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THE BEAUTY OF THE PURPLE

A Romance of Imperial Constantinople Twelve Centuries Ago

BY

WILLIAM STEARNS DAVIS

LONDON

LEONARD PARSONS

DEVONSHIRE STREET

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

This romance attempts to show forth something of the brilliancy, magnificence and teeming life of Christian Constantinople in an age when London and Paris were little better than squalid villages. It also tries to tell the story of the rise and the mighty deeds of Leo the Isaurian, that peasant youth who saved Constantinople and the Later Roman Empire from the Saracens, and thereby postponed for seven hundred years the extension of Moslem supremacy in the Near East. Historians are now well agreed that by his victorious defence of "New Rome" in 717-718 A.D., far more than by the repulse of the Saracen raiders by Karl Martel at Tours fifteen years later, Christian civilization was rescued from Islam, and that it did not come to pass (to quote Gibbon's famous words) that "the interpretation of the Koran was taught at Oxford, nor did her pulpits demonstrate the sanctity and truth of the revelation of Mohammed."

The tale of Leo's humble origin, his interview with the strange prophets from Syria, his astonishing rise to high command and then to Empire, of his battles by land and sea against the Saracens and of the unexpected discovery and terrific use of "Greek Fire" in the great siege of Constantinople, are rescued from the half-forgotten pages of such monk-chroniclers as Theophanes and Nikephoros.

Those who recall the well-authenticated accounts of how the Emperors Constantine VI, Staurikos and Theophilus choose their brides will not doubt the precise story of the award of the "Golden Apple" given here in the final chapter. Those familiar with the characters of such Emperors as Maurice, Leo the Armenian, Nikephoros Phokas and Basil II, will find confirmation of the statement that Leo the Isaurian like them was a man of deep and unaffected religious faith.

Constantinople in the eighth Christian century was a Greek-speaking city for all the boasts of its inhabitants that they were "Romans" and their metropolis "New Rome." In spelling proper names therefore, while those that have a familiar Latin form have so been given, those less familiar have ordinarily been spelled by transliteration from the Greek.

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CONTENTS

	PAGE
PROEM—BY THE OAKS OF ST. THEODORE	1
CHAPTER	
I. A HUMAN CHATTEL APPROACHING NEW ROME	23
II. A WHARF BY THE GOLDEN HORN	34
III. HOW FER GAL FOUND A MISTRESS	47
IV. KASIA AND LEO	58
V. AT THE SACRED PALACE	71
VI. THE HOUSE OF PEACE	86
VII. THE PROCESSION OF THE EMPRESS	102
VIII. A DEACON OF HAGIA SOPHIA	117
IX. THE HOUSE OF PEACE IS VIOLATED	131
X. THE TRIBUNAL OF THE PATRIARCH	145
XI. THE UNMAKING OF THE EMPEROR	165
XII. THE VILLA AT THERAPIA	179
XIII. A NIGHT ON THE MARMORA	193
XIV. THE CAPTAIN GENERAL OF ANATOLIA	208
XV. THE ISLE OF CEDARS	222
XVI. THE PIETY OF NEOKLES	238
XVII. BY THE RIVERS OF DAMASCUS	248
XVIII. THE DIVAN OF THE KALIF	261
XIX. A HAREM TRAGEDY	274
XX. AT AMORIUM	288
XXI. THE DISCOVERY OF KASIA	299
XXII. "LEO, TU VINCAS!"	312
XXIII. THE GUESTS AT SOPHIA'S WEDDING	329
XXIV. A COUNCIL AT GALATA	344
XXV. KALLINIKOS MAKES AN ANNOUNCEMENT	357
XXVI. THE COMING OF THE SARACENS	370
XXVII. THE EMPEROR SPEAKS FOR THE MAN	385
XXVIII. THE MIRACLE OF FIRE	396
XXIX. THE GATE OF ST. ROMANOS	408
XXX. IN THE CAMP OF MOSLEMAH	424
XXXI. THE ROAR OF THE LION	440
XXXII. HOW CYRUS REDEEMED HIS SOUL	455
XXXIII. EVAGRIOS CHOOSES HIS ROAD	471
XXXIV. THE BATHS OF XEUXIPPOS	485
XXXV. THE DOGS BEFRIEND SALOMA	501
XXXVI. THE TRIUMPH OF THE LION	516
XXXVII. THE GREAT CHRISTMAS	531
XXXVIII. THE GOLDEN APPLE	549
EXPLANATION OF CERTAIN TERMS USED	569

PROEM

BY THE OAKS OF ST. THEODORE

This is the story which the monks who wrote the annals of the Christian Empire of Constantinople desired other ages to accept as true.

IN the year which later generations would reckon as 705 A.D., on a certain midsummer's day a droning peace brooded over the village of St. Theodore. The village was very small, only a few white-walled, red-tiled houses and barns clustered around the grey stuccoed dome of the little church before which opened a market-place. The latter was sprinkled with a dozen oak-trees useful for tying cattle when the Thracian farmers gathered to barter their rural products. This, however, was not a market day, and the signs of life were few except just by the church where sprawled the low buildings of a tavern and posting station. Here travellers sometimes changed horses, for St. Theodore lay on the highroad betwixt Constantinople and Adrianople, and here also diverged a way southward to Kallipolis if one wanted to cross to Asia without first going to the capital.

It was, to repeat, a sleepy moment in the early afternoon. The long-haired "pope" of the church, having intoned his last office to an empty nave, was sitting with his red-cheeked wife at one of the small tables in the shade by the tavern door, each meditating over a pot of thin country wine. Two farmers' churls were throwing dice for a stake of three coppers at the next table, while a drover, an unkempt man in a dirty sheepskin coat, leaned on his crook-topped staff and recounted his adventures to Simmias, the idling inn-keeper.

"Yes, the pigs were sold at a good price,—praised be the Panagia!^[1] The recent uproars in Constantinople have made almost a famine, though the country is still so unsettled that I feel lucky to have trudged back these fifty miles with this wallet (he slapped his thigh) without attack or adventure. When I saw the old tavern I said, 'Only three miles more to the farm,' and turned in to wet my throat after the dust."

"So old Justinian Slit-nose is back in the palace?" suggested Simmias, rubbing his face with a much-spotted apron.

"He's back and his temporary supplanters are in heaven or a place more fiery. *Ai!* but there was a strange sight! The merchant who bought the pigs got me a seat in the Hippodrome; up high, of course, but I could see very well. You know all about the Hippodrome?"

"I saw the 'Blue' chariots win there four years ago," assented the inn-keeper.

"Well, that of course was when Justinian II was in exile. St. Kosmas smite me, but I can't remember how in these queer days they change around their 'Sacred Clemencies' in the palace. Tiberius Aspimar must have been reigning then. As I remember it's just ten years since Leontios deposed Justinian, slit up his nose and packed him off to exile in Scythia; then after three years Tiberius deposed Leontios, shaved off *his* nose in turn and clapped him in a monastery."

The publican plucked at his own nose, as if to make sure that familiar ornament was still in normal condition.

"Then, d'you see," continued the drover, "after seven odd years, Justinian breaks away from exile, gets help from the Bulgarians and retakes Constantinople."

"Haven't we heard all that?" retorted the other.

"No doubt," condescended his customer, "but perhaps you haven't heard what lately befell in the city while I was there. After Tiberius Aspimar had been deposed they dragged his nigh-forgotten rival Leontios out of his monastery. The restored Justinian had the two usurpers haled around the streets in chains, of course with a mob hooting and throwing offal. Then as many of us as could packed into the Hippodrome, everybody roaring and applauding together. Whereupon in came Justinian, clad in purple and gold, so splendid he could be seen clear across the arena, with all his 'Protectors' shining in silvered armour around him. He took his seat in the Kathisma—that's the imperial box, you know—amid greater uproar still; and next they dragged in Leontios and Tiberius Aspimar. Poor wretches! They must have been nigh dead already. With my own eyes I saw them forced to prostrate themselves on the top step of the throne, and then Justinian put his right foot on the neck of one and his left on that of the other. Whereupon all the courtiers, Protectors and the Blue and Green faction leaders around the Kathisma took up a great chant, something from the Psalter, I think: 'Thou shalt tread upon the LION and the ASP, the young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under thy feet!' And there those

two miserable creatures had to lie while the chariots raced, and while we all wagered and cheered like mad. After that I've heard they took the usurpers away and chopped their heads off, also that Justinian burned out the old Patriarch's eyes and set up a new 'Holy Beatitude' on the archbishop's throne in Hagia Sophia. *Ai!* These have been brisk days in Constantinople."

Simmius crossed himself with deliberation. "When I pray to the saints to-night," said he, "I shall give thanks that I sell wine in a quiet village and am neither Emperor nor Patriarch. Fine titles are fine things, but a firm neck and two good eyes seem better. Hei?—but what's that moving in the road?"

As a matter of fact two of the roads which converged near the church were clouded with dust, the one from the city obviously by two or three vehicles, the one from the north apparently by the approach of a large flock of sheep. The wagons rolled in rapidly and soon were halting at the tavern while Simmius ran forward.

"What are the *kyrios*' commands?"^[2] he began.

The "kyrios" in this case was a tall grey man with a remarkably lengthy beard and a long dark cloak which made the pope rise abruptly from his table, ready to crave the blessing of a hegumen over a great monastery. But the newcomer, who now descended, was clearly a secular personage. He wore many rings and a heavy gold chain with a large gilt medal about his neck, and instead of the tall monastic hat a kind of black turban. His aquiline countenance made the pope sit down muttering, "A Jew."

"More probably a Syrian," whispered his wife; "see, the little girl leaving the second wagon has a crucifix hung around her neck."

Not one but two girls, aged about eleven and nine, were now clambering from under the canvas hood of the second wagon. They were bright-eyed, winsome young mortals, the older with dark, the younger with much lighter hair, but both with healthy cheeks, rosy lips and a gaze most desirous to take in all the world. An elderly maidservant descended after them, ordering sharply "not to wander"—which mandate their animal spirits, repressed by the long ride, made it hard to obey. Meantime the Syrian gentleman was joined by two other quasi-Orientals also of peculiar yet venerable aspect, who had been riding with him. The third wagon was laden with baggage, and several competent servants made haste to water the horses and summon the hostler for forage.

In the interval Simmius respectfully informed "His Most Reverend Lordship" that a government regulation required him to take the names of all travellers halting at St. Theodore. The gentleman waved his hand graciously.

"Write then that I am Kallinikos of Heliopolis—by profession a scholar of all fair learning, of late lecturer in the Imperial University at Constantinople, but now journeying to Thessalonica to expound Plato in the schools of that city. These are my daughters, Sophia and Anthusa Maria, and thus far have come with me my erudite fellow-countrymen Barses and Chioba. They, however, leave me here, going afoot to Kallipolis to get shipping for foreign parts to keep alive the divine fire of our ancient learning perchance among the western Barbarians."

This last flourish was lost on the publican as he scratched down the names on a smudgy waxen tablet. "These are your servants, I suppose," he remarked, then tactlessly added, "and your wife——"

The scholar frowned. "I am a widower," he replied curtly.

"A thousand pardons, *kyrios*; I'm only doing my duty. Now you and your very learned friends will doubtless have some of our good Thracian wine and a few figs while the horses are resting.—Holy Mother, what's that!"

This exclamation followed a piercing scream which sent the whole tavern population into the market-place. What followed took far less time than it needs for the telling. Down the Adrianople road had shambled a huge flock of sheep, baaing and bleating and nosing one another desperately to get to the little river which they sniffed as flowing just beyond the church. Onward they came, headed by an august bellwether, an emperor among rams, with huge horns and terrifying frontlet. As he led on the van of his ewes, lo! the younger maid, Anthusa Maria, roving composedly about the market-place, suddenly found herself directly in front of him. The sight of the formidable beast froze the very blood in her veins. She stood helpless to flee, paralyzed even as a bird before the proverbial serpent, shrieking and trembling from head to foot. The ram halted one ominous instant, fixed his eyes on her, bellowed raucously, and charged.

A dozen rescuers had run from the tavern, but all would have been too late to save Anthusa. Then, unwarned, out of the dust cloud of the advancing herd, came flying a human form. In full charge, the ram was caught by the horns, whirled about with a marvellous concentration of strength and skill, and flung upon his back, kicking in vain fury.

The victorious champion was instantly the centre of a gesticulating, congratulating throng composed of every one from Kallinikos to the pope's wife.... "Such a rescue! If the ram had charged Anthusa would have been killed, or at least had all her bones broken, or at least had all her breath knocked out!" So the other drovers behind guided the sheep onward to the river, and in a great flurry they had the rescuer across to the tavern.

Speedily it was evident that if the Lady Anthusa had been slightly older she might have been embarrassed to express with maidenly decorum proper thanks to her deliverer, for the vanquisher of the great ram made the good pope (who knew his Scriptures) recall a certain other lad who once "kept the sheep" yet was "ruddy and withal of a beautiful countenance and was goodly to look upon." The present youth stood straight and tall with features not perfect but sufficiently regular, short reddish hair, a reddish first beard, a firm but friendly mouth, a clear eye and a high forehead. His dress was simple yet neat, and superior to that worn by most drovers. His sandal thongs were of green leather. In his belt hung a long ivory-hilted dagger. One glance at his shoulders told (without the proof upon the ram), "He is very strong"; a second glance at his face would have added, "He is very intelligent and can be trusted."

Congratulations being over, natural inquiries followed. The youth stated with perfect frankness that he came from Mesembria, a coastal city at some distance, where his parents were prosperous peasants, and that now, with a favourite servant Peter and other adjutants, he was driving some five hundred sheep to Constantinople upon assurances of a good market. They had come through without mishap, despite rumours of Bulgarian raiders. Loud were his apologies that his ram had thus terrified the little *kyria*—it was the first misadventure of the journey. As for himself, they had christened him Konon, but he had long since been called Leo ("Lion") "because," he added simply, "I have always wished to be a soldier, and have never disliked a chance for brave fighting."

One of the Syrians regarded him closely.

"You are from Mesembria, young sir, yet your Greek seems of an Eastern flavour?"

"No doubt, worshipful father," answered Leo; "my parents are from the Isaurian mountains on the confines of Cilicia. They were part of that great band of Isaurians who were compelled, when I was a babe, to migrate to Thrace by command of the Emperor. In my home my parents still keep up their Asiatic style of speech, although at our monastery school I hope I learned fair Greek as well as how to turn over a few books."

"I knew you were no ordinary Thracian," remarked Kallinikos, with a shrug. "Isaurians as a nation have greater fame as bandits than as readers. But this is a surly return for your brave promptness! Well, young master, we must be journeying. The angels know when we shall meet again. By your looks I'm fearful you'd refuse some money. Anthusa, my dear——"

"Yes, father," from the girl who with recovered colour was clinging to his long sleeve.

"Go over to Master Leo and thank him for his strength and courage. You are not too old to pay him with a kiss."

Blushingly the reward was given: still more awkwardly was it received. Leo appeared happy when the ceremony was over. Presently, the horses having been baited and rested, Kallinikos still with dignity paid precisely the proper sum to the host. He bade a private and solicitous farewell to the two Syrians. The girls climbed into the wagon and waved vigorously to Leo as the little party drove away. The young peasant gazed after them until the wagons vanished up the Adrianople road, then, declining the broad hint of Simmias that he should order refreshment, walked to where a line of evergreen oaks behind the church indicated a clear stream and a placid meadow. His drovers with their barking dogs had driven the sheep along the marge, where they could nibble in safety, while Peter, the head servant, laid out simple provisions and the party arranged for its siesta.

* * * * *

Leo sated his hunger and spread out his cloak a little apart from the drovers. The day was sultry. An hour's slumber would not hinder the journey, but the young man (so he clearly remembered it later) saw the two venerable Syrians

sitting at a slight distance in the shade, consuming a wallet of bread and dried fish. They silently beckoned him to join them, and leaving his men he obeyed. The twain were marvellously alike in costume and person, and presumably were brothers: they gravely offered him a small silver cup of wine superior to any he had ever before tasted. He noticed now that their garments, although very plain, were of remarkably fine material, and that each wore a girdle ornamented with gold plates set in gems, and embossed apparently with the signs of the zodiac. Their manner, however, excited confidence, and Leo was soon chatting freely, explaining how the proximity of a small convent to his parents' farm had given him a tolerable education; but that, although he had no distaste for letters, he felt no vocation for a religious life, because all his ambition was to become a soldier.

"Why then, stalwart sir," questioned Barses, the elder Syrian, benevolently, "have you not enrolled in one of the Emperor's cavalry 'themes'? Your broad shoulders commend you to any recruiting centurion."

Leo laughed ingenuously. "I will tell you, good fathers. I've a mother who rules me in everything. She has an ambition for me that's so high that as long as she lives—and the saints lengthen her days!"—he crossed himself—"I fear I must stay a simple trader of sheep. She swears that I must never enter the army save as a 'Protector.'"

"A lofty ambition, Brother Barses," commented Chioba, the second Syrian, looking upon his companion fixedly. "The Emperor's life guard is reserved for youths of noble blood and courtly influence, and many even of these are denied the honour. There are few enough peasants from Mesembria in that corps."

"Well, so I told my good mother an hundred times," rejoined Leo, "yet she always repeats, 'No son of mine is good enough to lay down his bones as a common private. Join the Protectors or follow the sheep.' Heigh-ho! It's hard to be thwarted by a beloved parent!" The young man seemed far from being down-hearted, however, and Chioba continued the conversation, albeit on more general matters:

"Your mother should know that the day may come when he who can serve as a simple archer, nay, as a mere rower in the fleet, can please God better than the pious monk who wears out his knees with long prayers."

The young man surveyed the others incredulously. "Why, venerable *kyrioi*, no churchmen ever talked to me like that. It's on my conscience that last week I told old Father Eukodimos that while I presumed that God loved the monks the best, I'd have to risk getting less of His love by refusing to enter the convent."

"This is a deep matter, we will not argue," rejoined Barses incisively. "Nevertheless, it was written of old, 'To everything there is season and a time for every purpose under heaven.' But I say to you—with your own eyes you shall behold the day when all the monks in the Empire shall join in one prayer, 'That God make the hands of all Roman soldiers mighty in battle!' What know you, young man, of the state of the Empire and the power of its foes?"

"Only what is said everywhere: that the Saracens press in from the east and the Bulgarians from the north: that there is riot and mutiny in the army: that the treasury grows bare though taxes ever increase, and that every time an Emperor is changed there is a woeful spilling of Christian blood. Even in Mesembria we hear all that. But old peasants always add, 'When was there a time when the years were not called evil and the foe dangerous? The Roman Empire is ordained of God, and being ordained of God will endure forever.'"

Barses laid a long gaunt hand on that of Leo.

"Young man, give ear. No Empire is eternally ordained of God, and any Empire can perish save as its sons fight for it valiantly. We from Syria know the power of the Saracens, the Misbelievers who call on their Anti-Christ. Syria, Egypt and now Africa bend to their yoke. Every year adds to their emirates while churches become mosques. Our children forget the Gospels for the Koran. Daily are victories reported to the Kalif in Damascus. While rival emperors slay one another and the witless racing factions howl in the Hippodrome, the Kalif counsels with his divan, 'How can we strike off the very head of Christendom? How can our Prophet give us dominion over Constantinople?' Every day brings the hour of their great enterprise nearer, and that sore ordeal shall you witness with your two eyes."

Leo recoiled. The manner no less than the words of the Syrian made him ejaculate, "God forbid!"

"God forbids nothing," persisted Barses, "when lawlessness, pride, iniquity work the ruin of Empires. Forty years ago in the reign of the Fourth Constantine the Infidels came and assailed Constantinople. You know how they dashed themselves upon the walls in vain. Now yet again will their hosts advance, and beside this second onslaught the former

shall be merely as the first patter of rain before the thunderbolt. For these many years what has there been in the Roman armies save mutiny? What in the palace save tyranny? What in the capital save corrupting luxury? What in God's church save contending doctors and clutching bishops? Great was Babylon, yet for its sins Babylon fell. Great was Old Rome, yet for its sins Old Rome fell. Great is New Rome, that is to say Constantinople, but think not that God will be more kind to Constantinople than to Old Rome and to Babylon."

The young shepherd drew back yet more: the two strangers had fixed their strange eyes on him, their gaze as piercing as swords.

"Why, venerable sirs," protested the youth in discomfort, "all this to me? Am I of the great patricians to counsel about the Empire's safety? Who are you that have the right to talk thus darkly and wildly?"

"Take then this answer," returned Chioba, still holding Leo spellbound. "We are masters of the foreknowledge of the East, permitted to read the horoscopes of the nations. Twelve years shall the Moslem terror wax in strength until nigh overmastering, then in the thirteenth shall a gracious God vouchsafe deliverance. And that deliverance shall come from a man of the people——"

"What man?" cried the youth, his flesh creeping as he listened.

The two seers appeared to be speaking no longer directly to him, but seemed in dialogue between themselves.

"This is the youth our science told us we should meet," spoke Barses.

"It is he," responded Chioba.

