus continued to neglect her, might she not turn to him in time? Her wounded pride would deepen the impression made by his own adroit appeals to her vanity and her ambition.

MARCUS' wounds were healed. His mind still remained depressed. So great was the longing to see again the face that haunted him that it made him unhappy. The first day that he left his room and breakfasted with his father, Agrippa saw that he was not himself.

"Marcus," he said, "you are taking your lesson too hard. It is preying on your spirits. There is no reason why you should be so cast down. Show yourself a man!"

"So I will. But you told me yourself that we had to learn by our mistakes. I have something to learn still."

"You won't learn by brooding over things and reproaching yourself. You have done that long enough. You need to be active. Do something! Take a post under me and I will give you work. You have fenced and exercised and explored the city till you are weary of it all. You need to have duties to perform every day. Your mind would be healthy if you were busy."

"Indulge me a little longer. I am not quite ready to give up my freedom yet. Before long I shall want you to assign me some task — not an easy one. And when I undertake it, I will do it well."

"Of that I am sure; but do not wait too long."

So Marcus took up his life again and went about

his wonted ways. He went to the gymnasium, though he exercised but languidly; he sought the gladiators' school and talked with Piso, though he had no heart for fencing with the gladiators; he drank and feasted with his companions without adding materially to their life and merriment. Julia, however, he did not seek. Day after day she hoped for his coming after hearing from Milo that he was active again; but he did not appear. The thought of Naarah — whom he did not yet know by name — made him altogether averse to seeing Julia. It was the companionship of Delphium that he craved and sought. With her, he thought, there could be friendship and genial converse without any disturbing question of sentiment.

The first time he visited her rooms, he went alone. He chose an hour when there would be few if any guests and a private interview would attract no notice. He found no one in the wine room. Delphium received him joyfully, conducted him into the cozy retiring room and gave him a beaker of the mellow soothing wine. With fine tact and insight she refrained from broaching at once the subject of the duel. Her quick eye saw that Marcus had not his old-time brightness of spirits. She divined that something was wrong and she suspected that the whole drastic experience was preying on his mind. Was there something more? If so, she would find it out.

“Drink!” she said, “and forget everything that troubles you! It is a joy to see you again. Let us not speak of that horrible fight! I know that it has been preying on your spirits and that everyone of your

friends has wanted to hear you tell the whole story over again till it has become as wearisome to you as the lesson a dull boy has to learn to save himself a whipping. I saw it, and that was enough. Welcome back to the world, Marcus! I drink to the happy days that are before you."

Marcus was surprised and gratified. His friends had indeed tried him not a little by insisting that he should talk about the duel. He had refused to humor them, but they had at least succeeded in making the subject distasteful. Expecting that Delphium too would demand the story, he had come prepared to give a reluctant compliance to the wish. For inasmuch as it was she who had put the thought of fighting Styrax into his mind, he could hardly refuse to gratify her curiosity. He would have told her the story in a dull, half-hearted way and been glad when it was ended. But now that she had waived the matter, he found himself strangely possessed with the desire to relate the whole episode and hear her expressions of sympathy and approval.

"Yes, I knew you were there," he said, after they had sipped lightly of the wine. "You told me you were going. I have wondered since whether you did not repent the part you had played in the matter when you saw how hard pressed I was at times."

"To be sure I did. But no more about it! It has made you suffer much. I can see that. Let us talk about something more cheerful!"

So straightway, Delphium began to chat in a light and entertaining manner about things that were trivial

in themselves but which she made to appear fresh and interesting by her wit and drollery. She talked about Marcus' friends and told how dull and spiritless they seemed when they came to the wine room while he was convalescing. She repeated the latest stories that were afloat, being careful to avoid those which were unsavory. She gave a vivid sketch of the doings of the informers, who had recently gathered some notable victims into their net. She denounced Tiberius and pictured his character in lurid colors. And finally she began to recount one of the numerous tales that had floated through the city regarding the reasons why Marcus had met Styra in a battle to the death. But hardly had she entered upon the story when she stopped short and said,

"Dear me! The forbidden topic. I happened upon it without thinking. You see, you set the whole city to talking about you, Marcus, and for quite a while nothing else that took place seemed of any interest. It is really difficult to rule you out of conversation."

"Finish your story, Delphium! I am not so sensitive on the subject as you suppose."

So Delphium went on with the tale, adorning it with touches of her own. When she had ended she said, as if struck by a sudden thought,

"Oh, there is just one thing I have been wanting to know about the duel and which perhaps you will tell me as you say you are not averse to speaking about it. I could not believe that you, with your vast strength, had been so badly wounded as to make you faint at

the end. What caused you to fall, Marcus? ”

Marcus was startled. He hesitated before replying. Then, thinking there was no reason for concealment here, he said shortly,

“ I saw a face.”

If Marcus was startled by the question, Delphium was more startled by the answer. She was like one gazing suddenly into a dark chasm where a moment before there had been green earth and flowers. At once she guessed why Marcus had come to her so listless and tame-spirited. What she had attributed to the repulsive character of the whole experience, had in reality a deeper cause. Whose face was it he had seen? Not Julia's, she felt sure. She must find out, but with all possible caution. She was too crafty to assault a citadel that needed to be undermined. Without showing a trace of emotion at Marcus' unexpected reply, she said laughingly,

“ What a strange man you are, Marcus! You overpower the most ferocious fighter in Rome and then fall down because you see a face. Were you dreaming, I wonder? But now that we have touched upon the duel, I believe you will have to tell me all about it. You owe it to me. I went through so much while I was watching you! You were too excited to think or feel; but to me it was awful, terrifying. I felt that I could not bear it. I wanted to go away, and yet I could not. I simply had to sit still and watch it through, though my heart almost stopped beating at times. I think I was most fearful for you at the first. You did not more than half fight for a while. But

after the real battle rage got hold of you, I was sure nothing could save Styrax. Why, even when he wrested your sword out of your hand, I still felt that somehow you would get the better of him. So do tell me the whole story! I feel that I was to blame for bringing such a frightful experience upon you, and I really must know just what you went through."

Delphium's animation was contagious. Marcus began, not without spirit, to describe the combat and the emotions he experienced at its different stages. As he went on, he warmed to his theme more and more and made his narrative intensely thrilling and dramatic. After a time he rose from his seat, walked about the room and acted out the story as it was poured forth in vivid and telling phrases from his lips. Delphium listened spell-bound and uttered a sigh of relief as the tale was brought to an end.

"Then he was mortally wounded," she said when Marcus finished, "and did not need a final thrust to bring his worthless life to a close. I was sure it was so. I did not see how any man could recover from such a blow as you gave him. And you pretended to faint just to avoid stabbing a dying man? It was like you, Marcus. But, dear me! I forgot. You said it was because you saw a face. Whose face was it, Marcus? How could you see any single face in that vast multitude? Did you have a vision?"

Taken off his guard and brought into a communicative mood by Delphium's artfulness, Marcus admitted that the face he had seen was that of a young Hebrew girl whom he had met but scarcely knew. She was

very beautiful and, he was sure, very good. By a strange chance his eyes had rested on her as he had looked up to the spectators to learn their animus toward Styrax, and her pale anxious face had affected him strangely.

He spoke with reserve, but Delphium questioned him so skillfully without seeming to question him at all, that he finally told the astute Greek all that she needed to know. A rival there was after all, and a formidable one. But how formidable? That she could not quite make out. With all her craft she could not read Marcus' mind for the simple reason that it was too elevated for her to understand it. She was like a person gazing up to a sun-lit hill crest through a dense undergrowth; and the undergrowth that obstructed her vision was the low and selfish motives that dominated her actions. But of one thing she was sure. Now was her opportunity. There seemed to be something amiss between Marcus and this girl who, as Delphium phrased it to herself, had caught his fancy. He did not, at any rate, seem to be seeking her. She herself, therefore, must act before it was too late. She must make her own arts and blandishments serve as erosives till this fondly cherished memory was effaced.

XXVI

HOW fondly cherished the memory was, Delphium naturally did not realize. Yet had she realized it, she could not have furthered her own cause with greater skill and adroitness. She never forced her society upon Marcus. She did not urge or even invite him to come. She simply made herself so attractive that he was loth to stay away. Hence to Marcus she seemed to have that reserve and delicacy which he had felt to be lacking in Julia.

Unprincipled as well as artful, the designing woman had carefully considered whether an appeal to the senses might not be the surest way of accomplishing her end. With rare subtlety could she have made it. An intimate relation thoroughly established, she could have stolen in upon the slumbering senses of the man as insidiously as the serpent in search of warmth coils about a sleeping body in the night. And when the revealing moment came and the man knew he was under temptation, would it not be too late for him to resist? For most men, yes. For Marcus, with his iron will and unbending self-respect, perhaps not. Moreover, in gaining all for the moment she would surely lose all in the end. She could not win success in this way without unmasking herself, and that was the very thing she was striving not to do. She was employing all her arts to hide her real self. To betray it would

be fatal. Marcus, even though won for the instant, would soon cast her off after she had forfeited his respect. Wisely therefore she determined that those dangerous weapons which have worked many a man's ruin must be let alone. She must reach him through his ready sympathies, his generous emotions, and the trust which he reposed in her integrity.

And this she seemed to be doing so successfully that she grew elated and confident. She was indeed more successful than she knew. She was becoming more to Marcus than anyone else, more even than the Hebrew maid whom he thought of with such reverence. The change in his feelings was so gradual that he himself did not realize it; but Delphium did. At least she saw enough to make her reasonably sure that the prize was within her grasp. It was now her task to make Marcus know his own mind; and to bring this about she laid her plans with care and with a shrewd understanding of Marcus' character.

A month had now passed since Marcus had recovered and again shown himself to the world. It was just at this time that he noticed a change in Delphium. She was low spirited; her vivacity was gone. She talked on pleasantly when Marcus found her alone, but it seemed to be with an effort. His attempts to find out the reason, however, she evaded, putting his questions by with vague, pointless answers. He wondered but did not press the matter. Going to the wine room one evening with his wonted companions, he hoped, as they all did, that Delphium would join them and help to make the occasion a merry one. She did

not appear, however, and for a while they talked and drank among themselves. But their spirits lagged. No one seemed to have any life. The company had always counted on Marcus to enliven them and he had never once been really gay since his encounter with Styra.

"By Pluto, Marcus!" said Caius after a while, "you are as glum as Charon. What's the matter with you? You haven't smiled for a month."

"Yes, what's the matter with him?" queried Bibulus. "If I had killed a gladiator, I should be standing on my head with glee."

"What, and let all the good wine run out?" said Milo. "No, no, Bibulus. You would never do that."

"I know why Marcus is so low spirited," said Cethegus. "He is haunted by Styra's ghost."

Marcus smiled at this sally, and the rest received it with a shout of laughter.

"Speak out, Marcus!" cried Caius, "and tell us all about it. Does the ghost come in the night and stand by your bedside? And when you see it, does your hair stand on end and your voice stick in your throat, like somebody that Vergil tells about, I forget who it was?"

"Does your voice ever stick in your throat, Caius?" asked Marcus by way of answer.

"Not that I am aware of. Why?"

"Oh, if it does, don't try to get it loose! That's all."

"Now that's like the old Marcus we used to know

before the fight," responded Caius. "You may hit us as hard and as often as you will, if you will only be yourself. But see! He has settled back into that gloomy mood again. I don't believe we shall get another word out of him the whole evening."

"Let's send for Delphium!" suggested Bibulus. "I believe she could draw him out."

"The very thing! Delphium by all means!" cried the rest; and one of the maids was straightway dispatched for her mistress.

Delphium did not at once appear. When she did, she entered the room languidly and in contrast to her usual manner. Usually she came in with a brisk step and a bright sally which she would follow up with a silvery laugh that was infectious. But on this occasion she had no cheery word of greeting and her movements were slow and spiritless.

"By the beard of Jupiter!" exclaimed Bibulus. "I believe she is seeing the ghost of Styra, too."

All except Marcus laughed heartily at this. Delphium smiled faintly and said,

"I do not understand your jest. But never mind! If it adds to your pleasure to make sport of me, I am not disturbed. But why did you send for me? Is the wine not to your liking?"

"There is nothing the matter with the wine, Delphium," said the kindly Milo, "but what is the matter with you? You are not yourself."

"Oh, nothing. We all have our moods, you know."

"No, we don't," said Caius stoutly. "You and

Marcus do, but I don't and Bibulus doesn't and Curio doesn't. Think of Curio sitting down before a great smoking pasty of capon and saying, 'I can't eat. I've got a mood.' Moods are bad things. Where did you get yours? We think Marcus has been seeing the ghost of Styrax; and as you seem to be as low-spirited as he is, we thought perhaps you had seen it, too."

"No, I have not seen it. If I had, I am sure I should be more low-spirited than I am. It would be a terrifying thing to look upon."

"Perhaps there are other ghosts that haunt you," suggested Cethegus.

"Such as what?" inquired Delphium, who knew that Cethegus was referring to her past but was also sure that he would not, when thus boldly challenged, throw it in her face. The adventuress lives largely upon courage. In this case the courage was justified.

"Oh," answered Cethegus evasively, "the ghosts of those who are burning up in Phlegethon and calling out for wine."

"They would clamor for water, not wine," said Curio. "No one wants to burn inside and outside at the same time."

"Bibulus would," said Milo. "Water wouldn't quench his thirst any more than the smell of a pasty would satisfy Curio's appetite."

After a few more forced and labored sallies like these Delphium retired, declaring that she was too dull to give life and spirit to such a company. For some time Marcus and his friends lingered. They drank their wine and they tried to be merry; but the entire

group seemed to be under a spell. The witticisms were so feeble that no one laughed at them. The current gossip was not racy enough to be interesting. The topics of the day were broached, but they seemed hopelessly tame. At last Cethegus said,

“The entire Roman Empire seems to give us nothing worth talking about. Unless some of you can summon up a ghost from Hades to entertain us, I think we had better go home.”

“Now is your opportunity, Marcus,” remarked Caius. “Styrax would certainly be interesting if you could make him appear.”

“I don’t think,” rejoined Marcus, “that we want a guest who will make our voices stick in our throats, for we all seem to be too much troubled that way as it is. Let us follow Cethegus’ suggestion and go home.”

The company, accordingly, dispersed, taking various directions. Marcus and Cethegus walked together, as their homes were not very far apart. They were never truly companionable, however, and for a while they paced on in silence in the starlight. Marcus was brooding over the events of the evening; Cethegus felt no inclination to disturb his uncommunicative mood. After a time Marcus said,

“What did you have in mind, Cethegus, when you asked Delphium if she were haunted by ghosts?”

Cethegus instantly felt reproachful. Cold by temperament he was wholly free from baseness. He was averse to bringing to light what a woman was trying to cover up. He saw he had put a suspicion into Marcus’ keen mind. He would do his best to quiet it. His

reply was prompt and untruthful.

“ I had nothing in mind but the desire to make a pleasantry. It was a poor one, I admit. Mercury did not sharpen any of our wits to-night.”

“ Why is Delphium low-spirited? Do you know aught about her that the rest of us do not know? ”

If Cethegus had given an honest answer to this query, Marcus' life might have been shaped differently. But he did not really have any idea why Delphium was depressed, though he was sure she was acting a part; and her discreditable past he would not betray. That Marcus could have any other relation with her than one of ordinary friendliness he did not consider possible. There was no occasion to give a warning. So he ignored altogether the pointed inquiry in Marcus' question and said in a light tone of raillery,

“ You are the one that ought to understand Delphium's moods, Marcus. To you she is an old friend. To the rest of us she is the clever and witty keeper of the wine room. I can't explain her humors any more than I can tell you whether on any night the moon will shine clear or be under a cloud.”

Marcus was ordinarily a difficult person to put off with an evasion. The failure to meet an issue squarely only roused him to persistent and searching questioning. But Cethegus' hearty tones and readiness in answering were altogether reassuring. He was convinced that he should be playing an unworthy part to follow up the faintly formed suspicion that had forced itself upon him and he dismissed the matter

from his mind.

Little more passed between the two. When they reached the house of Agrippa they bade each other good-night. Cethegus continued on his way and Marcus halted before his own door. He did not, however, enter. He looked up at the stars which were shining brightly in the still clear night. Then he gazed downward, as if lost in thought.

“I will go to her and find out what it is that troubles her,” he said; and straightway he retraced his steps toward Delphium’s. Did he know his own heart as he strode with quickened pace through the streets that led to the wine room? Not fully, perhaps; yet a wave of joy surged through him as he looked up to the bright shining stars. He was eager to be once more with this woman who had made such a subtle appeal to his interest and regard. Her grace, her charm, her beauty, and her never failing sympathy had taken full possession of him. The image of Naarah had grown very dim.

XXVII

THE ancients showed a fine understanding of the master passion when they pictured Cupid as a tiny boy. The conception did not mean that they belittled his power. Quite the contrary. The power was measureless, but the wonder was and ever is that a force so tremendous wears often so innocent a guise. A man of iron will walk serenely on his way, proudly thinking that he is perfect master of himself. He sees a winning smile and looks into a pair of radiant eyes; and before he knows it a fire is raging in his heart.

It was with no thought of declaring himself a lover that Marcus returned to Delphium. He went simply because the impulse to go was too strong to be resisted. But as soon as the grudging Gugon had announced to his mistress that Marcus had returned, the resolve was formed in her mind that he should so declare himself. She had half expected him. She was sure that it was more than friendly interest that brought him back. She would now throw off the mantle of reserve with its soft appealing hues. It was time to don the brighter and more captivating colors of deep uncontrollable emotion.

She awaited Marcus in the dainty room where he had first felt deeply her subtle and alluring charm. It

was on the night of his rough experience with Styrax that she had, quite unexpectedly indeed, found the opportunity she had been craving. Three months had passed since then. During that time she had used every opportunity well. She was satisfied that her hour of triumph had come. It was that elated consciousness that now animated and controlled her actions. As Marcus entered the room, she uttered a cry of delight and went eagerly forward to meet him with outstretched hands.

"I knew you would come, Marcus," she exclaimed joyfully. "I knew you would come." And she looked up at him with fast flowing tears. Marcus stood for a moment with her hands clasped tightly in his own. He looked into her eyes and read what was so unreservedly revealed there. Then a wave of joy surged through him. He was seized and thrilled by the lover's passion. Here was a heart that throbbed and vibrated to his own. Here was a womanly tenderness to which he could ever turn for rest, for sympathy, and for unfaltering devotion. In his own heart he felt an answering tenderness. Nor did he resist it. He exulted in it and let it dominate him wholly. Folding Delphium in his arms he pressed his lips passionately to hers. Neither spoke. Their happiness seemed to need no words.

When the first ecstasy of gladness had passed Marcus placed himself in a chair, Delphium threw a cushion at his feet and sat with her hands clasped upon his knees. Her eyes shone with joy as she looked up at him.

“Is it really true, Marcus?” she said gently. “Is it really true that you care for me?”

Marcus kissed her again. “My heart is all yours, Delphium,” he said. “I have been slow in finding it out, but it is all yours.”

“O Marcus! I have loved you so long, and now at last to think that you belong to me, you, the bravest and the noblest man in all the world! Oh, I am so happy. I did not know that one could be as happy as this.”

“Not happier than I am, Delphium. But it grieves me to think that you should have had so many sad and troubled days before the gladness came. But it has come at last and come to stay.”

“Oh, yes, yes!” said Delphium fervently, yet with a nervous movement as if some misgiving had seized her. “It has come to stay. It has come to stay.”

“I wonder what made you so heavy-hearted, Delphium. Perhaps I could guess, but I am not venturesome enough to do so.”

“If you won’t guess, then I shan’t tell you,” said Delphium quickly with a mischievous look.

“But I want you to tell me. That is what I came back to hear. Tell me, if you wish, that I was very dull not to know my heart sooner and spare you suffering. But I really must hear the story.”

“You are as vain as all men are. It would flatter you immensely to hear me say that I was weary and sick at heart for long, long months just because you would not utter a word of love to me. But I shall not say anything of the kind. How do you know what made

me low-spirited? Perhaps your guess was not anywhere near the truth."

"If I can guess what brought the unhappiness to an end," said Marcus, as he kissed her again, "I can guess what caused it. Yet I am not as vain as you think I am. I am sure it was more than the love you felt in your heart that made you lose your cheerfulness and gayety. Perhaps the life you have lived since your mother died had become dreary and burdensome. Tell me, was it not so?"

"It was even so, Marcus. How well you understand! No, it was not my love that really saddened me. A woman can find joy in loving even if she has no reason to think her affection is returned and cannot express it. She then hides it deep in her heart and goes cheerfully about her ways. But I was oppressed and haunted by all the years that had passed since I lost my home in Catana. My life seemed to be leading me nowhere. I was wondering if I should always be Delphium of the wine room, with no true friends and no acquaintances but those made over the cup."

"How dull and thoughtless I was not to see how you must feel about it! But you made the hours pass so pleasantly for all of us who gathered here that I supposed you found satisfaction in the life."

"So I did for a while; but I soon grew weary of it and my thoughts turned more and more to the happy days of my girlhood when we played together."

"Yes, those were happy days indeed. To me too it has sometimes been a relief to recall them, for my own life has not been flowing on smooth and untrou-

bled all the while."

"I wonder if you have thought of the things that have come most often into my mind? Do you remember how you stole into the garden of Acilius and brought away a store of pomegranates because I wanted them?"

"Very vividly. And I have not forgotten how I stained my face with the red juice because you dared me to and made everybody stare at me as I marched down the street."

"You were as heedless of what people thought about you then as you are now, Marcus. And the terrible beating you gave that big boy, three or four years older than yourself, because he pulled my hair! I felt sorry for him after a while and begged you not to strike him any more."

"I showed my love of fighting early, didn't I? I was already getting into training for my duel with Styrax."

"And the ruined fane of Pan, overgrown with vines and mosses — how we loved to play around it! I wonder if you have forgotten how you killed the deadly adder there just as he was coiled to spring at me? You grasped him by the neck just in time and then beat his ugly head to pieces with a stone. I was so frightened I could not speak, and I know I looked as white as a linen robe that has just come from the fuller's."

"No, I have not forgotten. It all comes back to me as if it happened yesterday, though that little incident I had not thought of since. 'T was a vicious

reptile, but I believe not very dangerous after all. I fancy we were both more alarmed than we need have been."

"I don't know how dangerous the creature was, but I know there never was another boy that would have had the courage to seize it by the neck and kill it as you did. But you never were afraid of anything, Marcus."

"Why should I have been? A cowardly boy makes a cowardly man, and the Romans have never known what it was to be afraid."

"Very true; but not every Roman in the old days was a Horatius, and no one living besides Marcus, the son of Agrippa, would have been eager to face Styrax in the arena. You were born to do great things, Marcus."

So long had Delphium been playing a part that even now she could not speak from simple natural feeling without a purpose. She had won what her heart desired, but she was bent on strengthening her hold upon Marcus' affection. Nor could she have chosen a better way. By adroit flattery and by dwelling upon the past they had so happily shared together, she was deepening Marcus' regard. It was with an altogether pleased feeling that he answered half jestingly,

"So my friends persist in telling me. It is getting to be quite embarrassing. I shall have to be another Julius Cæsar to satisfy them."

They both sat in silence for a while, as if dwelling on those bygone days of innocent pleasure. Then Marcus continued,

“Yes, those were beautiful and happy days, but happier ones are in store for us. The home we share together will bring us joys far brighter than any we have known. But I want to hear your story. I want to know of the struggles and trials you have had to meet and bear alone. For I have been slow to realize what a hard thing it was for a young girl to take up the burden you have had to carry. Let me hear all about it. Why was it that you had to leave Catana?”

“My mother’s death made it necessary. We were always poor. Even while my mother was living my father’s trade had so fallen away that it brought us barely enough to subsist upon. And he, you know, kind and good though he is, has no force or energy. I saw that he and I should really be in want if I did not do something. So I made my way to Rome to see what could be done to support us both.”

“That was immediately after your mother’s death?”

“No, I waited for a year. But things got worse and worse till I really had to make some sort of a venture.”

“You had no friends to help you; no relatives to turn to?”

“No. People are afraid to be friends to the poor. Such friendship may prove burdensome. It was no easy thing to get enough money together for the journey to Rome.”

“I thought an uncle in Syracuse left you a considerable sum.”

“Oh, yes; I did inherit money from an uncle who

died there. But it was no large amount and I put it by for use when I arrived here. It would not have done, you know, to land in Rome without a penny. So you see I had to be very frugal while I was on the road. Ah, what a dreary journey that was! It brought me many strange experiences and one dreadful one. But I got here, and I have found you, and I am the happiest woman in the world."

Delphium rested her head on Marcus' knee, and he stroked her golden hair with a tender and caressing touch. The meager glimpse she had given of her life had moved him. What she had been through, he was just beginning to understand. When he first met her in Rome he had not greatly marveled at her story. Everything that had happened seemed to have come about naturally as the result of her own sagacity. But he wished now to know what difficulties she had met and how resourceful she had shown herself in overcoming them. He was sure the more he heard the more he should admire her ready wit and her courage.

"You have indeed come through sore straits," he said to her, "and that long journey must have been a trying one. Tell me more about it. You say it brought you one dreadful experience. What was that?"

"Oh, that is a story I should really like to tell you. It is rather an exciting one, for the adventure I had was stirring and dangerous enough. It happened at a little inn, not very far from Tegianum, where I arrived just as dusk was gathering one evening in Au-

gust. The day had been warm. I had walked far and I was tired and hungry. So, scanty as my little hoard of money was, I sought shelter and food.

“The inn was a poor looking hovel, with one story. When I entered it I found myself face to face with a man, plainly the keeper, whom I distrusted the moment I set eyes upon him. He was small, thin, and wizened, with a nose and eye that made me think of a hawk. His wife, who appeared immediately, looked grim and sour. I saw at once that it was a doubtful place to spend the night in, but I was so hungry that I asked for food. The woman brought lentils and barley gruel. Just as I was beginning to eat, a youth, perhaps twenty-five years old, stepped briskly into the inn, whistling merrily all the while. The poor hovel had no dining room. I was making my slender meal very near to the door which stood open on the warm summer evening. So I could note the stranger well, and his frank blue eye and kindly face made me sure I could make a friend of him.

“‘Good evening, friend Corbo,’ he said as he entered. ‘You are as merry and handsome as ever, I see. And you, my good dame, you still have that bewitching look that would make the sourest vinegar turn into sweet wine. Nowhere else do I find such jolly hosts. ’Tis like a bit of sunshine on a cloudy day to look at you. Come now, your best cheer! Real wine! None of that muddy mixture of vinegar dregs and turnip juice! And a good generous slice from your fitch of bacon. Your gruel is only fit for swine.