"Sprung from Asia, but bred in Europe; born from peasant stock, yet not unlettered; bred of the cleanness of the land, and not amid the corruption of cities; strong of limb, clear of eye, faithful of purpose,—this is he."

Whereat Chioba took up the speech, "He shall fling back the Infidels. He shall purify the state. He shall renovate the Church. For hundreds of years he shall prolong the life of this Christian Empire."

"Master Leo," suddenly interposed Barses, still compelling awestruck attention, "do you not desire to be a Protector?"

"Most certainly."

"And a *spatharios*?"

"Aide-de-camp to the Emperor? Why, yes." Leo began to smile again. The jest seemed evident. The Syrians were clearly indulging in a somewhat forced pleasantry.

"And a patrician?"

"Of course—if you can make me one!"

"And Emperor?"

"By the Panagia, sirs, why not ask if I wish to have yonder brook pebbles turned forthwith into gold? Who would refuse to be Emperor?"

"So many an Augustus has said on his day of acclamation. Later he has perished miserably. It is a fearful thing to be Emperor."

"Good then," laughed the youth, making to rise, "I will cancel that particular wish. There are others I must forgo with greater pain."

But Chioba retained him with a grasp of remarkable firmness, and Leo broke out in protest: "Why do you gaze thus upon me? I begin to dislike you both. What have I, the son of plain Christian folk, to do with Syrian astrologers even if they profess the true religion?"

Chioba, however, still held him at arm's length, while Barses spoke once more, as if addressing his companion, but

with rising voice:

“He shall bear great burdens. On him shall rest the fate of millions. He shall know sorrow, care and the crushing anxiety lest after having dared all things he should fail. But after the winter shall come the time of the singing of birds, after the storm brightness, after the conflict peace. Victory over the Infidel shall attend his arms, and new life and healing shall he bring the afflicted Empire. Nations shall obey his laws, strong princes shall spring out of his loins, and a thousand years after him men shall extol his name, LEO THE ISAURIAN, Leo Augustus, Deliverer and Emperor.”

The shepherd leaped angrily to his feet, his eyes blazing.

“You make pitiful sport of an unpretending youth. The Holy Apostles forbid that such a burden should rest upon me! I beseech you both—talk as reasonable men.”

But Chioba turned on him a smile inscrutable, tantalizing and quizzical. “For this end, nevertheless, you are summoned of God. Forget it not: turn not aside to the right hand nor the left, turn not for pleasure of men nor love of women. Remember you belong not to yourself, but to the Holy Christian Empire until the Infidel peril is ended.”

“You rave wildly,” protested Leo, his wrath still kindling.

“Nevertheless,” replied Chioba calmly, “we ask you not to believe but only to remember. In all that shall come after forget not our saying and the oaks and the stream by St. Theodore. Our journey is long, Brother Barses, we must be going, for we are to carry our warning concerning the Saracen even to the Lords of the Western Franks.”

They rose and picked up quaintly carved staffs, preparing to take the road, but Barses held out his hand as if desiring a friendly parting:

“Master Leo, you have said that you desired to become a Protector. That is a bold but not quite a superhuman desire. Do you still cherish it?”

“Of course—if it were possible.”

The Syrian pointed with his long staff toward the sun. He seemed writing figures in the air. “Mark then these words. Ere the sun has sunk half way to the horizon you will be a Protector. Remember *then* all else that was spoken by Barses and Chioba.” ...

* * * * *

... Leo glanced about him. His head was upon the soft grass. He heard the brook purling over the round stones, and the wind in the oak leaves. The Syrians were nowhere, but to him came, running, Peter the herdsman. “You surely slept hard, young *kyrios*; at least I called many times and never an answer. We must get the sheep together and hasten.”

“Where are the strangers?” the youth demanded.

“I was not looking particularly, but I think I saw them pack their wallets some time since and take the road to Kallipolis.”

“A curse go with them,” muttered Leo, “if I did not merely dream all they seemed to say—what with their senseless talk, their wagging beards, and their snake-bright eyes. What could have been their jest? And so I am to be Protector in a little while? A pretty spot for induction into the corps! They say it is always done in the great court of the Palace.”

The dogs and drovers were again herding the sheep into the little market-place and Leo strode vigorously about, mustering his bleating army. But there were to be more visitors to St. Theodore that afternoon. Even while the sheep were forming their fleecy companies, great clouds of dust were seen rising over the rolling hills which covered the Constantinople road. “Horsemen: many horsemen and at speed,” hastily observed Simmias, shading his forehead, and Leo was ordering Peter to hurry the sheep back to the stream side (for armed bands often meant lawless foraging) when straight into the village galloped at full speed four riders whose tall bay steeds had carried them far ahead of the advancing squadrons.

The newcomers rode horses of superb mane, coat and limb. The housings of three of them gleamed with silver.

Silvered, too, were the peaked helmets and the coats of mail of their riders, who carried lances whence streamed blue banderoles. Over the cavaliers' backs clattered light targets likewise of silver plate, marked in the centre with crimson eagles having outspread wings. Their cloaks and the tunics under their cuirasses were of blue silk brilliantly embroidered. There were pearls on their sword hilts and on their golden baldrics. All three of them were handsome, proud-visaged young men who carried their armour superbly, but every curvet and gesture indicated that their attention was fixed on the least doings of the fourth rider, their chief.

As the horsemen whirled up, Leo as by instinct stood unafraid at military attention. Behind him shuffled and crowded the drovers and the sheep, but come what might he would not let himself be plundered unresisting. All his gaze also was upon this fourth rider.

The leading horseman wore likewise a silvered helm, cuirass and shield, but his tunic was a very deep red. Around his helmet ran a circlet of large pearls. His feet were cased in tall leather leggings dyed a brilliant purple, and each set at the ankle with a conspicuous gold eagle. All these things Leo took in at a glance as the four swept by him. They entered the market-place at full gallop, then the leader jerked back the reins and sent his powerful steed almost down upon the haunches.

"Halt!" he ordered in a voice sharp as edged steel. The three aides reined automatically and vaulted to the ground.

"Cool wine!" enjoined the leader, turning his face towards the little group that had assembled before the tavern: and at sight of him first Simmias and next all his guests and myrmidons in sheer terror dropped upon their knees, nor for a moment kept wits enough to heed the demands flung at them. Under the pearl-wreathed helmet showed forth a face aged, sensual and cynical, but every particular feature was forgotten in the realization that the nostrils had been slit hideously and then almost cut away. There was no mistaking this latest visitor to St. Theodore.

"Mercy, great Emperor," began Simmias, when at last chattering words came to him, "we are dust: we are dung: we crave your famous and ever abundant pardon!"

"Pardon for what?" roared Justinian. "If you've done anything evil do you suppose I'll spare you! Mice and lizards—you've not the courage for any genuine villainy! Move briskly, don't grovel, do what's commanded—then you can keep your skins."

The Emperor shot his eyes around the market-place, and took in the closely packed sheep and their master drover. When he fastened his gaze on Leo the youth raised his arm in soldierly salute. He did not fall on his knees.

Justinian threw up his distorted face with a brattling laugh: "Sacred wounds! What's here? A shepherd who salutes like a centurion! And this great flock of sheep? True manna from heaven, considering the plight of our commissariat. Question him, Demetrios—whose sheep are they and who is the fellow himself?"

The spatharios so ordered approached Leo and briefly learned all he desired.

"May it please the august Basileus,"^[3] he reported, "the lad says his father is a prosperous peasant of Mesembria. The sheep are to sell in Constantinople."

"Tell him," quoth the Emperor, "that the fat citizens will never grow fatter upon all that mutton. Here we have been constrained to march suddenly to save Philippopolis from the Slavs, with the capital so stripped of provisions that we've had to forage along the way to feed the army. These five hundred sheep are a gift from the angels. Give orders to the camp treasurer so his father won't weep over our requisitions, but first bid the tall boy to step nearer."

"The Emperor would speak to you," announced the spatharios to Leo.

The young peasant, not without awkwardness, but with a manly step, approached the great war horse. He saw the hideous face turn towards him.

"Tell me, sirrah," began Justinian, "why you didn't fall on your knees and bleat like all those other clowns."

"I would some day be a soldier, Sacred Clemency," responded Leo without trembling; "soldiers do not kneel before their masters. They salute their commanders, meaning that they are ready to die at their bidding."

"Nobly said. Heard you that, Demetrios? I hope all the Protectors mean the same when they salute me.—But why do

you call me ‘Sacred Clemency’?”

“I’ve heard that is the respectful way to address an Emperor.”

“And you think I am always very ‘clement’? Ha!”—the mutilated face broke again into laughter.

“I’m only a youth from Mesembria. People will talk, but I’ve no right to believe anything but good of those whom God has set over us.”

“Better and better still. If only all people had obeyed *that* Holy Gospel I wouldn’t be spurring over this accursed road to-day. You say you want to become a soldier? Haven’t you ever met a recruiting officer?”

“Often, Sacred Clemency, but my mother forbids me to enlist as a private. She consents to my enlisting only on a condition which is the same as forbidding me.”

“Your mother? Oh, Blessed Lord Jesus, who is it that obeys one’s mother any more than one’s emperor in these fearsome days! This grows ever more wonderful, Demetrios. And what is the strange condition which deprives our imperial service of such a strong-limbed fellow as you?”

“Your Sacred Clemency would be overwhelmed with anger if I told it.”

“Pah! Say it out. You aren’t Leontios or Tiberius Aspimar to need beheading.”

“May it please the Emperor, my mother is so vain that she says I can only serve if I am made a Protector.”

The three aides-de-camp nowise suppressed a loud guffaw, which however died away instantly at a withering glance from Justinian.

“Why is this, laughing jackasses? Finely have my high-born Protectors guarded me in the past! A band of silver-sheathed turncoats I call you. Leontios you ‘guarded’ lately, then Tiberius yesterday and Justinian again to-day. I wonder whom you’ll ‘defend’ to-morrow! God’s lightning blast me if I don’t recruit up the corps with more heed to valour and fidelity than to long pedigrees. What’s your name, my brave cockerel?”

“Leo, please your Sacred Clemency.”

“Leo, ‘Lion’—by all good omens! But what do you know of arms? You’ve swung something better than a scythe, I warrant.”

“I’m unskilled with many weapons but my friends say I have a ready hand and a good eye. Sometimes I have flung the javelin.”

Justinian nodded to the second spatharios. “Give him your lance, Genesisios. It’s an over-heavy weapon, but it’ll prove him. Now, my fine younger brother to Achilles, mark that knot on the oak bough over yonder. It’s a mettlesome distance, but see how near you can come to striking it.”

“I can only try, Sacred Clemency.” Leo’s heart had been pounding at first: now, however, he was perfectly cool. An inward sense was telling him that he was completely his own master. It was a fair sight to see his supple form poise itself and swing. The lance sang through the air and quivered high on the tree in the centre of the knot. The Emperor gave a deep “*Euge!*” and his aides exchanged frankly admiring glances.

“What else can you do? Can you wrestle?” demanded the monarch.

“I’ve shown a little skill, but among my fellows merely,” calmly responded the shepherd, brushing back his hair.

“Good, then; we’ll prove how little. Eustasios”—the third adjutant stepped forward—“you pass for the first wrestler in the corps. Strip off your cuirass and give this bold rascal a fall.”

Only the implicit obedience due to the purple leggings prevented Eustasios from refusing this unwelcome behest. To soil his patrician hands with the person of that dusty shepherd was anything but to his liking, but the commanding eye of the despot kept him from more than an impatient gesture. The two men stripped to their tunics. Already the van of the cavalry had cantered into the market-place and a swarm of gleaming staff officers was gathering around Justinian, whose

fondness for sudden pranks and follies was abundantly known.

Eustasios approached his adversary with an unpleasant smile, muttering just as they grappled, “Now learn, my young swaggerer, not to boast again.” But Leo, good-humoured and apparently quite at ease, parried his opening tricks, then suddenly had him round the middle with a grip of steel. The unfortunate aide felt his ribs crack. Almost before the new arrivals had ceased asking one another, “What is the Basileus’ latest pleasure?” behold the “Very Exalted” Eustasios, whose father was a Senator, whose uncle a Logothete, and whose great-uncle had been a Patriarch, lay on the dust of the market-place of St. Theodore, with Leo the peasant standing over him, and all his own comrades joining in sardonic applause.

The victor brushed the sand from his arms and neck, complacently assisted his late foe to rise, and respectfully looked towards the Emperor. Justinian beckoned towards his staff:

“Makrinos,” he summoned, and a high officer, his breast covered with broad gold medals, advanced and saluted; “how many vacancies are there now in the Protectors?”

“I think ten, Sacred Clemency.”

“I think nine, Illustrious Strategos. In these times of disloyalty we cannot ask too closely concerning noble ancestors. This lad from Mesembria can serve me better than by herding sheep or carrying a spear as a common private. It will also sound well to have men say, ‘Justinian is terrible to his foes, but honours sturdy worth before pedigrees.’ Therefore enroll this Leo among your Protectors, and assign him suitable armour, horses and allowance.” A perceptible murmur began to spread through the staff, but ceased before one bold sweep of the imperial hand: “And say to his new comrades that he is not to be mortified or misprized because his parents do not own a high palace upon the Mesē. *This is my will——*”

The autocrat had spoken. If the Emperor chose to lift an inferior subject from the dust, and enroll him in the privileged life guard what loyal officer had the right to say him nay? Instantly Leo was embraced by a score of noble arms, and flattering lips were lauding the monarch’s “remarkable judgment” and welcoming the new member of the Protectors.

“Thus shall be done unto the man whom the king delighteth to honour,” murmured the astonished village pope, silent witness of the whole proceeding.... A led horse was put at Leo’s service, then a shrill trumpet blew and the whole force of cavalry went whirling away. Some quartermaster’s men drove off the sheep, while the infantry divisions advancing by a parallel road did not enter the village.

* * * * *

Soon all was droning quiet again around St. Theodore. The sun was precisely half way betwixt zenith and horizon.

CHAPTER I

A HUMAN CHATTEL APPROACHING NEW ROME

It was very early on a warm September morning in the year 712. Justinian II had been slain in his sins more than two years earlier and Philippicus reigned in the Sacred Palace. From the quay of the little island of Proti near the eastern mouth of the Bosphorus a heavy coasting boat was setting out across the Marmora, her prow pointing towards Constantinople.

The *Holy Elias* crawled over the grey water under a lumbering triangular sail. A dense fog rested on the sea, not merely hiding the land but even making navigation dangerous. The captain, a swarthy, hawk-eyed fellow from the Archipelago, who wore a bright red sash (his name was Plato, but he was no philosopher), was fain to shift his big steering oars often, while yelling fierce orders to the half-naked boys in charge of the ponderous lateen yard. However, after he finished cursing at a tall government dromond that had shot out of the mist and almost grazed his stern, ere flying away under her double oar-bank, the fog lifted by a little, and the skipper ventured to chat with his chief passenger.

“St. Theodore smite me,” he bluntly informed the latter, “if I put out from Proti again before sun-up, without at least a better bargain than you were shrewd enough to drive last night, my good Hormisdas!”

The man addressed, who liked to pass for a Persian Christian, but who had a decidedly Semitic cast of countenance, thrust out a beak-like nose from under a dingy cloak and answered mollifyingly:

“Ah! my dear friend Plato, don’t you realize that you will get my cargo down at the wharf by the Navy Yard before the day is even started, and then pick up a most profitable fare? This trip is pure gain——”

“The Apostles grant it,” assented the skipper, turning to gesticulate his greetings to a familiar fishing boat that loomed up suddenly, “but perhaps I’ll wait all day and only get two old women merely bound for Chalcedon with a few boxes. However,” with a pious sigh, “it’s all as the Panagia sends!” Then he added, casting a calculating glance at Hormisdas’ cargo, “Why do you land your cargo first at Proti, anyway? Why not take it straight up to the city? You’ve good shackles.”

Hormisdas’ dark eye was cunning as a rat’s.

“Why not? Alas! because there is no such thing in this sinful world as Christian gratitude for kindness. Where can one lose a rogue who can pry off his fetters quicker than in the blind lanes of Constantinople? I weep still to think of what happened three years ago. As fine a pair of young Lombards as I ever handled, strong as oxen. I thought I had them snug and tight in a nice cell in Galata. They were worth fifty solidi^[4] apiece, but lo! the night before I could sell them, the devil let the twain escape. All because I treated them too well and spared the fetters! Now I’ve leased a good bagnio on Proti. They’ll first have to break prison, then swim off the island. I take them to market just a few at a time as chance offers.”

The slave-trader drew from his bosom a gold-set relic, a martyr’s finger-bone apparently, and kissed it devoutly to enlist heavenly aid for his approaching traffic. Plato shrugged his shoulders:

“My boat takes you, and I take your money, but blessed be the Four Evangelists for giving me a different calling! Last year I was voyaging off Rhodes and we were nigh snapped up by a Saracen raider. I could almost feel the shackles on my legs, and see myself on sale in the Beyrut market.”

“You’d have found those Syrian dealers wonderfully decent to their wares,” consoled Hormisdas; “for Infidels,” he added hastily.

“I’d rather not test out their good nature,” returned Plato vigorously; “however, no offense, Master Persian, it won’t be *your* sins I’ll have to account for. And do you mind telling how you came by those poor fellows here that you’ve got in those gentle fetters of yours?”

Thickness of hide being among Hormisdas’ prime virtues, he answered with oily accents, “Got ’em at Naxos down in the Islands. An Amalfi trader passed on three of ’em to me. How he got ’em is none of my business, seeing they aren’t the Emperor’s subjects, and I paid him good money.”

“You’ve no women to-day?” persisted Plato.

“Not to-day. To-morrow I’ll bring over three Gothic girls—strapping wenches, the Moors’ booty snapped up in Spain.”

“There’s a fearsome amount of kidnapping,” continued the skipper; “I pity the poor folk on the open coasts to westward, with the Infidels harrying everywhere.”

“It surely forces down the market,” assented the dealer dolefully; “I used to get forty solidi apiece for these fellows; now blessed be the Saints if I get twenty. Constantinople is glutted with slaves.”

Plato ran his eye over the four prisoners who reclined sullenly on the roof of the little cabin. “Well, that negro’ll make a good house porter for some High Excellency. That little chap chained to his ankle is a Sardinian—stupid and probably lazy. The older of the other pair looks like a regular Greek, but the fourth—the Apostles help me if he isn’t a bird with queer feathers—lank and bony enough for a hermit, tall as a pillar, with a nose like a falcon’s, and, oh, wonder! hair as red as carrots! Whence came he?”

“The Amalfian called him a Frank,” replied the trader; “but I gather he sucked his first milk in a very remote region of even those Barbarians. He can jabber the mongrel Greek of you sailors very well, and I learn that he’s called an Armorican,^[5] from a region extending far out into the Sea of Darkness. He said his name was Fergal, and that his father was a kind of chief or petty king among his half-savages.”

“All captives are ‘princes’—by their own story,” remarked Plato astutely.

“Of course; still I think his tale hangs together. His family was wiped out in a feud with another chief. As a captive lad he passed to an honest man in my own trade, and then on to another who sold him through Rialto (or Venice, as they’re beginning now to call it) to a Syrian emir. Our fellow was then several years among the Infidels at Damascus and might have come to big things had he only accepted the Prophet; but, like a pious rascal, he kept to our Holy Religion, and presently along with some fellow Christian captives he escaped by sea. However, it’s plain the Panagia didn’t want him to face the temptations of being his own master. Their crazy bark was smashed off Crete and the strand-wreckers seized him as he swam ashore half-drowned. So the Amalfian got him and then your humble servant, and to-day he’s to see Constantinople.”

“For which no doubt he’ll thank you,” leered the skipper.

“He should wax proud when I sell him for fifty solidi,” replied Hormisdas, ending the conversation by sitting down upon a coil of rope, producing a wax tablet and beginning a calculation.

Plato resumed his attention to the helm. Meantime the four human chattels, dumb and silent at first, were beginning to take interest in their surroundings. The negro indeed, ignorant of every Christian tongue, could only grin and gesticulate to his involuntary comrade, the Sardinian, but the elderly Greek found the Armorican, shackled by a short chain to his own ankle, more communicative. The two perforce sat close together, the younger man cupping his hands around his eyes while peering into the mist.

“Heigh-ho!” declared the Celt at length with a bitter grin. “What can’t be cured must be endured—an old saying, I take it, in every country. To-day I’m sold again like a pig or a sheep, but at least it’ll be in a city which the old monks by my father’s smoky hall chattered about, and which the emirs in the Kalif’s palace at Damascus envied. Hardly can I believe that Constantinople can rise to a tenth of its fame.”

His companion, a grey, unkempt fellow, and very melancholy, looked up listlessly from his tattered cloak: “You’ll see the city all right; too much of it, I fancy, if Hormisdas sells us, as he probably will. Curse my eyes! Wasn’t I second cook to a turmarch, free in everything but name, and happy and fat at Corinth? Then that wretched affair of the missing silver cups—what if I *did* know who snitched them! Ten years ago I quitted Constantinople expecting to come home a Senator perhaps, and now——”

He spat disgustedly into the gliding water.

“Don’t take on, friend Neokles,” soothed the Armorican with a friendly glint in his shrewd young eye. “The Saints send us all foul weather. At least I’m comforted that this time I’m like to get a Christian master and not an Infidel. Forget

the cups and if we can't make a merry morning, why, make the best of a sad one. Did you live long in Constantinople ere your master went to Corinth?"

"Most of my days," grunted Neokles, a bit less surly.

"Well then, let us pretend we do not enjoy this jewelry"—Fergal cast a spiteful glance at his leg shackle—"and that I am some brisk merchant nearing the city to sell and not to be sold. You are my guide and travel companion and shall tell me everything."

"An idle game," growled the ex-cook.

"Yet play it for lack of a better. Lift up your head, man, and look about you."

Neokles shook himself. He was indeed the victim of black thoughts, but the Celt's elasticity and cheerfulness even in such an hour were not quite to be resisted. He peered out into the mist.

"Still fog everywhere. The Marmora's often full of it in the autumn."

"See where the sun is just creeping up to eastward. I get the thin tracery of a sky-line. Hills, masses of cypress trees and buildings. What are they?"

Neokles' face lightened. "Chrysopolis,"^[6] he exclaimed, standing up. "We are nearer in than I reckoned. We will be in the Golden Horn in half an hour."

"The fog is lifting!" rang the voice of Plato. "Shift the sail, you brats! We'll get the breeze and make the Point of St. Demetrios and the harbour on this tack."

Fergal leaped also to his feet, almost tripping his companion. The fog was rolling away in a smoky gauze, which still hung closely over the choppy waves, but through it now were lifting dimly masts by sea, and ghostly domes and pinnacles by land. Straight across the *Holy Elias*' clumsy bows shot an elegant barge, her sixteen oars pumiced white and leaping with mechanical rhythm. They caught the gilding and brave colours on her curving prow, the rippling scarlet canopy on the stern, the brilliant dresses of two or three women beneath the canopy.

"A patricianess going to visit some convent down the coast. The liveries, I think, of the great house of Bringas." Neokles forgot his sorrows in his kindling excitement.

Instantly Fergal became aware that all about Plato's sordid bark there moved shipping. A tall merchantman laden perhaps for Sicily was working out into the Marmora, her sails still flapping on the yards, and her sailors chanting lustily as they plied the long sweeps. A deeply laden barge glided past. On her decks was a sheen of white marble. "Pillars from Proconnesus for a new wing to the palace, I take it," confided Neokles, his spirits momentarily rising. This was passed by a more speedy fishing boat, her brown sails set like picturesque pinions, her decks swarming with the orange-capped crew, plying keen knives as they cleaned their catch for market. Ever and anon out of the fast-dispersing mist would shoot *caiques*—slim, elegant skiffs of beechwood, with upturned prows and cushioned sterns, a pair of boatmen making each skim the waves like a swallow, while again like swallows they were darting hither and thither.

Close behind Plato's bulwarks sped one of these craft. Fergal could almost touch the passengers in the stern, a young man and a young woman. He could even sniff the redolent musk of their festival garments, and catch a few words of the song they were merrily raising together. Then a little knot of mist covered them. Slavery and rejoicing license had met and parted each for its separate destiny. Nevertheless, the reaction upon Fergal was not unpleasant; in a city thus sending forth its messengers of wealth, mirth and ease, how could it prove all sorrow for him?

"This pair seem very gay together," spoke he. "Does Constantinople begin its merry-making so early?"

"They are off on an all-day lark to Kartalimen, where there are delightful pleasantries for little money, but we'll find troubles enough after we've landed," responded the other captive, shaking his head again.

"But look, Neokles! Oh! marvel, the light!"

The sun had shot above the dark contours of Chrysopolis. A sudden puff from the Marmora sent the last mists flying. As by magic the great veil to westward over the imperial city melted, and before the wondering eyes of the Armorican

was spread out the majestic panorama of “New Rome”—of Constantinople—under the young light every detail from headland to headland standing forth with intense clearness of line and rigour of colour.

Fergal had seen many lands amid involuntary wanderings; he had heard of the present spectacle many times. Yet the reality surpassed all fame.

The *Holy Elias* was gliding steadily up the entrance of that mile-wide river, the blue Bosphorus. On the left, washed by the Marmora waves, for over five miles extended a vast circuit of imposing seawalls crowned by a magnificent confusion of greenery, terraced roofs, domes, enormous piles and stately pinnacles. The reach of the fortifications ran off dimly into the distance, almost beyond the scope of human eye. To the right were now revealed the white mansions and cypress groves of Chrysopolis with white and yellow villages crowding down to the Asiatic shore. Not far from these, lifting ruddy masses from the sparkling deep, rose the rough contour of unhappy Proti and behind her the larger bulks of Chaleitis, Pityusa and their sister “Isles of the Princes.” Straight ahead was opening the Bosphorus, one retreating vista of villa-crowned hills, terraced vineyards, nestling towns and frowning towers.

But Fergal’s gaze was all ahead and to the left, while, overcome by the once familiar spectacle, Neokles had dropped on his knees and was praying wildly:

“Oh! ye Saints who make blessed this immortal city, whose images never lack your multitudinous candles, whose relics are worshipped by a million, have pity on my plight!” Then the elder captive pointed in a kind of ecstasy to a majestic gilded dome supported by vast masses of grey masonry.

“Hagia Sophia,” he cried, “the temple beyond compare!” Fergal himself was fain to stand awestruck, trying to make his eyes bring some order out of the amazing spectacle, until Neokles recovered from his emotions enough to answer and explain. At last he began to point and wax eloquent:

“Right before us is now the imperial residence: not a palace of course, but a marvellous enclosed park, a mile and a half long and jutting out into the Bosphorus. You see how it rises terrace above terrace out of the sea. That two-storied building with long tiers of round-topped windows is the Bukoleon, a special residence beside which is the private haven for the Emperor’s yachts. A state dromond is at the quay even now. Those waving tropical trees are in the incomparable imperial gardens. All that confusion of lofty buildings contains the halls of state and the government ministries. Behind these of course extends the city itself. You can count most of the Seven Hills. Hagia Sophia is on the nearest, but all are crowned by some mighty edifice or tower. The Hippodrome is hidden behind the palace compound, but try to number the domes of the churches silvered or gilded:—that lesser one near Hagia Sophia is Hagia Irene,^[7] further south you see Hagia Anastasia,^[8] far away on another hill is the second noblest of them all, “Holy Apostles,” where they bury the Emperors. Yonder column is that of Constantine overlooking his own great Forum——” But here Neokles overran his eloquence, gloomy thoughts enforcing silence, and Fergal was left to drink in the spectacle unaided.

Plato shifted the helm, hugging close to the walls of the palace, so that on the battlements above could be seen pacing the silver-armoured guardsmen of majesty. Then as the wind bore them around a fortified headland, suddenly there flashed forth a new vista. A long, deep inlet of the sea was revealed, its length again fading into the distance. On the left hand, as the coaster turned westward, the buildings of Constantinople (no longer restrained by walls) seemed crowding tier above tier down to the harbour’s edge. Brightly coloured wooden houses appeared, mingled with marble palaces. Everywhere waved foliage. There were even gleams of flowering gardens. Churches, columns, residences, public buildings, colossal statues, many-storied dwellings, all were thrown together in an astonishing disorder.

These were on the southern bank of the harbour, while on the northern apparently rose another city of innumerable black buildings and of labyrinthine lanes, backed in turn by a lofty ridge. This was crowned with yet more cypresses and gardens, and by masses of white houses with nobly wooded hills spreading out beyond the range of vision.

“The Golden Horn?” queried Fergal, and Neokles recovered enough from his black mood to nod, and add: “Here to the north is Galata; on the height above is Pera. *Ai!* Our voyage is soon over; we’ll know our fates!”

But now the progress of Plato’s craft slackened. The entrance to the Golden Horn was one jumble of vessels. Deeply laden corn ships from the Black Sea and Crimea were contending for the fairway with lighter traders from Salonica and Smyrna. Fearful were the curses exchanged betwixt the mariners as their craft barely avoided collisions; reckless were the taunts hurled at the larger ships by the rowers of the numberless caiques which shot daringly across every path of

danger. Over them all hung the sapphire sky of morning, flinging its light into the yet bluer water. The Armorican stood for the instant transfixed, forgetful of present chains and impending barter.

“I thank ye saints,” he spoke aloud in his own Celtic tongue, “that I am suffered to behold this miracle. Now I understand what often I have heard of Constantinople, ‘If men there could be immortal, this city would be very heaven!’ ”

“Here comes Hormisdas after us,” croaked Neokles at his elbow. “The devil wither him! Now our troubles begin.”

As the ex-cook spoke, Plato dexterously seized with a boat hook one of the large bronze rings set along the quays. The long yard fell with a clatter. Hormisdas flourished an ugly, loaded cudgel.

“Here, you four, ashore with you! Don’t trip over your chains, and get a pair of you drowned together. The sun is high and a customer may have come and gone already.”

... And thus it was that Fergal the Armorican, second son of a kinglet of Vannes, set foot in New Rome.

CHAPTER II

A WHARF BY THE GOLDEN HORN

THE “Stairs” or Wharf of Chalcedon rose from the Golden Horn close to the Neoria, the Imperial Navy Yard, while a little westward was the frequented landing place for the ferry from Galata.

Close by the ferry station was a fish market, where imposing piles of Bosphorus mullet, pilchards, tunny, Black Sea turbot and swordfish were spread upon the pavement to be vociferated over by ardent buyers and vendors, and sniffed by the ubiquitous mangy dogs. Nearer the Dock Yards, however, rose the brazen statue of an ox, and beside this a more orderly crowd had mustered to listen to the morning sermon of the pillar saint Marinos.

Any loafer along the waterfront would have told you that in holy imitation of St. Simeon Stylites and others of blessed memory, Marinos had now these twenty years lived on top of a stone pillar some thirty feet in height, and about four in diameter, exposed to wind and weather, sleeping standing, and protected from falling only by a light railing around the summit.^[9] How he had trained his body to this feat was heavenly mystery not lightly to be pried into. While daylight lasted, scores would watch him, fascinated by his constant genuflections in honour of the Deity, while every morning he favoured a larger company with a sermon, usually composed of repetitious praises of the Trinity, although very often “when the fleas bit him too sorely” (said the few scoffers) he would scourge with dire prophecies the sins of the Imperial City. This day Marinos had been in his least conciliatory mood. His shrill voice had sent terror shooting down the spines of all the Slavs, Thracians, Greeks, Armenians and Caucasians in the motley throng which was gazing up at him.

“Yet forty days and Constantinople even as Nineveh shall be destroyed! Yea, it shall be with this iniquitous city as with Old Jerusalem! The angel of the Lord shall smite upon it and its gates shall lament and mourn. In place of a sweet smell there shall be a stink. In place of a girdle a rent garment.” But here Marinos’ eyes lit on the wimple of some female hanging on the edge of the crowd. “Woe, too, unto all ye mincing women, who walk with stretched-forth necks and wanton eyes!” His voice rose to a passionate scream. “Therefore the Lord will smite with the scab their heads and will take away their tinkling ornaments and their round tires like the moon. For your sins are great, I say unto you, and none shall deliver any of you in your hour of desolation!”

“He means that the Saracens will soon take the city,” shivered a caterer, picking up his portable oven, wherein meat was roasting to hawk to the passers-by.

“It’s an awful doom—they say the Infidels advance daily,” groaned back an Armenian porter, lifting an enormous bale to the pad on his shoulders and staggering away.

Meantime Marinos, his gust of passion peacefully subsiding, leaned over his railing and carefully drew upward a small bucket of beans, his daily ration, attached to a cord by the porter of a near-by chapel. The crowd melted. The traffic along the quay thickened. Marinos, apparently a gaunt individual, one mass of filthy hair and clad in an equally filthy sheepskin, began devouring his meal with great equanimity.

There was a constant scurrying of loose-trousered Bulgars, yellow-faced Huns, tall Persians with peaked sheepskin caps, and of swarthy Greek stevedores and sailors, but no visitors of note until a sudden “Way there!” from an outrider indicated travellers of quality. A gaily painted wagon rattled upon the quay. Its panels were adorned with excellent pictures of the martyrdom of St. Stephen. The harness of the two mules was set with silver. The canopy curtains were embroidered with the story of Adam and Eve. A dapper brown Coptic boy, its driver, went cracking his whip almost down to the very water edge, then drew up with a flourish, close to the base of Marinos’ pillar. Hormisdas, evidently expecting the arrival, presented himself beside the wagon with a fulsome smile.

The curtains opened and there appeared a stoutish man and a woman. The former was still in his thirties, but his ample dark hair and beard, his long, white tunic, white veil and flat-topped black hat proclaimed him a deacon. The lady seemed of elegant figure, yet wore the black hood, grey mantle and black shoes of a religious virgin. She had dropped a veil across her face, but the gauze was thin enough to betray features regular though highly rouged, while her hands flashed with rings and all her garments were charged with perfume.

“My lord the most sacred deacon Evagrius,” bowed Hormisdas, his hooked nose nigh touching the pavement, “and

this most sacred lady——”

“My beloved ‘Spiritual Sister’ Nikosia,” confirmed the ecclesiastic.

“I count myself fortunate in her holy acquaintance,” Hormisdas salaamed again. “If your Blessednesses can deign to such carnal things, the slaves which I sent word about are ready for your approval.”

“We will see them,” announced the lady; whereupon Hormisdas waved his visitors forward to a stone bench by the waterfront, where were seated, sour and anxious, his four captives, the chains still rattling at their ankles.

“These are the two which I commend—the cook, and, let me call him, the porter. The strength of this red-headed fellow is tremendous. They breed giants in Frankland. Around your holy establishment you can find innumerable uses for him.” And here Hormisdas dissolved into flowery praise of the intelligence, industry and faithfulness of his two chattels, which was cut short when Evagrius seized the unhappy Neokles by the arm.

“Flabby! Old!” proclaimed the deacon incisively. “You say he was a cook in a good house? Sold for thieving, then! He’s dear at five solidi.”

“Thirty! A gift at thirty, most sacred Reverence,” cried Hormisdas.

“Well, let’s try the other.” Evagrius gripped Fergal above the elbow. At a touch of the oily hand of the deacon the Celt’s face crimsoned. His teeth gritted. “More muscle,” confessed the churchman, “and perhaps more honesty! But what can he do? We want a porter, not a barbarian mule who must be flogged into learning everything. What do you think of him, Nikosia?”

The lady pushed back her veil, confirming the impression that although past her first youth, her features were as handsome and voluptuous, as certainly her manners were coquettish.

“I think him very possible. His red head will command attention. They say those western Barbarians are usually honest. Since old Pogon died I’ve needed such a man.”

Fergal’s teeth ground harder. His ankle chain tugged at that of Neokles.

“What’s his price?” demanded Evagrius abruptly.

“Sixty solidi, most sacred Reverence.”

“Sixty solidi? The Holy Ghost deny salvation if I hear aright!” Evagrius threw up his plump hands in outraged astonishment. “Why did you waste my time if your first talking price was not at worst thirty?”

“Oh, Sacred Reverence, hearken! He is young and stalwart. Consider: forty years of service out of him. No sickness. No epilepsy. Mark well his honest countenance. Forty years of porter’s work is the least——”

A hissing noise sounded betwixt Fergal’s teeth. How the bargaining might have ended none might say, but even then across the hum of traffic came the boom of a great *semantron*, a sounding board hung in the porch of a church and struck with a mallet before every service. Immediately Nikosia dropped her veil and crossed herself devoutly, raising her hand to her forehead, then drawing it to her heart, her right shoulder and her left.

“I must go into St. Gabriel’s,” she declared, “and hear the morning ‘office.’ When it is over we can decide whether to make you a reasonable offer for this boy and the cook.”

“And I have business with the sacristan over a new chalice,” confirmed Evagrius, drawing away with her.

“Brimstone consume them,” cursed Hormisdas, the instant they were beyond hearing; “they only go to consider how far they can beat me down!”

Fergal heaved a sigh of temporary relief. He knew enough of a sinful world to take the measure of the churchly couple, and every fibre of his being swelled with the prayer that whatever his calamity he might be spared such masters. Meantime he and Hormisdas alike scanned closely, such passers on the quay as might be ambitious enough to seek a stalwart slave.

The moments sped and the Celt was dreading the speedy return of Evagrios and Nikosia, when his eye caught a gleam of bright armour moving along the quay from the Navy Yard. Two officers were approaching with swinging martial strides. Even the unversed Fergal could surmise that one was of high naval rank, while the other was perhaps his superior in the army. The dromond captain, for he was surely that, was a short, jovial-faced little man, with great brown mustaches, a resounding laugh, and a hand clapped incessantly to the hilt of a long, clattering sabre. He was in a loose red costume, wore a crimson cap set with gold lace, and sported a great array of silken tassels from his cloak and baldric.

His companion, of commanding height, was equally of ample and powerful build. His arms and hands were long; his large features, intelligent and penetrating, were surrounded with a reddish beard. He wore high, green leggings laced with scarlet thongs, and a light leather cuirass with gilt plates, over which he had thrown a loose, blue mantle. On his thick locks was a small, silvered helmet topped with a very long and raking plume. His gestures were slower, his speech less boisterous than the sailor's, yet at intervals a genial smile would flash across his fine teeth. Fergal saw donkey boys and hucksters give one glance at the numerous gold medals which sprinkled both officers' breasts, then make way respectfully. Here were men of importance.

Another wagon, more elegant than Nikosia's, its wheels and body splendid with gilt plates, had drawn up at the landing stage. The car was drawn by four superb bay horses, and around it moved a full score of gorgeously liveried menials and running footmen.

"A carriage from the Dukas palace," passed a whisper down the quay. The two officers stepped past the lackeys and stood side by side at the water's edge as a magnificent barge shot nearer. There was one clash as the perfectly trained crew unshipped the oars, then right under the eyes of Hormisdas' quivering chattels, surrounded by her maids and with a beardless fat eunuch bending and giving her the hand, a great lady all in blue silks and gold lace stepped upon the landing. Fergal caught the general murmur, "Theophano Dukas, the patrician's daughter." He saw the two officers stand in salute, then approach the noblewoman. Her manner he could notice, was polite to the sailor, and was more than gracious to the soldier.

"Thanks, indeed, my very Excellent Leo and Basil!" was her greeting. "Your homage sends me home in good humour after a weary row down from Chelai.^[10] How is your good wife, Captain Basil? And you, Sir Spatharios Leo—you have no pretty bride to ask after; but my father admires your exploits in the Caucasus and will soon bid you to dine with us and tell more of them. The Saints give you both a lucky day."

The lady extended a slim hand covered with gems. Basil kissed it politely, Leo's kiss was equally polite, and for him the hand was withdrawn a little slowly. The two officers escorted Theophano to the carriage and congéed low when her train swept away.

Basil burst into a ferocious laugh.

"Oh, dear comrade Leo! What inordinate luck! Here you've come to the quay to meet your mother from the ferry, and lo! up sweeps her Magnificence Theophano Dukas and takes it all for herself. Man!—since you returned to Constantinople your fortune's clearly made. Everybody says you're soon to rise to greater things, and every patrician girl is after you. There's much worse that can happen than being Count Maurice Dukas' son-in-law!"

"And better also," returned Leo, slightly flushing.

"Why, nobody has better blood, better influence, better villas, or better estates in Bithynia."

"But you don't add 'a better daughter'—for the wife of the son of a Mesembrian peasant."

Basil slapped his comrade's powerful shoulder.

"Your pedigree will be illustrious enough after they publish those patents that are now drafting at the palace. Your old comrades will have a merry night in your honour soon."

"Loyal fellow," declared Leo affectionately, "I've a thousand things on my mind much more urgent than that of taking a wife."

"Such as——"

“Well, the unwelcome fact that I returned from my Black Sea mission to Constantinople, and found our Sacred Masters in the palace even more cowardly, luxurious and inefficient than when I departed.”

Leo delivered this opinion in a prudently lowered tone, but Basil recklessly slapped his own thigh.

“Holy Wounds! You speak for us all in the navy. The present Sacred Clemency Philippicus is worse in his sodden ease than raging old Justinian Slit-Nose. That eunuch Paul does everything. And who is *he* (smooth, sexless cat) to stop the Omiad kalif and all the advancing Hagarines?”^[11]

“We’re on the quay,” admonished Leo, smiling; “I shouldn’t have started you——”

Fergal had not of course caught this conversation, but he had watched the two officers intently while they stood chatting only a few paces from him. The sale of slaves on the quay was too common to attract their least attention. Hormisdas, despairing of other customers, was beginning to mutter a prayer and kiss his relic as a stimulant to profit, when yet another strange party appeared upon the waterfront.