“‘But what have we here? The brightest eyes

and the fairest face I've seen in a lustrum. And dining alone? By Pollux, what a shame! And can I believe my eyes? You rascal, Corbo! You ought to be down on your knees serving this fair stranger with your best wine and a fresh fowl from your roost, and you have given her those tasteless slops.'

"With that, to my utter astonishment, the audacious fellow seized the wooden bowl of gruel from which I was eating and threw it out of the door. He then sat down at the table with me, made the scowling Corbo produce his best, and chatted merrily on while he compelled me to eat and drink with him. I did not think of resisting him any more than I should think of resisting a torrent swollen by the rains.

"Before we had finished eating and drinking another man entered the inn. The darkness had gathered and the room was now lighted with pine knots that blazed with a red smoky flame. In the glow of it I could see that the new-comer was a few years older than the one who had come in before him. He was short, but powerfully built, and he plainly possessed enormous strength. His eye was dark and gleaming, and his face, with its close-trimmed beard and ugly mouth, had a wolfish look in the smoky light. As he entered I saw that he and the host exchanged glances as if they understood each other.

"He ordered food and wine and seated himself at the small table where I was eating with the other guest. For a while he said nothing, but stared at me continually. To the questions of my merry companion who greeted him heartily, he only replied with a sullen

look. Presently he asked me who I was and where I came from; and when the other youth attempted to join in the talk in his lively way, this churlish fellow turned upon him with a menacing air and told him not to speak unless he was questioned.

“The other seemed more amused than angered. He laughed and began to entertain me with a droll story. I showed that I enjoyed his wit and did everything I could to render the new-comer jealous. I was afraid of him and saw my safety in making the other my champion. At a moment when the stout ruffian had become so exasperated that he was threatening the other and forcing a quarrel, I stole the knife he wore in his belt without his knowing it. A moment later the two men had each other by the throat. My friend — for so I had come to regard the first comer — was plainly overmatched, but he threw his opponent by a wrestler’s trick. But the thrown man was instantly on his feet and the two again rushed at each other, each feeling for his knife. The ruffian uttered a cry of rage on finding his was gone, but closed with the other, though he received a thrust in the breast as he did so. Severe as the wound was, he seemed unconscious of it and struggled frantically to get the knife. At last he got it, so great was his strength, brought my protector down on the floor beneath him and buried the knife in his side.

“I had risen to my feet and was watching the struggle with an interest like that which I felt when you fought with Styrax. If the merry-hearted fellow who had been so friendly to me was killed, I should be at

the mercy of the inn-keeper and this murderous villain. I must balk him or I should be lost. As he drew the knife out from the wound, I rushed in and slashed his wrist with his own knife, slipped the weapon into the hand of the wounded man and darted back. Finding his right hand useless, the man on top shifted the knife to his left; but before he could strike he fell back dead. My friend had stabbed him through the heart.

“He was a horrible sight as he rolled over on the floor with his wide-staring eyes, but I was too excited to mind him. I helped my friend to rise. He staggered to a chair and sat there faint and pallid, looking as if he were wounded to the death. But his gay laughing mood was not even then subdued. He looked up at me with a smile and said,

“‘How clever you are with your fingers! If you hadn’t been a thief, I couldn’t have been a murderer. For your stratagem and your timely assistance, accept my thanks.’

“Then he looked at the inn-keeper and his wife who were gazing at us both with scowling faces. The woman had just come in, after the fray was over. The man had watched the encounter, and he would have made it end otherwise had he not trusted in the strength and the resource of the wretch who had perished. He did rush forward at the last to interfere, but it was too late.

“‘What delightful guests you have in this charming resort of yours!’ said the wounded man, addressing the guilty looking pair. ‘I hope you expect no

more of them this evening. I enjoy their company, but I am ill fitted to entertain them.'

"He gazed searchingly at them as he uttered these jibing comments, but their grim faces revealed nothing. So he continued,

"'It was well for you that your scheme to rob and murder me fell through. You were in league with that piece of dead carrion,' here he pointed contemptuously to the man he had killed and I think he would have kicked the prostrate body if he had had the strength, 'and a nice understanding you had with him. You gave unwary travelers shelter; he cut their throats; then you and he divided the profits. But bear in mind that my friends know where I am, and if you try to play any more of your merry tricks, either on me or this fair friend of mine, it will go hard with you. And now kind lady with the light and ready fingers, please help me to a room. It will be some days, I think, before I am on my feet again.'

"He was indeed desperately wounded, and it was only by careful nursing that I brought him back to health and strength. It was a task in which the innkeeper and his wife eagerly assisted, for they were now thoroughly cowed; and it was a task which I found far from irksome. For it was always a pleasure to do for my gay deliverer and to be with him. His merry humor never left him and he was the best of company. And he was such a gallant looking fellow, with his yellow curling hair and his bright blue eyes! He was generous too; for he gave me all the gold he had when we parted, and it was no mean sum.

Ah, how fortunate I was in finding such a protector! Those wretches would have murdered me if he had not turned up just when he did.”

Interesting as Marcus found the story, he had listened to it with a growing dismay. The character of the youth with whom Delphium had been brought into such intimate relations was but too apparent. Well did he know the type. Was Delphium in ignorance of it? Had she failed to see what the fellow really was? It was hard to believe that he had never showed his true nature to her. She had taken his gold. Why had she done so? Had he given her gold just because she had nursed and cured him? Marcus tried to think that this was so; yet he found it hard to think it, and he was moreover puzzled by the story. It seemed an echo of a tale he had heard long since and forgotten. Harassed by these vexing thoughts, he was in no laudatory or appreciative mood when Delphium finished speaking. Even her ready wit and her resourcefulness had not made a wholly pleasant impression upon him. As she told how she stole the knife and afterwards used it, the vision of Naarah flashed upon his mind. He could not think of the lovely Hebrew, with her rare delicacy and modesty, as lending a deciding hand in a tavern brawl. So when Delphium brought her narration to an end he made no comment. Surprised at his silence, she looked up at him questioningly, for she had expected to receive praise for the presence of mind and the courage she had shown. Her look recalled him to himself, and he said with as much feeling as he could

command,

“ An exciting adventure it was indeed. What a terrible experience it was for a young girl to go through and what wit and bravery you showed! Not another girl living, I am sure, could have saved herself as you did. But what was the end of it all? What became of the man whose life you saved and where did you part from him? ”

“ I do not know what became of him, but I must tell you of our parting, it was such a curious one. He insisted on going with me as far as Ebury; for he said he wanted to see me so far on my way that I should run no further danger. There he took leave of me, and as we parted he said, ‘ Good-by, little kitten! I shall always remember how well you scratched.’ ”

Marcus almost leaped from his chair as he heard these last words. He placed the story now. Some three years before this a lively, witty, but utterly dissolute youth from Herculaneum had visited friends in Rome and regaled the gay youth of the Capital with accounts of his amorous conquests. He was a captivating but altogether heartless fellow, who was always in quest of new victims. As soon as a girl had yielded to his seductions, he became indifferent towards her and looked for charms not yet known or appreciated. It was one of his boasts that when there were no fair faces in his own city that tempted him, he wandered far into the country in search of spicy adventures and won easy victories over the bright-eyed but guileless rustic maidens. Marcus had not met him but had been told of his graceful, winsome appearance and his

ready tongue. Some of his stories, too, reached Marcus' ears. In particular, he had heard a meager and undoubtedly twisted version of an exciting encounter at an inn and of the part played in it by a beautiful girl, who, as this vicious fellow wickedly phrased it, had not been content with saving his life but had also presented him with her honor. But, hearing only the bare outlines of the story and viewing such heartless doings with contempt, Marcus had for the most part forgotten it. He had only remembered clearly the striking words with which this gay adventurer had said good-by to his fair deliverer, and they were the very ones Delphium had just uttered as she brought her narration to a close.

Startled and shocked, Marcus put Delphium gently away from him, rose and paced slowly up and down the room. His mind was in a tumult. But he controlled himself so as to betray no agitation and said in a careless tone,

"So that was the last you saw of him. I suppose, however, he told you where he lived?"

But the astute Greek had grown wary. She had taken alarm at the sudden start Marcus had given when she mentioned the words of farewell. Perhaps he had met this man who held her reputation in her hands. It was well at any rate to be cautious. She would conceal the truth.

"Yes," she replied. "He told me his home was in Capua."

"And his name?"

"His name has almost escaped me. Let me see if

I can recall it. Yes . . . yes . . . his name was . . . Quintus Cerialis."

Marcus again seated himself. He was both puzzled and dismayed. What should he do? Tax Delphium with untruth and with worse than that? There was no other way; but such terrible accusations could not be roughly thrown at her when he had just been giving her the tenderness a man shows to the woman he loves.

"Delphium," he said, after she had spent some painful moments in wondering what was passing through his mind, "your memory, I fear, has played you false. Think again and tell me if the man did not live in Herculaneum!"

Even before Marcus had ended his question the quick-witted woman saw that she had erred. Marcus knew more than she had fancied. She must retrace her steps.

"You may be right," she answered. "The matter never made any impression on my mind. I presume it was Herculaneum."

"And his name — did that make no impression on your mind? How could you confuse Quintus Cerialis with Milvius Capulo?"

Delphium felt like one who was being drawn into a quicksand. She could not answer with her accustomed readiness. She was enraged with herself for telling the tale of adventure that had got her into trouble; she was thoroughly alarmed as she realized the horrible suspicion that had arisen in Marcus' mind. Suspicion? Perhaps it was more than that. Perhaps

he had met Milvius Capulo and heard the whole story, with the exception of her own name, from his lips. She must summon all her wit and courage and defend herself. After thinking for a moment, she answered,

“The name *was* Milvius Capulo. I remember now. But it is four years since it all happened. You cannot think it strange that it slipped from my memory and that I recalled another in place of it. The man, of course, I could never forget, but I had never thought of his name since I parted from him.”

“You did not forget my own name in the time that passed without your seeing me.”

“And should not have forgotten it if I had lived to be eighty and had never set eyes on you again. But we saw each other every day for three whole years. This man I only knew for a month and then he passed out of my mind.”

“How strange! You saved his life. You sat for long days by his bedside nursing him. You were captivated, as you have yourself admitted, by his airs and graces. And yet he passes from your mind so far that you do not remember his name.”

Delphium's mood changed. She took the aggressive, sharply and vehemently. She saw in it her only safety.

“Marcus!” she exclaimed. “What does all this mean? What does it signify whether I remembered the man's name or not? You come here and declare your love for me and then question me as if you had a vile suspicion in your mind. Is that the way to treat a woman? Shame on you, I say! It is you that needs

to justify yourself, not I."

Delphium stood before him with her bosom heaving and her eyes sparkling, the picture of righteous wrath. Marcus was sick at heart, but not for a moment was he influenced by an indignation that he knew to be assumed.

"You are wrong, Delphium," he said gently, "but I will not question you farther. I will tell you plainly what has come to my knowledge. Three years ago Milvius Capulo visited friends in Rome. I did not meet him, but I heard how he boasted of his power to bend young women to his evil will. That it was not idle boasting was proved by his conduct here; for a well known family upon the Quirinal has reason to rue the day that he set foot in the city. One of his stories — and he circulated many — came to my ears. It told of an exciting adventure in an inn in which he nearly lost his life. He was saved by a beautiful girl whom he lured into that shadowy path that brings sorrow in the end. He did not give her name. He was not so vile as that. But his farewell words to her were: 'Good-by, little kitten! I shall always remember how well you scratched.'"

Delphium could hardly keep from gnashing her teeth with rage. That she should have betrayed herself when it would have been so easy to avoid rousing suspicion! But she could make a brave fight yet.

"And that is all!" she cried fiercely. "You condemn me on the word of a vile wretch who is as false-tongued as he is wicked. The word of a woman you profess to love is nothing. That of this monster of

evil is everything. For shame, I say! For shame! I thought you were large-minded and generous, but you are like all the rest. Was there ever a man who knew how to be fair and just to a woman?"

"Delphium, if I could believe you, if I could think the feeling you show is genuine, I should go home tonight the happiest man in Rome. I should be so happy that I should shout aloud for very gladness. But I cannot. If I do not know Milvius Capulo, I know what he is. He is not a mere vain boaster. He is one of those evil-hearted men who are never happy when their vicious will is balked. If you had resisted him, would he have given you gold and parted pleasantly from you? No, he would have given you no gold and he would have followed you to Rome and begged and importuned and threatened you till he saw it was of no use. And even then he would not have given up. He would have used stratagem when entreaty failed. It is your own story that condemns you, Delphium, not I. It is your effort to conceal the truth that condemns you. You did not forget his name and his residence. It is impossible that you should have forgotten them. You had better tell me the whole truth, Delphium. It is the only way."

While Marcus was uttering these terrible words, Delphium had moved wearily to the side of the room and leaned against the wall. She did not change her posture as Marcus finished, but continued to stand there with a drawn white face and down-cast eyes. After a moment of silence she said in a low tense voice,

"It is all true, Marcus. I am guilty. I do not

deny it any longer. But I was so young and it has been my one and only fault. Be generous and forgive it! It would never have happened had I known what love really was, but I never knew till you found me here in Rome."

Marcus did not at once reply. It was not that he was questioning whether he could grant the appeal. It did indeed move him, but to grant it was quite impossible. The truth was too damning. But was it the whole truth? That was what he was considering. Unhappy suspicions were forcing themselves in upon his mind. Had Delphium told him what was false when he first met her in Rome? He now remembered distinctly that she had then stated the money used in opening the wine room had all come from an uncle who had died in Syracuse. But just now she had pronounced the sum a small one. Was the story a mere invention? She had taken money from Milvius Capulo. Had she taken it from others of like character? It had always seem'd a little strange to him that she had not made her arrival known to him and his father as soon as she reached the city. Had she avoided them because there were facts about her life that she did not wish them to know? And what were those ghosts to which Cethegus had so pointedly alluded, and which, very likely, he had afterwards made light of through unwillingness to compromise a woman? In the face of these accusing circumstances he could not help feeling that her word was worthless. She had tried to deceive him once. She was surely deceiving him again.

He gazed searchingly at her. She tried to meet his eyes, but read suspicion in them and could not bear their scrutiny. Her glance wandered; her face, even in the rosy light, was white with alarm.

“Delphium,” said Marcus very quietly and slowly, “was it your one and only fault? What of those ghosts that Cethegus questioned you about only an hour ago?”

“It was only an attempt at a jest — a very poor one as he himself acknowledged. I asked him to name them, and his reply was a mere pleasantry.”

“There was something pointed in his manner. Perhaps if I myself asked him to name them, he would not answer by a jest.”

“Ask him then!” said Delphium in a flame of passion, her face growing hard and defiant as she spoke. “The coward, to betray a woman! Oh, it is cruel and shameful to bring up the past and throw it in my face. I had buried it. Why could you not let it alone?”

“Such a past is hard to bury, Delphium. It was not I that brought it to light. It was your own words that revealed it.”

“And what if it stands revealed? So far as my own life goes, it is buried. It was buried long ago. I did have a lover. It was while I was on my way to Rome and just before I reached the city. But I cast him off when I opened the wine room. Why should he come between us? I love you wholly. I would live for you, die for you, devote my whole life to you. What woman could do more?”

Delphium quivered with emotion as she made her plea. She made it despairingly, and yet she was not absolutely without hope. She knew how large-minded and how generous Marcus was. She thought it possible that he might forgive what surely no other man in all the world would overlook. Yet passionate as her plea was, it condemned her. She was not remorseful over the past. She was angry that it was ruining her hopes of happiness. Had she cast herself at Marcus' feet in an agony of shame and sorrow, she would have roused his generosity and made of him a staunch and loyal friend. But her selfish nature had to assert itself and she could only make an appeal that showed concern for her own welfare instead of an ennobling passion that purified the erring nature and palliated the past.

Marcus was indeed stirred by her pleading, but it was not the stirring that could keep any embers glowing in the ashes of his love. He was a lover no longer. Passion was dead within him. The ardor that had flamed up in his heart so suddenly had been quenched like an altar fire on which a quickly clouded sky has dropped a copious rain. He realized now that his feeling for Delphium had been roused by deliberate design on her part. Standing before her and looking with pity at her hard set face, he said sorrowfully,

"It cannot be, Delphium. It cannot be. There is kindly and tender feeling in my heart for you, but it is impossible that we should spend our lives together. I never knew you till to-night. Now that I do know

you, our ways must lie apart.”

“Oh, yes! You have seen a face, a dainty, silly baby face. Well, go and seek it! You are large to play with dolls, but go and seek it if you will!”

“I go to seek no woman’s face. I go away sick at heart, to grieve over what might have been and to hope that in some way happiness, real happiness, may yet come to you.”

“You will grieve for a day, no doubt. Then you will seek and find your doll and think how much prettier and nicer she is than I. Very well. Seek her, I say. Be happy with her, if you can! Yes, be happy with her, if you can, if you can!”

It was in a scornful ringing voice that Delphium repeated the phrase and she followed it by a low mocking laugh.

“What do you mean, Delphium?” said Marcus gravely, as he gazed searchingly at her.

“You will find out in good time,” answered Delphium in the same vibrant, taunting tones. “You will find out in good time. Yes, and your baby doll will find out, too. A woman who is set aside for another does not sit down with sweet and happy thoughts in her heart. The time may come when you will be sorry you cast me off.”

“That time could never come, Delphium. You have showed me yourself. A love that could so easily turn into malice I shall never think was worth the winning. Good-by.”

Slowly Marcus walked to his home, and sleep visited him little that night. Delphium remained stand-

ing for a short time after he left her; then she sank down on the cushions at her feet and burst into a storm of weeping. Her dream of happiness had been brief indeed, but how bright and entrancing it was while it lasted! Now it had passed. The sky which had been golden was gray and dreary and her heart was desolate. She moaned aloud in her sorrow and found words to relieve the transports of her grief.

“Fool, fool that I was!” she cried. “To win him and to lose him all in a single hour! Why, why did I do it? Why did I betray myself by telling him that miserable story? It was all so needless. I ought to have known enough to let the past alone. A witless child should have known better. And you, you who pride yourself on your cleverness; you, who have been luring him on through these long months, you to ruin everything by the folly of a moment! Oh, I could almost tear my own tongue out for letting it run on in such a senseless way. And yet, would the end have been any different if I had not talked so like a brainless fool? A man can go wrong and pay no price for it. He can wallow in the mire if he pleases, and the world will call him white as snow if only he has name and rank behind him. But the woman must be as spotless as the Vestals. If there is one stain on her stola, men think she is as foul as the vile stuff the Cloaca empties into the Tiber. Ahenobarbus was right. I ought to have believed him. If a woman makes a single misstep, down she goes and she can never get upon her feet again. Cethegus would have told all he knew about me if the truth had not come out just

as it has done to-night. I was as simple as a child not to see it. Oh, why did I ever try to win him? Why did I build up any hopes of happiness? It was folly; nothing but folly. I have plucked roses that did not grow in my own garden, and now I must pay the price. No home for me! No happiness for me! I'm to be Delphium of the wine room till my hair is gray. Must I be just that, though? Bah! I am acting like a fool again. There are plenty of rose gardens left, and I'll find the roses in them — yes, and as many as I want. But I won't give up the wine room yet awhile. It pays, and I will go on with it till I have cooked a broth for that gladiator who thinks I am not good enough for him and for that doll-faced Hebrew girl. When they have drunk it, he will be sorry he ever flouted me. Oh, yes! He will be sorry. Now, let me think! What shall it be? What shall it be?"

The unhappy woman ceased to speak and began to brood over schemes of vengeance. Presently a low exultant laugh burst from her as a hellish plan came into her mind.

"I have it!" she exclaimed. "I have it, and that white-faced doll of his shall pay. Yes, she shall pay such a price that she will be sorry she was ever born, and he will be as sorry as she."

XXVIII

THE next day Marcus sought Cethegus at his home on the Viminal.

“Cethegus,” he said as soon as they had exchanged civilities, “why didn’t you tell me the truth about Delphium when I asked you last night?”

“What have you found out?” answered Cethegus evasively.

“I have found out that those ghosts you hinted at were real.”

“Then there really were *ghosts*? I knew of but one.”

“There were two. But why did you not tell me of the one? It would have saved mischief.”

“How was I to know that? What mischief has there been? I am sorry to have been the cause of trouble, but it seemed hard to strike a woman down when she was trying to get on her feet. I don’t believe you would have done it.”

“Perhaps not. At any rate it was the word you dropped out about the ghosts that finally helped me to see the truth. So, after all, I am indebted to you. As for the mischief, it was not serious. Moreover, it has had a use for me. I have played long enough. Now I am going to find something to do that will take all my energy and time. So you will see me at Del-

phium's no more."

"Which really means that you and Delphium are no longer friends. I am sorry for that, and sorry that we shall not see you at our merry-makings."

"I am sorry too. I shall miss the comrades with whom I have drained so many cups. But no word of this to any of them. It would only hurt Delphium and cause them to guess her secrets. Farewell."

Cethegus sat in deep thought for some time after Marcus left him. What did it all mean? Had Marcus really found himself in love with Delphium, roused her hopes, and then caused a rupture by discovering what she was trying to hide? He could see no other way of accounting for this sudden ending of an old friendship; and if this was the explanation, what bearing would the whole incident have on his own fortunes? Surely, Marcus would not turn at once to Julia after such a painful and unexpected rupture with Delphium. He would be wise, therefore, to press his own suit while he could be sure that the one rival he feared would not be in his way. Passion does not thrive upon neglect. More than once, accordingly, did he seek Julia at this time, and with all the craft and subtlety that was in him he strove to deepen her interest and regard.

His reasoning was both right and wrong. Marcus was altogether too self-respecting to kindle one passion upon the ashes of another. He felt battered and bruised by what he had been through. The feeling that had deepened and deepened in him till it had quite unexpectedly flooded his heart had just as unexpectedly

become like a turbid spring. So he looked now upon passion with mistrust. He must not again let it rule and possess him. It only blinded the eyes.

His own heart would have taught him better could he have read it aright. His regard for Naarah had been an elevating one. It had given him help and guidance when the revelation of Delphium's true character had shocked and bewildered him. But the vision that had strengthened him faded when the crisis was past. So entirely had he turned from the idea of seeking and knowing Naarah that she no longer haunted his thoughts. Even the superstitious feeling that Fate would again bring him face to face with her had almost wholly died. Plainly she was not for him. He would think no more of her.

But he did think of Julia. It was here that Cethegus made his mistake. Marcus' reflection was indeed sober. It was hardly tinged with sentiment. Deep emotion must come later. But more and more did the image of the beautiful daughter of Veltrius come to his mind. Her faults were not forgotten. She would not easily become the charming and delightful comrade he had found in Delphium. But she had the dignity, the ambition and the pride that had marked the grand and stately Roman matrons like the wife of Brutus and the mother of Coriolanus. Well was she fitted to stand at his side and help him to win the best things Rome had to give.

Not that Marcus, a youth of twenty-one and a hot-blooded one, could carry to this brilliant and fascinating woman the temper of an anchorite. If passion

did not now surge in his heart, it was sure to be kindled there when he sought Julia's society. But he had not thought of seeking it at present, nor was it all in a day that he learned to see clearly what he was going to do. It was little by little that the thought of Delphium ceased to haunt and trouble him, and little by little that his regard for Julia awakened the longing for their old-time intercourse.

He had indeed little time to brood over the past or to form plans for the future. Acting upon the resolve he had expressed to Cethegus, he took a post under his father and gave all his energy to the discharge of its duties. Rome was not easily kept in order. Its aristocracy was self-indulgent and its swarming proletariat lived on the bread of idleness and rioted in unclean pleasures. The haunts of infamy were numberless. Vice was not abashed by the daylight and in the darkness it knew no restraints. And as vice is ever the father of crime, wantonness grew defiant of the law. How many foul deeds were done in those degenerate days the world will never know. Petty crimes easily passed unnoticed; grave ones were not always rebuked. When vast crowds owned little or nothing, what matter was it if one of them lost his all? And when the city teemed with idlers, who cared if one of them fell in a drunken brawl? The air of the sty is not foul to those who live in it. Rome was too corrupt to purify itself. There was no moral sentiment to be shocked into indignant action. Evil could be restrained. It could not be cured.

How great a burden this condition of affairs im-

posed upon the Prefect of the city has already been pointed out. He was the one fount of order. His authority was practically unlimited. Through officers and soldiers specially assigned to the task he could watch for outbreaks, suppress riots, and hold crime in check. But this could only be done by constant watchfulness. Agrippa was vigilant himself; he had faithful and efficient helpers. Yet the kind of activity needed called for more than the stern Roman sense of duty. Moral alertness is not the offspring of discipline. It is the creation of character, not of rule and law. Agrippa wanted men like himself to detect and bridle the vice of the city. He rarely found them; he welcomed the assistance of Marcus. To him he had often pointed out the need of knowledge to defeat evil doers. Their practices and their plans must be known if their schemes are to be foiled. And as they were unceasing in their activity, those who opposed them had to be tireless. The man who had no hatred of crime but thwarted it as a duty easily became heedless of its machinations and callous to its horrors. Nor could even a man of deep moral feeling long watch the shamelessness of a great and corrupt city without a growing sense of powerlessness. When vice is an army, virtue wants recruits. But at least Marcus could for a time track infamy to its dens and make war upon them. He had not grown tolerant of wickedness because he had seen it flaunting in many guises.

Neither, on the other hand, was he ready to make the acquaintance he had been gaining, with shady resorts the means of their immediate undoing. Many

of those who frequented such places knew him. Though he had not shared or encouraged their vicious pleasures, he had met them in no spirit of unfriendliness. He could not now suddenly turn against them. Decency required that he should keep away from them for a time. But numberless were the quarters that called for close inspection, numberless was the riotous crew that needed to be kept within bounds, numberless were the plots that could only be foiled by unceasing wariness. Day after day Marcus made the rounds of the city and nearly every day he gathered information that contributed to better order. This street was growing to be a center for drunken brawls. A plot to murder a wealthy miser was hatching in a notoriously evil district. Here a centurion and the men under him were lax and careless. There the guardians of order were in alliance with thieves and pickpockets. And the shops of an alley on the Esquiline had been raided while no one offered to interfere.

So passed the days. In use and service, Marcus was finding a satisfaction which the pleasures of idleness had never given him. He recovered the firm temper and the confidence in himself that had been shaken by the awakening to Delphium's real character. The native buoyancy of his spirit asserted itself. Hope and visions of large enterprise were fed by actual achievement. His field of labor was not vast or supremely important, but his work engrossed him and he knew from his father's approval that he did it well. So the castles he began to build towered higher. He wondered if he had it in him to do what his friends

expected of him. He wondered if some day he should stand at an emperor's side, hold up his hands, direct his armies and sway his counsels. And as his skies grew brighter and his horizons wider, his thoughts turned more and more to Julia. He associated her with all the larger things he hoped to do, for he could not forget that she more than anyone else had declared him equal to great achievement and had tried to rouse his ambition. Naturally therefore he began to feel an inclination to seek her, which, immediately after the glimpse he had had of Naarah in the arena, he would have declared impossible.