Two Syrian youths with striped turbans advanced, leading two patient donkeys. The saddle of one was empty. On the other rode a woman, evidently young, although decently veiled. Her dress was plain but of fine green material, and the trailing skirt was embroidered with skillful figures of Abraham and Isaac. Beside her walked a venerable man who commanded instant attention. His dark eye was very bright, but seemed surveying the mercantile tumult with distant abstraction. On his breast gleamed a single large gold medal set with gems showing the signs of the zodiac. He wore a saffron turban and a perfectly plain saffron gown of the finest wool. At his elbow another Syrian, evidently an elderly and trusted servant, twitched his master’s mantle as if to remind him when to avoid hucksters’ booths or piles of offal. The little party moved directly down upon the quay, and then halted as if disappointed to find the ferry-stage quite empty.

“Has not the ferry-boat come from Galata?” inquired the servant of Hormisdas, who (scenting no traffic) answered insolently: “You have eyes,” and shrugged his shoulders. But the Syrian turned to the two officials, justly believing that high rank did not imply discourtesy.

“Will my gracious lords tell my master if the ferry-boat from Galata has been in sight?”

A glance at the patriarchal stranger made soldier, and sailor salaam together.

“It is late already,” responded Basil with a flourish, “but the shipping conceals it, and it can only come through slowly.”

“We must wait therefore, Sophia,” spoke the ancient, dropping his head as if in an abstruse calculation. The lady, however, unveiled and gazed forth upon the animated harbour. Fergal was observing that she was very comely, with bright, gladsome features unspoiled by kohl, rouge or henna, when to his infinite misery back from the neighbouring church came Evagrios and Nikosia. The deacon set his eyes first on Neokles.

“Twelve solidi—not an obol more,” he proclaimed. “You know why he’s being sold. You’ll never get a better offer.”

“Twelve—ah! ruin,” began Hormisdas, his arms going like flails; “twelve for this incomparable cook. I am a poor man—eight children, seven are girls. Your sacred Reverences would not——”

“Pist!” responded Evagrios. “Twelve or nothing—I see you don’t mean business. Where’s the mule car, Nikosia?”

“Twelve, twelve, gracious Sacrednesses,” dissolved Hormisdas, “I am only too happy. Twelve for the cook. But this porter, the Armorican? Such an opportunity!”

“Well, twelve more for him.”

But now Hormisdas became obdurate. His oratory in praise of the strength and virtues of the younger captive was worthy of a Demosthenes or a St. John Chrysostom. It availed so much that Evagrios at last said, “Fifteen.”

Thus far Fergal had followed the proceedings with the desperate hope that the deacon’s desires would not match the trader’s cupidity, but at length he caught the triumphant gleam in Hormisdas’ eye which proclaimed: “We will make a bargain.”

In sheer recklessness the Celt uprose from his stone bench, his fetters rattling piteously.

“Oh, gracious and valorous Lords!” he cried, uplifting his voice. Basil and Leo turned immediately. Fergal sprang forward the length of his chain and cast himself upon his knees. “You are men of generosity and honour. Wretch that I seem here, I am the son of a valorous chief, of a free race not taught to bear fetters, but to wield the spear and sword. Hear my tale. Deliver me from this hell. I will serve such as you forever.”

Hormisdas in sheer horror uplifted his club to smite, but lowered it at a flash from Leo’s eyes.

“What would you, strange rascal?” spoke the spatharios, astonished but not unkindly.

In frantic words Fergal poured out his story, his mongrel Greek uncouth enough but quite intelligible. Captivity in Armorica, Frankland, Venetia, Syria—long bondage with the Infidels, escape, a little gleam of freedom, then new bondage and degradation! Passion and anguish attested his truthfulness, and when he finished Leo at least was not unmoved.

“A sorry plight for a fine stout fellow,” assented the soldier, apprizing the Celt’s sinewy frame. “If you can speak Arabic and know the Hagarines you ought to sell for something better than a porter.”

Whereupon Hormisdas, scenting now a rare opportunity for a higher bidder, renewed his patter commending his article as “an ideal servant for his Very Puissant Nobility, apt for any kind of desperate service, and versed in all the tongues, both Christian and Infidels’.”

Evagrios had watched this whole proceeding with rising disgust. “This brute will prove intractable,” vowed the deacon, “let us be off with only the cook.”

“On the contrary, that red-headed porter takes my fancy, I can tame him,” rejoined Nikosia with a defiant toss. “Take twenty solidi——”

“What is the price of this lad?” demanded Leo, admiring again the Celt’s magnificent physique.

“Thirty-five solidi—so I just told their Sacrednesses,” gesticulated Hormisdas; “he is a gift!”

“Don’t be hoodwinked,” muttered Basil in his friend’s ear; “these rogues know your gullible heart. Probably the slave is imposing on you in collusion with his master.”

“Twenty-four solidi,” interposed Nikosia, with a defiant glance at Evagrios.

“Unhobble him,” commanded Leo; “I would see him test his limbs.”

Hormisdas instantly produced a key. “With the forehead, Excellency; with the forehead. Your will is my pleasure.”

The key turned, the chain dropped, Fergal shook his ankle clear and gave a great leap in the air. “Most gracious Lord,” he pleaded, “I cannot know your rank and name, but high as you may be, while I have power to serve you that power is yours. My own land and kin are lost to me forever. Give me the word and with mind and courage, as well as body, I am yours for life.”

The appeal, the enkindled eye of the young Celt were compelling, but Leo hesitated. “Honest Frank,” he confessed openly, “your plight I pity, but I must not play with you. I am not rich and my household is small. This good Persian—ahem! Christian—holds you too dearly. I cannot rescue every deserving prisoner sold on the Stairs of Chalcedon.”

“Twenty-six solidi,” pressed Nikosia, and to Fergal’s unspeakable misery Leo turned away his face. Then this and every other group of chafferers were struck dumb by the sudden voice of Marinos, screaming from his pinnacle directly above their heads.

“Behold, even now is God’s wrath upon the frivolous and wanton! In place of mirth, destruction. In place of thoughtlessness, death. Look, look forth, ye sinners, and see the finger of Heaven upon the wicked who said ‘Aha! the evil day is not for me!’ Woe! woe! ye fools, this moment your souls are required of you.”

The shouts of the pillar saint for an instant made every eye turn upward to his station. They saw him swaying on high, pointing a long, bony finger towards the harbour. Then the spell broke, and there was a rush by scores to the side of the

quay. A serious accident had occurred in the Golden Horn directly before the ferry-landing.



CHAPTER III

HOW FERGAL FOUND A MISTRESS

UNSEEN from the quay a ferry-boat had been urging her course across from Galata. The craft was very clumsy, so that at best her crew of ten made slow work with their long oars. But this morning the crowding with passengers had been unusual. A party of nuns from the Convent of St. Lydia in Pera had wished to visit and adore the new relics at the Church of St. Diomed, and had wedged aboard a deck already well filled. Then at the last moment a Cappadocian oil merchant had appeared and demanded transit for himself, three servants, and no less than three camels. Some of the earlier passengers had protested, but the ferry captain (against an extra fare) had admitted the creatures. The boat therefore had been grievously over-laden, and the camels had become restive, frightened and grunting ere they were fairly clear of the Galata wharf.

However, despite a great press of shipping, the boat made more than half the passage in safety, and the nuns were looking hopefully towards the looming warehouses above the nearing quays, when a wheat ship from Trebizond moved awkwardly across her bows. While backing water to avoid collision, the ferry captain's long oar snapped, and that worthy sprawled upon the deck amid curses and confusion, while his boat partially lost way, and swung her broadside across the southerly breeze. At this critical instant she was rammed by a lumber barge trying to make the timber wharves higher up the Golden Horn. The shock was great, but the splintering of wood and the squalls of the women were drowned by the frantic screams and neighs of the camels, now plunging beyond control. No one could explain precisely what happened next, but a twinkling later the ferry-boat had turned turtle, and discharged its terrified crew and passengers into the harbour.

From his pillar Marinos was the first on land to glimpse the catastrophe, but as the lumber barge swung aside a cry of horror swelled along the quay. Frantic orders were shouted upon many vessels. Several caiques headed towards the disaster, but to excited onlookers their distance seemed enormous. On the water rose bobbing and struggling the unfortunate women. The ferry crew, true cowards, were seen striking off towards the barge, although a hundred voices hooted them. Then out of the groans and panic came leadership and action. In the sight of all men, Leo the Spatharios was standing on the edge of the quay, stripping off his cuirass and beckoning for others to imitate. His voice rang like a trumpet far down the frantic wharves.

"Call the boats moored at the Navy Yard (don't loiter here, Basil, bring down your men) and meantime whoever here can swim and has love for wife, mother or sister—follow me!"

The patriarch with the zodiac medal caught at his elbow, his old eyes staring wide:

"My younger daughter," he besought; "I think I see her in the waves——"

"And I my mother," responded Leo coolly; "I'll do all I can." And forthwith he sprang into the Golden Horn.

As the water closed over him, a second splash sounded, ere a dozen other men (who had skill and courage to obey the officer) imitated Leo. Fergal the Armorican had leaped into the harbour like a fish into its element.

Hormisdas at the quay's edge dissolved in agony:

"Cursed wretch that I was to unlock the shackle! Drowned! Surely drowned! Vilest ingratitude. Alas, my lost solidi—all the profits of the voyage. Oh, blessed Saints——"

Nobody heeded. With speechless anxiety the crowd on the wharves followed the swimmers. Leo's strokes were long, but the Celt instantly passed him. Commander and slave—in that instant the latter was superior.

"Your mother—where?" demanded Fergal, as he shot by the officer.

"Yonder. The green cloak. An old woman—small and round." There was no nice choosing in Leo's words as he spat out the brine. "She's going down again."

"Fear nothing, I can reach her."

The Celt literally sprang across the water. Leo made his best speed. It irked him to see his mother rescued by an utter

alien, but seconds were precious. Ten fathoms away he saw Fergal seize his quarry with one hand, then hasten along with her, blowing and struggling, towards the nearest cargo boat, which was now casting out lines.

The officer pressed onward. A stout nun bobbed up beside him, sputtering her, “Mother of God, rescue! rescue!” but a nimble stevedore—the best of the other swimmers, snatched at her trailing hood and began towing her away to safety. Leo turned towards a more distant nun when out of the waters shot up something red. A woman’s face, very pallid, with streaming brown hair, lifted itself. Her hands beat the water, but she was evidently imprisoned by her heavy crimson cloak. She seemed nigh spent and ready to go under for the last time, when Leo seized her hair.

It was no instant for civilities. Though without Fergal’s speed the officer was a good swimmer, and had kept all his wits. A fierce tug at the shoulder brooch made the cloak drift safely away. The instant she felt assistance the woman collapsed and floated a dead weight, which fact made Leo’s task somewhat easier. Keeping her head emerged, he paddled steadily, encouraged now by rising shouts from the quay. “They come!”—and at length with swinging stroke four long, slim cutters bore down from the Navy Yard with Basil standing in the stern-sheets of the nearest and trumpeting orders to his men.

Leo lifted himself and shouted. In a moment the captain’s craft was beside him, and ready arms dragged the spatharios and his charge aboard. “Your mother?” was Basil’s first demand, but learning of her rescue, he cast an experienced eye upon the woman now lying on his bottom boards. “A pretty little whippet,” he announced bluntly. “See the blood! A timber has bruised her forehead. She was nigh helpless, and about to give it up. You were just in time.”

And so, amid splashing, shouting, screaming, ordering, countermanding, swearing, applauding—tragedy was everywhere averted. Even the three camels were steered ashore, sorely bedraggled. A sergeant of the watch duly arrested the unlucky ferry skipper for violating the imperial ordinance against overcrowding his vessel. When Leo, still in dripping tunic, sprang upon the landing stage, the numerous soldiers who had run up and witnessed the rescue raised a shout which pealed along the wharves, “Leo the Spatharios! Ten thousand years to Leo the Spatharios, the pride of the army!”

But the hero of this applause heeded nothing as he ran precipitately to a second boat that was just pulling to the quay from an anchored coaster, then opened his arms wide for a fat little woman, whose dishevelled grey head came far beneath his shoulder, and next smothered her with kisses even as with chokings and coughings she declared, “Your old mother Kasia has been splashing like a fool, but is very safe!”

* * * * *

Kasia was safe, and so were the nuns, despite wet garments, groans to the saints and general excitement. For a few moments, however, this was not so certain about the young woman Leo had rescued, and whom the patriarch anxiously claimed as “My daughter, Anthusa Maria.” Her sister, Sophia, seemed aghast at her insensible state, and the nuns were too demoralized to assist. It was Kasia who broke through the ring of stupidly baffled men-o’-war’s men, soldiers and stevedores, loosened the girl’s wet undergarments, raised her feet, and lifted her arms with a calm efficiency whereon Leo and Basil gazed helpless and humble. Then came the rush of colour to the cheeks, and two large, brown eyes opened wonderingly, while Kasia wiped away the blood still oozing from a slight bruise on the temple. Hurt more by the blow from some shattered timber of the capsizing ferry than by the wetting, Anthusa at length smiled feebly, drew herself together and essayed to lift herself upon the stone bench whereon she rested.

“Ei! *makaira*—blessed dear!” encouraged Kasia, with vigorous arms around the girl, “all is safe. A shrewd knock, but ‘well ended is half forgotten.’ Your father is here, and your sister. And you, Leo”—with a lightning glance at her puissant son—“haven’t you and these other he-asses wits enough to know that your mother, this young mistress, and all these holy nuns are cold and dripping, and that dry clothes are better than dumb gaping?”

Thus inspired, many things soon happened. An oily-tongued old-clothes vendor appeared by some magic out of his lair under an adjoining rope walk. He had elegant garments for their Reverendesses and Nobilities and “would trust for his reward to God.” Whereupon two Armenian women who ran a little wine-shop chased out their few morning customers, and sheltered Kasia, Anthusa and the nuns until they were all dry, reclad, and tolerably personable, albeit in most uncourtly motley.

The young woman whom Leo had rescued, had recovered part of her strength and faculties, although she was still rubbing her forehead and laughing a little hysterically. She came out of the wine-shop clad in a faded violet mantle that had first graced a merchant's wife and then her tire-woman ere reaching the pledge shop. The dingy colour and the threadbare picture of the Good Shepherd sewed to the bosom increased Anthusa's appearance of pallor, but on her softly moulded neck there had remained a gold chain dangling a very fine Egyptian cameo. Over delicate little ears Kasia had tied up her long, brown hair in a tight, plain knot, increasing the height of a naturally lofty forehead. Her features were smaller than her sister's, her lips more sensitive. On quitting the friendly wine-shop she winced at sight of the swarming strangers, then her colour flushed back with a charming confusion, but she came straight forward to the embraces of her father.

"Now by Christian saints and philosophers' daimons," exclaimed the old man, "be thanks to this brave officer for restoring you safe! Unpardonable was my folly when I let you go to your cousins in Pera, and did not promise to send Ephraim for you with a caique."

"But Eudoros took me safely to the ferry," replied Anthusa with returning composure. "I knew you'd meet me here. Who could expect——"

"Say no more," commanded the patriarch. "Are you recovered enough to ride? Shall we call a litter? We have waited so long upon these unhappy 'Stairs' and I'm so shaken by my fright that I fear I can't proceed with my researches and experiments all day."

"I can ride the donkey," answered Anthusa, with a brave toss of her head belying her white lips, "that is if—if Ephraim walks very close beside me. My temples will ring less by and by. But first," collecting herself with an obvious effort of will, "let us proffer thanks to the gallant officer who plucked me from the harbour."

Her father smote his breast, then turned to Leo and bowed with innate dignity.

"Valiant *kyrios*"—his Attic Greek became the purity of the Academy or the Porch—"forgive the emotions of a parent and the futile wanderings of a pedant. Where is my gratitude? Miserably did I reflect while you so gallantly proved yourself a very Nereus in the waves that not all the the physics of Aristotle, the mechanics of Archimedes, or the mathematics of Eratosthenes could avail me to save from a watery death one whom I prize beyond life. I cannot insult your Excellency by offer of material reward, but can only say, 'Kallinikos, lecturer at the University, thanks you.'"

This speech, coxcombical and absurd from another, was uttered with perfect fitness and dignity. Leo, with equal dignity, lifted the old man's mantle to his lips, "With the forehead, most learned *kyrios*. Fortunate I am to have rendered this service to one whose fame sheds lustre on Constantinople; and"—his eye turned respectfully to Anthusa—"to this gracious *kyria*."

As he spoke, rescuer and rescued stood face to face. Was it mere vagrant curiosity that made them scan one another closely? Across the young lady's pale lips there trembled a smile, not merely grateful now, but quizzical.

"Most noble Spatharios," spoke she, "just now they have told me your name and rank. The fame of your success has long since reached even our quiet home; and well might we wish you fair fortune. Do you recall a certain day seven years ago, at a certain village of St. Theodore, and a certain venturesome little maid, and a certain great ram, and how then——" She stopped in growing confusion at her own unwonted boldness.

Leo's blank countenance began to beam with friendly recollection.

"The day I was made Protector? Can it be, gracious *kyria*, that a second time I am permitted——"

But here Sophia interposed with guileful laughter: "Oh, the pity, brave Excellency, my little sister cannot repay as she did then!" A barbed sally that made both Anthusa and Leo blush to their ears; whereat Sophia more discreetly turned to Kasia: "Noble lady, this is the second time your gallant son has played a true Perseus to my sister's Andromeda. If he's not told you, then let my father and myself speak out our double gratitude in a better place than this foul quay."

Kasia manifestly reckoned neither Perseus nor Andromeda among her gossips, but she acknowledged the speech with a rustical courtesy. Still exceedingly pale and with her head doubtless throbbing, Anthusa was lifted upon the waiting donkey, but the Spatharios stepped politely forward.

“Your favour, *kyria*,” he requested. Anthusa cast down her eyes, but held out her hand. He kissed it, and saw the white fingers whisk back promptly under the violet mantle. With Ephraim and Kallinikos close at either side she started away behind her sister. The nuns had already assembled their clothes and faculties and had departed. Only Kasia remained beside her son and Basil.

The old woman was still puffing with the excitement. “Where now, son Leo?” she demanded.

“I’ll call a sedan chair and take you home,” announced the officer directly, “since you persist in forgetting that the mother of spatharios should not wander around Constantinople without even one maid, like a green grocer’s dame. You, too, should have summoned a caique.”

But here the others beheld the old woman dart away with fire blazing from her black little eyes.

“Holy Trinity, what do I see! The lad who saved me is being shackled like a brigand!” And her powerful fist descended with startling force upon the ear of Hormisdas, who had stooped to snap the fetter back upon the ankle of Fergal.

The slave-trader had lived in a Gehenna of fears until Fergal, after rescuing Kasia, so far from attempting to escape, had deliberately swum back to the quay. All chaffering being of course interrupted, Evagrios had piously muttered prayers while the nuns were being rescued, and Nikosia had produced a crystal vial filled with the tears of Mary Magdalene and kissed it passionately. After the crisis was past the deacon considered that his calling still demanded a decent delay ere resuming carnal commerce, and Hormisdas had waited with patience until, unable to trust the Celt’s intention longer, he had made his unlucky movement to secure him.

The vociferation and fury that followed Kasia’s onslaught at last calmed into explanations and apologies. Hormisdas wisely refrained from meddling again with the fetters, smirked, bowed and attempted to resume the sorely interrupted bargaining. Nikosia, whose veil did not conceal her curling contempt for the older woman, hastily renewed her last bid of twenty-six solidi. The trader, however, calmly declined less than thirty-five, glancing hopefully towards Leo, who stood somewhat irresolute, but his mother promptly took up the bargaining.

“Twenty-seven,” declared Kasia.

Nikosia smiled frigidly through her fine teeth, remarking: “Don’t be foolish, my worthy woman. Your son has already said he doesn’t need this porter, while I——”

“No need for the lad who has just fished me out of the harbour? While you, cat-faced ‘Spiritual Sister,’ ” broke out Kasia yet again, when Leo whispered hastily: “Calm yourself, mother, I beseech you. You are not in the old village. The dignity of my position requires——”

But here, to his friend’s no slight relief, Basil interposed, looking fixedly from Hormisdas to Evagrios.

“Reverend Deacon, you will not find it advantageous to bid against my noble friend whose good will can be worth more to you than many porters. And you, sirrah slave-trader, since loitering on this quay I’ve recalled your face. You were at Salonica four years since?”

“Not at all, most valorous captain, not at all!” asserted Hormisdas hastily.

“I think differently. I might make the City Prefect agree with me. Let his Excellency Leo have this lad for fifteen solidi, and save yourself a most unpleasant trip back to Salonica.”

“Oh, *despotes!*” Hormisdas crouched at Basil’s feet and the tears fairly squeezed from his eyes.

“Yes, fifteen. My memory becomes perfect. You know why you’d be welcome in Salonica.”

Nikosia turned in disgust. “Vulgar swashbucklers!” she snapped. “Let us go, Evagrios. Have him bring the cook around to our place to-morrow and get his money. We can find another porter.”