More than a month had passed since the fateful interview with Delphium. It was a warm and sunny November afternoon. Marcus had been inspecting the heights and the surroundings of Janiculum to see how order was maintained there and was retracing his steps toward the Tiber. His pace was slow. His mind was occupied. It was not what he had just seen, however, that engrossed him. Nothing notable had met his eye as he made his rounds and the thought that possessed his mind had no connection with his duties. The task he had set himself for the day was done and he was questioning whether he should visit Julia. As he was not given to indecision, it may be wondered why he was questioning instead of acting; but the truth was, the thought of Delphium had intruded upon and well-nigh destroyed a half-formed resolve. What did it mean to go to Julia? Surely, not to declare sentiment. He had none to declare. His feelings, so he assured himself, were purely those of friendship. At

the same time he could not help dwelling upon Julia's brilliancy and forcefulness, her personal charm, her wit, her intense Roman pride, and her eagerness to kindle in himself an ardent patriotism. Would not this potent alluring personality cast its spell upon him and inevitably make friendship ripen into a deeper regard? The very thought that this might be was enough to cause a feeling of repulsion to arise in him. But one moon had waned since he had gone to another woman and uttered words of tenderness and passion. Could he after so short an interval seek a presence that any ardent Roman youth was sure to find almost irresistibly appealing? No, it hardly seemed in keeping with perfect integrity to do so. He must wait till the shadow which his unhappy experience with Delphium had cast over him was completely lifted.

While his mind was thus working he drew near the ancient Pons Sublicius which Horatius and his two helpers had so gallantly defended against the Tuscan horde. Glancing toward it, he saw that which fixed his attention. Across it was coming a *lectica*, borne in accordance with the prevailing custom by four stalwart Phrygians dressed in red. On the instant, Marcus was sure that he recognized it. The trim clean garb and dignified carriage of its bearers, the richness of its mountings, and its costly frame of inlaid wood, all suggested an elegance that peculiarly characterized the equipage of the daughter of Veltrius. As it approached the Janiculum side of the river, Marcus saw unmistakably that it *was* Julia's, and at once his scruples vanished. The mild vein of superstition in him, which

had for a time made him believe that his recognition of Naarah in the arena was ordered by some supra human agency, now again manifested itself. This meeting was not a mere chance. Julia had somehow been sent across his path. His way was clear.

Instantly his pace quickened. As he drew near the *lectica* he signaled to its carriers to stop. They knew him and stood still. The day was so mild and the busy streets so attractive that Julia had drawn back her curtains and was enjoying the mellow sunshine. Before she had time to wonder why her carriage had suddenly come to a standstill, she was gazing into the face of Marcus. Her surprise was at once succeeded by indignation. This man had neglected her and wounded her pride. Thus to dictate to her slaves and accost her on the street was not to be borne. She would repulse him rudely and bid her carriers go on.

Yet the words she began to frame were not spoken. As she looked into the eyes of Marcus her anger passed quickly away. His expression was one of command, yet there was gentleness, respect, and entreaty in it also. Her quick intuition told her that his mood was one which he had never shown to her before. It seemed to reach and possess her and make resentment impossible. She was therefore not unprepared for the gentle and appealing tones in which he addressed her. Gentle and appealing they were, and yet there was in them a quiet force that could not well be gainsaid.

“What a fortunate meeting!” he said. “Pray leave your *lectica* and walk with me by the river side! I have things to say to you.”

His smile was so winning that Julia smiled too as she replied,

“A Roman woman leave her *lectica* and walk away with the man who dared to stop it? Would Horatius ever have defended this bridge if he had foreseen such things?”

“This isn’t the Rome of Horatius or of stupid old Cato who despised all women. So come with me!”

With that, Marcus bade the bearers lower the *lectica* from their shoulders. Julia did not resist. He helped her to alight; she directed the Phrygians to await her there and went with Marcus along a rude path that skirted the river’s edge. Following the current of the stream, they came presently to a small solidly built pier around which ran a parapet of stone. On this they leaned and gazed upon the sluggish tide of the tawny stream. Neither spoke for a time. It was Julia who first broke the silence,

“You are very uncommunicative, Marcus, for a man who has ‘things to say.’”

“I was wondering how to say them; nor was I in haste about it, for I find it pleasant to be with you.”

“Perhaps the pleasure was greater because it was so unaccustomed.”

There was a sting in the words, but the tone was playful and Julia looked at Marcus with an arch smile as she spoke. Sadly as she had been neglected, her spirit was not bitter. She was still touched by the kindness and the deep respect that showed in Marcus’ voice and manner. He met her look, smiled also, and then his face grew grave as he gazed again upon the

river.

“Your words,” he said, “invite me to explain. That I was bringing myself to do, and yet I think I will not do it. Since we last met, I have had much to harass and perplex me — the duel with Styrax, other things. Why dwell upon them? They are all past. They have made me value more than ever our friendship of former days. They have made me turn to you in my thought with a deep appreciation of the pleasantness of our intercourse. So you see they have had their use even though they have kept me away from you. Let us think of them as buried!”

“I hardly need to answer you, Marcus,” said Julia very gently. “You know well that I should shrink from hearing anything you did not wish to tell me. I am as ready to bury the past as you are.”

“Yes, let us bury deep the things that have been and forget them! Let us think of the things that are to be! How noble and stately Rome looks in the warm bright sunshine! A different Rome it is from that which Horatius saw when he stood on the bridge yonder to defend it. It has had a good five hundred years to grow in. Those gorgeous palaces upon the Palatine were not there then. Jupiter had no such splendid home upon the Capitol in those early days. And yet, perhaps it was a better Rome then than now. Then homes were pure, youth was unsoiled and every man had no higher ambition than to die for his country. But alas! what shall save us from the shame and the abominations of this present time?”

“You, Marcus. Have I not always said so?”

“Yes, but you must not say it, must not think it. What can I do, what can any man do to stem the evil currents of the day? Could I dam that rushing river with these hands of mine?”

As he spoke, Marcus picked up a fragment of wood that was lying at his feet and threw it into the stream. This way and that way it was borne by the eddying waters and soon carried out of sight. Both watched it in silence till it disappeared. It seemed like an object lesson that pointed the truth of what Marcus had said. Then Julia spoke slowly and thoughtfully.

“The river is mighty. It will sweep away all the chips that are carelessly thrown into it. It does not carry away the Pons Sublicius. It would not bear away a dam that was built by an engineer after some wise and skillful plan. Be the engineer, Marcus! Plan wisely, bravely, grandly! Get the strong men of the state to help you! With them you can stay these vicious tides that are beating at the foundations of our great imperial city.”

“You do not know how fierce and tremendous the tides are. I am not an idler now. I have a post under my father. I am inspecting and studying the city that I may help to keep its evil-doers in check. It is an absorbing task. It is a discouraging one. The flood of wickedness is like an engulfing sea.”

“Yet you do not give up? You see things to do and do them?”

“Yes, indeed! Much is done and I do not undervalue it. Without it hardly a home in the city would be safe. The battle can never be fully won, but it

must go on. Do not think I would give up because I show you the dark side! I only want you to see that you must not expect too much of me or of any man. This Empire is vast. It is a mighty task to keep it orderly and decent. We can not restore the old simple virtuous days."

"Not any more than we can make a soldier on the battlefield into a babe slumbering in its cradle. We should not wish to do so. Rome is great and glorious. I think you make it out more evil than it is. Was it ever better ruled than under Augustus? Yet he died but little more than ten years ago. I believe it is going to be grander and mightier than ever. It needed emperors to rule it. It has them, and beneath their sway it will gain new power and dominion till it governs the whole world. And it is men like you, Marcus, that are to make it grow. Don't shrink from your task! Face it like the man you are!"

"'Varus, give me back my legions!' You know how that strange victory of the Germans cut Augustus to the heart. Other foes as fierce will assail us. If the Empire gets too big it will tumble to pieces. But do not set me down as faint-hearted because I see dangers at our firesides and on our borders! I am not shrinking from my task. I am doing it every day with all my heart. Whether it is big or little, I shall do it till I die. But I shall need help, counsel, sympathy, to do it well. I shall need the help that a man can only get from the woman who shares all with him and guards his hearth-fire; and when the need comes I shall know where to turn."

Marcus looked meaningly at Julia. She flushed, but cast her eyes downward and did not speak. Instinctively they turned together from the pier and walked slowly toward the bridge. There was silence between them for a while. As they came in sight of the red-clad Phrygians, Marcus made the mischievous query,

“What would Cato have said of that *lectica* of yours, Julia?”

“The same that he said of Carthage,” was the quick reply. “Let it be destroyed this very day!”

They both laughed. Julia took her place among her cushions and her bearers started on their homeward way. Marcus stood still and watched them till they were out of sight.

XXIX

THREE days after Marcus had met Julia by the Tiber Lucius Agrippa was interrupted by his guard as he was working busily in his official room. It was evening. He was in the midst of an absorbing task. So loth was he to set it aside even for a moment that he was inclined to disregard the knock at his door. But Gnatho, the veteran who guarded it, was intelligent and trustworthy. It might be a matter of importance. So he gave the signal of admission and Gnatho entered. That he was no tyro his appearance gave unmistakable evidence. He had served under Agrippa in Greece and Syria, and his rugged, weather-beaten face showed the scars of conflict. Saluting, he said with a soldier's brevity that he had admitted an old man into the house who demanded instant audience.

"Why did you admit him, Gnatho? The morning is the time to seek me. I can not be annoyed with petty complaints after my evening labors are begun."

"I knew what your rule is, but you give me discretion and I could not resist this man's pressing entreaties. He even commanded rather than entreated. He has an air of authority about him."

"Well, I can but hear him now he is in the house. Show him in!"

Gnatho withdrew and a moment later ushered the importunate visitor into Agrippa's presence, remaining himself as was his custom unless he received a signal to withdraw. Agrippa found himself face to face with an old man whose hair and long flowing beard were white, but whose figure was erect and whose eye was keen and bright. He was much above the average height and his manner was as dignified and stately as an intense and uncontrollable excitement allowed. The Prefect had indeed little time to form impressions, for the old man advanced quickly the moment he entered the room and exclaimed,

"Lucius Agrippa, do you know me?"

"No. And yet I ought to know you, too. . . . I have seen you somewhere. . . . What? . . . Can it be possible? You are not Eliud Merari?"

"I am Eliud Merari."

Agrippa started to his feet and eagerly seized the old man's hand. He held it long in his own firm clasp, and his whole face lighted up with pleasure as his eyes met the intense and troubled gaze of his visitor.

"I am more glad than I can tell to see you," he resumed, "but where do you live and how came you here? You are anxious and perturbed. Almost do I hope you are in trouble, if the trouble is not serious; for nothing could give me so much happiness as to repay the debt of gratitude I owe you."

Merari was overcome with emotion. He staggered back, sank into a chair and exclaimed in a choking voice,

"Trouble? God of my fathers, yes! My daughter! My daughter! — but give me water. I am too

weak and faint to speak."

Gnatho was hurrying away in response to the request, but Agrippa stayed him by a motion of his hand, went himself to a cabinet in the wall and produced from it a small earthen jar of wine and a cup of bronze. Pouring out a generous potion, he handed it to Merari, who took it without speaking, drained it slowly and then said,

"Pardon an old man! I have been discourteous, for my grief has undone me and I am thinking only of myself and my sorrow. You are most kind and generous. I thought you would be so, but I was not quite sure; for you Romans are very proud and you and I have not met for thirty years. Forgive the doubt and accept my heartfelt thanks for your courtesy and your ready sympathy; and oh, accept all I have, all the treasure I have gathered in a long and busy life, but give me back my daughter! I implore you, give me back my daughter!"

"Your daughter? Is she your only child?"

"She is not really my daughter. She is my granddaughter, my beloved Naarah, the only child of my son Daniel who died many years ago."

"What has happened? How have you lost her?"

"She was taken from me by violence yesterday."

"By violence? Here in Rome? How strange! Tell me the story!"

"It is not a long one. My child, my granddaughter, is now nineteen and of late has shown an earnest desire to see this great city and its doings. I have indulged her. I have taken her to the theater and

the games, and I have walked with her nearly every day to show her the Forum, the gardens, the temples and all that is splendid and magnificent in your proud city which boasts that it is the ruler of the nations. Yesterday we walked to the Campus Martius and, returning, had nearly reached our home on the eastern side of the Esquiline when we were suddenly seized, gagged and blindfolded by a gang of ruffians and carried off. I was released only half an hour ago. Where my child is and what dreadful things she may be going through, I do not know and dare not think."

"At what time was this?"

"It was just before sundown."

"Just where was it that you were seized?"

"In a narrow street that leads out of the Clivus Suburanus."

"Was there no one near to help you?"

"If any were at hand — and I really did not observe, so busy was I in explaining an old Roman myth to my daughter — they were too few to render assistance. Besides, who would help me, an alien, in this evil city?"

Agrippa did not resent this censure of the city he was trying to keep in order. Merari's grief was so deep and overpowering that his own sympathies were deeply roused.

"You speak in bitterness," he said, "but I can not blame you for thinking ill of a city that has brought you such a heavy grief. Rome has its foul and shameful haunts, though your Jerusalem too, no doubt, has its plague spots. No matter about that, however.

There is only one thing that concerns us. We must find your granddaughter. You say you were suddenly assailed. How many of the ruffians were there? ”

“ I should say that four attacked me and the same number seized my granddaughter.”

“ If there were as many as that, the object doubtless was to overpower you instantly and prevent you from crying out. How far were you carried and where do you think you were confined? ”

“ They put me, gagged and blindfolded as I was, into some sort of a *lectica* and drew the curtains so that my condition might not attract notice; then they carried me through the streets for as much as half an hour. But whether they bore me to a distant spot or whether they made frequent turnings and finally brought up at some place not far from their starting point, I can not say. Nor do I know what sort of a habitation it was that I was confined in. For about twenty-four hours I was kept in an ill-smelling underground room, in utter darkness and without food. Then I was blindfolded again, brought outside, and carried through the streets for about the same time as before. Finally I was set down not more than two hundred paces from my own home, with my hands and arms free. But before I could tear the bandage from my eyes my captors had disappeared. Seeing that I could not overtake or find them, I rushed eagerly to my own house, with a faint hope that I might find Naarah, my child, there. But my house was a casket without its precious jewel.”

“ How do you know you were confined but twenty-

four hours if you were in total darkness all the time?"

"I have lived long. I have ways of noting how time passes even when I can not see."

"Do you think your granddaughter was carried to the place where you were kept?"

"I have no idea. I have no means of judging how far or whither she was borne."

"Why do you suppose you were released?"

"I dare not say all the awful things I fear and imagine. It would seem as if they wanted to keep me prisoner just long enough to enable them to carry out some dreadful purpose —"

"And that when they had accomplished it, they were willing to let you go? Very naturally you fear that; but courage, my friend, courage! There is good ground for hoping that their purpose, whatever it may be, is not accomplished yet. They set you free because they were not afraid of you. They thought your story would go unheeded because you are an alien. They will find how greatly they were mistaken. One day is a short time in which to carry out an evil purpose. I do not believe anything has yet been done. Nothing shall be done. All the military power of Rome shall be used in your behalf as much as if you were the Emperor himself. If all the soldiers and all the officers in the city have to join in hunting for your grandchild, they shall do so and she shall be found. And do you think I would touch a feather's weight of your gold for the service? No, I know that in your heart you never supposed I would, and that your proffer of your riches spoke only of your despair. Keep

your treasure, my friend! No greater joy could have visited me than this opportunity of helping the man who came to me unsought when I was in prison and saved me from humiliation and lasting disgrace. I would spend my own substance to the last denarius if it were necessary in order to lift you out of your troubles. So, courage, my kind old benefactor! Courage! I am sure all will yet be well."

"May the God of my people bless you! I can not say more. My heart is too full. But oh, as you pity me, act! Act at once! There is no time to lose."

"True, and no time shall be lost. Gnatho, is Marcus in the house?"

"I am sure that he is."

"Summon him at once! I think he can be of service."

"My son Marcus," Agrippa went on as Gnatho hurried away, "has an acquaintance with the low haunts of the city that is likely to be useful now. Yet do not think this knowledge of his is due to evil habits. He is wholly free from vice. But some of his boon companions are not as careful of themselves as they should be, and with them he has made his way into many of the unclean resorts that are the pest of the city. Being sure that I could trust him, I have been willing that he should do this, for I have seen that his experiences would eventually be of service in tracking infamy to its dens. And I am sure that this will now prove to be the case. But tell me, how long have you been living in Rome?"

"Four years."

“And you only came to see me when you were in trouble! That was not right. Why have you kept away from me all these years?”

“I am ashamed, deeply ashamed that I did so. Yet I had a reason. You Romans, as I have already said, are very proud, and, alas! I have not always met with gratitude in my dealings with men. I feared to receive coolness and condescension from you instead of warm and generous feeling, and that would have been a bitter disappointment. How groundless my fears were, you have shown me to-night. Again I say, I am ashamed.”

Marcus entered the room as the old man finished speaking. Merari gazed at him with curiosity; Agrippa with fatherly pride. Each thought that the youth presented a noble picture of manly beauty; each unconsciously enhanced the picture through the pervasive and revealing law of contrast. To a more discerning beholder than Gnatho, impressive would have been the spectacle of the three generations thus for the moment brought together.

Age, experience, breadth of knowledge, and the power that comes from the noble use of a strong and noble mind spoke from Merari's austere but pleasing and attractive countenance. The venerable aspect imparted by the full and silvery hair and beard was confirmed by the deep lines that marked the strongly molded features. But the lofty brow, the keen dark eye, and the resolute will that was revealed by every look and motion told of an energy that had not been chilled by the frosts of time. And yet there was more

in the face than the energy that results from rectitude and large mentality. Through it there seemed to gaze a soul that was at peace with itself because it had higher than earthly communings and assurances of its own immortality. Judæa, with its spiritual yearnings, its sublime visions, and its triumphant faith in the Everlasting, had given its own character to the old man's sensitive and noble face.

Serenity showed likewise in the finely chiseled features of the Roman Prefect. It was the serenity of a mind that has mastered unruly impulse and, having disciplined itself to meet every experience with unshaken fortitude, can even face the likelihood of its own extinction without a tremor. Agrippa was a Stoic and was loyal to the principles which even then governed the School and made uncomplaining endurance the loftiest of the virtues. All his life he had given to Duty as unquestioning an obedience as the well-trained legionary renders to his centurion. Influenced, though not dominated, by the philosophy of Lucretius, he had no sure belief that life outlasts the mortal body; yet more than once he had confronted death and danger with absolute unconcern. He was a Roman; if Rome needed his life at any time, it must be offered up as readily as the unthinking child surrenders its own will to that of its parent. It was Rome therefore that gave its impress to the Prefect's countenance — a countenance that plainly bespoke resolution, courage and tranquillity. The abundant hair, tinged with gray but not whitened; the unwrinkled brow; the clear hazel eye; the finely cut firm mouth, all

bore witness to a vigor that was unimpaired by years and to a spirit that could rule others because it was ruler of itself.

And Rome spoke too from the frank open countenance of Marcus, which glowed with energy and life. Here too was a face that seemed but the fitting clothing of a fearless, upright and unsullied mind. The high and noble forehead, the dark flashing eye with its direct unshrinking gaze, and the lips, sensitive but without suggestion of weakness, told of an imperious will that swayed others because no vitiating self-indulgence had undermined its force. Here was a Roman indeed, a worthy descendant of the men who had first made the city of Romulus victorious over dangerous rivals by their iron strength of will. Yet something more than the old, intrepid and triumphant Rome seemed to find expression in the youthful face that was so full of energy and hope. Here was manifest the spirit of the new Rome that was already listening to prophetic voices and catching fleeting visions of a more than earthly grandeur; the Rome that was to outlive the shamelessness of its degenerate sons and become the center of a far-reaching spiritual dominion; the Rome that found its seer and interpreter in Vergil, whose pure and sensitive soul could look through the garment of the flesh and divine the nature of man's eternal destiny.

It was not without wonder that Merari gazed at Marcus and noted the frankness of his bearing, the evidences of health and spirit that were given by every attitude and motion, and above all the real nobility of

the face which seemed a convincing proof of honor and manly integrity. So absorbed was the old man in noting and studying the youth, of whom he felt that he had formed a false and unworthy estimate, that for the moment he forgot his own trouble and the errand on which he had come. It was Marcus' voice that recalled him to himself.

"You sent for me, father," he said as he glanced questioningly from Agrippa to Merari. "What do you wish of me?"

"First of all, my son, I wish to make you acquainted with an old friend. You remember that I told you not very long ago how I should have suffered imprisonment and disgrace but for the unlooked for offices of a kindly Hebrew on whom I had no claim and whom I had never even seen. His name was Eliud Merari. He is before you and he is in great trouble."

Marcus' face lighted up with pleasure. He hastened to the old man, grasped one of his hands in both of his own and said with feeling,

"What? You who saved my father's honor are in need of help? Pray tell me how! I am young and strong. I would give my life to serve you and give it gladly."

Merari had too disciplined a character to show all he felt, but he was deeply affected. For a moment he looked keenly at the eager face that was gazing anxiously into his own and then said,

"I believe you, my son, and I humbly confess that in my thought I have done you wrong. I have warned my granddaughter Naarah against you, but I believe

you are good and true. I accept your service gladly, and oh!" he added while his voice trembled with the emotion he could no longer repress, "serve me with all your heart! My granddaughter! Find my granddaughter, my Naarah! She has been stolen from me."

"Your granddaughter?" exclaimed Marcus excitedly, as a suspicion that was still more a hope arose in his mind. "Your granddaughter? Can it be?" — here he looked at his father, but Agrippa had no conception of the truth and could throw no light, for he had never heard the story of the beautiful Hebrew girl. So Marcus looked again to Merari, who nodded and said,

"It is even as you fancy. You have met my child, my granddaughter. It was she who spoke to you in the street one day last midsummer. It is she who has been taken from me by miscreants, for what evil purpose I dare not think. Find her, my son! Oh, find her and give her back to me!"

The old man held out his arms appealingly and the tears gathered in his eyes. Astonished at this new aspect of the situation, Agrippa came and placed himself at Merari's side with a questioning look at Marcus, who said before his father could speak,

"You see there was more in my mind than you supposed that morning when I asked you about the Hebrews and you told me how this generous man had come to your assistance when you were sorely in need of a friend. It was because I had met his granddaughter, though I had of course no idea who she was, that I wanted to know about her race and nation." And

very briefly Marcus related the story of his first meeting with Naarah. That he had seen her since or that he had cherished a feeling of sentiment toward her, he did not think it wise to reveal.

"How strangely it has all come about!" said Agrippa when Marcus had finished. "But more than ever do I believe that it is going to be my privilege to requite the good you did me so long ago. My son will find your daughter. Do not fear! He will find her, I am sure, before the night has passed."

"Find her?" cried Marcus, all on fire with impatience. "Yes, I will find her. I will not rest or sleep till I give her back to you. But give me a clew! Where did you lose her? Where did it happen? Who did it? Tell me all!"

The story was soon told. Marcus' face grew black as he listened.

"I understand," he said. "I know who has done this. I know where she has been taken. I will find her and save her, but there is no time to lose. Gnatho, find Hacho and bring him here at once."

"You know of Euthro's vile resort," he continued, turning to his father. "It is there that she will be found. My old comrades who go much to Delphium's wine room have mentioned to me that there was to be a special and very entertaining show at Euthro's tonight. They did not know what it was to be, but they had had assurance that it was something quite unusual. They told me this in the hope that I might accompany them; but I have let all such haunts alone since I began my work —"

“ You alarm me,” interrupted Merari. “ You fill my soul with terror. What wickedness is on foot? What have they against my innocent child, and why do you connect her with that unseemly show which your friends are to witness to-night? ”

But this was a question that Marcus could not answer unreservedly. He saw only too clearly that Naarah's disappearance was the work of Delphium. He knew that the spectacle his friends had learned about at Delphium's wine room must be a part of Delphium's own scheme for vengeance. But these were matters to be kept from the knowledge of his father and of Merari. Nor was it necessary that they should be thoroughly informed. The evil practices of a scoundrel like Euthro were easily explained.

“ If you knew who Euthro was,” answered Marcus, “ you would be at no loss to understand why your granddaughter was so rudely captured and why you were for a time kept in confinement. My father sees what it all means very readily. But do not be alarmed. The purpose of the scoundrels is no good one, I admit. But I will foil it. I will rescue your grandchild if I have to tear down every brick of the wretched place to which they have taken her.

“ Ah, here is Hacho. Follow me, Hacho, and do not lose sight of me. I am going to Euthro's on the north side of the Cælian and I am going to run as I never ran before.”

“ Stay, stay! ” cried Merari. “ Take me with you! You must not leave me here in this agony of fear. The suspense will kill me.”

“You must wait. You would only hinder us and perhaps spoil everything if you went with us. Leave it all to me. I will send Hacho back as soon as I have news. But it will be good news. Never fear. All will be well.”

Thereupon Marcus and Hacho rushed out into the night, while Merari sank back into a chair and buried his face in his hands. Agrippa did not try to comfort him farther. He saw that he was praying.

XXX

MARCUS was quite correct in thinking that the seizure and imprisonment of Naarah and her grandfather was the work of Delphium.

Not for a moment had the foiled and infuriated woman abandoned her vengeful purpose. Her plans were carefully matured. In due time they were craftily yet audaciously carried out. To execute them she went to Euthro, recking not of reputation now that the end for which she had so zealously guarded it was forever lost. To Euthro she represented herself as a woman who had been grievously wronged and who was thirsting for vengeance. He promised to aid her, and from the vicious characters who came to his resort it was easy to select a few to whom it seemed only an amusing pastime to lay violent hands on an old man and his granddaughter. The identity of Naarah Delphium had ascertained by finding the flower girl whom Marcus had alarmed and Naarah had, rather needlessly as she herself afterwards realized, attempted to assist. Naarah herself and her residence being known, it was a simple matter to become acquainted with her habits and to seize and carry off her grandfather and herself. And to ensure success after the seizure was accomplished, Delphium persuaded Euthro to show her whatever was cryptic or labyrinthine in his peculiarly

constructed establishment. With the knowledge of rooms, passages and secret stairways thus acquired, she counted confidently on bringing her plot to a triumphant issue.

True, Euthro had not unhesitatingly lent himself and his establishment to the perpetration of her scheme. He was a cowardly knave and he saw hazard in it. His roof often sheltered criminals; he did not wittingly allow it to shelter crime. If he had realized that this lawless undertaking was really projected in order to wound the son of the City Prefect, he would have had naught to do with it. But that he was not permitted to understand, and for more reasons than one he was glad to gratify Delphium. She began negotiations by appealing to his cupidity. He had always liked her; after he had accepted a large bribe from her he found her most ingratiating. That she had kept away from him for a long time he had never thought of laying up against her, for he was not one to be sought by those who laid claims to respectability. Respectable he believed her to be and he was flattered that she now came to him in an extremity. Her very condescension pleased him; and so artfully did she manage him that she finally made him perfectly pliant to her will. Apprehensive and resisting at the outset, he ended by feeling it an honor that his resort should be chosen for the consummation of her plans.

And the resort was certainly well adapted to the shameful purpose. Though outwardly decent, it gave evidence that vice had kept pace with the substantial growth of the city. For it was a large three-storied

building of brick, and its two upper stories were well lighted, with the exception of some rooms which were purposely made dark. The first story was partly underground and to reach it it was necessary to pass from the street down several stone steps that led to an arched passageway. At the end of this passageway was the double doorway which formed the main entrance into the building. Most of the space on this floor was given up to a low-ceilinged hall wherein shows, sometimes decent sometimes ribald, were presented both in the daytime and in the evening hours. Below was a subterranean network of cellars, labyrinthine passages and unlighted rooms.

It was in one of these cavernous rooms that Merari was confined, after he and Naarah were made captives, and dark, damp and unwholesome he found it. Naarah was placed in a spacious apartment in the second story, which was well lighted, though the windows were so high from the floor that she could not see through them and gain an idea of her whereabouts. This was the first thing she realized when she was left to herself; for her hands were free and at once she tore away the bandage that blinded her eyes.

It was a dreary place that she found herself in as she looked about her. Not alone the height of the windows from the floor, but the whole character of the apartment and of its furnishings suggested a prison. The floor was of cement. The walls were brick. A rude mattress was the only furniture. And she had heard her captors lock the door when they left her. She tried it in order to make sure, but it was fast.

Upon the mattress Naarah sank in utter wretchedness, wondering why such an unhappy experience had come to her, and grieving much over her grandfather, for whom her fears were chiefly excited. She could not believe that anything evil was planned against herself. She had done no one any wrong. She was sure she had not an enemy in the world. But Merari was rich. This must be a scheme to rob him; and, distressing thought, it might be that his captors would extort money from him by threatening that they would do violence to her if he did not meet their demands. Oh, if she could only communicate with him and tell him not to give way! She feared nothing. She had never come in contact with evil and she could not believe that there were persons vile enough to injure her in order to bring him to terms. But he would fear that they would do her harm, and that would make him yielding. So she would be released after a while, perhaps, to find that the fond old man, who cared for her as if she were his own child, had impoverished himself unnecessarily in order to save her from suffering.

So ran her thoughts. In picturing her grandfather's distress of mind about her she quite forgot herself and her surroundings till the door was opened by a large, coarse, ill-clad and ill-kempt woman, who placed on the floor beside her a piece of bread and a large cup of red wine.

"Eat and drink," she said and turned to leave the room. But Naarah sprang to her feet, seized the creature's skirt and held her back while she inquired,

"Where am I? Who brought me here? What

do they want of me?"

The woman gave her an evil look, burst into a low savage laugh and answered,

"You will find out before you are many days older."

Then she laughed the same ugly laugh again, rudely wrenched herself free and once more started to go away.

"Stay!" cried Naarah. "I am rich. I will give you more gold than you have ever seen in your life if you will answer all my questions and then help me to get away."

At the word gold the woman cast a quick, covetous glance at her and when she finished said in a hoarse whisper,

"Gold? Where is it? Give it to me and perhaps I will do something for you."

"I have none here. But my grandfather is rich. Help me and I will give you enough to buy everything you wish, enough to buy this house."

"Enough to buy this house! Ha, ha! A lovely thing to own that would be. But you are trifling with me. How do I know your grandfather is rich? Who is he?"

"He is Merari, the Hebrew. All the Hebrews in Rome know how wealthy he is. Ask one of them."

"A Hebrew! Bah! What do I know about Hebrews? You are trying to fool me, you black-eyed maker of lies. But I am not to be fooled. I'm not going to be knocked down with a club and beaten for letting you go free, just to find you have made promises you never meant to keep and have slipped through

my fingers. There's your food. Eat it, and I wish you joy of it. If you had any gold about you, perhaps I could tell you something worth knowing about it"—here she eyed Naarah closely, but, seeing no movement to produce money, she went on, "but you have nothing to give but promises. So eat your bread and drink your wine, and much good may you get from them! Yes, much good may you get from them!" she repeated with a wicked leer and a chuckle that had the same suggestion of mirth as the crackling of newly kindled flames.

The woman went out and Naarah again seated herself on the mattress, now thoroughly alarmed. The hardened face of the gross creature, her malignant glances and the dark hints conveyed by her words, all roused apprehension. Naarah wondered what the place she was in could be. Her visitor had laughed at the mention of buying it. And was it safe to taste the bread and the wine? Perhaps they were drugged or poisoned. She took up the piece of bread, which was quite large enough to stay the appetite of a hungry person, and examined it attentively. She could see nothing about it to excite suspicion; still, she did not dare to partake of it. The wine also she subjected to a careful scrutiny; but if anything foreign and dangerous had been placed in it, the ruby depths of the liquid kept the secret effectually concealed. She dared not drink however; nor indeed had food and drink any attractions for her. She was too wretched in mind to feel the wants of the body. So she sat wondering and grieving till darkness came on. Then she lay down

on the mattress, which had to serve both as chair and bed, and tried to sleep.

She was not very successful, though the mattress was not uncomfortable. She got snatches of troubled and unrefreshing slumber; but all through the night she kept waking with a start, and to wake meant a renewal of anxiety and fear. Toward morning she sank into a heavier sleep which lasted till an hour or more after sunrise; and when her eyelids finally opened, she saw standing before her the same blowsy, repulsive creature who had visited her the afternoon previous.

"So my dainty duckling doesn't like its food," the woman began when she saw that Naarah was fairly awake. "Perhaps you expected to be fed on roasted peacock and fresh turbot and honey. And perhaps you think the wine isn't old and choice enough for your delicate taste. A Hebrew! Humph! I suppose plain Roman fare isn't good enough for Hebrews. Well, we will see, my beauty. Folks that won't eat can be made to eat. We will see. Oh, yes! We will see."

This said, the woman turned and left the room. Naarah made no effort to stay her, for she was a little dulled by her heavy sleep and she realized too the uselessness of pleading with a nature so hardened and debased. But the words that had been uttered caused her added alarm. They were plainly threatening and they made her feel more than ever suspicious of the bread and the wine. She was now fully resolved not to taste of them, though the gnawings of hunger were making themselves strongly felt.

Her suspicions were well founded, for her abstinence was a bar to the full success of Delphium's scheme. Diabolical indeed the scheme was and worthy of the Greek's astute and evil mind. It was her purpose to drug Naarah and then have her exhibited and rudely handled before an evening audience in which were some of Marcus' intimate friends. The presence of Marcus himself she did not wish and did not count upon. She knew that his new life kept him busy and that he no longer frequented his old haunts. Not even a special message or invitation would be likely to bring him to Euthro's at a given time. But if a beautiful girl, who was plainly an alien, were shamefully used before his friends, the news of it would get to Marcus' ears and he would understand the meaning of it all. His quick mind would couple the episode at Euthro's with the threats she had uttered on that night when she had both won and lost him. He would come like an enraged lion to deliver the captive girl, but — he would come too late. By the time he appeared she would have been made a thing of shame, to be pitied but no longer to be esteemed.

At the outset the scheme worked well. The capture was easily effected. Marcus' friends, she was sure, would be present at the desired moment, for at the wine room she had invited them in such terms as to rouse their curiosity. But she had been a little concerned when she found that Merari had been released by Euthro's orders. The timid knave had become alarmed on discovering that some of the worst scoundrels who frequented his establishment were planning

to torture the old Hebrew in order to wring from him a large ransom. For well did these cutthroats know how rich he was. Fearing the consequences of such an outrage, Euthro set Merari free after twenty-four hours of confinement without consulting Delphium. The old man's story, so he argued, would go unheeded, because he was an alien. Delphium however did not feel sure of this. Without knowing anything of Lucius Agrippa's old-time indebtedness to the Hebrew merchant, she yet felt a little uneasy lest Merari should somehow get Marcus' ear sooner than she wished. Still, she did not believe that this could happen until the foul work she was planning was accomplished.

It was important, however, that the Hebrew girl should come in a drugged and thoroughly dazed condition before the motley crowd that would gather in Euthro's hall. Otherwise she might make such a plea for help as would rally the friends of Marcus to her assistance or cause one or more of them to go at once to Marcus and tell him what was happening. Accordingly, when she was informed that Naarah was not touching either the bread or the wine that was set before her, she determined to go herself to the fractious girl, disarm her suspicions by craft and fair promises and induce her to eat and drink. Force she was averse to using unless it should be absolutely necessary. It was not that the idea of applying violence to one of her own sex was repulsive to her. So desperate was she that she was ready to resort to desperate means to accomplish her design. But she regarded force as a clumsy weapon. She would employ it only when craft

and ingenuity failed. A simple thing it should be to convince this obstinate girl that no harm was to be done to her and that she could safely satisfy the demands of appetite. The wine that had been set before her contained a potent drug that dulled the senses and made clear thinking or intelligent speech impossible. This wine the captive girl must be persuaded to drink.

Softly Delphium unlocked the door of Naarah's apartment, glided in and fastened it behind her. Naarah was asleep. She was exhausted by lack of sustenance and by mental suffering; and after the withdrawal of Bacchis, the serving woman, she had again dropped into a restless slumber. A disturbing dream awoke her. She thought she saw robbers beating her grandfather, and she opened her eyes to see Delphium standing before her, smiling and seemingly the image of friendliness.

"I fear your dreams were troubled," was Delphium's greeting. "Your lips were moving and you shivered as you opened your eyes. But you must not be alarmed and anxious. I am the bringer of good news."

Naarah looked intently at her. She had risen to her feet and stood facing her, trying with all her might to fathom the character of this fair-faced woman and read her soul. She had a feeling that her very salvation depended on her power of seeing correctly and making no mistake. She gazed so long and so hard indeed that Delphium's face flushed and her eyes dropped.

"Come, come!" said the embarrassed Greek in a

gay tone. "Let us make ourselves comfortable. Suppose we sit down together on this mattress. We can then talk freely and understand each other."

She took her seat accordingly and Naarah sat down beside her. She had seen enough to make her deeply suspicious. "She is false and I must be on my guard," was her thought, but she determined to meet craft with craft. So she sat as invited, but still kept her eyes fixed on the other's face.

"You say you bring good news," she said questioningly. "That can only mean that I am to be set free at once. I can conceive of no other good news, imprisoned here as I am."

"Oh, do not say that! You are not a prisoner. I am so sorry you have been treated thus. It has all been a mistake. You will be set free in a few hours."

"Why not at once?"

"Mistakes can not always be rectified right away, you know. There are persons who have to be consulted, and orders from them have to be awaited."

"What persons?"

"How inquisitive you are! I should like to tell you, but I could not do so without betraying secrets, and I am sure you would not wish me to do that."

"My grandfather and I were both seized. You say a mistake has been made. I can only understand from that that the wrong persons were overpowered and carried off. Who were the right ones and why were they to be treated with such violence?"

"Secrets again!" said Delphium, smiling and holding up a deprecating finger. But try as she would, she

could not meet the steady gaze of her questioner. She could only glance at her quickly, almost furtively, and immediately lower her eyes.

“You surely can not say it was for a good purpose?” persisted Naarah.

“Well, then; I will say it was for no bad one,” replied Delphium, with a strained attempt at a playful laugh.

“No bad one? People are not carried off by force in broad daylight unless harm is to be done to them. But I will respect your secrets. Surely though, you can tell me of my grandfather. Where is he? Is he well?”

“He is well and he will soon be set free,” replied Delphium, little supposing, however, that this was soon to take place as a result of Euthro’s timidity.

“I suppose when the mistake has been rectified,” continued Naarah with the same pointed interrogations, “it will mean that those persons you can not mention have been consulted and the orders from them have been received?”

“Yes, yes! Exactly so. How clever you are at seeing things!”

“And when the orders have been received, of course my grandfather and I shall be released together?”

“Y-e-s. That is, I suppose so. But what a steady fire of questions! Really, I cannot give you any more information. I came here to question you, not to be asked all manner of things I cannot tell without betraying secrets. I wanted to know if you had slept well? I hope you had a comfortable night?”

“I slept as well as I could when I was tortured with

anxiety about my grandfather.”

“And the bread and wine — I hope you found them satisfying? It is simple fare to be sure, but good and wholesome. Why, dear me! You have not tasted them.”

Naarah was closely watching every look and motion of her visitor, but she made no reply. Her silence together with her fixed look was confusing to Delphium, who hesitated, but went on after a moment's pause,

“You surely must be hungry after all this time. Perhaps the food was too simple. You ought to have something more delicate, more tempting. I will send you a pasty of capon, some fresh fruit and a choicer kind of wine. This has been standing so long that it must be flat and stale. But you really must eat and drink. If you do not, you will be weak and faint when you meet your grandfather. He is old, you know, and he might require assistance which you would be unable to give. He may not be bearing his captivity as well as you.”

“Do you know that he is well? Have you seen him?”

“Questions again! I cannot answer any more questions and I do not need to, for you and your grandfather will be united again before very long. But do eat and drink, I beg of you, so that you may be able to help and comfort him when you see him. At any rate drink the wine if you cannot eat! It will refresh and strengthen you.”

“I may eat but I shall not drink,” said Naarah to

herself as Delphium left the room. Suspicious from the first, she had grown more and more so as she had noted the expression, the attitudes and the words of the crafty Greek throughout the interview. Subtle as Delphium was, she had betrayed herself. She had not been prepared for the eager, searching and untiring gaze that was directed at her nor for such a series of embarrassing questions. She was not wholly easy in her mind as she left her captive and she feared that her visit had been a failure; but she sent the pasty, the fruit and another potion of the drugged wine.

With some hesitation Naarah ate sparingly of the pasty and the fruit after finding that neither had any peculiar or suspicious taste. The wine she felt absolutely sure was either drugged or poisoned; but to avoid suspicion she emptied most of it into the straw of her mattress through a rent she found in the covering. Then she sat and awaited events.

Toward evening the attendant Bacchis came in again with a basin of water and a napkin and inquired of Naarah if she wished fresh clothing of any kind. "No," answered Naarah, hardly opening her eyes, for she pretended to be asleep the moment the woman entered, thinking she should thus be showing the effects the wine ought to produce. Her apparent stupor seemed to cause the woman satisfaction. She peered into the cup and then nodded approvingly as she looked at her prisoner.

"So you've drunk of the wine, my beauty," she said with a low chuckle. "Ah, it's a rare, choice liquor. I'll bring you more of it and you would best drink

again. 'Twill make you happy.'

So saying, she went out and presently returned with an urn from which she filled the cup. She also left a piece of fish and a generous portion of fine bread in place of the pasty and once more withdrew.

"How crafty they are!" thought Naarah to herself. "She did not bring the urn of wine with her when she first came in, for she did not want to rouse my suspicion by seeming to press the liquor upon me. But she was pleased when she thought I had drunk of it and went at once to get more. Her visit was made purposely to see if any of the wine had been used. I will not taste a drop of it; but I will empty this also into the mattress to make them think I have partaken of it freely."

So she emptied a goodly portion of this second filling into the mattress and again lay down. The sun sank and darkness slowly gathered in the room. When the daylight was wholly gone the door was again opened and Bacchis and two other women, equally ill-favored, made their entrance, one of them bearing a lantern. Again Naarah pretended to be asleep. The women came to her couch; again Bacchis looked into the cup; again she showed satisfaction as she saw that it was nearly empty.

"Come!" she cried, leaning over and shaking the supposed slumberer. "You are wanted below."

"Am I to be released?" cried Naarah, sitting up and looking eagerly into the woman's face. But her question brought no immediate reply. Bacchis was suspicious. After reporting that the wine cup had

been found empty, she had received instructions to bring the captive girl down stairs at a stated hour. That the prisoner would be in a drugged and bewildered condition was confidently assumed. But Naarah's eager inquiry showed that her mind was clear and vigorous. What was the explanation? Had she really drunk the wine, or was it working more slowly than usual? And should the orders be obeyed or should a new report be taken to Delphium? Bacchis hesitated for a moment; but, with the mechanical mind that belongs to people of her class, she decided that an order was an order. So she gruffly told Naarah that she was not there to answer questions and repeated her command.

"Why am I wanted below?" demanded Naarah, loth to go anywhere under such forbidding guidance.

"No matter why," was the answer, given in a menacing tone. "Come at once, or you'll be made to come."

Resistance was folly. With a slow and unwilling step Naarah passed through the doorway and followed Bacchis, who led her through a narrow passage and down a straight steep stairway. The lantern afforded the only light, as there were no lamps fixed upon the walls. The bottom of the stairway reached, they went some thirty steps along another passage and then Bacchis opened the door of a lighted room, thrust Naarah unceremoniously inside and closed and fastened the door behind her.

Bewildered yet alert, Naarah looked around her. Intrepid though she was, her heart sank within her as

she took in the scene. She was in a room about twenty feet square, and in it were a dozen or more women whom she saw at once to be lost to every sense of modesty and decency. Their clothing was in keeping with the bold, hard look of their faces. The presence of one would have been offensive. That of all was loathsome.

For a few moments they gazed at her in curiosity. They had expected something different. A dazed woman, staring about vacantly, acting strangely, and, in case she spoke, talking incoherently, was what they had counted on seeing; for they knew that the wine given to their victim had been drugged and that the drug should produce a confused mental state and an irresponsible behavior. They were therefore surprised to see before them a girl whose wonderful beauty they could not help envying and whose composed mien and penetrating glances gave no indication of a dulled or bewildered brain.

But their curiosity was soon satisfied. Drugged or not drugged, this queenly looking girl was to be shamefully used. So they showered her with foul epithets, asked her all manner of indecent questions and laid rude hands upon her. They tore away her outer garment, pulled her hair out of its braids not without painful violence, and pushed her from one to another of their group with such force that several times she fell upon the floor.

But this was only a beginning. On one side of the room there were four steps leading up to a door. This was thrown open, and up the steps and through

the door Naarah was now hustled, breathless, dazed and terrified. She had just time to see that she was on a stage and confronting a throng of spectators when the rough handling began again. A wild and furious dance was started by the women; and though she could not perform its measures and most surely would not have performed them if she could, she was seized now by one and now by another of the dancers and made to keep a rude sort of accompaniment.

“ Oh, help! ” she managed to cry at last, breaking away from her tormentors to a corner of the stage and looking appealingly to the strange assemblage before her. “ Is there no man here who has enough respect for his mother to help an innocent and friendless girl? ”

Hardly were the words out of her mouth when a terrific crash was heard, the concussion of which jarred the whole building. It was followed by another and then by a third. While all in the hall and on the stage were silent, wondering and alarmed, the door that connected the hall with the outer passageway was hastily thrown wide and Gugon, Delphium's servitor, rushed in.

“ It is Marcus, the son of the Prefect, ” he shouted. “ He is beating down the door. Quick, hide the girl! There is not a moment to lose. ”

XXXI

AS runners dash down toward the goal to win the coveted prize, so Marcus and Hacho had speeded straight from Agrippa's house to Euthro's unclean resort. That after reaching it he could pass in unchallenged, Marcus did not suppose. He knew that there were occasions when the entrance was carefully guarded, and this he felt sure was one of them. At such time a special signal was required of all who wished to enter; but the signal that was commonly used he was acquainted with and by means of it he hoped to gain admission. If the signal failed, he could but trust to the resourcefulness of himself and his stout ally.

Arriving somewhat breathless but none the less ready for instant action, he went down the stone steps with Hacho, knocked on the door three times, then gave three double knocks and pronounced a word not to be found in the writings of Cicero. But the porter was wary. Both Euthro and Delphium had charged him to see that no one was admitted who might spoil the evening's entertainment. Moreover, Delphium had stationed Gugon with him to see that these instructions were effectively carried out. Hence, instead of removing the bar and letting the double doors open inward, the porter pushed back a small sliding panel in one of them and looked through. Gugon

looked also and instantly recognized Marcus. The panel was pushed in place with a vicious snap and the doors were not thrown open. On the contrary they were now secured by a second bar. For this was the one man above all others to be kept out. On the morrow he would be welcome; but Delphium was not ready to receive him yet. He would spoil her scheme by appearing now. He would prevent the infamy which she was planning. And that huge companion of his looked very menacing. What a commotion he might make if he were once inside! By all means these two were to be excluded.

Marcus was dismayed when he realized that the doors had been doubly barred. They were of massive oak; the pivots on which they swung were of metal and were deep sunk in the threshold and the lintel which were both of stone. Admission in that quarter seemed quite hopeless.

"What shall we do, Hacho?" inquired Marcus, utterly perplexed.

"Break down the door."

"But we can't. A dozen men couldn't do it. It would take a battering ram."

"There is one right here," replied Hacho imper- turbably.

And thereupon he seized one of the stone steps, a heavy piece of granite some four feet long which a man of ordinary strength could hardly have lifted from the ground. Raising and poising this ponderous slab with perfect ease, he darted forward and drove it with tremendous force against the double doors. A

second blow followed and a third. The staples which held the bars in place began to give. Three more blows tore them completely loose. The doors opened wide and Marcus and Hacho plunged into the dimly lighted passage.

Marcus knew where to find the door that gave entrance into the assembly hall and toward it he made his way. As he advanced he thought he heard a smothered cry for help, but he was not sure. The truth was, the porter had followed Gugon into the hall and closed and locked the door that gave admission to it in order to keep out these masterful intruders as long as possible. Just as he closed and fastened it, Naarah, thrilled and excited by Gugon's shout of warning, cried out, "O Marcus, save me!" But hands were placed quickly over her lips as she began to speak, and she was hurried off the stage into the dark corridor. A cloth was held over her mouth and her cries were effectually stifled.

The door that opened into the hall was not a double one and was secured by a lock instead of a bar. The lock was no flimsy one, but it was a feeble barrier to a man of Marcus' strength. Dashing against the door with all his force, he burst it open at the first onset. Into the hall he strode with Hacho close behind him. Once inside, he had expected to encounter resistance, perhaps violence. It was Delphium who stood facing him. Her face wore a smile, but it was not a pleasant one to see. It was not friendly. It meant malice.

"As masterful as ever, I see," she said in cutting

tones. "But really it was not necessary to use Euthro's door so rudely. You would have been instantly admitted had you sent your name to us by Gugon. Such as our show is to-night, you are welcome to see it." And she waved her hand toward the stage where the group of coarse and frowzy girls stood huddled together and looking on with eager curiosity. An incident like this was a welcome interruption to the monotony of their deadened and degraded lives.

"Delphium," was Marcus' curt query, "where's Naarah?"

"Naarah? Naarah? Who pray is Naarah? There is no one of that name here."

"Delphium, where's Naarah?"

Delphium's face reddened. She had looked Marcus straight in the eye while she spoke, but she could stand his steady gaze no longer. She dropped her eyes and her confusion bore witness to her guilt. It is one thing to be abandoned to evil; it is another to be hardened in it. Only by long service do the tools of wickedness get the edge that is not blunted by the grain of virtue. Still, nerved by her lust for vengeance, she did not lose her effrontery.

"If you are so sure she is here, you had better look for her yourself," she answered. "I know nothing about any such person."

"So I will and I will take you as my guide. Come with me."

"May I rot before I go a single step with you!"

"I say you will come."

Thereupon he seized her right hand and twisted it

till she screamed with pain. He loathed himself for doing it, but he could not hesitate. He knew the structure was full of secret passages, concealed chambers and all manner of contrivances for defeating justice and covering up foul deeds. Euthro, to be sure, shrank from criminal doings. The thought of being caught in the iron clasp of the law had always been a disturbing one to him. But Marcus reasoned that the miscreant was Delphium's tool. He would sway to her will like an osier to the breeze. Whatsoever the astute Greek planned was almost certain to be executed. Even while he was lingering, the vile minions of the place might be making way with the innocent girl. He was compelled therefore to resort to extreme measures, even to using violence to a woman to whom only a month ago he had uttered words of tender affection.

Delphium was desperate. Courageous at all times, she was roused to recklessness by the humiliation and the rough treatment she had received. Hatred fired the worst passions in her nature. She looked about her. It was a motley crowd that her eyes rested upon. There were not a few of Marcus' own class present. There was a whole swarm of shopkeepers and others of the vulgar bourgeois type. Not as numerous, but armed and always eager for a fray, were the denizens of Rome's shadiest streets and alleys. These would all rush forward at her call. Some of them, she had not failed to notice, scowled and half drew their knives when Marcus' merciless grasp had made her cry out in pain. She would appeal to them. Per-

haps they would cut to pieces this proud patrician and his friends. For those who rallied to the side of Marcus would for the most part be weaponless, she was sure.

“Friends!” she cried, “will you see a helpless woman abused? Help! Help! Deliver me from this brute of a man!”

A sudden roar went up from all the depraved spirits who were present, and they hurried forward to rescue her and make short work of Marcus and his ally.

Some fifty of these ruffians forced their way through the crowd, which, awed by the drawn and brandished knives, was all too eager to give them room. Fifty to two, they counted on an easy victory. They did not know, as Delphium did, that Marcus' own circle of intimates was there. But there they were and they were not slow in making their presence manifest. Moving even more quickly than Delphium's scurrilous supporters, Milo, Caius, Bibrax, yes, and Bibulus and Curio also, with others who have not at any time been named but whose loyalty to Marcus did not falter now, leaped to the spot where their old comrade stood and ranged themselves about him. Most of them had no arms. All of them were pleasure lovers and without moral seriousness. But they were Romans; they were not afraid of death; and they would not stand still and see their friend cut down.

But Marcus had a much more formidable ally in Hacho. Had Delphium's rescuers seen this towering giant when he beat down the entrance door, they might not have come forward so eagerly. As they drew

near to Marcus and his friends, Hacho darted upon them like a thunderbolt, seized the foremost of them before he could use his knife, swung him in the air by his feet, and, using him as a club, dashed his head against that of one of his comrades. Both skulls cracked and it was a dead body that Hacho now wielded; but with it he felled several more of his opponents before he paused.

The men whom he faced were not easily daunted by death. Some of them had served in bloody encounters on land and sea and were accustomed to count their lives as nothing. But this gruesome method of fighting cooled their ardor. They could face cold steel. To be mowed down by the corpse of a boon companion was appalling. They drew back for a moment, and as they did so Marcus took advantage of the lull in the conflict and quelled the storm.