The pair mounted their mule car and clattered away. Hormisdas shrugged his shoulders in capitulation, produced an ink-horn and dirty parchment, and scribbled a bill of sale. Leo in turn wrote a brief order on a Mesē banking house and pressed it with his signet ring. A military orderly hitherto discreetly in the background, appeared to announce that the

despotes' horse and escort were ready, and that the sedan chair had been ordered for the *despoina*.^[12]

Fergal had watched and listened as if caught in some agonizing dream. Now he knew that Neokles was wringing his hand and slobbering, "Don't forget me!" and he saw Kasia beckoning towards him with her short, little fingers.

"Come, red-head," she commanded.

"Oh, gracious lady," cried the Celt, kneeling in the dust at her feet, "you have saved me from a living death. My life henceforth belongs to you."

"Pish," was the irrepressible answer, "as for our lives we're more than quits! I only want honest service. Here you, Peter"—to the orderly—"show him the way."

Leo sprang upon his steed. A file of four archers fell in behind him. Two porters shouldered Kasia's sedan chair, and set forth with steady gait, Peter and the dazed Fergal following in the rear. Basil stood for an instant beside his mounted friend, his eyes twinkling maliciously.

"Well, comrade," remarked he, "it's not often you get *two* such nice hands to put under your lips within one morning hour. Which was the prettier?"

"My friend is a sailor, and sailors have a right to jest," was Leo's response with a dignity totally unexpected. Before Basil had devised a winged reply, the Spatharios and his little company had vanished up the street.



CHAPTER IV

KASIA AND LEO

FERGAL followed dumbly beside Peter. The latter, grizzled and scarred, obviously had been Leo's factotum for years. He wasted no explanations upon the Celt, and his glances merely betrayed a contemptuous patronage, but Fergal found occupation enough with his own eyes, as going southward from the Golden Horn they plunged apparently into the very heart of the city.

The actual distance traversed was less than a mile, but thanks to the many meanderings through strange places, the Armorican gained all the impression of a lengthy journey. Speedily the waterfront was hidden. They urged their way up tortuous streets barely fifteen feet wide, where high wooden houses with projecting balconies almost cut off the sunlight. Now they were in a lane infested by Turkoman merchants from beyond the Caspian—flat-faced, oblique-eyed yellow men, muscular and hard, whose dwellings seemed oases of sheer barbarism. Now all around rang the clamour of Armenian bronze-smiths and kettle-makers, or again through open doors could be seen the tall silk-looms where women with clear Greek profiles were making bright webs grow under skillful fingers.

Presently at length the litter-bearers halted to adjust their poles in a small square. Under a single plane-tree bubbled a fountain above a marble basin which bore a relief of sporting nymphs and dolphins. By the great bowl jostled and laughed broad-featured Slavic girls, filling tawny pitchers, while a viciously horned buffalo waited with a driver to quench his thirst. On the pavement of the square in an ample heap slept a dozen mangy, yellow dogs, the public scavengers, almost at the very entrance to a squat-domed parish church. The portal of the latter stood open, and there drifted out into the square the deep male voices of the choir, and the wailing "*Kyrie eleison*" of the worshippers chanting through a long liturgy. One world seemed treading on the heels of another every instant as Fergal advanced.

Uphill and down he was led; often through filthy lanes and blind cat-alleys, where fearful hags leaned forth and all but touched him. Then the streets gradually widened. The air grew purer, the shops less starving; the passers better clad. Repeatedly the litter was halted before other sedans, wagons or outriders; but Leo's snapping whip and high-stepping charger made impudent donkey boys and sweetmeat vendors give back and others swerve respectfully, and presently his little party entered a true avenue, where an enormous traffic hummed more smoothly.

To right and to left extended a majestic portico, with shops under the promenades, and stone steps leading to yet other shops in the stories above. The shops yielded to pillared fronts and portals, flanked by statues of pagan gods or by pictures of brilliant mosaic set into the brick work. At the open gates lounged porters, negroes often, and through the openings came glimpses of cool patios set with tropical shrubs, of bronze or marble sculptures, of gilded tables and playing fountains.

"Patricians' palaces?" ventured Fergal at length to Peter.

"Patricians'?" echoed the disgusted orderly. "Blessed Lord, why must I answer such ignorance! Only well-to-do merchants. Little you know of Constantinople!"

But now at length Leo's modest cortège showed signs of nearing its goal. They passed a broad parade ground where a century of infantry recruits was at spear drill. Peter condescended to point out a long line of grey barracks and of massive many-windowed buildings, and informed his companion that here were located the ordinary city garrison and the offices of the War Department. Subaltern officers in undress armour saluted Leo as he passed. Presently a shouting was heard, "Way! way!" and at headlong speed with a dozen outriders, along clattered a heavy vehicle boasting six horses and an infinite display of silk trappings and gilding. In the open car rode a venerable nobleman with robes of pure white edged with purple and with a high, flat-topped hat of like colours. As he passed, Leo reined and saluted. The magnate raised his hand; the whole train halted instantly. He beckoned; Leo bowed politely and rode beside the carriage, whose master beamed affably.

"We have the report on the Psidian fortresses. Your opinion is needed. I have ordered that you be added to the council to consider it. My palace is always open to you. A fortunate day——" And the great man swept on.

"His Magnificence the Logothete Libanios," admired Peter in delight. "Look you, Frank, he treats the Little Master like a younger brother! Every day our fortune betters." ...

... The litter turned abruptly along a side street near the War Department. The door of a house, small but new and clean, swung open. Over a pavement of particoloured flags Fergal found himself entering a courtyard, also small but surrounded by Corinthian pillars of grey-veined marble. In the centre was a pool of luxurious water-plants between which stupid brown fish were waving their fins and ogling upward. The ceiling was tastefully fretted and gilded. On one wall was a good mosaic of David smiting off the head of Goliath, beside the other stood a pedestal upbearing a fine bronze Nike that perchance had once graced a mansion in pagan Ephesus or Athens.

Leo had tossed his bridle to Peter and entered with his mother. A still older retainer appeared, and the master pointed to the dumb and marvelling Fergal, adding, "The *despoina* bought this lad after he had saved her life. Treat him well. I will hear his story later."

With that the officer followed Kasia through the court to the inner chambers, himself in just need of fresh apparel. When he found his mother again she was in a small garden in the extreme rear of the dwelling. A sun-dial made the centre, and some palms in portable tubs and a profusion of grape and gourd vines provided a modest arbour. Here were a table, benches and stools, on one whereof now sat Kasia, suitably clothed and deep in talk with a man whose black coat, white veil, black hat and gold pectoral cross proclaimed him at least a priest. His grey-streaked hair fell upon his shoulders, his untrimmed beard half covered his face, but his eyes were wise and his deep voice kindly. Leo dropped on one knee before him.

"Your blessing, reverend Pope Michael. You have heard how God afforded us a great mercy to-day?"

The priest raised his hand, extending three fingers and muttering a formula; then, as the officer rose, he responded, "Yes, and under God we must thank that red-haired barbarian whereof your mother has just told. Of a truth, dear *kyria*," turning to Kasia, "I think the Saints will hardly let you drown when so many sick and poor are kept by your bounty at the Hospital of Samson. I came to bring good news. The lad Trophios is better. They say he will leave in ten days; and old Hermina is no worse, which is all we dare to pray for. And now I am off to the Pharnar district. Jacob the sailor has quitted his wife just as she expects her seventh babe. I must see the kind sisters of St. Dorkas——"

"Money," interrupted Kasia and turning to Leo.

"Was it not 'money' yesterday?" returned the latter, smiling.

"It'll be more 'money' no doubt to-morrow, at least if Pope Michael calls," announced the old woman; "your mother may have her sins, but the preachers can't scourge her from their ambos as they do the fine hussies come from the palaces: 'You fasten in your ears gold to feed a thousand poor: and lo! Christ's little ones are starving.'"

Leo clapped his hands, whereat appeared Peter.

"Unlock the chest," ordered his master, "and give his Reverence twenty *keratia*.^[13] You see," he added, smiling to the priest, "I am a soldier, and a soldier's first duty is to his commander."

"You could find a worse commander," responded Michael, returning the smile. Then he thanked them sincerely and without unction, repeated his blessing and departed.

"A man of God," repeated Kasia after him.

"A man of God," echoed the officer, "full of good works and faithfulness. Ah! my mother, when I see such as Michael thrust aside for preferment in the Patriarch's hall, and that screaming wretch Marinos adored by half of Constantinople as a saint, I know there are two things in this sinful world right hard to understand."

But here, with a shift of mood, he knelt on the greensward beside Kasia. "Oh, Mother Mine, what an awful moment you have given me. What profits success, promotion, men's praise, if you—my happiness—were taken? Why can you not learn that Constantinople is not Mesembria: that to steal away to your gossips unattended is not the way for dames whose husbands or sons go often to the palace? We are not rich, but our means will permit a modest train—and yesterday, back I came from the arsenal to find that you had gone to visit old neighbours in Galata, with only a message for your son 'that you were not too old yet to find your own way.'"

Kasia stroked his head and rocked her fat body to and fro; then answered, "You mean well, *philotate*, but you forget that while your mother's not too old to pick her road, she is, to change her life. Peasant I'm born and peasant I'll stay,

though you, my *Lion*”—her caress grew very affectionate—“at last roar so loud that perhaps all the world will hear you. Laugh at me they must, but they’ll never scold how ‘My Lord Leo’s mother wears the clothes of a patricianess after the manner of the cowmaid that she truly is!’ The Panagia pity me if ever I have to put on stiff brocade and finger great gems, and bow haughtily and have forty lackeys touching their noses to the dust at my feet. Why, even now the few honest servants which we have catch the mood and call me ‘Gracious *Despoina*.’ I would almost laugh in their faces. ‘*Despoina* of what?’ I want to cry, then go and cook your dinner.”

“Mother, mother,” exclaimed Leo, laughing and clutching his hair, “can you ever understand? Are you sorry that we are not still on the Mesembrian farm, that your son is now consulted by logothetes, that my friends even predict——”

“Hoity-toity, no!” she answered, leaping up, her little black eyes beaming with pride. “Was ever a widowed mother luckier in her son than Kasia? Don’t I wear out my knees thanking the Trinity for your goodness to me and beseeching that you prosper ever more? Prosper,” the levity left her voice, and her hand touched his face gently, “until the whole of that strange prophecy of Barses and Chioba be fulfilled.”

“Do you know what you’re wishing?” interposed Leo hurriedly.

“Why not?” ran on the old woman. “If a shepherd may become a spatharios, why may not a spatharios become——” She did not finish the sentence, but drew the soldier down upon a bench. Soon his head was upon her ample lap. Between mother and son there was obviously complete trust and comradeship. “Let us tell over again, my Lion, all the favours which the Saints have showered upon you. The recalling will give us confidence for the future.”

“Well,” he began, gazing up in lazy affection, “you know after I became Protector I had an unhappy year before I learned the ways of the court and how to carry myself with assurance. My noble comrades despised my birth and picked on me incessantly despite the Emperor’s orders. Then I killed Sergios Botaniates in that duel. After that I was feared and patronized. Next old Justinian Slit-Nose gave me a small command on the Cilician frontier. I destroyed the raiding band of Emir Mutazz, and Iconium hailed me as ‘Saviour of the City!’ This brought me back to Constantinople with some small honour. The Emperor named me Protostrator of the Thracian corps.^[14] Justinian deemed me a fit adjutant for his bloody schemes, but I evaded his worst orders, while avoiding charges of disobedience. Finally, needing a man for the difficult mission to the Caucasus, he made me his spatharios, but hardly had the patent been issued ere I met my greatest peril. Jealous comrades charged me with conspiracy. One night——”

“I remember that night,” said his mother, laughing, yet wincing.

“They had me in the lowest hold of the Numera, the palace prison. Gleeful tongues whispered, ‘To-morrow that upstart’s head falls in the Amestrian Forum.’ But a just God and my mother’s good angel were with me. Justinian was a very fiend of cruelty but was seldom deliberately unjust. Good friends came forward: Basil, and Daniel the Præfect, and many another. The charges were disproved. I was freed and vindicated. So the Emperor sent me off to the Caucasus—a thankless undertaking. With an escort rather than an army I was to restore the Roman name among the barbarous Alans and Abasgi. How my kind Saints prospered me there; how I brought the tribesmen to subjection and taught them the length of the Roman arm; how I crossed with my men over the ice-bound Caucasus on snow-shoes, and got back safe to Trebizond—that’s a long, tedious story.

“When I returned to Constantinople, Justinian had gone to his account. He had lived by the sword and had perished by the sword, but his overthrow and the setting up of Philippicus was no deed of mine. It now has pleased their Magnificences in the palace bureaus to speak well of me. The army needs new leaders, and my record has been fortunate; and so,” he raised himself and kissed her, “you have me here to-day once more, oh, my mother!”

Leo sluggishly regained his seat, then sat pressing his mother’s hand. Both for a long time seemed watching a brown lizard as he scuttled among the palm tubs; then Kasia resumed:

“You think the Saracens are still making way?”

“Constantly, best of mothers. Philippicus is a sybarite and is hated by the army. Of the soft-handed patricians and eunuchs who rule in his name some mean well ignorantly, some sacrifice the Empire for their own sordid power and profit. The themes^[15] are demoralized. Basil tells me not twenty dromonds at the Navy Yard are fit for sea. Daily reports come in of Infidel raids in the Ægean. The governors of Sicily and Apulia keep back their tributes. Even our city walls here are in bad repair. Meantime every messenger tells of the swelling Moslem armaments: how Kalif Walid and his

viziers deliberate whether our Roman Empire is not a ripe apple—ready to fall at a touch. Spain, we hear, has succumbed. They are to-day rearing mosques in Cordova and Toledo; and in Hagia Sophia, Christ's noblest church itself," Leo rose and paced the little garden nervously, "they will soon read from the book of the Hagarines' false prophet, unless——"

"Unless what?" cried Kasia, frowning now and troubled.

"Unless when the foes come up against us, God rain down his fire as once on guilty Sodom."

Kasia shook her head. "You are trying to scare me, son. Is not Constantinople always called 'The City Guarded of God'?"

"His watchcare will be sorely tested," retorted the soldier irreverently. "Well, little mother, I must not terrify you. The Saracens won't come to-day, nor probably to-morrow. Meantime, their Sublimities and Magnificences at the palace may snatch some wisdom—though I doubt it. For a while Constantinople can go on trading, and crowding the Hippodrome races and variety theatres, and driving or promenading along the Mesē, and going to fêtes at the Bosphorus villas, and rejoicing in Church processions and displays of holy relics, and thronging to watch the dumb shows at the palace. After that the Saints know what is best, not I——"

"You know what Barses and Chioba said," she reminded.

"I know what they said, or rather what I dreamed. Best of mothers, let us have no more of this. I have seen enough of the palace and the camp to know it is no great thing to become wearer of the purple leggings. But the man who becomes Emperor in the next few years with the Saracen ordeal ahead—Christ pity him!"

Then, seeing his brow darkened, she deliberately chose a lighter vein. "Boy," she began, "there is still another thing that troubles me."

Leo laughed. "What is it? When you say 'boy' I know reproaches will follow."

"Did I not get from Basil that you met Theophano Dukas at the quay?"

"Her Ladyship's barge landed while I waited for you. I was merely courteous."

"Boy," her keen little black eyes were full on her son, "was it not her father who has been so extremely gracious to you of late?"

"Why, yes; he has been somewhat kind."

"And that Logothete Libanios we passed—he has an unwedded daughter, too?"

"I've only seen her with her mother at a few of the palace fêtes."

"Her mother? That's far worse."

"Dear soul," cried Leo, kissing her forehead and laughing most heartily. "It's only to *my* mother that her son is so handsome!"

"Handsome? As if it mattered whether you were ugly as the great ape they showed on St. Thomas' Day at the Hippodrome! It's only to *your* mother that her son is not the most envied officer in the army, unwedded still and with a boundless career before him."

"This is very discouraging," responded the spatharios with a mock sigh; "now, beside the intrigues in the Council and the scimitars of the Saracens, I've got to fight all the barbed tongues of the relentless patricianesses. I'll be overwhelmed by numbers——"

Kasia boxed his ear almost as roundly as she had favoured Hormisdas. "Boy," she asserted, "do you imagine that every woman in Constantinople does not know that you have now these many years treated them all with as frigid courtesy as would become St. Anthony the Hermit, and that it's all put down to most clever policy—that they all gossip in the churches, public baths, and theatres, 'Now he can reach for the highest match. Will it be Maurice's daughter, or Libanios', or perhaps the heiress of great Alexios Rendakes?' "

“Don’t be foolish, mother,” commanded Leo, testily.

“Foolish? I’m rustic enough in looks, but farm breeding at least teaches me how to take in hen’s cackle. I’ve tried to scorn it, but I’m growing afraid.”

“Scorn it still. I’ve already two commanders, my soldierly duty and my mother. How can I add a third?”

“And why not, you big sheep? Aren’t you of proper age? Haven’t I a right some day to a daughter; yes, and to grandchildren when you’re off to the wars? Blessed God—how canst Thou suffer men to muster armies, govern empires—yes, and rule Thy universe—yet have no wit concerning things which touch them most!”

“Well, my mother,” responded Leo, knowing the best way to terminate unwelcome conversation, “I have ever prospered by obeying you. How can I obey you now?”

Kasia went beside him, thrusting her homely wrinkled little features up close to his face.

“Hearken, boy: if your love for me is more than greasy perfume, give me no daughter who’ll walk only in silks and eat only from a golden dish. Remember we’re peasant-born, and the sniff of the cowbarn is still upon us. The bride who may fall in the arms of the spatharios may still shoot out her forked tongue at his stupid old mother.”

“Then farewell to them all,” vowed Leo merrily; “to Theophano and all the rest!”

“Yet there may be one,” her eyes closed cunningly; “there may—And what was named that girl you saved years ago from the huge ram, and now,—astounding luck,—fished out of the harbour?”

“They call her Anthusa, daughter of Kallinikos; but I would just as lief have rescued a pury nun, seeing that Fergal had you safe.”

“No doubt; no doubt: I only meant that she seemed to have a good heart and a modest face, and I don’t think she would ever thrust needles in my back if I *do* come from Mesembria. But I’ve clattered enough already, and goes not the proverb, ‘No young lion trembles at his parent’s roaring’? This isn’t a fast day and I grow starved.”

She clapped her hands. A decent man-servant set on the garden table a large tray, whereon was a silver plate piled with soft cakes folded over highly-spiced mutton. There was a sweet sherbet in a tall blue-glass ewer. Mother and son were busy with this simple meal, when Peter appeared and saluted.

“A *mandator* from the palace,” he announced.

“Bring him in,” ordered his master. Whereupon a gorgeously appressed functionary, with red slashings conspicuous upon his long black mantle, strode into the garden. The messenger held out a scroll, at sight whereof the officer made a slight obeisance. The other then dropped on one knee and delivered the document.

Leo read aloud:

“Paul, Master of the Palace, to the most excellent Spatharios, Flavius Leo, greeting:

“Know that his Sacred Clemency the Basileus was humbly advised to command your presence at a Sacred Consistory to be held to-morrow morning. His Sacred Clemency has deigned to confirm this loyal suggestion of his councillors. Fail not therefore to obey this summons. Farewell.”

Leo nodded with grave formality to the mandator, and that pompous messenger of despotism salaamed almost to the gravel, then swept out of the garden. The officer sighed:

“A whole morning lost; and I had promised to go over the project for reorganizing the Anatolic theme. Now it is of more importance that I should be bowing and prostrating at some worthless ceremonial. But go I must.”

“Peter!” called out Kasia at the top of her voice, “you’ve been listening. Don’t deny it—of course you have. Bring me his best dalmatic and the new buskins laced with gold thread. I’ve got to see if they’re fit for the palace.” And so in partial bad humour the two finished the cakes and mutton.

CHAPTER V

AT THE SACRED PALACE

THE water clock in his courtyard had just discharged three balls upon a silver slab, marking the third hour of the morning, when Leo set forth for the palace. He wore a new gilt helmet set with a few good opals. His dalmatic of green brocade trailed very low. In token of his rank he carried a slender red lance, with a golden pomegranate upon the butt, while from the head streamed a purple banderole. The four archers ran at dog trot ahead of his high-stepping bay, and Peter and three other servitors, including Fergal, fed, clothed and happy, followed in the rear.

The Celt found his master and humbler companions little enough inclined to loiter that he might gape at the ensuing wonders, yet even they might have lingered to gaze upon the noblest quarters of Constantinople. The route from the Golden Horn to the War Department had led through some of the least select regions of the capital, but now must be traversed those fora and high avenues which made New Rome the Wonder of the World. Not Old Rome herself in the spacious days of Hadrian could have spread out plazas and palaces more magnificent.

Striking boldly along a few inferior lanes, the company entered an ample thoroughfare lined with huge residences, whose columned fronts indicated increasing degrees of magnificence. The ways now were thronged with servitors of all ages and sexes wearing the striking liveries of the great Senatorial^[16] houses, mingled with guardsmen off duty and private gentlemen taking in the sights. These last were clad in heavy embroidered and fringed garments, with a bravery of jewels on shoes, belt and turbaned cap, and carefully curled hair and beard. Behind all persons of consequence walked at least one servant bearing a folding stool, and often a second with a ready umbrella. Of the numberless women, some were brilliantly gowned and coquettishly veiled, others were wrapped in sober mantles, and still others were in the long black gowns of nuns or the grey of real or avowed "Spiritual Sisters" attached to the Church.