"Fools!" he shouted. "Would you ruin yourselves and ruin Euthro and ruin Delphium? You are not fighting me. You are fighting the Prefect of Rome. He knows I am here. He knows why I have come. If any harm comes to me, both Delphium and Euthro will end their days in a dungeon. Put up your knives and behave like decent men, or I swear a whole legion shall pull this foul nest to pieces to-morrow. Now, Delphium, will you show me where you have put Naarah?"

"Yes, but unhand me first. I won't be treated like a child."

Marcus released the hand which he had held with no light clasp all this while, and Delphium instantly

darted away to a distant corner of the hall. Marcus was about to follow her and seize her again; but before he could do so she called out,

“Don't follow me! It is needless. I shall keep my word. Euthro, show Marcus to the room where the alien girl is confined! Take him by the broad staircase — by the broad staircase where it is light! There,” she added, “Euthro himself will go with you, and you know he would not dare to play you false.”

“I don't think he would,” said Marcus grimly. “Be it so! Hacho, remain here and see that no mischief is done! I will follow Euthro.”

“Be careful, master!” was Hacho's warning.

“Have no fear!” answered Marcus, and he followed Euthro out of the hall.

There was an evil look on Delphium's face as she watched them go out. If any that were near her had noted her carefully, they could not have failed to see that she was under deep excitement and that her eyes, which fairly gleamed with hatred, betrayed a desperate state of mind and feeling. She was indeed beside herself with rage and her purpose was fell and deadly. This was Marcus' hour of triumph. She would turn it into one of despair. The consequences she would not weigh. They might be fearful; but she would find a way to evade them. What the way might be, she had no idea. She could not pause to reflect. Passion mastered her. It had to be obeyed.

Mastered by these feelings, she had broken away from Marcus, made Euthro accompany him and given the direction that they should go by the broad stair-

way. This was a roundabout way to the room where Naarah was confined, not by any means as short and direct as that by which she had been conducted to the ante room of the stage and by which she had just been carried back again. The task of taking her back Delphium had had just time enough to attend to after Gugon announced that Marcus was at hand. She had bidden two of Euthro's serving men hurry Naarah back to her room, gag her securely, lock the door and leave her.

But she knew a still shorter way to Naarah's chamber. No sooner had Marcus and Euthro left the hall than she herself passed out by another door into a dark passageway. Through this passage she glided rapidly till she found a door which opened upon a secret stairway. This door she left open that it might cause her no delay on her return. Up this stairway she proceeded with the same hurried and stealthy step and found the handle of the door at the top. This door, artfully concealed, gave admission into Naarah's room. Noiselessly she pushed it open and now she stood in the presence of the girl who had roused her hatred. Where was she? The light was very dim, but her eyes were now so accustomed to the darkness that she could just make out the figure she was seeking. The terrified girl was sitting on her mattress in utter misery. Her head was bent low; her hands were tightly bound behind her. Marcus, she felt sure, would not succeed in finding her, and soon she would be again dragged forth to be the victim of insult and foul abuse. Why did the God of her people allow one of

His children to be so cruelly used by these wicked aliens who offered no incense at His shrine?

She was in even direr peril than she feared as these thoughts passed through her mind. The moment Delphium made out her position through the obscurity she drew a dagger from her bosom and stole exultingly toward her. She could lean over her and strike a fatal blow before the girl was aware that she was not alone. Noiseless was her step; it gave no warning of her presence or of her murderous design. But equally noiseless was the step of the figure that had been close behind her since she left the hall and now followed her on tiptoe across the chamber. Naarah was utterly unaware of her danger. Delphium was equally unaware of the form that glided behind her like a phantom through the gloom. She reached the bowed figure of the girl. Still Naarah was unconscious of her approach. She leaned over her and drew back her arm to plunge the dagger home, only to find her wrist seized and securely held. Surprised and startled, she allowed the blade to fall ringing to the floor.

At the sound Naarah tried to spring to her feet. Bound as she was, she could not do so; but she saw the two figures standing over her, she knew not what new peril was threatening, and even as the noise of approaching footsteps was heard outside she sank unconscious upon the floor. A moment later the door was opened and Marcus rushed in followed by Euthro and two serving men with lights. He glanced about him, but he had eyes only for Naarah. As soon as

he realized her condition, he knelt beside her, cut the cord that bound her hands and removed the cloth that had been thrust into her mouth. Tenderly he chafed her hands and temples and at the same time he bade one of the servants bring water.

"Stay! Here is wine," he said as he saw the cup, still not quite empty, which had been left for Naarah and had not been removed.

"Use it to rub her temples! Do not let her drink it!" said Euthro. "It is too potent."

Marcus paused and looked at him with suspicion.

"You mean that it is poisoned?" he asked sternly.

"No, drugged," replied Euthro sheepishly.

"Then why was it placed here for this helpless girl to drink?"

"Ask Delphium. It was her doing."

"Delphium will have many things to answer for," said Marcus, eyeing her curiously rather than threateningly, while he continued his efforts at restoration. "Perhaps among other things that dagger which I see upon the floor. What say you, Cethegus?"

"For that, certainly," replied Cethegus; for he it was who had followed Delphium and foiled her murderous design. "She tried to kill that poor girl with it. She would have done so if I had not stopped her just in time."

"Snake!" hissed Delphium, looking at Cethegus with fury in her eyes.

"If there are reptiles about, we shall know how to recognize them," said Marcus. "Pick up the dagger, Cethegus, and put it in your belt. And don't loose

your hold on Delphium. She might feel moved to leave us suddenly. But why doesn't someone bring water? Hasn't this poor girl suffered enough already? And oh, the shame of it! They have taken away her *stola* and her clothes are rent and torn. Euthro, you shall answer for this. It was all done under your roof, no matter who planned it. If you want to have any mercy shown you, go yourself and bring me a clean fresh *stola*. A clean and fresh one, mind you! None of those rags your minions wear! Ah, here is the water at last. That will revive her."

Water was sprinkled upon Naarah's face and her temples were bathed with it. Presently she opened her eyes and was able to drink a little. Before she came fully to herself, Euthro appeared with a rich garment of crimson which Marcus wrapped about her. She accepted the attention unresistingly, scarcely realizing what was being done or who were about her. But she soon sat up, Marcus supporting her, gazed around the room and said plaintively,

"My grandfather! Where is my grandfather? Why don't you bring him to me?"

"You shall see him soon," said Marcus. "I am going to take you home and you will find him there."

"Oh, take me at once! My grandfather! I want my grandfather." Then, recognizing Delphium, she said, "Oh, why did you bring me here and treat me so cruelly? Have I ever done you any harm?"

"Yes," answered Delphium, her wrath again making her words sound like a hiss. "Your black eyes and your silly face have ruined my life. I hate you

and I am sorry I did not kill you.”

“Oh, it all comes back to me. You tried to kill me in the dark and someone saved me and the knife fell on the floor. And you are sorry you did not do it? How can you feel so hardly toward me? I do not hate you. I would be friends with you. Will you not let me?”

Delphium turned away her head and did not answer. Naarah gazed beseechingly at her for a moment. Then she looked about her, realized that Marcus was supporting her, blushed and said,

“You must help me to rise, good sir. You have been very kind to me. I do not know how to thank you. My grandfather will thank you for me. And he will reward you richly if you will let him; yet I hardly think you will. I believe you are noble and true and that you will find all the reward you wish in thinking of the good you have done. Is it not so?”

Marcus bowed. He did not know how to speak; and Naarah, whose attention was now caught by the bright color of the robe that had been wrapped about her, blushed again and said, as she turned once more to Marcus,

“You are more than kind. You are tender and thoughtful as a woman. Accept a woman’s gratitude. And now take me away! Take me yourself!” she added earnestly, while a look of fear came into her face. “I trust no one here but you. And yet I would not be unjust. You too have done me a service,” she said, going to Cethegus and taking his hand in both her own. “You have saved my life and from

my heart I thank you. And now, Marcus, take me home!"

Marcus found it difficult to speak. For the first time since he had reached the years of manhood he was overcome with emotion. Naarah's gentleness and humility, her entire sweetness of nature and her ability to think of others in the midst of her own heart-rending experiences, affected him profoundly. With an effort he commanded himself and gave what directions were necessary before starting away.

"Cethegus," he said, "let me thank you too! You have a story to tell, but I cannot hear it now. All that I ask of you now is to search out Hacho and tell him to go at once to my father and make known that I have found Merari's granddaughter and have taken her home. Euthro, send one of these men to show me to the street by some private stairway, for I know that there are more ways than one of getting out of this foul haunt of yours. Do you yourself guard Delphium and be sure that I find her here in the morning. If she escapes, your head will be the forfeit."

Cethegus had already departed on his errand. Euthro took one of the servants aside, whispered some directions into his ear and then told Marcus to follow him.

Leading and supporting Naarah, Marcus went with the man, who conducted them a short distance along the passageway and then through a door, known only to the initiated, and down a steep straight stairway. At the foot of the stairs was a door that opened into an alley in the rear of the establishment. Marcus and

Naarah passed out into the open air and both involuntarily drew a long breath, as if to cleanse themselves from the miasma of the foul place they were leaving behind them.

"Tell me exactly where your grandfather lives," said Marcus as they began their walk. "I think I know about where the house stands, but I am not sure."

Naarah, who was rather staggering than walking from the effects of the terrible ordeal through which she had passed, gave the name of the street and described the house.

"I understand," said Marcus. "It is not very far, but it is a long walk for one as tired as you are." And before Naarah fairly realized what he was doing, he had lifted her in his arms and was carrying her as if she were a child.

"Put me down! Put me down this instant!" cried Naarah, struggling to free herself. "You have no right to use me so. Besides, I am heavy and I should weary you."

"About as much as the tiniest babe wearies its mother," answered Marcus as he strode sturdily on. "So you need not resist or struggle. I obeyed you the first time we met. This time it is you who will obey me. When I have reached your grandfather's house I will set you down, and not before. You are as weary as a child that has been crying its heart out all day."

Naarah resisted no longer. She felt indeed like a tired and sleepy child, and she rested her head on Marcus' shoulder with a sigh of content and closed

her eyes as if to shut out the terrible things she had endured. But in a few moments she opened them again and said,

“My grandfather! How selfish I am! You said I should find him at my house and I trust all you say so fully that I thought no more about him. But do you know that he is well and safe? Have you seen him?”

“He is well and safe. I saw him at my father’s house. I sent word to him that you were found and he must now be starting for his home. He will be there almost as soon as we are.”

“At your father’s house? How strange! How came he there?”

“I will tell you the whole story some time or he himself will. But no more questions now, Naarah! You are too tired to talk. Rest quietly. We shall soon be there.”

Naarah closed her eyes again. She was indeed but little inclined to talk. She was full of a great peace and thankfulness. After the awful experiences she had been through and the agony of mind she had endured, to rest thus in the arms of a man she wholly trusted gave her a feeling of entire tranquillity.

As for Marcus, he was in an ecstasy of joy. He was thrilled with passion, and it was a passion so purifying that it did not need to be resisted. To yield to it was a supreme happiness. He loved Naarah, but his love was not mere sentiment or feeling. It was reverence, adoration. He knew now that he had always loved her. From a sense of duty he had reso-

lutely kept away from her. He had felt the spell of Julia's brilliancy and charm. He had fancied himself in love with Delphium. But deep in his heart there had been the profound regard for Naarah ever since their first strange meeting. And this night had so revealed the sweetness and unselfishness of her nature that his regard had ripened into unmeasured devotion. He was her rapt and adoring lover from this time on.

Accordingly, they were both quite happy enough to make words unnecessary, and so they went on in silence. For Marcus the distance was all too short, and too soon for his own pleasure he realized that Merari's door was near at hand. They were now not more than a hundred paces from it when he became dimly conscious of a crouching figure near him and felt something like a hot iron in his side. A man had sprung upon him out of the deep shadows and had driven his knife home. The blade was jerked quickly from the wound and drawn back for another and a still deadlier blow. But the blow never fell. Before the assassin could deliver it, he was lifted high in air and dashed to the ground with such terrific force that his skull was crushed and his brains oozed forth upon the paving stones.

"Are you badly hurt, master?" an anxious voice inquired.

"Ah, that was well done, Hacho. No, I am not much hurt. Only a scratch. But who was the knave?"

"I am not sure, it is so dark. But I think it was Delphium's servant, Gugon."

“Beyond a doubt. He said once he would be even with me, and he would have been but for you, Hacho. A second thrust would have done for me. But how came you here, Hacho? I am afraid you disobeyed me.”

“So I did, master; but I knew your life was in danger, and Cethegus said he would take your message to your house himself. I did not dare to let you make your way here alone, for I knew some of those bad men would follow you and try to kill you. And you see I was right.”

“I can not find fault with you. You have saved my life. But go quickly now to my father’s and make sure that Cethegus gave my message. Poor Merari! What agony he is suffering if he has not heard!”

Hacho turned and seemed to go rapidly in the direction of Agrippa’s house. In reality he ran only a short distance away and then stole back to make sure that Marcus reached his destination without further trouble. As he disappeared, Naarah, who had listened with dismay to Marcus’ conversation with Hacho, now demanded to be put down.

“You are hurt, Marcus. Put me down at once! I insist. You must not try to carry me when you are wounded. You are making light of what is serious. Put me down, I say!”

“Don’t try to make me break my word! I’ll put you down at your grandfather’s door. I tell you it was only a scratch. And see! We are almost there.”

A few steps more and they stood in front of Merari’s house. Marcus now put Naarah gently down and

leaned against the wall while she gave the signal that would be recognized within and cause the door to be opened. Very slowly and cautiously it was opened a little way and a gray-haired head was thrust forth. Naarah turned to Marcus to ask him to come in and rest and let his hurt be examined. The light from the partially opened door showed her that he was slowly sinking to the ground. Before she could help him herself or bid the servant to do so, Hacho again sprang out of the darkness, lifted his master in his arms and bore him within.

XXXII

MORE than once before Marcus came fully to himself he opened his eyes, was dimly conscious of a figure that glided softly about, and heard strains of music that were a balm to his spirit. But like a weary child that is too exhausted to gain full possession of its senses, he fell again into a heavy slumber without speaking. Finally, however, he waked so thoroughly that he gazed about him in wonderment at his surroundings which he utterly failed to recognize, looked appealingly at a figure seated near his bedside and murmured: "Where am I? Who are you?"

At once the figure arose and a kindly face with silvery hair and beard was bending over him.

"You are in my house. Do you not know who I am?"

"Yes. You are the friend who saved my father from disgrace. But how came I here? What has happened?"

"A good deal has happened," said the old man with a smile, "as you would realize if you tried to move about in your bed without assistance. No, no! Don't try it! You will hurt yourself. That stab was very deep. It would have killed most men."

"Stab? Have I been stabbed? Oh, yes. I remember now. It all comes back to me. I was bring-

ing Naarah home. I was almost there when a man thrust a knife in my side. It did sting. It bit worse than the wounds I got when I fought the gladiator. And then, and then — I don't seem to remember what happened after that."

"And then you carried my granddaughter to the door and fell down in a dead faint just outside the threshold."

"And had to be put to bed in your house? I am ashamed to have made so much trouble. You say the stab was deep. Was it so deep that I must really lie here and trespass on your kindness? Surely I can be carried home. I ought to be under my father's roof and waited on by his servants."

"It would be dangerous to move you. Whether it is dangerous or not, here you stay till you can walk out of my house unaided, well and strong. The service I did your father was poor indeed compared with that which you have rendered my child and me. It is our joy to care for you and bring you back to health and strength again."

"I think I woke in the night and saw your granddaughter and heard her singing. Was it really she?"

"It was no other. She will rejoice to know that you have come to yourself. I will send for her."

Merari clapped his hands softly and the aged woman Tirzah at once appeared. Her master bade her summon Naarah, and after a few moments the girl entered the room. She approached timidly and softly for fear of disturbing the patient whom she expected to find sleeping. A joyful expression came over her face as

she saw that he was awake and that he met her own look with an answering one of pleasure. She came directly to his bedside, bent over him and said, as she gently clasped his hand,

“It is a great joy to see you so far recovered.”

“It is a great joy to come to myself and find you so near at hand.” Then, looking at Merari, he said, “Yes, everything comes back to me now. I remember all that has happened.”

“If you remember all, you remember as brave and noble a deed as man ever did,” said Merari warmly, and the look he gave Naarah showed how his spirit would have been broken if evil had befallen her. But after a few more words had been exchanged, he begged Marcus to excuse him, as he had reached a most engrossing point in his studies, and quietly left the room. After he had done so, Naarah seated herself by the bedside.

“That was a very deep scratch, Marcus,” she said mischievously. “Some people would call it a wound.”

“I am glad it was as deep as it was. If it had been nothing more than a scratch, I shouldn’t be lying here and you wouldn’t be sitting near me.”

“Ah, but if it had been just a little deeper, you wouldn’t be here at all. It makes me shudder to think of it. How much you have dared and endured for my sake! What am I that a brave man should risk his life for me and nearly give it to save me? I am an alien, a Hebrew maid whom your countrymen would consider only fit to be a slave.”

“My countrymen! My countrymen!” said Marcus

slowly and thoughtfully. "They have much to learn. After last night I wonder if I am proud of them and proud of being a Roman."

"After last night?" queried Naarah with an amused expression. "And so you think it was last night that you brought me home and ran against the knife of a murderous villain?"

"Why, surely. It must have been last night. Your grandfather tells me that I fell down in a faint as soon as I got to your threshold. Your servants put me to bed, I suppose, and I seem to have slept through the night, though I remember waking once or twice. And now it is morning and I have waked for good."

"Yes, it is morning and I suppose you always wake in the morning. Most people do."

"Of course. How could I do otherwise?"

"How curious that you should change the habit here?"

"Change it? What do you mean?"

"You have had a long sleep. This is the fourth morning since you were hurt and fell unconscious."

"The fourth? Impossible! What does it all mean?"

"Simply that my grandfather, who is wise in the art of healing, gave you sleeping potions to keep you quiet and prevent fever."

"Ah, now I begin to remember, though it is all like a dream. I waked a number of times and it was not always night when I opened my eyes. But always I saw someone here, and before I fell asleep again I heard singing. Was the someone you and was it your

voice that I heard?"

"It was I that sang to you, Marcus."

"But I slept so long, and you I am sure were always near. How could you do it? When did you sleep?"

"When you were slumbering most soundly. I have had sleep enough."

"I am sore troubled; for, like all of my countrymen, I have thought ill of your people. Are there many of them like your grandfather and yourself?"

"Perhaps I will tell you that if you will answer my own question. Are there many Romans like you?"

"Not many as big, it is safe to say."

"And there are not many men of our nation who are as wise and good as my grandfather."

"You have answered only half of my question."

"And not many Hebrew maids that go about the streets and get carried off for their pains."

"And not many, I venture to say, who sing so sweetly. Will you not sing to me again?"

"Whenever you wish. I dearly love to sing."

"Sing now, please! Sing me the song I caught snatches of in my moments of wakefulness. I was so drowsy that I could not take it in, but I seem to remember that it told about sheep and green fields and quiet streams."

"Rather of Him who made the sheep and the green fields and the streams. It is one of the hymns of my people. It has been sung by them for a thousand years in praise of our God Jehovah."

"Then you sang me a Roman version of it, for I

surely heard Roman words."

"Yes, though I sometimes sang it in Hebrew. I will sing it in our own tongue now and then I will repeat it in the Roman version I have made."

Thereupon, Naarah took up her harp which was lying near at hand, seated herself a little distance apart and sang a few strains that might have sounded harsh to Marcus had they not been softened by the exquisite voice of the singer.

"It has no meaning to me, of course," said Marcus, "but you make it seem beautiful. It makes me feel as if I were in a temple. Now let me have the Roman rendering so that I may know the thought that is in it."

In the same low sweet voice and with perfect modulation Naarah sang a Roman version of the Twenty-third Psalm. Marcus was silent for a while after she had finished. Then he repeated softly,

"'I shall dwell in Jehovah's house forever.' Those words have a solemn restful sound. I don't understand the hymn at all, yet there is that in it that appeals to me. It has a true worshipful strain in it which I have never found in the odes which Horace and Catullus wrote in praise of the Gods. You must explain it to me sometime, but not now. I begin to feel tired. I believe I am really getting drowsy. I don't see why I should be, but I am and I think I will try to go to sleep again."

"The reason is not far to seek, Marcus. You have been very near that valley of death I sang of. Most men hurt as badly as you were would have passed down into it. Sleep all you can. It is what you need."

XXXIII

THE following day Marcus saw his father for a short time. Agrippa took his son's hand in his own and looked at him with an expression of deep tenderness for some moments, but he did not try to put his feeling into words. Then he seated himself by the bedside and said,

“For a man who has never seen a battle you are getting to be quite a well-seasoned veteran, my son. Many a soldier spends his life under arms without receiving as many wounds as you have had.”

“A wound in the back is not supposed to be creditable, but I am not ashamed of this one.”

“You may well be proud of it. Your mother would have been made glad by what you did had she lived to know of it. That's a vile place that Euthro keeps.”

“Euthro! The name almost startles me. What of him and Delphium? I have been too weak to think about them.”

“Euthro has been severely dealt with. He has amassed a fortune by his odious doings, and I told him I would send a whole century and tear his house to pieces unless he paid me at once a thousand sestertia. He paid the sum, though he groaned greatly, and his miserable den will be well watched in the future. I would have destroyed it besides fining him had it been really worth the while. But alas! evil doers will have

their haunts. Such unclean places are as sure to be found in a big city as rats and vermin. As for Delphium, her property has all been sold and the money given her; and she herself is being taken by a guard to Brundisium where she will be put on a vessel bound for Alexandria. I told her a dungeon would be her fate if she was seen in Rome again. Her father goes with her."

"Poor Delphium! She sinned much, but I suppose it was because she loved much."

"Loved much? How? Whom? I never knew about it."

"And it is best you never should. It is a sad story. I hope she will keep out of mischief now and not make trouble for herself or anyone else."

"I hope she will, but I doubt it. What she tried to do to that innocent girl showed a wicked heart. But I must not tire you. I must go, but I shall come and sit a moment with you every day till you are well."

This promise Agrippa kept, and not a day passed that did not bring Hacho, both morning and evening, to Merari's door to inquire after his master. Two or three days passed after Agrippa's first visit before it was thought best to bring the faithful servitor to the bedside, for Marcus' strength was easily exhausted. His face was fairly radiant when at last he was ushered in.

"You saved my life, Hacho," said Marcus as he clasped his hand warmly.

Hacho's delight was manifest, but all he could find to say was,

"Yes, master."

"And without you I could not have saved my friend's granddaughter."

"No, master."

"What can I do to show you how grateful I am?"

"You have done enough. You made me free."

"I wish to do more. Is there nothing you want, Hacho?"

"Only to serve you, master."

"That you shall do as long as we both live, and never did a man have a more faithful servant." Then after a pause, "And was it really Gugon that tried to kill me?"

The name seemed to rouse Hacho and loosen his tongue.

"Yes," he answered excitedly. "He hated you. He would have killed you long ago if he had not known it would make Delphium angry with him. But that night he saw that his mistress would be as glad as himself to have you put out of the way. So he made up his mind to do it. I saw him steal out of the hall while you were upstairs and I was waiting below. I knew he meant mischief, and even if he did not attack you, some of the other murderous fellows whose sport you had spoiled were sure to do so. So I followed you and I ought to have been quick enough to stop that first blow. I have felt badly ever since that I was so slow and clumsy."

"If you had not been as quick as a wild cat, a second blow would have followed the first. It was dark and the attack was very sudden."

“ Ah, but he might have killed you with that one stroke, and then I should have been unhappy all my life.”

“ He might have, but he didn't, Hacho. You saved me, and I shall never forget it. Come and see me whenever you find out anything in the city which you think I should like to hear about. And please find Cethegus and tell him I should like to see him. He has things to say that I want to know.”

In these early days of his convalescence, Marcus had neither the strength nor the desire to talk freely. Even to follow one train of thought was a weariness. But the hours did not pass heavily. He was quite content to lie still day after day, for Naarah's presence was an unspeakable joy. She sang much to him, sometimes in Hebrew, sometimes in his own tongue; and the music always cheered and refreshed him. But he never asked to know the meaning of the things that were sung. Naarah had expected that he would. The Psalm he had listened to on the day when he first rallied had roused in him a desire to understand the thought. And to have manifested the desire again would have been but natural. That Marcus was eager to find light has been abundantly shown. He had turned from the Gods of his own nation. The religion of his countrymen repelled instead of attracting him. But his mind was not skeptical. It did not rest satisfied with casting off the coarse and tattered garment of belief which so many Romans of his day and time contentedly wore. He longed to don one which would be an unfailing protection against the chilling

breezes of doubt and negation.

But he was too weak to grapple with soul-stirring questions. He was too deeply and too ardently in love to give them consideration. It was not his spiritual yearnings that now craved satisfaction. Strongly affectionate by nature, he found the sweet presence of Naarah was like a flood of sunshine after dark and stormy days. For even the imperious promptings he had felt to a life of action had not quieted the hunger of his heart. If his thoughts had turned ever to the soldier's career of tumult and alarms, they had often centered also on the joys of a happy restful home. Delphium had truly told him he was no Hannibal. The camp would in the end have been nothing better than an exile. Conquest would have gratified ambition. Yet ambition, however fully gratified, would have left the better part of him starved.

All this Naarah understood; yet she understood it like one who sees the trees reflected in a stream that is ruffled by a breeze. Her woman's intuition told her that Marcus cared for her deeply, though no words of love had passed between them. But a woman's intuition is limited by her very purity and unselfishness. It was Naarah's own maidenly modesty that prevented her from realizing the depth and intensity of Marcus' feeling. She had given him an affection as strong as was his own for her; but she had given it in a woman's way and the very fineness of her nature bade her keep it repressed and concealed. Marcus on the other hand had the man's delight in the intensely personal character of his feeling and the man's eagerness

to give it expression. He therefore listened with rapture to the words she said and the hymns she sang because it was she who talked and sang to him. And the appreciation he manifested took a form that was a little unexpected and as disappointing to her desire for serious intercourse as it was gratifying to her ardent but hidden feelings.

"That hymn is beautiful," said Marcus one day after she had sung or chanted one of the Hebrew Psalms to him in a Roman version. "I don't understand it at all, but it is beautiful just because it was you that sang it."

"But my singing has nothing to do with its deep and holy meaning. That would be the same whoever sang it."

"Ah, but not the same to me, Naarah."

"I am almost sorry to hear you say so. Oughtn't it to be the same, Marcus?"

"No, surely not. When a child is sick and weary, does it make no difference whether it is his mother or some strange woman who sings him to sleep?"