Next followed the black cloaks and high caps of monks, the crimson robes of a professional lawyer, the blue of a physician, or even the saffron of Kallinikos' colleagues at the University. Everywhere swung sedans and litters; everywhere dashed silver-plated carriages, each drawn by four mettlesome horses yoked abreast. The rattling of wheels, the incessant shoutings "Way for his Nobility!" the constant greetings of dignified personages, the careful genuflections, the ceremonious adieus—these smote Fergal with utter bewilderment.

But now Leo's party reached the monarch of avenues—the Mesē. Clear across Constantinople ran this High Street, more than four miles from the Golden Gate by the Propontis to the Brazen Gate which gave entrance to the imperial palace. The spatharios entered just before the street broadened into the Forum of Constantine, a noble plaza paved with fine marble, its area scattered with numerous lofty statues pillaged from ancient Greece and Italy. In the centre soared a porphyry column one hundred and twenty feet in height, the whole crowned by a majestic golden statue of Constantine the Great himself. Quitting this forum, the Mesē ran eastward, flanked on either side by a majestic double portico for foot-passengers, while carriages and chariots could speed between. Off from the porticoes opened the shops of those silversmiths and bankers whose treasure barbarian kings and Moslem kalifs vainly had envied. To the left, as the party advanced, could be seen the long tiers of arches of the Hippodrome, while to the right were the stately Courts of Justice with their porches already sprinkled with clients and pleaders.

And now yet another area opened. The course lay across the northern end of the stateliest forum of them all—the Augustæum. To the left loomed the colossal mass and far uplifted dome of Hagia Sophia; to the right extended the great square itself, lined with a dozen public buildings, each unique in the world. The Golden Milestone set under a triumphal arch, the enormous Baths of Xeuxippos, the Palace of the Patriarch, and the Hall of the Senate were only the most conspicuous. On every hand one beheld statues, bronze and marble, rearing quadrigas, equestrian warriors, hero-tall emperors, or Winged Victories and nobly-poised goddesses of departed paganism. The sunlight ran over broad designs of jewel-like mosaics set into the walls and over the portals of nearly all the buildings, while under and around all this splendour, surged and resurged the multitudes on pleasure or business bent, that Greek-speaking "Roman People" who were keeping alive the flame of civilization when Old Rome was nigh to sinking into a venerable ruin, and when Paris and London were clusters of smoky cabins upon their swamps by the Seine and Thames....

... Saluting an occasional acquaintance, Leo led his party directly across the Augustæum to its eastern limits. There came now to view a long battlemented wall capable of resolute defence, before which rose an advanced portal crowned with a lofty coppered dome upheld by eight tall arches. The arches themselves were sealed by enormous bronze gates of

exquisite relief work, and the ceiling within the dome was set with elaborate mosaic tableaus portraying the conquests of Belisarius. All that was not of bronze or mosaic was of rarely-veined marble. This structure was the “Chalke,” the great entrance to the “Sacred Palace.”

Leo reined. A personage wearing a blue tunic with red facings, with white hose and a very heavy gold necklet, stepped forward from among the golden-mailed sentinels who were pacing before the portal. He was a lieutenant of the Protectors, one of the personal guards of majesty.

“Most Serene Leo—you are expected.” His salaam was profound.

“I am only a ‘Valiant Excellency,’ ” corrected the other.

The noble guardsman answered with a deprecatory sweep of the hand. “No matter. I have orders to conduct you to the Most Sublime Master of the Palace. Follow me immediately.”

Leo tossed the bridle to Peter, leaped to the pavement, and followed the Protector into the magnificent courtyard behind the Chalke, leaving his followers to spend an idle hour.

* * * * *

In a room high in the upper stories of the great Daphne, an enormous conglomeration of public halls, ministerial offices and official apartments, three personages were deep in conference.

The windows before the trio commanded a magnificent view. At their feet spread the great park of the palace grounds dotted with pillared pavilions, the domes and vaulted roofs of the Monastery of the Virgin which lay within the imperial compound, the rank foliage of the horticultural gardens, and the isolated Bukoleon palace close to the seaside; beyond these reached the sparkling Bosphorus, alive now with caiques and tawny sails. Farther still rose the white houses of Chrysolis, and farthest of all the snowy outline of the summit of Asiatic Olympus.

The three present cared for none of these things. Ceremony had been cast aside. They sat on heavily-cushioned armchairs around an elaborately carved and gilded table piled with tablets and parchments. All were patricians, as could be told by their gowns of lustrous white silk sewed with large purple squares over the knees, by their red girdles and their black shoes. All were past fifty. The beards of two fell to a venerable length, but the face of the third was absolutely smooth, fat and with projecting fish-like eyes, while the boyish tremolo of his voice seemed to belie the carefully pomaded grey hairs upon his forehead. At his belt dangled a large bunch of golden keys, evidently a token of high office. All Constantinople knew that here was Paul the Eunuch, Master of the Palace, the most powerful official in the Empire.

One of his companions, the Logothete of the Civil Service, Niketas, was speaking:

“I grant the situation is bad, but why take alarm? The Saracens can hardly come in greater force than they did forty years ago in Constantine IV’s day. Then they raged vainly against the walls, tried to make a pirate lair over at Cyzicus and to harry Thrace, found they had bitten on iron and slunk away. They know this now. They are not fools at Damascus. Their wild fanatics will win paradise more comfortably and will have more worldly booty to enjoy first, by pushing their present conquests in Spain.”

“A mistake,” rejoined his colleague, Theokistos, the arch-secretary. “Those accursed Hagarines know their business. Eighty years ago we lost Syria and Egypt just by saying ‘What’s the danger from those camel-drivers from the desert?’ We’ve proof the Kalif has plenty of agents in Constantinople, not to say spies in your own chancellery and mine to tell him how since the fall of Tiberius Aspimar we’ve merely slaughtered one another: how the Slavs and Bulgars have ravaged Macedonia: how the army is——”

“Don’t thresh out old straw,” enjoined Paul, rubbing his fleshy fingers. “Niketas can nurse his hopes, but even he will grant that it will be more pleasant to keep our honours and our palaces here than to be haled off as slaves to Damascus or Kufa, or else (the Panagia forefend!),” he crossed himself hastily, “be forced to change our most holy religion.”

“We are agreed,” resumed Theokistos, “that no chances must be run. The army must be reorganized drastically by a single competent hand. The present Majestic Clemency is—well, let me say, too happily devoted to the pleasures of the

banquet and the Hippodrome to interfere with our administration. There is a grave peril in promoting to very high command any son of a great house. A premium would be put on conspiracies most deplorable for his Clemency——”

“And for ourselves!” completed Paul with a high-pitched laugh.

“Therefore,” the arch-secretary summed up, rather pedantically, “it behooves us to advance to a most responsible military post some individual who, although possessing the confidence of the troops and the essential technical knowledge, shall nevertheless be of such humble social origin as to make him no easy aspirant for the throne, and who shall be entirely beholden to us and our faction for his honours and therefore be responsive to our wishes.”

“In other words,” resumed the Master of the Palace, pithily, “we propose to promote Leo the Spatharios, ordinarily called Leo the Isaurian, to the rank of Strategos and general War Minister.”

Niketas combed his beard. “I had expected this,” he said slowly, “and I give consent. Nevertheless, take care: the fellow is clever. Underneath his tact, modesty and affected simplicity of life I suspect a deep design. Remember the old fable—King Log was bad, but King Stork proved worse.”

“But we are not frogs,” responded Paul dryly, reaching to the table and taking thence a mass of soft wax, ready for seals. “Fear nothing. I can mould him like this!”—rolling out the substance between his palms. “Consider his history: A Protector only by the crazy whim of Justinian; without family, or worse rather, loaded with a mother whom he must hide in the background because she’s simply a boorish peasant. He’s so engrossed with his cavalry tactics and fortification systems that he will not take the trouble to marry—which he might do now to great advantage. Our favour will dazzle him. If we give him a free hand at the War Department and a reasonable appropriation we can control him absolutely.”

“Unless some one teaches him ambition,” spoke Niketas.

“Our enemies may do that,” added Theokistos.

“I think I understand human nature, my dear Logothete,” remarked Paul composedly; “I have already read this Leo’s character. He is one of those men who can best be ruled—by a woman. It will be our care to find him a suitable wife. After that we will have to dread—nothing. Ha!”

“So be it,” assented Niketas. “Let us proceed with him. I understand the Emperor is so busy arranging a feast in the Hall of the Nineteen Couches that he’s in a mood now to sign anything to avoid trouble. Have the patent drafted immediately.”

“We will meet again in the Presence,” remarked Theokistos, rising and with Niketas disappearing through a small door. The eunuch tinkled a golden bell, and through a larger door a handsome boy appeared.

“Bring in the Spatharios,” he commanded.

Leo entered, saluted the Master of the Palace, then stood at military attention.

“You are curious to know why you are summoned to the Consistory to-day?” inquired Paul.

“That is but natural, your Sublimity.”

The eunuch stood up in his stiff robes, smiling unctuously:

“I cannot anticipate the official announcement. Nevertheless, I may say that his Sacred Clemency has been induced to think well of you. A heavy responsibility with corresponding honours is about to be laid upon your shoulders.”

The soldier started and flushed slightly, then murmured a few words of gratitude.

“I am not here,” pursued Paul, in insinuating tones, “to discuss your new duties. I am merely the minister who in a humble degree, a very humble degree, brought home to the Most August Basileus your fitness. Your well-known discretion will teach you to respect the wishes of your patrons. The hands that can exalt can also abase, and ambition (especially for one of modest birth) should always rest its feet on solid ground.”

“Your Sublimity will always find me heedful of your suggestions.”

“You understand therefore my friendly caution.” The eunuch took a step nearer; his squeaking tones became confidential: “You understand that since the fall of Justinian the imperial government is somewhat imitating the custom of those Western Franks, whose king indeed retains his outlandish honours, but whose actual power seems largely committed to a faithful deputy, called, I believe, ‘The Mayor of the Palace.’ This you quite realize?”

Again Leo bowed his assent. Paul with affected familiarity came nearer and laid his thick hand upon the young man’s shoulder.

“So far as an official: now I will speak—ah! let us say as a scrutinizing uncle intent on your welfare. Your allowances will be increased to match your honours. A word then of advice. They say you have a mother—a worthy soul; the Saints bless her! a very worthy soul, full of good works”—the eunuch’s voice broke in a snuffle—“but for courtly society, alas! unfitted. Find her some comfortable villa, say at Perinthos on the Marmora, or elsewhere not too near, and provide for her handsomely. Then consider well that you are still unmarried, and how the advantage of an exalted alliance can advance you. Count Maurice Dukas has the noblest palace on the Mesē. He has also a daughter—ahem! I need not continue. The Count has assisted me faithfully. I can open the matter to him whenever you desire.”

Leo’s flush deepened, Paul assumed with satisfaction.

“I am treasuring your Sublimity’s words,” answered the soldier awkwardly. “Of course you do not press for an immediate reply.”

“Of course,” smiled the eunuch; “only consider well.”

A clarion pealed down the corridors of the vast palace. Paul gathered his robes about him. “The Consistory in an hour. I have much to do.” He swept out, while the officer saluted again, then stood for a long interval buried in his own thoughts.

* * * * *

The “Purple Hall” of audience occupied another wing of that vast complex of structures grouped around the Daphne and Chalke. Its vestibule was a majestic apartment in itself. Pillars, pavement, walls and vaulting were a sheen of many-coloured marbles and mosaics, with purple tints predominating. When Leo entered, the long alabaster seats extending down either side of a lengthy promenade were lined with high officials, all in their state dalmatics and wearing medals of honour, waiting their turn to be admitted to “Kiss the Purple,” a ceremony necessary before departing on a public mission, or laying down official duties, and also for merely testifying a loyal respect for the Emperor. Many were ahead of Leo and his wait promised to be long. Beside him sat an old acquaintance, a commissioner reporting on the aqueducts of Adrianople. The latter had just heard the abundant gossip concerning Leo’s exploits at the harbour, and congratulated his friend vigorously.

“And the damsel you saved,” laughed on the functionary, “a lady Arion, with you the succouring dolphin, they say is the musical daughter of preposterous old Kallinikos the lecturer?”

“Musical?” queried Leo. “I heard nothing of that.”

“Why, yes. I was formerly much at my sister’s house near the Forum of Theodosius. Kallinikos lives close by; many is the evening I’ve sat dreaming of heaven while that girl would sit all unconscious at her window and play her little organ. My sister says she is still a merry, modest lass, but I can never think of her as anything but cousin to St. Gabriel.”

“And her father?”

“As you of course know, the most learned and pathetically useless man in all Constantinople. Now he lectures on pagan philosophy, now on abstract physics, now on Homer and now on geography. Rumour says that he shuts himself up with dark experiments, seeking the ring of Gyges which makes invisible, and the philosopher’s stone. Many idle young men crowd his hall, fascinated by his flow of absolutely unpractical erudition. I heard that some of his colleagues were jealous of his vast knowledge, and, more serious still, that various fanatical monks have talked of accusing him as a wizard. But I consider him absolutely harmless.”

“Very likely,” remarked Leo. “See, the Lombard ambassadors are being brought in.”

Three tall blond men, with long unkempt beards, ill-fitting blue robes and wearing heavy gold necklets, were being marched towards the silver door of the throne room, by a squad of ushers and interpreters. Their astonishment and absolute lack of ease was patent, and at sight of a splendid official emerging from the Presence, one of them began bowing and scraping.

“Alas! the poor envoys,” laughed the commissioner, “they have saluted a mere Protostrator. What will they do when overwhelmed by the sight of the Basileus? They’ll sign away half their master’s sorry kingdom.”

“This pomp and ceremonial has its value, therefore sensible men endure it,” responded Leo; “for some barbarians it takes the place of our overblunted swords and spears. Would to God it could avail as much against the Saracens.”

The envoys were not admitted immediately, however. Policy in fact required that they should be kept standing long on the threshold, while one and another favoured servant of autocracy passed in before them.

The silver doors reopened. A “silentiary”^[17] in white and scarlet tunic with yellow crosses on the shoulders announced in clear voice:

“Flavius Leo.”

“It is not yet my turn,” murmured the officer.

“Flavius Leo,” was repeated loudly.

The soldier rose and passed through the portal. Once inside, obedient to rigid ceremonial, he cast himself on his knees, bowed almost to the pavement and then only arose partially, his hand shading his eyes as if to shut out the effulgence shining from the throne.

In physical fact the audience chamber seemed dimly lighted. Overhead in a soaring dome were gleaming vague labyrinths of mosaics. Through small, high-set windows a pale illumination fell across the circular chamber. When etiquette permitted Leo to look about him, he perceived sitting immovable as statues some twenty white-robed patricians in ivory-armed chairs of state. Standing grouped behind them were about twice as many other dignitaries of slightly lesser glory—clad in green, blue or purple dalmatics. On either wing of this arrogant hierarchy stood also a decade of rigid Protectors in golden armour holding gilded swords.

But no visitor to this awful assemblage could suffer his gaze to wander far. Straight ahead across the wide hall rose a silver ciborium, a small dome in itself, supported by four pillars of like metal raising the canopy high enough to disclose a motionless figure sitting upon a chair encrusted with ivory, jewels and gold. In the half-light none could distinguish the features, but there was assuredly a face encased between a deep purple robe and a ponderous diadem. The latter was studded with enormous pearls and had four great lappets of pearls which fell, two over either ear, downward to the shoulders. Purple were the shoes, purple and gold the belt. In the left hand of this dumb figure was a globe (also of gold and gems) of the size of a large apple, surmounted by a cross. Here was the successor of the first Augustus and of the first Constantine!

“Flavius Leo!” announced the silentiary.

The officer continued kneeling a long instant until there was a slight rustle and murmur from the figure on the throne.

“Arise, Flavius Leo!” commanded the herald.

The officer rose and stood mute and steadfast.

One of the hitherto motionless patricians suddenly stood erect. He held up a parchment codicil, engrossed with purple ink and dangling a ponderous seal: then read with loud voice:

“Alexios Bardanes Philippicus, Cæsar, Augustus, and Christ-loving Basileus of the Romans, to all dominions and provinces, officials and subjects: Know ye that in our paternal care for the universal welfare we have sought out a man most expert, valiant and faithful, to set him over the Thracian theme of our army and to become our war-minister. Let Flavius Leo, hitherto Spatharios, be exalted to the rank of Strategos. Let our Count of the Sacred Largesses pay him an allowance annually of four hundred pounds of gold. Let his kindred partake of his nobility——”

and so through many clauses.

When the chancellor ceased, the newly-created Strategos cast himself again upon the tessellated pavement, and remained with head bowed as if overwhelmed by the greatness of the new honours, until a hollow voice proceeded from the throne: “Draw near.”

Leo ascended the three porphyry steps leading to the ciborium. As he did this, the seated figure bent forward and with a stiff gesture extended to him a ponderous fold of the purple robe. Leo kissed it, then retired slowly backward. Simultaneously two silentaries stepped to his side, deftly detached his green dalmatic and substituted another of brilliant red, while a trumpet pealed a silvery blast. “Hail! All hail to the Strategos of Thrace!” burst as a kind of chant from the assembled company, when the two chamberlains led the fortunate man to his new station at the right of the throne, close to the seat of the Master of the Palace.

Thus the audience proceeded. The doors were reopened: a sub-governor was permitted to kneel at the throne and touch his lips to the purple, then take his station in the hierarchy, and finally the Lombard embassy was admitted....

... At length the Master of the Palace rose from his seat of honour, and shook the golden keys held in his upraised hand. The remainder of the company dropped on its knees and fixed its gaze devoutly upon the monarch. Instantly unseen hands drew close the curtain about the imperial canopy. The throne was hidden; then, amid a dead hush, the creaking of a mechanism sounded faintly. The curtains flew back. Behold! Throne and Basileus had vanished.

All ceremony forthwith abandoned, the entire company rushed around Leo. Custom as well as friendship demanded profuse congratulations. “Strategos! Strategos! Hail to his new Serenity!” Loudest and warmest were the rejoicings of Count Maurice Dukas.

They brought Leo home with pompous procession, a great concourse of civil magnates and army officers followed by a shouting, cheering mob sweeping up the Mesē. When the gates of the little house by the War Department closed behind him, the new general ran into the embrace of Kasia, and rapturously kissed on both cheeks “The most Serene and Illustrious Strategissa who has made me all I am...”

... Meantime Paul and Theokistos were conversing at the Palace.

“Well,” queried the latter, “the plunge is taken. We have made him great for lack of any agent better. You have talked with him. Will he prove pliable?”

“Pliable?” echoed the eunuch. “By the Trinity, yes! Of course he said little, but he received my proposals about thinking of the Dukas marriage like a lamb. And once married to that Theophano”—the eunuch gave a wheezy chuckle—“my negro boy Amasis won’t belong to us more utterly!”



CHAPTER VI

THE HOUSE OF PEACE

So Leo, the peasant's son, became Commandant of Thrace and War Minister; but although he accepted all the formal honours of his new station, to the marvel of all the gossips of Constantinople, he still dwelt in the little house by the War Department. His mother went about her wonted charities, although at length with a modest escort, and her now "Serene" son remained unwedded, despite constant small talk connecting him with several eligible patricianesses.

He seemed lost in the infinite problems connected with reorganizing an army whose morale and efficiency had been nigh ruined by twenty years of tyranny and civil war. He promoted officers without fear or favour. Veteran subalterns suddenly found their merits recognized. Comfortable sinecures were abolished. The soldiers, who knew a true man, grumbled not when he restored strict discipline. In the barracks leathern-throated centurions and *decarchs* shouted his praise over their flagons, and drilled their recruits with new ardour. Thus through the winter and into the spring Leo was happy—for he saw his work prospering.

While Leo worked, Fergal, his new retainer, somewhat idled. The Armorican speedily ceased to be a slave, for Kasia declared, "she did not care to *own* the fellow who saved her life," and had him to the prefecture for the formalities of emancipation. Fergal therefore became his patroness' guard of honour, marching now in resplendent livery ahead of her sedan chair, and learning soon to swing a white baton and cry, "Way for her Serenity!" When not thus convoying Kasia to hospitals, almshouses, churches, or to personal acquaintances of less prosperous days, his time was his own, and he soon rambled the length of Constantinople.

The more Fergal beheld of the city the more his wonder grew. All that was best, all that was worst in the world was converged in New Rome. Within a pebble's toss of the marble Mesē were vile lanes and hovels, the haunts of vice unspeakable. Yet there were in Constantinople at least four hundred churches, and as many monasteries, with full two thousand lesser chapels and sanctuaries. There were legions of monks, nuns and less regularly consecrated ascetics of both sexes. The bulk of the population spoke Greek, yet called themselves proudly "Romans," mingling their speech with many uncouth terms of Latin; nevertheless there were whole precincts of outlandish people of every skin and tongue: Gepids and Goths, Lombards and Slavs, Huns and Bulgars, Syrians and Turkomans. There were numerous Italians, a small colony of Franks and even a very few exiles from rock-bound Armorica, from whom Fergal could hear his own Celtic speech and renew dear memories of his irretrievably lost home-land.

Often he turned in disgust from the flaunting evil, the pretentious luxury, the vicious artificiality seen everywhere. Then in an hour he would be delighted with the displays of elegant munificence and the elaborate philanthropies, by the orderly police control, by the scientific administration of justice, by the splendour of dress and architecture, by the heavenly music in the churches, by the colourful processions from the imperial palace, and finally by beholding the hosts of cultivated men and women, each in his or her own way actively bent on doing good.

Presently, too, he became increasingly intent on walks to a certain house near the Forum of Theodosius, and his visits began in this manner:

A few days after the ferry disaster and Leo's promotion, Kallinikos and his daughters called upon Kasia. The girls were not a little shy of the newly acclaimed "Strategissa," but the old woman laughed in Anthusa's face when she attempted to use the title, and put them immediately at their ease. Leo of course was preoccupied, but Kasia was delighted at the visit. Anthusa and Sophia neither patronized her ignorance nor fawned upon her new dignity. They spoke the purest Attic Greek, and in fact had evidently been educated in an atmosphere where "Excellencies" and "Serenities" counted for little, and honest courtesy and kindness for much.

Kallinikos indeed was lost when attempting to converse with the old woman. When he alluded to a phrase in "Plato's 'Apology,'" Kasia interrupted to say that Plato's boat, she was sure, was not the *Apology* but the *Holy Elias*. This was too much for the younger women. They dissolved in gales of melodious laughter, but so inoffensively that Kasia's little body promptly swayed with them, and she had to wipe her eyes for very glee. After that they were the best of friends, and when they parted, Kasia promised to return their visit speedily.

She kept her word. Escorted by Fergal, she found Kallinikos' house in a decent, quiet street on the "Third Hill," near the Forum of Theodosius whereon faced the University buildings and the Public Record Office. The mighty aqueduct of

Valens ran its lofty ivy-covered arches close to the rear of the dwelling and from the upper casements in front there was an enrapturing view of the Marmora, the Isles of the Princes and the dim shores of Bithynia. Like many good houses away from the Mesē, this residence was of wood, painted a dark red and rising to three stories with iron-grated balconies and windows.

Once inside, Kasia's domestic eyes were delighted by every sign of excellent housekeeping. Kallinikos' wealth was moderate, but his normal wants were simple. Soft-footed Syrian servants waged truceless war upon dust and cobwebs. The courtyard pool was full of rare plants, "From Arabia and India," Sophia explained, "for our father's studies." The marble Artemis by the ever-bubbling fountain was an original from the chisel of Lysippos. In a large cage screamed three bright tropical birds, while a pair of enormous cats ("Lethe and Tobias," informed Anthusa) which climbed purring into Kasia's broad lap claimed lineal descent from the famous felines of old Egypt sacred to the dreadful goddess Pasht.

The visitors' marvelling, however, grew especially at the profusion of books scattered everywhere. Unclerkly as both Kasia and Fergal were, they knew that no palace of a Dukas or a Bardas could boast any such library. The house seemed over-running with manuscripts. Old-style papyrus rolls set in round leathern cases were intermixed with the newer parchment codexes in opening covers of red or purple vellum. With no consideration of his guest's untutored state, Kallinikos boasted of a few of his treasures—a copy of Homer annotated by the master-critic Didymos, a recension of Herodotus older and more accurate than any other in Constantinople, a sermon of St. Basil's in the holy man's own hand, and many others—until Anthusa tactfully induced her father to display his improved timepiece, not yet quite perfected, to be sure, but in which by a wheel, weight and pulley, he hoped to revolve an arrow around a dial, and thus mark the hours far more closely than was possible by sun-staff or water clock.^[18]

All this made Kasia's little eyes veritably start from her head, yet she was not dismayed. The learning of Kallinikos was never patronizing, and his daughters treated his jargon with a playful humour which put their visitors wholly at ease. Kasia loved direct questioning, and soon she had all the family history. Her host was from Northern Syria. To escape Saracen domination he had removed to Constantinople before Sophia was born. When Anthusa was an infant her mother had died of the great plague. The father had lectured awhile at Salonica, but a few years since had returned to his old chair at the University. The girls had an aunt in Pera, but in the main their father had been their official tutor with the sedate Marsa, their nurse, as domestic mentor.

As a result, explained Kallinikos gravely, "Although Sophia, I grieve to say, has profited little, being too much like that Martha of Holy Writ, 'cumbered with much serving,' I have found Anthusa Maria not unlike her sister Mary who 'chose that good part'; for I have been able to teach her not a little of the epic, lyric and tragic poets, yes, and of the lighter and more apprehensible dialogues and theories of Plato, although, to my great sorrow, her grasp upon Aristotle and Kleanthes leaves much to be desired."^[19]

"St. Theodore preserve us!" cried Kasia, gazing in astonishment at Anthusa. "To imagine that you carry fearful things like those under your thick hair and inside your cunning little head!"

"But really, dear lady," confided Anthusa demurely, "I've no need to remember all the wise lore my father pours into me. Since Sophia must order the house and keep the maids from quarrelling, haven't I task enough," she playfully wrung her hands, "to keep returning incessantly to their cases and cupboards all my father's multitudinous books?"

"Verily, you have, *makaira!*" assented the admiring Kasia, who could spell only with the greatest difficulty. And so, accepting two or three tropical roots to put in her garden boxes, the old lady went home, assuring Fergal and Peter that "Here were the first people who smelled of parchment, yet didn't let that smell turn her stomach."

This was the first of many visits. The motherless sisters under Kallinikos' abstracted tutelage were wont to go about Constantinople with a freedom unusual for the run of genteel unmarried women, but Kasia soon found that no neighbour was peevish enough to breathe a word against their characters. Michael reported that the priests at St. Mary the Deaconess, their parish church, praised their piety and charity, although their father came rather seldom to mass and was suspected of the Nestorian heresy. So Kasia visited them often, and Fergal never grudged attendance, especially after his mistress explained bluntly to the sisters, "He's not a slave, this red head. In his own land his father was some kind of a 'Serenity,' I suppose, and no doubt he's got bluer blood than a certain old Strategissa, shaped like an oil-vat, whose name I *might* mention."

Therefore on pretext of trifling errands Fergal went often to the house of the Lecturer. Anthusa seemed always

assisting her father with his crucibles or bookish researches, but Sophia was more accessible. With Marsa of course bestowing discreet countenance, Fergal was thus favoured with many interviews. The native wit and gift of speech of the Celt kindled with each opportunity. His long captivity at Damascus supplied him endless anecdotes, which, artful rascal, he could expand to the best of advantage. Soon he found himself incessantly calculating how soon he might decently repeat his visits. In this way Hormisdas' quondam chattel found the days beginning to glide by in a decidedly pleasant fashion.

Matters had thus been ripening steadily, when one evening Leo returned from the War Ministry in a state of unwonted petulance. Accustomed to talk freely to Kasia, he poured out his wrath against a certain self-confident engineer who had proposed a new type of catapult, and had constructed a costly mechanism, only to have it fail ludicrously. When the Strategos' passion had subsided, Fergal, serving the modest supper, fell on one knee before Leo:

“Would the *despotes* suffer him to speak?”

“Certainly,” cried the general testily, “did you learn among the Saracens how to make better war engines?”

“Not so, *despotes*; but I know one who can. I have seen the models of a marvellous catapult at the house of Kallinikos.”

“Kallinikos? That most peaceful of dotards?”

“Yes, truly. His daughters tell me that he has been hiring in a skillful wood-worker and a smith to aid him to prepare imitations of all the machines described by a certain wise Archimedes—somebody long departed.”

“Archimedes? I think I've seen his name in the military books,” confessed Leo. “Tell me more. Perhaps the queer old pedant has hit on something useful, after all.”

Possibly for his own devious ends Fergal exerted his Celtic eloquence. As a result, the next day Leo returned early from his bureau, wrapped himself in a plain chlamys to avoid frequent recognitions, and with Kasia in her sedan, its bearers and Fergal and Peter as sole attendants, he set forth for the Forum of Theodosius.

The appearance of the mighty war-minister, even in Kasia's friendly company, put all the household of Syrians in a wondrous flutter. Old Ephraim almost broke his back salaaming when he took the message, “Leo the Strategos requests an interview with the most learned Kallinikos.”

The menial, however, returned only after a long interval, and not with his master, but with Anthusa. She was red and obviously embarrassed.

“My father, most Illustrious Serenity,” she courtesied, “says he is in the midst of a vital experiment. His crucibles are at precisely the right heat. He cannot leave them. He prays to be excused.”

“Tell him, gracious *kyria*,” replied Leo smiling, “that for once I have plenty of that rare thing—time. We will wait.”

“Show my son your father's books, girl,” commanded Kasia, bustling about; “he can make much more out of gilt initials and black hen's tracks than I can.”

Anthusa threw open the chests and presses, and brought out the best treasures. After a little she forgot she conversed with the Strategos of Thrace. Her words came naturally. Her explanations of rare volumes lost nothing with Leo, because they were uttered with an exquisite diction and accent which the greatest patricianesses might have envied. Possibly the interval was long for Anthusa. It was far shorter to her guest. At last, to the maiden's great relief, Ephraim appeared bowing and doubling again.

“May it please your extraordinarily Magnificent Lordship,” he announced, “my master says that while the crucibles are cooling he will see you.”

Ephraim was closely followed by Kallinikos in person. The savant wore an astonishingly dirty robe, burned through in several places. His hands were smutty with charcoal; even his beard was slightly singed. Leo, not without amusement, caught the glances of mortified dismay exchanged between Sophia and Anthusa. Upon his chief guest Kallinikos gazed somewhat blankly, then began mumbling his wonder that his antiquarian researches should interest busy men of affairs.

The strategos explained with soldierly directness what Fergal had told him, and described his own disappointment with the unsuccessful catapult. Kallinikos' eye kindled directly: "I need not be told wherefore it failed. The levers were arranged on the fallacious principles proposed by Zenodotos. Not that he was a feeble mathematician; indeed, his treatise on the 'Equal Periphery' is worthy of profound reverence; but in mechanics—what a child!—Now if your engineer had but sat at the feet of Archimedes——"

But here the sage ran off into a long discourse as to how, while turning over ill-arranged manuscripts in the public library at the Octagon by the Augustæum, he had lighted upon a unique document, giving the very specifications and drawings of those incomparable military engines wherewith "the diving Archimedes" had so long baffled the Roman Marcellus at the siege of Syracuse. Forthwith Kallinikos had engaged craftsmen, and with much labour had prepared working models of all the machines described.

"Not that he, a man of peace, so hateful of bloodshed that he even shrank from ordering the extermination of superabundant kittens, desired the destruction of mankind by such siege engines, but he was anxious to test the accuracy of the manuscript, and also to vindicate to a certain misdoubting colleague the authority of the great Syracusan as a master of mechanics, statics, and hydrostatics, as well as in pure mathematics; for in such matters as quadrature of the circle——" Here mercifully he paused for lack of breath.

Leo could therefore interpose, "I pray you, learned father; I doubt not the fame of your great Archimedes, but since I do not share your erudite disputations, favour me with a sight of the models themselves."

"Follow me," commanded Kallinikos, plunging across his courtyard and swinging open a heavy door. Leo entered a spacious apartment the like whereof he had never seen. A broad table was strewn with parchments, calculating tablets, mathematical dividers and a bronze globe whereon were inscribed all the constellations. Around the room ran numerous shelves, some bearing a carefully arranged collection of curious stones, others covered with birds and small quadrupeds, artfully preserved and skillfully mounted. The soldier recoiled for an instant. A full-sized leopard seemed opening his fangs before him, but Anthusa's smothered laugh proclaimed that the figure was harmless. Speedily his eye was caught by a broad copper plate mounted on a stand, and Kallinikos was explaining that here was a map of the world according to Strabo, and containing (he made bold to say) certain additions beyond the knowledge of the sage of Alexandria. Then at every turn Leo beheld models in wood and metal of strange mechanisms, some for military purposes, but others whereof the design baffled him completely. In one corner a fire was glowing under copper cauldrons, and the room reeked with the penetrating odour of some drug that just had been under experiment.

With courtesy but firmness Leo compelled the sage to omit a long lecture on poliorcetics, and to display his newest models. Small as these were, their faithful construction and proportions illustrated all their principles. The soldier laid aside as hopelessly impractical the attempt to prepare a series of mirrors powerful enough to converge the sun's rays upon a hostile ship and burn it from a distance, but in the catapult he instantly perceived an adjustment of ropes, counterweights and levers surpassing the best in the arsenal. Not without boyish ardour he shot harmless missiles, while Kallinikos watched his enthusiasm with unconcealed delight. At length Leo set down the model.

"Venerable *kyrios*," he declared, "a full-powered catapult like this should fling its bolts full fifty fathoms beyond the best range of any we possess. In a siege ten such engines might be worth a thousand men. Let Fergal take this model away, and to-morrow you shall receive such an order on the Count of the Treasury as will prove the imperial gratitude."

The lecturer shook his head vehemently.

"Take it hence. I am gratified that a thing prepared out of pure love of science, even as men study the moon, should have so utilitarian an end—but nothing from the Treasury; let my wealth never grow by devising the slaughter even of Hagarines. Besides, the idea was not mine, but Archimedes'. My wants are simple. My girls are not penniless. Every solidus above sufficiency is a snare to divert me from the noble quest of undefiled truth."

Leo whistled through his teeth. Pillar saints might possibly thus sweep gold aside, but not many other mortals, according to his experience. Then his wonder and withal his sense of humility grew as Kallinikos showed to him yet other things—the presses of dried plants and herbs which her father said Anthusa had mounted; the great living African bat that blinked grotesquely from an inverted cage on the ceiling; an elaborate combination of blocks and pulleys wherewith a child might lift a marble pillar, and finally a sizable bronze cylinder, pivoted upon a central axis and with bent pipes projecting at certain intervals from its surface.

The strategos gazed upon this last device with unconcealed bewilderment, whereat the delighted savant signalled to Ephraim. The domestic poured water into a tightly closed cauldron beneath the cylinder, laid charcoal under the cauldron, ignited the fuel, and presently, even as Kallinikos was explaining to his guest the different veinings of Parian, Pentelic and Proconnesian marbles, there was a hissing noise as of an hundred serpents. Lo! without human touch or other apparent agency, right under their mortal eyes the bronze cylinder was whirling around with lightning velocity, with hot jets of vapour leaping from all its tubes.

“Art magic,” screamed Kasia, clapping her hands over her ears; “the devil’s inside it!”

“It is merely Hero’s nigh forgotten ‘aeropile,’ ” explained Kallinikos benevolently, and told how the unseen power came neither from demons nor from wizard spells, but simply from the energy contained in the steam which arises from boiling water.

“But what’s the good of it all?” cried she.

“Every substance, every power which God has planted in this world is good,” responded the lecturer simply; “it is only for us patiently to search them out. Then in time He will reveal the purpose.”

“I would we found some solid use for this strange ‘vapour engine,’ ” remarked Leo, not a little awestruck; “it irks me to see the strength of men, horses or even of mere water flying all to waste.”

“Since the strength is there,” remarked Kallinikos unconcernedly, “some day, doubt it not, God will reveal its uses to men—though perhaps only after a thousand years.”

But now the shelves and the presses had all been explored, and the Strategos was seeking courteous words of thanks and farewell, when Kallinikos plucked at his mantle.

“Good youth,” the savant had long since cast official honorifics to the winds when addressing his visitor, “grant to an old man one small petition.”

“Anything, venerable father.”

“We are greatly in your debt. Payment is impossible, but as token our gratitude is not vain, do you and your good mother remain and break bread with us.”

The look of consternation stamped simultaneously upon the countenances of the two sisters assailed the soldier’s gravity, but he answered at once:

“My evening—thanked be the Saints—is free; we are greatly honoured.”

Sophia, with a despairing gesture towards her father, suddenly disappeared. There was an unwonted running to and fro among the Syrian servitors. Anthusa also glided away. Leo gave Kallinikos a rare happiness by listening to an exposition of Poseidonios’ theory of the tides—a matter whereof the soldier was in sheer and unabashed ignorance. When the girls reappeared, Leo was only vaguely conscious that both seemed more charming than ever, but Kasia more professionally noticed that they had slipped on silken gowns and had flowers in their hair. And then Ephraim announced that supper was ready.

Kallinikos took his guests to a modest dining-room, where two choice mosaics of Odysseus and the Sirens, and of Joseph uplifting Benjamin faced in friendly proximity. A large semi-circular table stood covered with viands. The lecturer apologized for having abandoned the still-frequent custom of reclining at meat, and ushered Leo to the seat of honour at his right hand, next which was placed his mother. The food was simple, but Kasia noticed with approval that the cooking was the best. When her father’s allusions seemed too recondite, Anthusa fell to boasting how the eggs and vegetables were from their own farm by his villa at Therapia. After a little, Leo forgot all about the intrigues of worthless officers and the knavery he had just unearthed in the quartermaster’s department. Completely at ease, his laugh was merry, his speech free, and his stories of bizarre adventures in the Caucasus lost nothing when recited to such an audience. With no pleasant surprise he presently realized that the board was cleared—that the innocent feast was at an end.

Kallinikos nodded to his daughters.

“Our guests will pardon our custom. We are simple people and show our simplicity by making every night the same.”

Then the lecturer and the two maidens stood together, and with downcast eyes chanted what Leo knew was the very old “Apostolic hymn” of thanksgiving after meat:

“Thou art blessed, O Lord, who nourishest me in my youth:
Who givest food to all flesh.
Fill now our hearts with joy and gladness,
That at all times, having all-sufficiency,
We may abound to every good work,
In Christ Jesus, our Lord!
With whom and to Thee be glory, honour and might,
Forever and ever! Amen!”

When the grace was ended, Kallinikos turned again to Anthusa: “And now, of course, the organ.”

Anthusa compressed her lips: “Not to-night, father, our guests grow weary.”

“*Kyria*,” cried Leo, hardly knowing what he said, “I am the least weary man in all the world.”

Anthusa sighed prettily, blushed again, but submitted. The servants tugged in and set before her a portable organ with three octaves of bronze pipes set over silver keys. Sophia stood beside it, gently working the lever for the bellows. Then Leo sat spellbound while Anthusa, after pressing down a few soft notes, let her calm eyes wander afar, then opened her lips—and from them rushed a melody clear and sweet as bells across the summer sea.

And for the first time in his life Leo heard the great choruses of the poets of Athens poured out as noble song. After her first embarrassment was over, Anthusa lost herself in the music. The Antigone, the Orestes, the Prometheus, the Ion—she knew them all. Now some winged ode of Theban Pindar would leap to her tongue, and now some high choral of Simonides. A new world as it were—a world of vocal, incarnate spirits, infinitely fair, seemed suddenly opening before the pragmatic soldier. He felt lifted out of self, with all the dross and dregs of life retreating. And almost he thought himself to be drifting veritably with the “Clouds” in empyrean, when at last Anthusa struck on some lilting chorus of Aristophanes, such as

“Cloud maidens who float on forever,
Dew-sprinkled, fleet-bodied and fair,
Let us rise from our Sire’s loud river,
Great Ocean, and soar through the air
To the peaks of the pine-covered mountains
Where the pines hang as tresses of hair!
Let us seek the watch-towers undaunted
Where the well-watered corn-fields abound,
And through murmurs of rivers nymph-haunted
The songs of the sea-waves resound:
And the sun in the sky never wearies
Of spreading his radiance around....”

At last the flow of song ended. Anthusa’s hands fell. She glanced at her father.

“Sufficient, child,” he nodded dreamily. “We are Christians, not pagans. So once again give us the evening hymn.”

Many a time had Leo heard the familiar stanzas of Patriarch Anatolios, but never as now carried by that voice:

“The day is past and over,
All thanks, O Lord, to Thee!
I pray Thee now that sinless
The hours of dark may be:
O Jesu, keep me in Thy sight

And save me through the coming night.

“Be Thou my soul’s preserver,
O God, for Thou dost know
How many are the perils
Through which I have to go.
Lover of men, oh, hear my call,
And guard and save me from them all....”

... Very low was Leo’s reverence when he took his leave of Kallinikos that night. His words were few, but his whole manner told how he had been stirred by a flood of hitherto unwonted emotions. He assured the lecturer that he would not fail to return and examine with greater care his other models. Out in the darkened streets, where link boys were running before the carriages and litters, Kasia spoke to him:

“Well, wasn’t Fergal right about the catapult?”