"And yet I am almost a stranger. Till a few days ago we had never exchanged words but once."

"A stranger? Don't say that. Time does not count in such things. Two who have lived side by side for years may be strangers. Two who were born to know and understand each other may do so in an hour."

"But I am of an alien race. I have inherited different traditions from your own. I have a different, oh, such a very different faith! And when I sing to

you the hymns that have given comfort to my people, you do not understand them. You do not even seem to care to understand them."

"I am weak and tired, Naarah."

"Yes, and how weak and tired you are, perhaps I realize even better than you do yourself. Yet the first time I sang to you, you thought that when your mind was not too weary you would like to know the meaning that is in the words."

"So I should — some time when my mind is not too weary."

"Of course I should not wish to fatigue you by explaining things that were strange and perplexing."

"Explain! Explain by all means! I shall love to listen to your voice."

"But not to the words it utters. Ah, Marcus, you would never make a schemer. You are too frank and honest to cover the ways of your mind."

"Very well. I confess it. I love to hear your voice because it is yours. Talk to me then. Talk to me about anything you would like to tell me."

"And find my satisfaction in knowing that you hear my voice but do not take in a single word I say? No, no! I won't waste my breath on such a listener. A mind that is so empty should not be put to even the smallest strain. It needs a visitor who will come, I am sure, almost the very moment I have left the room, and that is Sleep."

XXXIV

SOME three or four days after Marcus began to see visitors Cethegus appeared. He came in response to the message he had received from Hacho, a message that he obeyed with all possible celerity for more reasons than one. He was full of curiosity to see and talk with a man whose name was on everyone's lips and who had nearly met his death in doing what hardly another man in Rome would have attempted to do without a century of soldiers at his back. But he was influenced also by two other motives: he wished to vindicate his own conduct, and he wished to see for himself whether Marcus' relations with the fair alien girl were such as to encourage his own hope of winning Julia.

He was therefore openly frank and secretly circumspect as he seated himself at Marcus' bedside. Naarah was of course not present when he entered the chamber, but he thought he might see her or hear from Marcus some expression about her before he went away. And so the two began a conversation that was like a fencing match, wherein one of the contestants uses his foil for pure enjoyment and is perfectly indifferent as to results, while the other has a wager on the issue and is watching intently for every chance to score.

"Cethegus," said Marcus after they had greeted cordially and Cethegus had made the natural inquiries

after Marcus' condition, "how came you to be where you were that night at Euthro's?"

"How came you to be where you were, Marcus? What brought you there at all?"

"Oh, that fell out most naturally. Eliud Merari, whose granddaughter it was that you saw so shamefully used there, was an old acquaintance of my father's. So he went to my father at once as soon as the people who carried him off let him go free."

"But to go to such a place as Euthro's with only one man to back you! A reckless proceeding! Why didn't you wait and bring a troop of veterans?"

"The things that happened answer that question. I was only just in time, as it was; and Hacho and I ran all the way as we never ran before."

To himself Cethegus said that a man in such desperate haste must be in love. Was the Hebrew maiden also in love with him?

"Yes, you were only just in time, but with a man less stalwart than Hacho to help you your arrival at the time you did would have meant nothing. Why, you couldn't even have got inside."

"When the need is desperate, one has to take chances and be ready for the unexpected. But tell me now, did you and Milo and the rest have any idea what you were going to see that night at Euthro's?"

"No! We are not so bad as that. As you know, not all the sights at Euthro's are indecent. Delphium had made us all think that you had used her badly and that she was going to show you and us that she was better than you thought her to be. But we were

dismayed and astounded when we saw that poor girl used so outrageously, and the appeal for help she made stirred everyone of us. Whether we could have done anything to help her, I do not know. We had indeed no time to think about it or take any steps in her behalf. Hardly had that appealing cry for succor passed her lips when Hacho's crashing blows made the whole building quiver."

"I was sure you and the others did not lend yourselves to anything you knew to be vicious; but what a shrewd lot you were to be so taken in by a woman like Delphium!"

"Were you never taken in by her, Marcus?"

"A home thrust," answered Marcus with a slightly crestfallen air. "I may as well admit that I was long in finding out how false she was and how capable of double dealing."

"Double dealing? Her double dealing was the least of her offenses. It was her spite, her fierce hatred, her love of revenge, that made her so vile. What in the world," Cethegus went on to say with apparent innocence, "made her so cruel and vindictive toward that beautiful girl?"

Marcus grew grave and did not reply at once. His reticence, however, was understood. Cethegus, apparently gazing about the room in an indifferent manner, was yet noting carefully the expression upon Marcus' face and did not fail to discern that he was slightly confused by the sudden and unexpected question. With his native quickness he saw clearly now what he had strongly suspected, that Delphium had been in

love with Marcus, had discovered Marcus' affection for the beautiful Hebrew and had tried to disgrace and perhaps ruin her in order to hurt the man whose heart she had won. He was intensely curious to find out all that had passed between Delphium and Marcus, but he saw that he should only arouse suspicion if he tried to draw Marcus out on such a private and personal matter by subtly designed questions. So he waited with indifference for Marcus' answer, knowing that it would tell nothing and thinking to himself that Delphium's hate would not have been so deadly if she had not been sure that the affection she had vainly tried to arouse was given unreservedly to her rival.

"Delphium," said Marcus after a brief silence, "has been banished, my father tells me. Let us dismiss her and her doings from our thoughts. I know more about her than I have any right to tell. Let us hope that she has been taught a lesson and that she will be more decent and less vicious wherever she may go. But how were you able to thwart her as you did that night? Merari's granddaughter would have lost her life but for you."

"That I should," said Naarah, who had just appeared at the doorway with Merari. "I have asked my grandfather to come with me here that he might meet the man who did me such a timely service and that I might again express to him my own gratitude and appreciation. And now that we are here, we should both be glad to hear this story. No one else could possibly be as much interested in it."

“Yes,” said Merari very warmly, “all the courage and resolution of my wounded friend here would have availed nothing but for you. Nay, I must not say it would have availed nothing, for death is better than disgrace. But death were a sad fate for one so young and full of hope, and it would have meant the death of two; for my own would quickly have followed that of my beloved child. So let me add my own heartfelt thanks to hers. You, a Roman, could hardly stand in need of the help of an alien like myself. Yet I once did Lucius Agrippa a service he has not forgotten. Could I ever render you one, it would be given with all my heart. But let us hear your story. I am all eagerness to know how you found it possible to give such prompt and effective assistance.”

“I count it a great piece of good fortune that it fell to me to do what I did, for I have not the big body and the love of battle of our friend Marcus and I am not likely to accomplish anything like this again. Hence, to have done the deed is in itself a profound satisfaction, though I value much your kind expressions of gratitude. It came about in this way.

“When your friends, Marcus, went forward to stand by you and be slaughtered if necessary, I did not go with them. I was not utterly unwilling to be slaughtered. Still, I preferred not to be. There were not enough of us to check that crew of dirty knaves, and I objected quite seriously to being killed by such a filthy pack in such a filthy place. If worst came to worst, I meant to offer my own personal contribution to the small pile of corpses that was apparently to be

accumulated. It was far from my thought to save my own skin if all my friends were butchered. But before I went forward like a lamb to the sacrifice, I considered it well to look around and see whether there was no possible means of foiling the scoundrels that a ready wit might contrive. It has always been a favorite theory of mine that men fight too much with their bodies and too little with their brains. If I were a general, I should plan to make the enemy walk into an ambush and then dictate terms to them without any horrid butchery. That wily old Samnite, Pontius, was a warrior after my own heart.

“Well, while I was holding back and trying to hit upon a scheme of deliverance, our good friend Hacho was warring upon the enemy in his own effective and original fashion, and I saw that there was to be no massacre and no need of going forward at all.”

“Oh, do tell me what Hacho did!” exclaimed Naarah. “I know he battered down the door. He is a giant, but how could he defeat so many?”

“Hacho,” continued Cethegus gravely, “is also a great strategist, like Pontius and Hannibal. His method might roughly be compared to that which the inventive Carthaginian adopted when he bewildered our own forces by means of the drove of oxen with lighted fagots tied to their horns. Hacho too overpowers his enemies by startling them and depriving them of self-possession and courage. But the details are a little gruesome, my lady, and would best not be stated here. Suffice it to say, that he disconcerted the assailing crew quite effectually and freed me from the

necessity of being immolated on the bodies of my friends.

“ So I remained where I was and watched to see what would take place. A moment later Delphium was released by you and came in my direction. I was suspicious of her from the moment she darted away from you. There was a decision in all her movements that convinced me she was acting with a purpose and an evil one. I was all the more sure of it when she repeated so emphatically her directions to Euthro to take you by the broad stairway. So I determined to note everything she did. Without her knowing it, I got close to her and I saw a desperate look on her face and a wicked gleam in her eye. For there was light enough in the hall to show this.

“ The instant you and Euthro were out of the hall she darted stealthily through a door that was near and closed it after her without making any noise. As silently I opened it, passed through, and also closed it behind me. All were so bent on watching you and Euthro, and Hacho too I should add, that what Delphium and I were doing escaped notice. I now found myself in pitch darkness, for I was in an unlighted passageway. But as I had entered it the light that came in from the hall gave me a momentary glimpse of Delphium disappearing through a door just three paces away. Quickly though I closed the hall door behind me, the gleam of light that had been admitted disconcerted her and made her pause for an instant. ‘ Who’s there?’ she asked in a loud whisper. I made no answer. Disturbed though she was, she could not

pause to investigate; for the delay of even a few moments would have been fatal to her purpose. Hearing no answer, she went quickly on, leaving the door open, in order, doubtless, to facilitate her return after she had accomplished what she had in mind. The instant I heard her steps again I darted to the door and by groping in the darkness quickly ascertained that it was, as I had supposed, at the foot of a stairway. It was a winding stairway, and up it I went as fast as I could go without making my footsteps betray my presence. The stairs were of brick or stone and therefore did not creak. At the head of the stairway I found another open door which I passed through. I was now in a room that had a window, and in the very dim light which it admitted I could just make out the figure of a woman crouching forward just in front of me. Evidently she was getting her bearings, and it was the moment Delphium spent in doing this that defeated her purpose. That moment had given me time to overtake her before she struck the blow she planned.

“I had barely time to discern the outlines of the form before me when it started forward with noiseless tread. What this catlike movement signified I could not tell; but the very stillness of it made me sure that it meant mischief. So after the crouching figure I tip-toed with equally noiseless step. The figure halted, leaned forward and drew back an arm. I caught the faint glitter of steel. I seized the arm. A knife fell upon the floor. Then a figure became visible which I had not been able to see before; and I did not need

the light of lanterns and torches to show me that Delphium had been trying to murder the unhappy girl I had seen tormented down stairs and that I had fortunately been able to foil her wicked scheme."

"I tremble even now as I think of it," said Merari as Cethegus ceased to speak. "You call it good fortune that you were able to stay that murderous hand. I see more than good fortune in it. I see the evidence of a keen, quickly discerning mind, of resolution and generous feeling. But more than all I see the mercy of our fathers' God, Jehovah, through whose loving-kindness it was that my child was preserved to me and that I was not left desolate as Rachel was in my declining years."

"I would not dispute you, sir. I do not know your God, Jehovah, nor what He is able to do. But it occurs to me that if it was He who protected your granddaughter on that evil night, He must have a remarkable faculty of seeing ahead and must have had this matter in His mind a long time ago. If you had not known Agrippa, the Prefect, and gone to him as soon as you were free, neither Marcus nor I could have done anything to save your granddaughter."

"Peace, young man! Do not mar your noble deed by scoffing! It was Jehovah and none else who put it in my heart long years since to do an act of kindness to Lucius Agrippa. When He did this, He who created the ends of the earth, who fainteth not neither is weary, knew well that I was casting bread upon the waters and that I should find it after many days."

"Well, sir, I am very glad you have found it and

that I had a hand in the making of it. On the whole, it seems to me about the best piece of bread I ever helped to get out of the oven, and I shall felicitate myself on the share I had in the handling of it. I fear I shall not make any more that is equally good. And with all due respect to your Jehovah, sir, for I would by no means scoff at a belief that is sacred to you, I consider myself very lucky to have helped on that occasion to make a piece of good bread instead of something that would turn the stomach. A man can not go to such a vile place as Euthro's and count on finding a rare opportunity to do another a good turn. So I think I will let haunts of that kind alone in future. Once more, sir, I must express to you and to your granddaughter the pleasure I had in being of service. And now I must take my leave. Command me, Marcus, if I can do anything for you."

"Ah, my good friend," said Merari as Cethegus was departing, "it is again the hand of Jehovah that has wrought what you call luck and chance. It was He who put it in your heart to go to that evil place in order that He might use you for His own purposes and might at the same time turn you from ways wherein men may not walk without falling."

As Cethegus went away, he felt a deeper satisfaction in his heart than the consciousness of his great service to Merari and Naarah had given him. Apparently demure, he had kept a close eye upon Naarah from the moment she had entered the room; and the solicitude she had in manifold ways shown over Marcus made him sure that her heart was touched. But

would Marcus marry a Hebrew? Would his father ever consent to it? This he would have doubted had the man been anyone but Marcus. Before that indomitable will, however, race pride and race prejudice would fall as the grain falls before the sickle. "Julia is mine," he said to himself exultantly. But love currents often disclose rocks and shoals which the confident lover does not anticipate.

XXXV

THE day after Cethegus' visit Naarah took her post at Marcus' bedside as usual to minister to his wants and help either to amuse him or encourage him to sleep when he became too tired to talk or listen. He was still very weak. He was not left alone long at a time. That she should be the one to nurse him till he was well on toward recovery seemed to the generous and warm-hearted girl the only thing possible. He had saved her from a fate so terrible that she could not let her mind dwell upon it even for an instant. He had nearly given up his life in doing it. To help in giving the life back to the world that needed it, to make the hours of languishing pass pleasantly was a deep delight to her.

Usually she was quiet when she was near him. She had a happy feeling that her presence comforted and soothed him. This day, however, she found him restless. She talked to him, but he was not responsive. She sang to him, but she saw that he did not half listen. When the song was finished, he looked at her earnestly and said,

“Pray sit closer, Naarah. There is something I would say to you.”

“I am listening, Marcus. I can hear everything you say.”

“ But I want you very near. I am hurt and helpless and I must have my way. I can not draw nearer to you, so you must come to me.”

Naarah sat in silence for a moment; then she gratified the wish, though she did not meet the eager pleading look that was fixed upon her. A pleasantry half shaped itself in her mind, but there was that in Marcus' manner that forbade her to utter it and she did not speak. But she did not resist him when he took her hand and clasped it gently in both of his own and held it to his breast, though her heart began to beat quickly and the color rushed into her face.

“ Naarah,” Marcus began, “ I can not give my mind to the hymns you sing to me. I can not measure or take in the thoughts that are in them. The language and the imagery are strange. They are too strange to be comprehended by a man who is hardly yet fully released from the icy grasp of death. But some time I feel sure that the faith of your people will be my faith too. That which is the truth to your mind will seem so to my own. Almost now do I see a light that I have never seen before, a light that makes me feel I have been walking in darkness all my days. But it goes almost as soon as it comes. I shall have to be stronger before I can open my eyes to it. I am too weak to let my mind dwell long on anything now. I can't think. I can only feel. And there is just one thing that I feel, and that is, love for you, Naarah — as deep and tender a love as a man ever felt for a woman. I feel it all the time. When I lie here alone, when you are by me, when I go to sleep, when I wake

in the morning, you are in my thoughts and only you. Oh, Naarah! dearest, beloved Naarah, speak to me and tell me that you care for me. I have given you all my heart and I must have your love. I could not live without it now."

There was joy in Naarah's face as Marcus revealed the depth and intensity of his passion; yet it was with a troubled look that she answered very softly,

"Marcus, have you forgotten that I am a Hebrew maid?"

"I have not forgotten, yet why should I think of it? What has that to do with our loving each other?"

"It could not prevent us from loving each other —"

"And it does not prevent it? You really do love me, Naarah?"

"Yes, Marcus, I love you. That you have a right to know. But —"

"That is enough. That is all I want to know. If you love me I am happy. Oh, yes, I am the happiest man in all the world."

Marcus pressed to his lips the hand which Naarah had not withdrawn and looked at her ardently. An answering glance of love would have lifted him into a very ecstasy of joy. But the glance did not come and the troubled look did not leave Naarah's face.

"That you love me, Marcus, makes me happy too," she said in the same low quiet tones after a moment's pause, "and yet I can not give myself up to the feeling as you do. I can not find unmixed delight and satisfaction in it. For, alas! I am sure you ought not to love me. I am sure unhappiness will come to you

from it in the end.”

“Never! It must not. It could not. Why should you think that it would?”

“Your father, your Emperor, the men of power and station who would help to make you great — what would they think of your . . . of your . . .”

Naarah flushed and Marcus said the words she could not utter.

“Of my marrying a Hebrew girl? They could think only one thing when they saw her — that I was the most fortunate man in all the world.”

“You speak from your heart, Marcus, not from knowledge, not from prudence. For you know that no Roman could obtain advancement if he married a woman of my nation.”

“I know nothing of the kind. The prejudice exists. I can not deny it. But it must be faced. It must be overcome. Yes, and it shall be overcome. With you at my side I will win all the honor which the world has to give me, all that it is in me to win.”

“You would try. You would try with all your heart and soul. I fear though you would only meet with failure and discouragement. But we must not dwell on this. It excites you and uses up the strength you have had such hard work to gain. We must be cheerful and not talk of dark things that are to come.”

“No, we will think and talk of the love we have for each other and of nothing but that. Never mind the future! I am sure we shall find a way to make it bright. Why, it can not help being bright. Is not our love enough to make the whole world full of sun-

shine for us?"

"Your love would make it all sunshine for me, Marcus."

"And no clouds could linger in my sky while you shared everything with me. So let us delight in our love and in the happiness it brings. And the happiness is so great! Why, it is almost like a pain to be so happy. Do all that love feel as I do? Do you feel so, I wonder? No, how foolish of me to think it! You couldn't love me as much as I do you. That wouldn't be possible."

"Very strange things are sometimes possible, Marcus," said Naarah very demurely.

"Then you do love me as I do you? Can it really be? How wonderful! How did it ever come about? I couldn't help loving you, of course. You are so beautiful, so unselfish, so full of fine, delicate, maidenly feeling —"

Just here a soft hand was placed over Marcus' lips, and Naarah with a ripple of laughter took the words out of his mouth.

"The list is quite long enough, Marcus. Do not add to it; for then, you know, I should have to make one equally long for you, and that might be just a little embarrassing. Let me see now what can be said of you! You are very daring and very big and strong, and — and — you love a maid who isn't the least bit worthy of you, and that makes you seem to her the most foolish and the most perfect man in all the world."

"Not worthy of me? Oh, Naarah, how absurd!

Why, I have carried you in my thought ever since you spoke to me that first time, and I have really worshiped you in my heart, though I did not understand it all till I found you at Euthro's and knew that life would have been a long agony for me if I had come too late."

"Did you care as much as that?"

"Yes, I cared as much as that; but it was only when we came together again so strangely that I read my own heart aright. Before that I had thought that I was simply admiring an image of womanly purity and goodness, very much as I cherished and loved the memory of my mother. But when I saw you lying on the floor of that dreadful chamber, I knew it was you and you only that I loved, and that I could never love anyone else as long as I lived."

"I am glad you found it out, Marcus," came Naarah's answer in the same demure and gentle tones.

"Glad? Oh, it isn't gladness. It is rapture. It is such joy as makes life seem a new thing. Why, I have only just begun to live, Naarah. I never knew what living was before. But tell me, how came you ever to care for me? Have you cared for me long? Have you cared for me ever since you first saw me? No, no! That could not really be."

"There are places in a maid's heart, sir, which she is not ready to lay bare even to the eyes of the man who loves her. So, do not be so curious about the length of time I have loved you! A man who kisses flower girls on the street might well think himself lucky to get me at all. And yet, shall I tell you a se-

cret, sir? I read the heart of the man whom I found in that little act of folly. I saw that it was brave and noble and generous and kind; and I thought of the man every day from that time on."

"How wonderful! It was an act of folly. I am ashamed of it. And yet, if I had never committed it, I should never have known you and I should never have learned how to love."

"Perhaps not. And yet, surely you would have married. Why, Marcus!" and here Naarah laughed merrily and her eyes twinkled with mischief, "you might have married the lady you carried out of the theater when I met you at the doorway. Who was she, Marcus? She surely wasn't a flower girl."

As a happy voyager rounds a bend in a seemingly placid river to find himself on the brink of rapids that threaten destruction, so Marcus had forebodings of disaster as Julia was thus brought suddenly to his mind. It was not indeed that he realized all at once how insecurely he had been drifting on to a fancied haven of peace. Partly through weakness, partly through the force of his passion which had borne him on like a tide, he had quite forgotten Julia. Now that he was forced to think of her, he felt a vague uneasiness; but without serious concern he answered Naarah's question.

"No, indeed! That lady was no flower girl. She was an old friend, the daughter of Cornelius Veltrius and the sister of my comrade Milo."

The answer was lightly and carelessly given, and yet Marcus was not quite himself in giving it. There

was a shadow of constraint and self-consciousness in his manner, and Naarah could not but note the change. A film of cloud seemed to have passed over the sun that had been shining so brightly on them both. Hardly knowing what she said or why she said it, Naarah remarked,

“She was very beautiful. I wonder you never cared for her, especially as you have known her long.”

“Sometimes . . . I . . . thought . . . I did.”

The words came out slowly and hesitatingly. Naarah felt that the sun was still further clouded. She was loth to speak. She knew not how to be silent.

“Your manner is strange, Marcus,” she said very gently. “You are no longer natural and like yourself. I find myself tempted to ask whether she also thought you cared for her. And yet I must not ask it. I do not ask it. You are all truth and honor and you would not have asked me for my love if by winning it you were going to bring disappointment to another.”

“Truth and honor. Truth and honor,” repeated Marcus with an accent of bitterness. “I must at least be nothing but truth and honor with you. I could not indeed be anything else. To win such a love as yours by deception would be the vilest thing a man could do. You must hear my story. That is the only way I can make you understand.”

“I do not want to hear your story. I do not want to understand. I trust you entirely. I do not want your love unless it can be honorably given. I leave it all to you.”

“No, it can not be decided so. Too much has

passed between us. It is only right that you should know all, for otherwise you could not judge me fairly and truly. And I need your help. I have lost my way and I can not find it without your clear sight to guide me."

So Marcus began and told the whole story of his relations with Julia. He told how she had always fascinated him and yet failed to win his absolute respect; how the interviews between them were sometimes stormy and disquieting; how he had in consequence left Julia and found satisfaction in Delphium's society; how Delphium's final revelation of herself had driven him away from her; how he had then met Julia by the river, found her gentle and winning, and said enough to her to make her feel that he should seek from her something more than friendship.

"I did not seek it, however," said Marcus in conclusion, "and that was why I asked for your love in entire good faith. If Julia and I had been betrothed, I could not for a moment have forgotten it. I could not have allowed my love for you to possess me so completely. At any rate, I could not but have expressed it or have thought of it as anything but a source of grief and pain. But we were not pledged to each other. Julia was not in my thoughts. I had just begun my duties under my father, and they absorbed my energies so entirely that the idea of following up that interview by the river and of seeking Julia in marriage did not fill my mind. So when I found you and found that I cared for you, it did not occur to me that I was not free. Love bore me on its cur-

rent like a river that bears the little skiff out into the ocean. And here I am on the great wide sea and no shore in sight. There are only the waste of waters and the angry waves."

"I do not blame you, Marcus. I do not find fault with you for anything that you have done. You are not like other men. I understand you perfectly, I think. I see just how you have been misguided without ever having consciously done wrong. Yes, I believe in you. I could be as happy with you as ever woman was in this world. But it may not be, Marcus. It may not be. You belong to another, not to me. You really promised yourself to Julia. I could not marry you and live with you and think all the time of her sorrowing heart and her disappointed life."

"But we do not know that she would be sad and disappointed. She might marry and be far happier than she ever could have been with me. As I told you, we clashed frequently when we met."

"Yes, but you told me also that in that last interview she was gracious, kind and womanly. She cares deeply for you, Marcus. Perhaps," and here Naarah gave a smile that showed more heaviness of heart than pleasure, "I am not an impartial judge; but I do not believe a woman who has loved you with all her heart is going to find herself capable of feeling another affection."

"Would you have me marry her when I do not care for her, when I do not even thoroughly respect her? It would only lead to unhappiness."

"You have cared for her enough to think of mar-

rying her. You must respect her; for I am sure, from all you tell me, that though she is willful and capricious she is good and true at heart. And she needs you all the more because she is not free from faults. You could be such a strength and help to her! And I am sure you would learn to care for her more and more as you saw her depend on you and grow finer and more unselfish through trusting in you and leaning on you."

"You reason well, Naarah; but I do not know how to give you up. I think it would kill me to do so. Such a love as I feel for you comes but once. I was wounded almost to death. You nursed me through the dark days and flooded my life with joy. Your love was like a sun. Take it away and all is dark. I shall go down again into that valley of death and no hands will lift me up tenderly and lay me in the green meadow beside the still waters."

Marcus' face, pale from weakness and exhaustion, had grown ashen gray through the agony of his spirit. Naarah was alarmed as she watched him, and her heart was torn with anguish because she had to give him counsel that made his suffering piteous to see and added to her own grief till it was almost too great to bear. But she kept back her tears even while her heart was breaking. He was hurt and feeble; she must be strong. Speaking without a tremor, though the effort was an agony, she said very quietly,

"Men do not die of love, Marcus. They suffer, but the wound is cured by time. Have courage! You will only gain strength in the end by doing what is right. We must not think merely of ourselves. If

you suffer so much, think what Julia has suffered and what she would suffer if her hopes should be disappointed."

"I can't reason. I can't talk. I only know that I suffer and that the light seems to have gone out. Oh, why didn't Gugon strike a little deeper? But no! I should not then have had these moments of joy — such joy as I believe no man ever had before. It was worth while to come into the world just to have them. I shall think of them and live in them till I die."

"But you are not going to die, Marcus. It is your grief, not your reason and sound sense, that is speaking. I tell you again that men do not die from disappointed love. No more do women, and women are ruled by their feelings far more than men. Do you think I am not hurt and almost crushed by this great sorrow? But I am not going to die. I am going to live. I must live for my grandfather and for the good I may yet do to my own land, among my own people. And you too must live. You must live for your father, for your country, and for Julia who needs you and whose life will be poor and broken, I fear, without you."

"Naarah, you do not understand. I do not think of marriage as most men do. It had always been to me the one most sacred and beautiful thing in the world. As my father and mother found it, it is the supreme joy and happiness. I have wanted what they found in each other and what they shared together till death took my mother to the unknown country where perhaps you and I shall sometime meet again.

But I could not find what I wanted. I never saw the promise of it till that day when you spoke to me and showed me that what my whole nature craved really existed in the world. Had I been wise I should have sought you then; but everything seemed to work against it. We Romans are a proud race, and I was made to feel by everyone to whom I confided my thought that an alliance with an alien woman was impossible. Even my father took that view. So I was tossed about and made restless and unhappy by desires and longings I did not know how to satisfy. At last chance brought me to Julia when she was in a gentle kindly mood, and here, I thought, is my destiny. Why look for what will never appear? You are a Roman. Here is a stately and beautiful Roman woman who will make your home bright and attractive to the people of rank and dignity among whom you move. I approached Julia as if it really were destiny that was trying to unite us and I made her feel that it was so. And then the true destiny, not the false one that had smiled upon me only to work my ruin, brought me to you, and I found what my heart had been longing and thirsting for ever since I grew to be a man. You are my life, Naarah. How can I give you up? Can a man who has seen the sunrise go and dwell in a cave where there is nothing but murky darkness? Can a man who has sat by a brookside in the springtime and smelled the fragrance of the flowers and heard the birds sing and the waters plash go and spend his days in a sandy desert? No, I can give you up if I have to do so. I would not marry you and

thereby do an act of dishonor. And if I were well and strong, I would go out to the frontier and die on the field or live on sad and companionless as long as I could serve my country. But I have been sore stricken. Death almost claimed me, and I am too weak and exhausted to fight him off any more. I don't want to fight him. Let me pass on! That is best. That is the only peace."

Quite worn out with the long effort, Marcus turned his face away and closed his eyes. Naarah watched him for a moment and then, unable to control her own grief any longer, she sought her room, sank upon her knees, and cried to the God of her fathers for help and guidance, while the scalding tears flowed like rain.

XXXVI

THROUGH the rest of the day Marcus slumbered and tossed by turns, suffering cruelly from his wound as he moved uneasily from one position to another, and yet indifferent to the suffering because of the far greater mental distress which he endured.

At the approach of evening Merari came to see how his patient was faring and found Naarah watching him with undisguised concern. She had taken her place again at the bedside after spending two or three hours by herself, and she was unspeakably troubled to see an anguish of mind that she was powerless to relieve. Merari was surprised and shocked when he noted Marcus' condition. His face was worn and haggard. His eyes wandered restlessly about. Even when he lay quiet he seemed to be getting no real repose.

"What is the matter?" said Merari anxiously to Naarah. "He has not been like this at any time before. Something must have happened to excite and upset him."

"Yes, he has found out something that distresses him greatly. He is so grieved in mind that his bodily strength has felt the strain and is becoming exhausted."

“How did he hear such ill news? No one has been here to-day but his father.”

“It was something that came out in a long conversation he had with me about his life here in Rome, something which he did not understand before and which has shaken him terribly.”

Merari looked searchingly at his granddaughter. Naarah colored under his gaze and did not meet his eye.

“It is not what you think, grandfather,” she said, “but I cannot say any more.”

“I would not have you do so, but I hope you will see some way to relieve his anxiety. His condition will be serious if his mind is not made easy.”

Naarah and her grandfather took turns in watching at the bedside through the night. Marcus slept fitfully and never long at a time. When he was awake he talked much to himself, and no admonitions could keep him from moving about upon the bed in no gentle or careful manner. The very sharpness of the pain thus caused seemed to be a relief. It made him conscious that he had a body and that it too as well as the spirit could give torment and unrest.

The result was that the wound became inflamed and fever set in. When Agrippa made his usual visit the following morning he was astonished and troubled to note the change.

“What does it all mean?” he asked anxiously of Naarah whom he found at her post. “What has caused these alarming symptoms? There was no sign of them when I came yesterday.”

“It is a mental trouble that has caused the change. The wound was healing nicely, and my grandfather thought the danger was passed two or three days ago. He is now doing all he can, but medicines will not cure a wound of the spirit.”

“The wound must have been a savage one. Who gave it?”

“No one, intentionally. Your son has found that there is something in his relations with one he has known long that sorely hurts and distresses him.”

“What is it? I am his father. He is my only son, my only child. I have a right to know.”

“I think you have,” said Naarah after reflecting a moment, “but not yet. When you come to-morrow, I will tell you all if there still seems to be reason for doing so. But you know how strong Marcus is. In twenty-four hours there could be no serious change for the worse. Wait then, I beg of you, till to-morrow; for I think that by that time the crisis may be passed.”

“Which means, I am sure, that you intend to do something to make the crisis pass. Am I not right?”

“You are right. I should not put you off without a reason.”

“Then I will wait, for I have confidence in your judgment as well as in your goodness of heart. But I shall be here again at sundown. Perhaps you will have something to tell me then.”

“Perhaps. I am not sure. I will not promise.”

Agrippa lingered a few moments, took Marcus by the hand and spoke words of encouragement. Marcus looked at him and smiled, but seemed to have no

wish to speak. Fearing to excite and weaken him, Agrippa then took his departure, though he sought Merari before he left the house and received from him the assurance that there was no immediate danger. After he had gone away Naarah continued to sit and watch by the bedside.

"Marcus," she said presently.

"What is it, Naarah?"

"Are you glad that I am here?"

"Unspeakably glad."

"And yet you do not try to stay in the world that I am in."

"No, Naarah."

"Why not, Marcus?"

"The world is so wide. We should be so far apart."

"I should care for you. I should be thinking of you."

"But I should not see you."

"The world will be very lonely to me if you are not in it, Marcus. I shall be old with grief when I am young."

"Come and join me."

"No, grief does not kill. I shall be likely to live long."

"I shall wait for you."

"But I might not find you. Our Holy Books do not tell us that lovers and kindred meet beyond the valley of the dark shadow."

"Do they not? That seems strange, for I think it must be that they come together again. Don't you

feel as if your love would last forever? I am sure mine will."

"Yes, but that world beyond seems so shadowy and dark, and this is so full of sunshine. Stay in it, Marcus! Stay in it for my sake!"

"I am too tired, Naarah. This fever is burning me up. It will burn all my strength away before many days, and then I shall go."

Naarah feared that this was true. Marcus, so Merari had told her, would become delirious if the fever could not be subdued and very likely pass away without regaining consciousness. And the fever could not be conquered unless the mind was relieved. Naarah saw that. She had made her last effort to arouse the worn and weary spirit and had failed. She could think now of but one thing to do, and she girded herself for as difficult a task as a woman can ever perform.

XXXVII

THAT same day Julia was sitting in her beautifully decorated room and listlessly attempting to read the poems of Catullus. The great Marriage Song, with its brisk movement and its chiming music, had always been a favorite with her, and she now read snatches of it with genuine enjoyment. But she was in no mood to read it through from beginning to end with full appreciation and abandonment to the spell of its cadences. From time to time she would let the hand that held the roll fall into her lap; and she would then forget the verses as her own thought took possession of her and drove all other considerations out of her mind.

“I wonder,” she queried to herself, “whether he is going to send me any word about himself, any message that he is thinking of me and wishing to see me? They say he is getting better. It is time for him to give me a share in his thoughts instead of letting that low foreign girl take all his attention. To think that he should have gone to that horrid place just on her account and that she should be the one to watch at his bedside and bring him back to life and health! Oh, that a man like him, the bravest, the cleverest, and the most splendid man in Rome, should have his head turned by that silly, black-eyed creature with her doll’s face and her chirping ways! To fancy an insignificant

alien upstart when there are women in Rome," and here Julia swept across the room and looked at herself in a polished mirror of silver, "who could give him beauty and affection and all the dignity and station that ambition could desire! Yes, a woman of his own people who had wit and craft and the power to mingle with the highest, might place him on the Emperor's seat.

"But I will not give him up. I need not talk about the other women of Rome." Here she again placed herself before the mirror and gazed at the image in it with seeming satisfaction. "He belongs to you, Julia, the daughter of Veltrius. If he did not plight his troth to you, he said enough to give you the right to claim him. And I will claim him. He is a man of honor, and I shall see that he keeps his word. Oh, yes; I shall see that he keeps his word!"

Here she laughed a bitter scornful laugh; and even as she did so her special serving maid knocked and entered and told her that a woman who insisted upon seeing her was in the main audience or waiting room.

"What does she want?"

"She says she brings you news from Marcus, the son of the Prefect."

"At last," said Julia triumphantly, as if to herself. Then, a thought striking her, she inquired eagerly,

"What does the woman look like? Is she young or old?"

"Very young, I should say."

"Black-eyed?"

"Yes."

“ With a pretty, simpering, babyish face? ”

“ Yes,” replied the maid without hesitation; for she had learned the wisdom of accommodating herself to her mistress’ views.

“ It is she! ” cried Julia scornfully. “ The impudent creature! I will go to her and I will see that she leaves the house much sadder and humbler than she entered it.”

Julia made her way into the waiting room and saw instantly, as she had expected, that the young woman who was awaiting her there was no other than the stranger whom Marcus had accosted with surprise at the door of the theater and whose face had remained indelibly fixed in her memory. She advanced toward her with a slow and stately step and an expression of hauteur and disdain; while Naarah, who had seated herself while waiting, rose as Julia entered and went to meet her with equal dignity but with quicker movement and with a smile of greeting.

“ I bring you good news,” she said, “ which I know you must be eager to hear and which you of all persons have a right to hear. I wish I could say it was all good news. Alas, it is not! But you will at any rate be glad to know that Marcus, the son of Agrippa, is still living in spite of a very dangerous wound which at first seemed sure to be fatal.”

“ You tell me nothing that I did not know. I have been informed of everything you say, though not by those from whom I might have expected to receive the courtesy.”

Julia stood facing Naarah as she said this, her tones,

her features and her attitude showing all the contempt which she could make them express.

“You are right, dear lady. You are entirely right. Word should have been sent to you directly from my grandfather’s house where the son of Agrippa has been cared for. But it has been a most anxious season, and those about the sick bed could think of nothing but the care which such a desperate injury required. And — you will pardon me, I am sure, for speaking frankly — we did not know till yesterday of the . . . of the promise that he had given you. It was indeed wrong and cruel that you should have been kept in suspense when a life that was so dear to you was at the very gates of death. Believe me, we would have sent you hourly tidings had we known. You see, it was our ignorance that was at fault, and that I am sure you will forgive.”

“And how, I should be glad to know, was your ignorance enlightened? How could *you* become informed about a matter so private and confidential?”

“It was the son of Agrippa himself who told me. I could not possibly have gained the knowledge from anyone else.”

“Indeed! And so Marcus, the son of Agrippa, begins to tell you of his love for another woman as soon as he is able to talk. What a peculiar and gratifying intimacy you must have with him! I congratulate you. Is it your habit to establish so early these close and confidential relations with men?”

“Your words are unkind, but I must admit that your resentment is most natural; for you do not under-

stand. But you must understand, dear lady. I have come to tell you things you need to know. I am sorry to have to say them, for I know they will give you pain. But when you hear them, you will see, I am quite sure, that the only thing possible for me was to tell them to you."

"You are very confident. Perhaps that was to be expected from a young girl who so quickly becomes familiar with men. But I am not in the habit of learning about matters so confidential from such a messenger. Perhaps it is, after all, your own affairs that you come to talk about, and I very much doubt whether I ought to listen to you."

"Oh, but you must listen. It would be cruel, wicked not to do so. There is more than you dream of depending upon it. The very life of the man you care for is at stake."

"Must is a word I am not used to hearing from strangers, especially from such as do not hesitate to call me cruel and wicked. But if this is a life and death matter, I suppose I ought to let you speak. We will retire into this adjoining room, however, where you can speak without being overheard. In your excitement your tones are somewhat penetrating."

Julia led the way into an anteroom where they were sure of being free from intrusion, seated herself, assuming an indolent and indifferent attitude as she did so, and without motioning her visitor to a chair or a divan bade her begin.

"First of all," said Naarah, much grieved at the studied insolence with which she was treated, but feel-

ing pity rather than indignation all the while toward a woman whom she considered to have been unfairly treated, "I think I ought to tell you more exactly than you yet know just what has happened since that dreadful wound was received and the son of Agrippa fell fainting just outside my grandfather's doorway."

"He was coming, I think, from a vile resort kept by one Euthro, after finding you there."

"You are correctly informed, my lady. I was carried there by evil men and should have suffered I know not what terrible things had not the son of Agrippa found and rescued me. One of the wicked men there followed him while he was seeing that I reached my grandfather's house in safety and inflicted such a frightful wound upon him that at first my grandfather, who is skilled in the art of healing, despaired of his life."

"I believe the far East has sent to Rome many so-called healers who use strange drugs and practice magic and incantations. Your grandfather is, I presume, one of that class."

"My grandfather is a merchant and is known and honored by all the people of rank and influence in my nation; but in a long life that has been spent in many lands he has acquired an unusually full and profound knowledge of medicine which he makes use of for his friends but never for money. He administered powerful sleeping drafts which induced almost continuous sleep for four days and warded off fever. We were painfully anxious, for my grandfather said the wound was really a mortal one and that if death did not result, it was solely because of a strength and health

which not one man in a thousand possesses.”

“No doubt too, in spite of your seeming modesty, your grandfather was relying on his own skill, which you consider so remarkable.”

“His skill is very rare, I think; and a less dexterous treatment might not have saved the life in spite of the sufferer’s wonderful strength of body. However that may be, he waked after four days, and it really seemed as if the crisis had passed. During the days that followed he continued to gain; so that until yesterday we were perfectly sure he would recover. But yesterday came a most unexpected and most serious relapse, and to-day we are again almost ready to give up hope.”

“But what, pray, has become of your grandfather’s skill? I thought it was the part of a wise physician to prevent just such lapses as this. It would seem as if the skill had been much over-rated.”

“There is no skill in the world that will cure the body if the mind is a prey to anxiety and distress; and the son of Agrippa is so unhappy that he can not sleep restfully, he will not eat, he tosses on his bed and inflames his wound, and he is in consequence the victim of a raging fever which is rapidly wearing away his strength.”

“It is a strange story that you tell me. I am sure he is too sick and weak to see any besides you and your grandfather, and I suppose his father also. His own father could hardly excite him and make him unhappy. What is it that you and your grandfather have done to bring about this most cruel change and plunge a suffer-

ing man from hope into despair?"

"My grandfather is quite innocent in the matter. I am the one that has thus distressed him and I did it simply by telling him that he ought to do a thing which he is very loth to do."

"Indeed! Has he made you his Mentor? I can not but laugh as I think of it. Marcus the Roman, the son of the City Prefect, the man of honor and courage and of such strength and keenness of mind as few ever possess, has to learn his duty from a young girl of a foreign nation whom he would never have known had she not boldly accosted him on the street! Really, this is getting too absurd. I begin to feel that I have listened to you too long already."

Sorely hurt by the pitiless taunts and jibes with which she was thus constantly assailed, Naarah did not lose her courage nor did she feel any prompting to answer scorn with scorn. She was face to face with an evil pride. It had to be humbled, and she was grieved and sorry that she was forced to humble it. How could she feel anything but pity for this insolent and sharp-tongued woman, who was yet, she was sure, honorable and true, mastered by a passion that was not returned, and craving the sympathy and affection that would make her sweet and kindly instead of resentful and bitter? How gladly would she avoid giving her pain and humiliation if it were possible! How gladly would she, if permitted, show her friendliness and express her heartfelt sorrow at robbing her of the one thing that could make life beautiful and joyous! Quite lifted above selfish feeling and moved by deep

and tender emotion, Naarah went to the woman whom she felt she had, however innocently, wronged, knelt at her feet, and said with tears in her eyes,

“Do not speak to me so scornfully, dear lady! Your words are bitter, but I know it is because you love so deeply and your love has been so cruelly tried. It was very hard for you to pass these days without any word from the man who had given you his promise. But oh, for his sake I beg you to be just even while your heart is torn and bleeding. He has never spoken words of love to you — you are too true and honest not to admit that — and it was because he was never able to give you the love which a woman needs to make her truly happy. There was much indeed to draw him to you — your beauty, your charm, your wit, the brightness of your presence, your love of Rome, your admiration for him and your ambition to see him great and honored and renowned. No wonder that he sought you and felt the spell of your brilliancy and fascination. The wonder to me is that he did not long ago learn to feel for you the deep and overmastering love which would have made him think you the one fairest prize in all the world. But that love he gave to another. He did not really know her. He saw her so little that he did not realize how deep his love for her was. And so he said things to you which rightly made you feel that he belonged to you and that you and he were to have one life together. And then he found that this other feeling was the deeper one, was indeed so strong that it claimed and possessed him wholly, flooded his heart and alone gave him the prom-

ise of sacred happiness. All this he found out as he lay wounded and near to death; and with it came the consciousness that he was not free, that his promise had really been given to you. It was when I told him that promise was sacred and must not be broken that his mind became distressed, his will to live enfeebled, and death which he had fought so bravely once more threatening. You would pity him, dear lady, if you could see him now as he lies wan and haggard, his eyes closed, his strength slowly failing, his heart sad and heavy, and his interest in what is taking place around him wholly gone. Oh, if you love him deeply and tenderly and truly — and I am sure you do — give him back his promise! For his sake give it back! He would not ask it. He would not be willing that I or anyone else should ask it; for he is all truth and honor and he has the noble Roman pride which has made your city great through the long, long years. But I ask it for him and I ask it for his sake. I ask it for his country's sake, for where is there another man like him to stand up and do for her among all the countless multitudes she rules? And I ask it for your own sake, dearest lady; for how could you have any peace or happiness afterward if you let this glorious noble life go out in darkness when you might make it a light and strength for all the Roman nation? For there is none other like him. You know there is no one like him in all the world."

"I know it so well," answered Julia in gentler tones than she had used before, for she was not unmoved by Naarah's fervent pleading, "that what you ask of me

is nothing less than that I give up all hope of happiness. I have cared for Marcus ever since I was old enough to know the feelings that are most sacred to a woman. I suffered much when I saw that he did not care for me as I cared for him. It was because I felt deeply his failure to return my own affection that I was sometimes willful and passionate when we met and made him go away from me in no friendly mood. But I felt sure that I should win him in the end. I thought when he found me unexpectedly and told me he was staying in Rome for my sake that I really had won him. And I should have won him if it had not been for you. Why did you come between us? Why did you speak to him that day when you interfered to help a miserable girl who needed no help at all? If you had acted as maids are expected to act upon the streets and let alone things with which you had no concern, he would never have known you, never have been hurt in trying to help you, and I should be happy to-day in feeling that he was wholly mine. But now you have taken him away from me and you come and ask me to give him up that you may have him. For that is what it all means. I understand it and you can not deny it. I am to give him up that he may live, and if he lives he is to marry you."

"I do not know that he will marry me. I do not find any wish in my heart that he should marry me. Indeed, it hardly seems to me now that I could marry him; for if I did I should be haunted by the thought that I had come between you and him and found the way to happiness only through your sorrow. No, it

is not for myself that I am pleading. I am thinking only of him. I want him to live. I can not bear to think that he, so brave, so generous, so full of strength and power to do, should be lying still in death, with all the great and splendid things he might have done forever unaccomplished. Oh, give him back his promise just that he may live and not be lost to the world! Give it back, I beseech you, and know the joy that comes from doing that which is generous and noble even if it costs you pain! Ah, how often is love like a knife in a woman's heart! And yet even in her agony she blesses that which is at once her glory and her sorrow."

"Who taught you that? How do you know it? It is a strange saying to come from one so young."

"Is it not love's language? Is it not what every woman learns as she comes to be truly a woman? I have been learning it every day since I first met the son of Agrippa. And your own story tells me that you have been learning it too."

"Not well. Not perfectly. If that is what the little God with the bow and arrow teaches, I am not an apt pupil. I want happiness from love. I want it because it is my right to have it, and I mean to find it still."

"But you can not find the kind of happiness you seek in a love that is not returned. You can not find it in being hard and ungenerous to a man who, even though it costs him his life, will not violate the promise he gave you. If you should have to think, as I fear you will, that you have caused his death, that surely

would be anything but happiness."

"I refuse to believe it. A man of such matchless iron strength! He could not die for such a reason. It is foolish to think it."

"Not if he were himself. It is only because he is at the point of death from his terrible wound. When the will is dead and life is trembling in the balance, a whispered word, the fragrance of a flower, the carol of a bird in the stillness of the morning, may win back a spirit that is fluttering for release."

"Then whisper your own words to him and win him back if you can. They ought to do it, for you say he loves you. Mine would be vain and impotent; for I, who have known him so long and given him my whole heart, am cast aside and counted as nothing because you have come between us. I must keep away from him in his struggle with death, while you can sit at his bedside and murmur words of love to him and see him smile as he listens. Oh, I could hate you for it, and yet I do not. I came to meet you with hatred in my heart and I said hard and cruel things to you. I am sorry I said them. You are kind and unselfish. I have no right to hate you or be angry with you. But Marcus belongs to me. I am a Roman. I could understand him and lead him on to greatness as you could not. If he should get well and if you and your grandfather should go back to your own land—which I would that you had never left—I believe that he would care for me still and that I could make him happy. But why should I give him up and see him marry you and be lost to Rome and greatness? If he

can not get well unless he is to be free to marry you, I think it would be as well for him to die. Now go to him and bring him back to life if you can; but know that I shall claim him if you do."

"Farewell, lady. I shall pray to the God of my nation that you may be able to claim him and I shall be at his bedside day and night till I know surely whether it is death or life."

XXXVIII

WHEN Agrippa came again a little after sundown Naarah told him all. She told him how deeply Marcus cared for her, how in consequence the partial promise he had made to Julia took from him in his exhausted state the desire to live, and how she herself had vainly pleaded with Julia to give him back his freedom.

Gravely and silently Agrippa listened to the story. How deeply and how painfully it impressed him he did not show and Naarah never knew. His son care for an alien woman whose race the Romans held in subjection and despised? How strange! How unexpected! How dismaying! Naarah was beautiful. She was altogether unselfish. Had her heart not been thoroughly pure, she would not have gone to Julia and pleaded with her as she did. But the stern Roman pride which kept Germanicus from marrying a Jewess he loved deeply was fully roused in the Prefect. In his heart he rejoiced that Julia had refused to relinquish what she not unjustly regarded as her own. He would rather see his son engage in a grim and desperate battle with death than find healing through the hope of a marriage with this Hebrew girl. But the girl herself had acted too nobly to allow him to wound her or let her realize what was passing in his mind.

“ You have acted bravely and unselfishly,” he said. “ Do not mourn over your failure. Whatever happens I shall hold you blameless.”

“ But will you not go yourself and plead with Julia? Remember, your son’s life is at stake. Surely she would not stand against your prayers and entreaties.”

“ She will never hear them. It would not be self-respecting to supplicate her farther. She has made her choice and I can not find it in me to reproach her for it. All depends upon Marcus himself and upon the care you and your grandfather give him; and that I know will be the best that skill and devotion can give. I will say a few words to him myself if he is not too weak to hear me, as I may be able to put a little courage into his heart.”

Agrippa had indeed but little hope as he stood by the bedside, for Marcus looked as if the hand of death were upon him. The high fever, which made the eye glitter and flushed the cheeks, did not prevent the face from looking drawn and wasted or the complexion from showing the hue of exhaustion. Agrippa leaned over him, clasped his hand very gently and said,

“ You are very sick, Marcus, but I want you to get well. You are all that I have in the world. Live for me! Live for your country! Rome needs you. Live, live, live, I say, and do the things which your mother and I dreamed and hoped for you when you were a little child and sat upon her knees! ”

Marcus smiled and murmured so that they could hardly catch the words,

“ It is too late. I am tired out and I have lost my

hold upon life."

Then he closed his eyes and Agrippa went away.

But yet it was not too late. His father's appealing words may have given a thrill of life to the jaded and nerveless will. His own strength was perhaps too massive to yield to the deadly assaults that were made upon it and that seemingly had broken into the innermost citadel of being. At any rate the spark of life was never extinguished, though for days it seemed ready at any moment to flicker out. Naarah obtained snatches of sleep at the bedside, but never left it for many moments at a time. Merari, despairing because he had never seen a man recover from such extreme exhaustion of mind and body, yet alert and resourceful, shared the long vigil and watched intently the slightest symptoms of change.

For seven days the fever raged and the best that could be said at any time was simply that the end had not yet come. On the eighth day the slumber seemed more restful and there were the faintest signs of improvement. The next day the improvement was so marked that Merari said joyfully,

"He will live. He will live."

Two days later he was so far recovered that he could think clearly and talk to those around him; and almost the first words he uttered he said to Naarah in a spirit of discouragement and of faint resistance to the new tides of life that were creeping through him.

"Why did you do it, Naarah? I was too tired to live any longer. I wanted to die."

"And I wanted you to live and be the man you were

meant to be and are going to be some day.”

“ I was meant for you. That is the only thing I am sure of. As I can not have you, I do not seem to take an interest in anything else. I am still too tired. When I get strong again I will try to quit myself like a man and do the things my father would have me do. I wonder if I ever shall.”

“ You have made a good beginning, Marcus. Since I first saw you such a short time ago, you have fought in the arena, broken into a den of infamy to rescue a girl, received a dagger thrust from a villain, and twice you have beaten Death as thoroughly as your Hercules is said to have done when he made him give up Alcestis. If you can do all this in three short months, what can you not do in a lifetime? ”

XXXIX

MARCUS gained slowly, for his listless mood continued. The future did not look joyous to him, and he seemed to shrink from the thought of activity or the serious pursuit of any end.

On one of the early days of his new convalescence word was brought him that Cethegus wished to see him. Marcus felt strong enough for the interview and Cethegus was ushered into the sick room by Merari, who cautioned him about taxing the patient's strength.

"Such a rare disciple of Æsculapius," answered Cethegus suavely, "has a right to be obeyed. Perhaps you would prefer to remain and see that I do not become too garrulous? Pray do so! I have nothing private to communicate."

So Merari remained, for the anxious hours he had passed at the bedside made his care a very jealous and watchful one. But he placed the visitor close to Marcus, and the always self-possessed Cethegus began to talk in his usual vein of irony, which at the same time expressed hearty and genuine feeling.

"It is pleasant to look at you again, Marcus. You have given us rather an anxious season. For some days we were expecting the news that you had found this world a little too tame for further occupancy, in spite of gladiators and night assassins, and had started for Hades to carry off Cerberus or engage in a wrest-

ling match with Hercules down there. I am sure you would be successful in any such little adventure, but we are glad to keep you here. Things would be a little dull without you. Have you planned your next surprise yet, or haven't you got strong enough for that?"

"I thank you for your confidence in my powers, Cethegus; but I am a little tired of adventures. When I get well, I am going to lead such a tame and quiet life that you will hardly know me."

"That is a sick man's utterance. You are altogether too low-spirited. You need somebody to stand at your side, Marcus, and put life and courage into you. Why don't you follow my example and get married? I am going to be married to Julia."

"Married to Julia?" cried Marcus, sitting bolt upright in bed. "Impossible!"

"Now, see!" said Cethegus, turning to Merari. "I have put energy and spirit into your patient already. I have touched his vanity. You did not suppose," here he looked at Marcus again, "that Julia would for a moment think of marrying anybody but yourself. That she should turn from you and put up with such a plain, ordinary person as myself is a blow to your pride. But you will get over the shock in time and be the loudest in wishing Julia and me happiness."

"But . . . but," stammered Marcus —

"But you don't understand how it all came about. Well, I could tell you the story and show you that it happened in a very simple and natural way. But I hardly think I will. You remember how the Athenian Hippocides, as that genial old gossip-monger Herod-

otus tells the story, lost his chance for a wife by too free a use of his legs. I should be sorry to forfeit mine by an unwise indulgence of the tongue. And then you know, Marcus, or if you do not know already (Cethegus could not refrain from putting a slight emphasis upon 'already,' which Marcus well knew had reference to himself and Delphium) you will perhaps know ere long, that there comes one moment in a man's life which he is not quite willing to talk about. He will tell what happened in it. Indeed, he takes immense satisfaction in doing so —"

"Just as you take especial satisfaction in coming and telling me before anyone else what happened in your particular moment. Ah, Cethegus, don't tax me with vanity unless you can look me in the face and say that I am not the first to share your confidence!"

"No, you are the first, Marcus. I admit it," said Cethegus, who was rather amused than embarrassed by the way in which Marcus had turned the tables upon him. "There were . . . well, there were various reasons why I thought you should be the first to hear the news. So I came here to tell it to you and receive your congratulations."

"We won't probe deeply into your various reasons, Cethegus, and I most certainly do congratulate you and Julia with all my heart. May you both live long and may all good things come to you!"

"Oh, I mean to live long and I am sure I shall if you are out of the way. The only time I have ever been in danger was when I went to Euthro's that night and you nearly got us into a fray with those villains

who wanted to cut our throats. Go off to the wars somewhere, Marcus, and win glory; and we shall have a quiet time here in Rome and live perfectly secure. And I hope you won't get killed in the first battle you engage in, but I very much fear you will; for you will rush into the midst of the enemy without waiting to see whether your men are following you. Still, if Hacho plunges into the fight with you, you are likely to come out unscathed. His peculiar mode of attack will always cause consternation and give your tardy followers time to rally to your support.

"But I fear I have disobeyed the injunctions of this wise healer of yours by talking so long and so freely. So I must take my leave with many regrets if I have tired you and taxed your strength."

"Your visit has cheered me, Cethegus, and I thank you with all my heart for coming. Farewell, with all good wishes."

Merari ushered Cethegus from the room, returned and lingered a while, and then excused himself on the ground of weariness. So eager had Marcus been to have him go that he could hardly keep from hastening his departure by urging him to seek rest and sleep. When Naarah entered the room a few moments later, she saw a look in Marcus' eye that made her stand still and brought the color to her cheek.

"What has happened, Marcus?" she said falteringly and without meeting his gaze.

"The best thing in the world that could have happened," cried Marcus as he stretched his hands out to her. "Come to me and I will tell you."

Slowly she came to him and placed her hands in his.

“What is it?” she said softly.

“Can you not guess?”

“You shall never know what I am guessing.”

“Yes, I shall; for your face can not hide the truth from me. You are guessing that I have my freedom, and it is true. Julia is to marry Cethegus.”

Naarah's eyes sparkled with pleasure for a moment. Then the light died from her face; she withdrew her hands from Marcus' clasp and sat down with a grave and troubled look.

“Why, what's the matter, Naarah?” cried Marcus in perplexity. “I thought the news would fill you with delight.”

“I am thinking of Julia.”

“But why think so mournfully of her? She has found her happiness.”

“No, she has lost it.”

“Come, come, Naarah!” said Marcus with a laugh. “Don't be so flattering to me and so hard upon Cethegus! He is upright; he has talents; he will make her happy.”

“I hope so,” answered Naarah with a sigh, “but I saw her heart. She cared for you, Marcus, as a woman cares once only and never again.”

“But why has she accepted Cethegus if she does not care for him?”

“Through pride, I suppose. As she thought the whole matter over after I left her, no doubt she made up her mind that she could not join her life with yours even if you asked her to do so. Her self-respect would

not have allowed her to marry a man whose heart she had not won. So she smiled upon Cethegus partly from pride, partly from ambition."

"What had pride to do with it?"

"She did not want the world to guess her disappointment by seeing her live unmarried."

"Perhaps it was so. As to ambition, I can realize how that may have influenced her. She has always wanted power. I think she will secure it with Cethegus. He is shrewd; she is brilliant. They will help each other. Let us prophesy success for them instead of pitying them."

"I trust the success will come; yet I fear it will not bring full satisfaction if it does. And Julia well deserves a happy life. I believe she is good and noble at heart. I shall always have a kindly feeling for her."

"I am sure you will. Your heart is so tender it would not let you do otherwise. But let us think of ourselves now! I am free, Naarah, and there is no longer anything to come between us."

"Alas, there is much, as I tried to show you when you first told me that you cared for me. Do not deceive yourself, Marcus. There are powerful influences that will work to keep us apart."

"You mean especially your grandfather and my father?"

"My grandfather would be sorry to oppose anything on which I had set my heart; yet a different marriage is what he would wish for me, and I could not bear to grieve him. Your father's resistance will be a

very determined one. I doubt if his consent can be gained."

"It will be gained. Your grandfather will approve when he sees that your happiness is at stake. Every obstacle will be overcome."

"So at any rate we will hope. And whatever comes, we shall be happy in our love. Nothing can change that."

"No, that we shall have always."

If Marcus was so overjoyed at the news Cethegus brought him that he had no strong curiosity as to the exact happenings of the "particular moment," the story still requires that they should not be utterly passed over. The truth was that Cethegus' good fortune did not come to him in the wholly simple and natural way he claimed. Julia's refusal to release Marcus from what she interpreted as a promise, though it was hardly that, had been a very decided one. Only after bitter and painful conflict did she decide to give him up. But it was true, as Naarah had divined, that she was at heart too proud to wish for a life union with a man who cared for another. Consequently, when Cethegus sought her shortly after her interview with Naarah, he found her in a very sober but a gracious and kindly mood. Indeed, her manner, though subdued, was so winning and so friendly that he summoned all his courage, told her how he had long cared for her so deeply that he could give his affection to no other woman, and asked her to share his life. Her reply was not immediate, nor could she meet the eyes that were so earnestly fixed upon her. With her own heart

she needed to have one last communing before her answer was given. After a short time, however, she looked at him with a smile and said,

“ I will share all with you, Cethegus.”

How much the answer cost her, Cethegus never knew.

XL

NAARAH'S prediction was correct. Marcus was so elated by his new found freedom that his father could not help noticing the change. He had been depressed; now he was jubilant. Agrippa inquired what had so cheered and brightened him, and Marcus privately told him.

The Prefect's brow clouded as he heard the story.

"This must not be, Marcus," he said. "I knew what it was that brought you so near to death after you were well on your way to recovery. Naarah told me that your partial promise to Julia was tormenting your mind and making your life hang by a thread. Yet I was glad that Julia refused to release you. Broken though I should have been if you had not recovered, I did not want your life to be saved at the cost of honor and a Roman woman's happiness."

"But honor was not sacrificed. I did not even ask Julia to release me. It was Naarah that did that to save my life, and a brave and noble thing it was to do. What other woman would have had the courage to do it? But though I was held to the promise I made — and it was not really a promise — I was saved from death; and after I began to mend, Julia consented to marry Cethegus. If she chooses to do this, how can I be accused of destroying her happiness?"

“ You could not justly be. I spoke as I did merely to show how strong my feeling is. You owe your life to your country, Marcus. With a woman like Julia at your side, you can win honor and do Rome noble service. What can you do if you wed a Hebrew woman? Nothing. You would be of no more value to Rome than the legionaries who were slain at Cannæ and lie buried by the Aufidus.”

“ Surely, father, you are wrong. In the soldier’s life it is valor and strategy that count. If I lay low my country’s enemies, what will the Romans care whether the woman who sits at my fireside was born within the walls of Servius Tullius or on a foreign shore? ”

“ The battlefield is not the only place to gain advancement. In these strange turbulent times it is not the best place to gain it. You have begun your career here in Rome. Here is the field where the richest harvests are to be reaped.”

“ But not by him who swings the sickle like a hireling. It is the man who travels far, sleeps under foreign skies, mingles with many races, and follows the Roman eagles across deserts and through forests who will best mold these Romans to his will and magnify and widen their dominion. And while he is gaining this wider knowledge and acquiring power of command, his wife can only guard his hearth-fire. Whether she be Roman or alien, she is alike powerless to help him.”

“ She can help him more than you realize. You are too young to understand how wide is woman’s domain and how potently she rules in it. I tell you, you

will make a mistake that you will pay for all your days if you marry this alien girl, beautiful and winsome and unselfish though she be. You will ruin your career."

"That could not be. At the very least I can give Rome the service of an honest man and bring up my children to love her and honor her and, if need is, die for her. And in these days of uncleanness and debauchery that is no small thing to do."

"It is far less than you ought to do."

"Well, be it so then! Better far the smaller service that comes from a pure sweet home than the larger one that is offered by a heart unsatisfied and a mind never at peace with itself."

No more was said at the time, but the convictions of neither were shaken and several times the battle was fought out anew. How it would ultimately have gone if one of the contestants had not received a quite irresistible support, it is hard to say. But to Marcus the support came, and it came in the person of Merari. His consent was not indeed immediately asked. Naarah naturally would not ask it. Marcus was not ready to ask it till he had overcome his father's opposition. But the wise old Hebrew understood the situation. He read it in his granddaughter's grave looks and Marcus' troubled face. Without waiting to be questioned, he himself begged Naarah to tell him if her loss of cheerfulness was not due to her having set her heart on something she despaired of gaining.

"Yes, grandfather," was Naarah's simple and quiet answer.

"And has Marcus the son of Agrippa set his heart

upon the same thing also? ”

“ Yes, grandfather.”

“ I thought as much and I think I know why you both are so cast down. There is an obstacle in the way. But do not despair. I think I can overcome it.”

“ Then you approve? ” cried Naarah in a burst of joy, while she clasped her hands and held them out appealingly.

“ No, my child,” said Merari, shaking his head sadly and solemnly. “ I do not approve. But neither do I forbid. I dare not forbid, for I fear I should be resisting Jehovah’s will if I did so. But no more. You are never to know all that is in my heart. Be satisfied with this: Your happiness is everything to me and I shall not only not stand in the way of it but I shall do what I can to see that it is secured.”

Understanding perfectly that Marcus was finding it difficult, perhaps impossible, to win his father’s consent to his marriage with a foreign woman, Merari went to Agrippa to plead the cause of the two lovers. Received with marked cordiality, in which there was yet discernible a shade of embarrassment, Merari at once approached the unwelcome subject.

“ You are no doubt aware,” he said, “ that your son desires to marry my granddaughter Naarah.”

“ I am.”

“ And probably you know too that she returns his affection.”

“ I have my son’s assurance of it, which of course I do not doubt.”

“ Then why do you stand in the way of their hap-

piness?"

"How do you know that I do?"

"How could I help knowing it? Their own dejection tells me. And do I not know the unbending Roman pride? You are deeply opposed to this marriage because you think it will injure your son's career. Is it not so?"

"It is so. And my deep respect for you must not prevent me from telling you that 'injure' is too mild a word. If Marcus marries your granddaughter, he will ruin his prospects for advancement."

"So speaks the Roman, arrogant even when he would be just. Have you no sense of shame in saying this, knowing as you do that these two are rarely suited to each other and their love is deep and honorable?"

"Why should I have sense of shame?"

"Because you let prejudice rule you and possess you. Because you set ambition, rank, and fame above the joys of a contented home and offspring that will be the fair fruit of a pure and noble love."

"You are using the same argument my son has used. I do not find it convincing."

"It convinces me, a Hebrew. Much more should it convince you, a Roman."

"What mean you by that?"

"I mean, it is I, not you, that has reason to oppose this marriage, did I look, as you do, to baubles instead of jewels. For my nation is older far than yours. It has had a far more wonderful and glorious history. Yes, so splendid, so distinguished, so unparalleled has been its past, that the Hebrew thinks of marriage with

a foreigner as something defiling and unclean.”

“Strange words these to be used of a youth like my son Marcus, with his perfect rectitude and his sure rise to fame and honor — sure, that is, if he does not spoil all by indiscretion.”

“No, not strange, if you knew how through more than a thousand years the one true God, whom you mock by erecting graven images to worship, had made himself known to my people and visited them with peculiar favor. Yes, uncounted generations before this city of which you are so proud began to grow here by the Tiber, our great forefather Abraham was led by Jehovah into our own blessed country and there he founded our nation. In a time of famine his descendants went down into Egypt and were there made slaves. Jehovah delivered them by a great deliverance. To lead them through the desert and the wilderness back to the borders of their own chosen land he raised up Moses and talked with him face to face — Moses who could lift up his hand and call down the wrath or the healing mercy of Jehovah; Moses, a man so mighty and august that your Scipios and Cæsars are but children when compared with him. And when he passed, other great leaders were raised up who brought my people into the land of promise and helped them to subdue the fierce and stubborn foes that there awaited them.”

“Did they subdue them? If so, the story is not known, as is that of the great victories the Greeks won over the Persians.”

“It is not known because my nation has been iso-

lated; but it is a far more wonderful and glorious story. Yes, we subdued our enemies because Jehovah fought upon our side. In a single night he destroyed scores of thousands of those who came to conquer us. He raised up David and Solomon to rule us. Under them Jerusalem, the seat of our sacred temple, became great and splendid a thousand years ago, long, long before Romulus and Remus lived and founded Rome."

"And yet to-day Rome rules Jerusalem."

"To-day, but not to-morrow, Rome is corrupt. Rome is tottering. You know it. But to my people Jehovah has promised a Messiah, a leader greater than the world has ever known, who will make the Hebrew nation more glorious and mighty than Rome is now when the world has passed beneath her yoke. To this day my people are looking forward. They know it is to come. There are many signs that show the times are ripe for its coming. My people are strong and conscious of their strength. Rome is growing more shameless every day. Our power will increase. Yours will wane. Your palaces and temples will moulder on these hills; Jerusalem will shine with a luster that will brighten through the years.

"Well then may we look with horror, almost with loathing, on marriage with those who are not of our own blood, yes, even with you Romans who look down on all the world. Your worship is impure. Ours is holy. Your blood is tainted; ours is clean. So justly do we hold ourselves in isolation because we are God's chosen people, so sacredly do we maintain our race from alien mixture, that we do not easily forgive those

who marry foreigners and bring an unknown strain into their offspring's blood.

"Do you think then that I welcome this union of your son Marcus, vigorous and splendid as he is, with my beloved child? Ah, no! The thought of it has cost me many and bitter tears. But I accept it, even though it may almost make me and my granddaughter outcasts when we go back to our own land. I accept it because I fear my child's heart will be broken unless I do. I accept it above all because, as I look back at the strange ways in which these two have been so many times brought together, I see the hand of Jehovah overruling my unrighteous will and guiding them to each other. I accept it. Can you do less?"

Agrippa's answer was long in coming. Realizing how much Merari had sacrificed in sanctioning a marriage which at heart he so disapproved, he did not feel able longer to withhold his own consent. But his pride still rebelled and it made his reply, when it finally came, of the briefest. It was not till he had held Merari many minutes in suspense that he finally rose, clasped the Hebrew's hand warmly and said,

"No, I can do no less."

Sadly, and yet eagerly because of the joy he was to bestow, the old man returned to his home and made known the glad news. He made it known to Marcus and Naarah together, and then bidding Naarah kneel at the bedside he joined Marcus' hands with hers, and with outstretched arms and eyes lifted heavenwards repeated solemnly,

"May Jehovah bless you and preserve you. May

Jehovah be merciful and gracious unto you. May Jehovah let the glory of his own face shine upon you and give you peace."

XLI

MARCUS had sent for Cethegus in the early days of his first recovery because he was anxious to hear him tell how he had been able to save Naarah from Delphium's murderous anger. Before his other chosen comrades had had opportunity to visit him, his relapse came and only his father had been admitted to Merari's house. But as he again recovered health and spirits his thoughts turned warmly to the friends with whom he had spent many a pleasant hour, and he thought regretfully that the merry-makings they had had together would never be repeated.

Yet in spite of the pleasure with which he recalled some of the happy evenings at Delphium's when wit was lively and the jests were droll and telling, he rejoiced that he was leaving the old roistering life forever behind him. He had largely emancipated himself from it when he began to serve under his father; he was now to wash his hands of it completely. Was it a thing to be ashamed of? He hardly knew. Certainly he had never let it lead him into unclean and dishonorable ways. And but for it he would never have found Naarah. So he was not able to think with utter condemnation of the turbulent pathways he was to tread no more. But the old days of turbulence were well ended. Of that there could be no doubt. To break with the friends who had shared them was

a different matter. That brought a pang. Nor need he indeed break with them all. With some he had shared his better self, his deeper thoughts and feelings. These he longed to see now, even before he was on his feet again. The others he would meet later; he could hardly bring them into the house of the austere and reverent-minded Hebrew. So Bibulus and Caius and Curio and Bibrax had to wait for a greeting from their old boon companion. Lentulus and Milo were sent for and appeared one day together not long after Merari had given his sanction to the union of Marcus with his grandchild.

"Ah, friend philosopher," cried Marcus heartily to Lentulus, "I can imagine how puffed up you are with virtuous pride as you see me lying here. I read your mind. You are thinking: '*I don't go to wine rooms and make enemies of surly door-keepers. I don't go to vicious haunts like Euthro's. And so I don't get stabbed in the back for my follies.*' Well, wisdom is on your side. Exult as much as you please!"

"Nonsense, Marcus!" answered Lentulus, coloring slightly. "I did not come here with any such thoughts in my mind. Milo and I came simply to tell you how thankful we were that you are alive and getting well. Your friends have had some very unhappy hours. There were days when we were told there was no hope for you."

"Yes," added Milo, "we who have so often shared the triclinium with you had a heavy heart when the news of you was so discouraging. That banquet I

gave you has often come to my mind. You came to it quite down-hearted, and the mood that was on you seemed like a forecast of the troubles that followed. Soon after it occurred the encounter with Styra at Pluto's Cave and the falling out with Delphium's door-keeper; then followed the duel with Styra; then the break with Delphium; and then, worst of all, the terrible evening at Euthro's and the assault that nearly cost you your life. What does it all mean, Marcus? Has an evil fate been pursuing you?"

"Ask Lentulus!" said Marcus, as he cast a mischievous glance at the Stoic. "He is an authority on such questions."

"No, Marcus!" quickly rejoined Lentulus, whose face again showed a slight tinge of red. "I am not authority. I only use my judgment about such matters; and all can do the same."

"Yes, but what does your judgment tell us?"

"Why, if you really want to know, it says that you have been paying the penalty for — well, as you are still prostrate from your wound we will say, for being a man of action."

"Just what I said when you came in, Lentulus," cried Marcus exultingly. "You are fairly trapped. You cannot help being the philosopher and the moralist however hard you try. You still believe that we have nothing but reason to guide us? That there is no such thing as fate or destiny? That the future is never revealed to us? That we have no proof that we live on after death?"

"Surely. That is what we have to think if we

listen to reason."

"Reason is our only guide? There is nothing else, nothing better?"

"No, there could not be. Many think there is, but they are weak-minded. They let their reason be swayed by superstition or sentiment."

"Put me down among the weak-minded, Lentulus! I told you I did not think it was mere chance that brought me face to face with the Hebrew maid, the granddaughter of Eliud Merari, in whose house we are, not once but three several times. I told you I felt that I was going to meet her again. And meet her you know I did. I found her at that dreadful haunt of Euthro's. I carried her home. I was wounded nearly to death very close to her door. She nursed me to life and I am going to marry her when I am well."

"You are going to marry her!" exclaimed Lentulus and Milo together in surprise.

"Yes, I am going to marry her. You are both, I can see, thinking something that you would not say. You are thinking it strange that I am to marry an alien woman. That reason of yours, Lentulus, would no doubt say it was unwise. But my heart says something different, and hearts have always had a way of dictating to the reason in matters of love. Of course this is very shocking to philosophy; but still, they will do it. Perhaps you will sometime find it out for yourself, Lentulus."

"I think not," replied Lentulus with steady gravity. "Reason and I are such close allies that I do not

believe our relationship will ever be ruptured or even strained. But reason and philosophy do not frown on friendship and good feeling. I am a man before I am a Stoic, Marcus, and I congratulate you with all my heart. I am sure your feeling is deep enough to make your choice a wise one. May it bring you life-long happiness!"

"And the richest, fullest happiness a man can get," added Milo heartily; "for you deserve it, Marcus. But the news gives me pain as well as joy. I fear that marriage with this beautiful foreign girl may mean that you will go and live in her country and among her people."

"I am afraid that will have to be so for a time."

"And we shall miss you sorely, Marcus," continued Milo with a grieved and saddened look, "even as we missed you after you took service under your father. There is no one like you, no one to take your place."

"We have been good friends, Milo. I shall not forget you. You have been generous and true."

"And I thought we were sometime going to be closer friends than ever. I had hoped you would marry so as to make us brothers. Nothing could have gratified me more than that. You are the one man in the world whom I would have been glad to take to my heart in that way. But it was not to be."

"It was good of you to think of me in that way, Milo. But Cethegus is an honorable man and a very shrewd and clever one. He is ambitious, too. I am sure he will help your sister to win the place she wants and ought to have in this great capital of ours."

“Yes, Cethegus is clever and he is ambitious. I think he will give Julia the life she craves. But Cethegus isn’t you, Marcus. I can’t say more.”

“You have said all there is to say, Milo,” said Lentulus heartily. “Cethegus isn’t Marcus. No man is. You will leave a great gap here when you go and live in Judæa, Marcus. We shall never cease to miss you. Philosophy is a good guide; as an intimate bosom friend to share feelings and opinions with, she is not all that can be desired. She does not even talk back to you. Why, I enjoy arguing with you, Marcus, just because you do have a liking for fate and dæmons and superstition and all manner of imagined things the philosopher cannot believe in. Yes, I shall miss you greatly.”

Milo and Lentulus took their leave and Marcus found a sober feeling taking possession of him as they departed. Would he find such genial intimates in Naarah’s country?

XLII

FOR to Naarah's country it was fully decided that they were to go. This Merari demanded and Marcus could but acquiesce.

"You are taking all I have," the old man said to him on the day when he first found himself able to rise from the bed he had kept so long. "You are taking as fair and pure a maid as ever comforted the declining years of a lonely man. Do not rob me of her altogether. I wish to spend my last days in the land of my own people. Go with me there, I pray, that my old eyes may be gladdened by the sight of you both as they grow dim to the things of the world. Go to my own land and live with me there through the few brief years that are before me! After that all the world is yours."

"Willingly will I do so. It would be wrong to do anything else. My debt to you is greater than can ever be paid; all I can do to pay it, I will do most gladly. And I can still serve Rome while living in your far away land. My father will find some post of duty for me there. We will all dwell there together and you shall share our joy."

Such a post Agrippa easily secured. Marcus was made a centurion, with the special task of watching and reporting on the course of events in Judæa where there had already been an outbreak under Pontius

Pilate and the air seemed rife with discontent and sedition. Nor was it as a man without substance that Marcus was to go into this far away country and live among an alien people. On the day that Agrippa told his son of his appointment to the centurionship he said to him,

“I am sorry you have to go to a land so distant from Rome, but it is right that you should and you will not go empty-handed. I have been waiting for your marriage to tell you that your uncle, Pherecles Silanion, your mother’s brother, bequeathed to you a considerable property when he died a number of years ago. While he was serving in Spain he became possessor of a silver mine which made him rich; and as he never married he made you his heir. That property I shall now make over to you, and you need not therefore feel any scruples about marrying the granddaughter of a very wealthy man who will in time inherit all he possesses.

“The rank I have obtained for you, that of centurion, is not high; but it is as high as you could fairly expect considering your years and your lack of experience. You must rise from it through your own proved capacity, not through any influence of mine. That your marriage will make it difficult for you to rise high, I have told you plainly. But you must do your best and you have no mean opportunity before you. You are going into a country which Rome is watching with interest and solicitude. Merari’s people are as proud as the Romans themselves, as exultant over their past history, as headstrong and arro-

gant, and possibly when roused as warlike. Watch them and study them closely, and from time to time write me the results of your observations. Naturally you will have a peculiarly kindly feeling toward them now that you have chosen to marry one of their own nation; but that you will be unswervingly loyal to Rome I shall never for a moment doubt."

As Merari succeeded in settling his affairs at Rome much earlier than he had thought possible and as he was impatient to return to his own country, Marcus and Naarah were married only five months from the day when they were for the first time so strangely brought together. A few days previous Cethegus was wedded to Julia. When Naarah was informed of it she looked grave and serious, even as she did when Marcus had told her that the two were betrothed. Her mind went back to the moment when she had seen Julia borne in Marcus' arms at the Theater of Marcellus, and she reproached herself for the hasty and unfavorable judgment she had then formed of her. The trying interview she had had with her had revealed a nature which, though arrogant and scornful, could yet feel and suffer; and Naarah was pained that it should have missed the one supreme joy it had craved. To the end of her life she thought of the beautiful daughter of Veltrius with tenderness and sympathy. But Marcus augured happiness and increasing satisfactions from this union that had made his own marriage possible. It was well that he should think so and his feeling was not without justification. Julia longed for just that splendid and exalted life

which, with Cethegus to aid her and to be inspired by her own ambition, she seemed likely to attain. That her disappointment would outlive the blandishments of worldly station, Marcus was not vain enough to believe. Does a man ever understand perfectly that only love can satisfy the hunger in a woman's heart?

It was arranged that the voyage to Palestine should be from Ostia. To this port at the mouth of the Tiber a small boat carried Merari and his two children, as he called them, on a mild and beautiful morning in early December. The old man was full of eagerness to reach the home of his fathers and tread once more the soil made sacred by the holy men who had lived and died there and interpreted the will of Jehovah to the erring and sinful generations. That he himself was to witness mightier happenings than the ancient prophets had beheld, he did not dream. Nor did Marcus foresee that the land to which he was traveling with youth's fond anticipations would bring to him a profound spiritual awakening and change utterly his ambitions and the currents of his life.

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