“Ei, the catapult?” said Leo, rousing himself from a deep reverie. “I had nigh forgotten all about the catapult, the other engines and the wars. We have been—what shall I say?—*to the House of Peace.*”



CHAPTER VII

THE PROCESSION OF THE EMPRESS

As the spring advanced, subalterns and associates at the War Department noted a subtle change in the young Strategos of Thrace. He was less abrupt in his commands, more gentle in his manner, more whimsical in his phrases. He was seen at the great bazaars on the "Street of Lamps"^[20] selecting garments of price which set off his fine military figure to best advantage. He even visited the shop of Ibas the Armenian, the most exclusive jeweller in the city, and made relatively extravagant purchases of costly rings. The women talked about him more than ever when they met at their variety theatres and baths. It was long taken for granted that he was contemplating a wealthy marriage; but nothing happened, although Theophano Dukas continued unwedded, and the War Minister was occasionally a guest at her father's palace.

One day when Leo visited the Daphne to secure the signet of Paul upon certain documents, the eunuch beckoned to his secretaries to withdraw to a proper distance, and then his manner became confidential.

"I have been watching you, Sir Strategos," he said, smiling with his hairless lips.

"You have then learned my mistakes," replied Leo boldly. "You have also learned that I have striven my best."

"I have learned that there was no blunder in your appointment. All hopes in your abilities have been justified. And yet—we are disappointed."

"I do not quite understand your Sublimity."

"A man who will let his personal opportunities slip through his fingers, as do you, can sometimes fail in his public duties also."

"I am still puzzled," confessed the soldier.

Paul half closed his eyes and gazed at the other penetratingly: "Perhaps you think to conquer in some deep game which my friends and I cannot understand. Think hard. Look well to your pieces on the board. If you intrigue, you play against masters. The son of an Isaurian peasant should take no chances. Once before I reminded you that you continued unmarried——"

The form of the strategos straightened. "My superiors command my obedience," he announced with emphasis; "my patrons deserve my gratitude. But my household and my private desires are my own."

The eunuch shrugged his ill-shapen shoulders and forced a short laugh.

"*Pfui!* Let's not quarrel, my dear general." He smiled unpleasantly. "What can an old courtier like myself do but play the busybody? Your work at the War Ministry rejoices us all. Here, let me seal the diplomas."

After Leo had bowed himself out a little stiffly, the prime minister's bell tinkled, and a page went out with a hasty summons to Niketas and Theokistos.

The junior members of the palace triumvirate came to their senior colleague immediately, and Paul revealed the unsatisfactory attitude of the Isaurian.

"Manifestly," commented Theokistos, "his refusal to marry springs from some deep cause. He's not pious enough for some absurd vow of celibacy. If he gets out of control, it's a blow to all our party."

"The more so," confirmed the eunuch, "because the clerks in my pay in the War Department report his services there are indispensable. He has reformed the General Staff with firmness, yet tact. A remarkable new catapult is being manufactured at the arsenal. Now he is reorganizing, with astonishing prudence, the great Armeniac theme. His popularity with the army is such that to remove him might veritably set the palace on fire. We must act most warily."

"That loutish mother of his," remarked Niketas, "is at least harmless, though he won't send her from the city. Our concern should be elsewhere. His refusal to push his suit for the Dukas girl, considering her wealth and connection, is the act of no sane man; yet, where's there a cooler head than his?"

“I like the case little,” thrust back Theokistos. “If Leo’s not already betrothed to Theophano it’s for reasons that touch our safety. The Patrician Soganes has the blood of the old deposed Heraclius dynasty in his veins, and, though he’s too old to head a conspiracy, he’s got a marriageable daughter. Has this Isaurian been inveigled into seeking her hand along with her father’s claims? Such a thing might be.”

Paul shook his head. “I’ve thought of that, but Soganes’ butler (who gets my fees) swears that his master and Leo are barely acquainted.”

“And common report,” pursued Niketas, “makes our fine strategos as moral as a cenobite, not given to wine or dice, seldom at the races or pantomime theatres, and with an appetite only for reports, fortress plans and infantry reviews. We must hunt more diligently.”

“There is something else, *philotate*,” announced the eunuch cynically. “Before we wander farther it shall be searched out. I’ve not dried up in the palace all my days without learning to know men—and women. Helen ruined Troy. Cleopatra undid Antony. The conduct of the most Serene Leo can be explained, I think it is safe to say, simply by remarking: ‘He has a mistress.’”

“Well, what’s the harm?” rejoined Theokistos in a relieved tone. “Mistresses are common and safe.”

“Merely, my very noble Secretary,” spoke Paul, “because mistresses are pliable and corruptible. Of course, she’s keeping her lover from the Dukas marriage, which would probably mean her downfall. Very possibly she’s playing the other faction’s game (I know that Nikephoros Skleros and his following!) and perhaps winning for them control of the army. The whole case, then, becomes very simple.”

Theokistos made the eunuch a profound reverence:

“I marvelled at your Sublimity’s astuteness before. I am more than ever convinced of its powers now. We must find her out.”

Paul’s bell tinkled again. “Send in Petronax,” he ordered. After some moments a sleek, well-formed young man, in brilliant livery, with eyes subtle as a cat’s, was plumping on his knees before the patricians.

“Petronax,” ordered the eunuch, “in the past you have discharged delicate missions; take now another. Find out if Leo the Strategos has a mistress and where he keeps her. Learn all about her. Of course, move secretly. Nothing overt, you understand, but report promptly. It’s a matter of weight.”

“With the forehead, Sublimity; with the forehead,” and Petronax, literally fulfilling his words, smote his head upon the carpet.

“A most useful fellow,” assured Paul, dismissing him with a wave; “and quite to be trusted. In three days we will know everything.”

“And decide whether a bribe, a halter or a nunnery will answer us the best,” laughed Niketas as the heavy curtain closed behind the emissary.

* * * * *

In these same days Leo had been undergoing a new experience. No man could have risen as had he, without drinking much of life’s cup, too often even to the evil lees. Saint and ascetic he had never been. Great crimes had not stained his soul, but in occasional self-searching moments he had reviewed with self-reproach his share in deeds oblique, brutal or fleshly. The guard-corps of Justinian II had been no monastery of the virtues. He had known the ways of a luxurious court and its sordid intrigues, of the barracks and their coarseness, of the battle and its bloody perils, of the glozing society of the magnates, of the base wiles of unholy women. If he had been saved from the searing effects of the life about him, it had been because of an innate disgust for things artificial, unmanly and vile, and because the influence of his mother, even in his most tempted moments, had ever remained his guiding star.

Kasia, however, although she had given her son all that she might of positive virtue, of unpretending piety, and of abhorrence of pretense, had made it her open boast that she could not rise above her peasant viewpoint. If their home

contained sundry refinements, these existed at Leo's behest, not hers. If he showed an instinctive love for books, and spent many an hour over Polybios and Prokopios, when his associates were at banquet, she simply marvelled at his use of spare time.^[21] Hitherto, caught in his military life, he had looked on the world of the intellect and the nobler arts, as a super-mundane realm, wherein entrance was perhaps to be forever denied him. And now—an opportunity.

Fergal had no longer any difficulty in finding excuses for interviews with Sophia. His master provided all the excuses for him. The interest which the strategos developed in Kallinikos' military models presently made the astute Armorican's eyes roll in his head. The new catapult worked excellently, but Leo must needs visit the lecturer repeatedly to consult about a small adjustment which might well have been settled by a letter. The War Minister even saw possibilities in a proposed movable siege-tower, although Kallinikos professed that the plans were faulty, thanks to errors in the manuscript. Furthermore, Leo suddenly discovered that the Aqueduct of Valens, so essential for filling the city reservoirs in emergency, needed careful repairs. Every afternoon as the work progressed he rode to confer with the master mason, and Fergal failed not to note that his patron invariably went through a certain side street, and by a certain house, with his eye on a certain lattice.

Seldom the victim of torturing self-analysis, Leo long kept from questioning why he found the learned converse of Kallinikos fascinating, although, truth to tell, the old man was often well worth a hearer. The great thing the soldier knew was that in these days he was often entering a house the like whereof had never swung its doors to him before: a house where voices were melodious and low: a house where gentle consideration ruled every act—where there abounded not golden cups and gilded couches, but books of noble thoughts and deeds: where pelf was only prized so far as it ministered to the things of the spirit: where happiness rested not on the life without but on the life within. All these things Leo observed wonderingly; and unconsciously he grew humble, and also very glad.

When Kasia came not with her son, at first Sophia and Anthusa kept discreetly in the background, but Kallinikos needed his daughters to help display his models, and after a little the shyness wore off. The girls no longer called Leo "Serenity," but merely the friendly "Kyrios," and soon they met his unassuming moods with a frank demeanour befitting that granted a dignified cousin.

At last Fergal ceased counting his patron's visits. Once or twice the discussions with Kallinikos would run into the evening, when Leo would need no persuasion to stay to supper. Sophia was no longer disturbed when he did so, and later must appear the little organ to evoke the silver voice of Anthusa. Once the girls paid an afternoon call upon Kasia. Fergal never explained how it was Sophia's donkey most unaccountably fell lame, and how no substitute could be obtained until the strategos himself strode in after a weary day at his ministry. Then Kasia's cookery must needs be sampled, after which Leo (asserting that footpads were many and the watch unreliable) convoyed them homeward himself, with his archers clattering on ahead to guard the way.

All this time Kasia and Fergal spoke not a word about a certain matter, although sometimes the twain winked at one another slyly. Equally silent was Leo as to which of the two sisters interested him more; but the strategos (so Fergal with no sorrow observed) always seemed to have the more conversation with Anthusa, and in his abstracted moments when he had the habit of humming raucously certain tunes, they were always tunes that had first fallen much more melodiously from the lips of the younger sister.

Thus matters progressed through Lent and the great feast of Easter, and on a pleasant day soon after, Leo had to ride out again to inspect the aqueduct, and must needs go to the red house on the quiet street (his horse now knew the way without touch of bridle), and ask for speech with Kallinikos. Scarcely had the sisters greeted him in the aula, and Sophia had disappeared to summon her father, when in the street was heard a shouting. Anthusa sprang to the lattice.

A bustle suddenly pervaded the peaceful way. Varlets in imperial livery, with the Cæsarian eagle blazoned on their breasts, were running along routing from their lairs in the gutters the innumerable street dogs wherewith the city abounded. Other menials were scattering over the pavement great masses of myrtle and laurel leaves, box and ivy, while here and there they were setting down lighted pots of incense which released a heavy smoke so that one saw the avenue only through a blue haze. Sophia, running back from the study, gazed also and clapped her hands.

"I have it! This is the Saint's name day at the Convent of St. Floros, and the shortest way from the palace lies hither. The Empress is coming."

Leo inwardly thanked the Trinity that he had not been summoned to join the other dignitaries undoubtedly required to

march in the train of Majesty. The procession presented scant novelty for him, but the sisters had been too home-bound often to witness the palace fêtes, and their faces glowed prettily with excitement. The strategos dimly realized that he had never beheld Anthusa so animated and charming. Even Kallinikos laid down his Ptolemy to gaze upon the invasion of their wontedly peaceful quarter.

Presently sounded a great clamour of oboes, lutes, dulcimers, trumpets and cymbals. Then could be heard the deep chanting of the priests and monks heading the procession. Their hymn was supposedly in praise of the Panagia and of St. Floros, but at intervals would rise the obsequious refrain to their human patroness:

“Thou crownèd of God,
Basilissa, belovèd of Christ,
Thou Beauty of the Purple,
Come now and shine upon thy servants:
Rejoice the hearts of thy people!”

“‘The Beauty of the Purple?’ ” questioned Anthusa, leaning against the lattice. “Is her Sacred Majesty indeed that?”

“Wait and see,” responded Leo enigmatically, his eyes intent upon the glowing colour in her face.

Now sounded the thunderous shout from the multitudes of citizens and idlers who invariably thronged all the street corners and areas along the way.

“Christ-loving Basilissa shine forth!
Shine forth, thou Beauty of the Purple!”

Leo wondered to himself whether he could loyally and wisely tell the girls that Vania, Philippicus’ Empress, was a fit mate for her sybaritic husband—a luxury-loving Armenian woman, too fat to waddle save when borne on the arms of eunuchs, too doltish to give intelligent orders to her women. He kept his peace. Such unspoiled delight in an empty spectacle refreshed his soul. He stood back from the lattice, watching not the bowing and scraping throngs below, but the eager movements of Anthusa.

Now the van of the marchers came in sight. First a corps of heralds in long red gabardines went swinging white staves to clear the way. Then came three solid platoons of Protectors in their blue silk uniforms, carrying long spears and blue shields sprinkled with black stars. Leo pointed out his friend the Count of the Guards, their commander, on horseback, trailing a flaming red tunic, purple-breasted, and bearing a green shield centred with a huge golden cross.

The chanting and rhythmic acclamations grew louder. The great corps of musicians followed, and a company of black-robed, white-veiled priests and monks, their tall hats all bobbing together. Above them floated half a dozen gauzy banners covered with religious pictures. One stalwart deacon carried on high a silver statue of St. Floros, at sight whereof the more pious spectators fell on their knees. The rhythmic acclamations intensified.

“Christ have mercy upon us!
Thou Mother of God preserve us!
Thou holy St. Floros intercede for us!
Preserve and intercede for the most pious and fortunate Augusta.
The Panagia preserve the Basilissa, belovèd of Christ!”

Now followed the civil officials of the palace, each haughty functionary mounted on a white mule, his robe falling in enormous folds, and his steed surrounded by a squad of menials in turbans and mantles made gorgeous with colour. After half a score of these high logothetes, counts and consulars, appeared still more white mules bearing the patricianesses who attended upon the Empress. They were all in flowing costumes of blue silk, and wore their state “proplomæ”—lofty-peaked headdresses with white veils, held down by circlets of gold. Then pealed the acclamations again:

“The Beauty of the Purple!—
Ten thousand years to the Joy of the whole World!”

The “Beauty of the Purple” rode in an open four-wheeled car completely covered with gold-plate and drawn by four

horses with coats like new snow. Their trappings were purple, marked with golden eagles. Around the car marched a square of twenty beardless eunuchs in liveries stiff with jewels and ornaments. At the bridle of one of the imperial horses, with an ostentatious humility marking him out as proudest of the proud, walked the acknowledged first power in the Empire, Paul himself, the Master of the Palace.

The imperial car advanced with befitting deliberation. Under the clear light its sole passenger, centre of all applause and glory, flashed like a terrestrial sun. The sisters saw an obese woman sitting in an enormous purple mantle spangled plenteously with gold. Gold were the slippers which peeped from under its folds. Gold of course the diadem upon her head. The gleaming metal was however partly hidden by the gems. Even from the lattice one could almost identify the heavy emeralds and topazes. The crown was surmounted by an elaborate pearl-set cross, and heavy strings of pearls hid the wearer's neck and shoulders.

Motionless and passionless the Basilissa rode straight on, the thunderous chanting seemingly no more to her than the dashings of the sea. Whether the features beneath the diadem were coarse or mobile, passionate or pitiful, what mattered it? A bedizened doll might have shown as much life as the Augusta. The sovereign was almost past the red house, and the rear guard of yet other Protectors was coming to view, when suddenly the automatic progress of the imperial car was interrupted.

Inspired by some fiend, an unlucky street dog, chased perhaps by boys from his refuge, darted before the white horses, surprising the one at whose bridle was complacently marching Paul. The mettlesome horse reared and curvetted. For an instant the car was shaken. The eunuch had the reins twitched from his grasp and barely escaped a kick and a fall. His white robe was dashed with mud ere a dozen hands could calm the horses. Under its enormous crown, the sisters could just catch the startled eyes and blanching face of the Empress. As the malefic dog shot away, an outraged Protector avenged the insult to Majesty with a keen lunge of his spear. The dog ran off on three legs, bleeding, while his piercing yelp rose above the chanting of the priests. Then the acclamations resumed. The monarch settled back into her state of petrified calm. The eunuch resumed his post at the bridle. Soon the chanting and cheering died around the next street corner, and the little quarter settled to its accustomed quiet.

Some hundreds may have witnessed the trifling incident of the dog. Not one had wisdom enough to know that on that incident there would some day in large measure depend the life or death of Leo, Anthusa, and Paul, or even of the entire safety of Constantinople and the Roman Empire....

... Leo had seen little of the procession. He had seen very much of the sisters. Giving free rein to his fancy, he had tried to picture the sensitively moulded features of Anthusa looking forth betwixt a purple robe and a pearl-encrusted diadem. The thought contained nothing displeasing. As the crowds in the street dispersed, he asked an idle question:

“Well, most gracious *kyriai*, how would one of *you* like to be ‘The Beauty of the Purple’?”

Sophia's eyes kindled immediately.

“Pray, sir, don't ask silly questions! What man doesn't want to be Emperor?”

“Yet the crown was heavy and the day was hot.”

“As if she thought of *that!*” retorted the elder sister disdainfully.

“But your opinion, Kyria Anthusa?” continued the officer.

The younger maiden's calm forehead wrinkled.

“I don't agree with Sophia,” she replied with a pretty shrug; “a Basilissa's slavery must be intolerable—a slavery to one's own greatness, forever in purple bonds and golden fetters. I could never endure it—that is, unless I loved my husband very much.”

“Then, dear *kyria*,” laughed the strategos, “from what I know of the Daphne you would find life there very stupid!”

So passed the afternoon; but one other trifling event followed: In the doorway was found cowering and trembling the luckless dog which had cost Paul his dignity. The spear-thrust had been vicious, and, to boot, the creature was only half-fed. His mangled ears and tail proclaimed him the veteran of many street battles. Kallinikos began elaborate remarks

about how he possessed some poison on the formulæ once tested by Cleopatra upon criminals prior to her own suicide, and here was a chance to “end the poor creature’s misery, and to test out the prescription.” But Anthusa immediately had the animal up in her soft arms (Leo watching with wondering eyes), washed off and salved the wound, fed the wretched nigh to bursting, then laid him on straw in the courtyard—her patient enduring unresistingly and wagging his tail in silent gratitude.

This done, the strategos, in the full spirit of the hour, remarked merrily that so favoured a creature must forthwith have a name. Kallinikos learnedly suggested “Argos” after the famous hound of Odysseus; but the sisters denied their father’s right to voice in the matter, and gladly took the suggestion of Leo that he be christened “Dorkon,” for the renowned charger which Heraclius bestrode when he defeated the Persians. “Because,” said the officer gaily, “if this Dorkon did not defeat the Barbarians, at least he smote a Chief Minister and an Empress with fright—and few are the mortals that can do that. So let us give him a good Christian and Roman name.”

They parted that evening with more than the usual deliberation. There was even some remark that now the weather was so fine, a water party up the Golden Horn would be enjoyable. When Leo bent over Anthusa’s hand he thought she did not withdraw it as quickly as at first. The manner in which he whistled and hummed to himself all the way homeward made his archers say that their general was surely very well pleased with old Kallinikos’ military engines.

Once returned, however, Fergal demanded a private word with his master:

“*Despotes*, I think I should tell you. While you were engaged—otherwise—the Armorican’s cough was very discreet—“Ephraim said that something had troubled him. Strange men have been lurking around the house of Kallinikos for several days. Once a beggar-woman made impertinent inquiries of the maids about their young mistresses. Just as we were returning home I thought I caught sight of a smooth sort of fellow observing us. My suspicion is that I’ve seen him once before when sent on a message to the palace.”

Leo bit his mustaches angrily.

“This shall be looked into. If any wretched fool should venture——” His hand almost crushed the lion’s head on his armchair. He did not pursue further because simultaneously Peter entered the chamber!

“A messenger from the War Department. The great beacon is reported to be blazing on the heights of Mount Damatrys^[22] on the Asiatic shore.”

The minister leaped to his feet. “The fire-signal is flashed on from Mount Tauros and across all Anatolia. So the Saracens have attacked the Cilician passes at last. Perhaps their great advance has begun. Heigh-ho!”—he vented a mingled laugh and sigh—“no more afternoons at Kallinikos’ house for yet a while. I must cross to Asia very early to consult on many things. Pack as usual, Peter; and you, Fergal”—he turned earnestly to the Celt—“look to my mother (so far of course as she will let you!), and if you be not the greatest numskull whose head was ever thatched with red, sift out Ephraim’s story, and if some scoundrel is hatching mischief against *that* house, bring me back to Constantinople—yes, though I were in combat with the great Kalif himself.” ...

... At grey dawn the strategos’ barge landed him at Chrysopolis.

CHAPTER VIII

A DEACON OF HAGIA SOPHIA

THE Most Reverend Evagrios, Deacon of Hagia Sophia, rented a small but pleasant apartment on the second floor of a large residence building near the Julian Haven. From the central court a staircase led up to his rooms the outer windows whereof opened upon a pleasing view over the small harbour, and across the domes of the Church of Saints Sergios and Bacchos to the bright Marmora. Most of the near-by dwellings were filled with the families of minor court officials, and the lower entrance to the Hippodrome was near enough to provide a great convenience in attending the races. The neighbourhood, in short, was highly genteel and suitable for a self-important member of the clergy.

The deacon had furnished his rooms handsomely, although certain captious visitors had complained that his furniture carried too much gilt paint, that the holy books in his cupboards were most indifferent copies although in very sumptuous purple bindings, that his mosaic of the Marriage at Cana was garish, and that the marble Priapos in his dining-room was in doubtful taste for the home of a man in holy orders. None could deny, however, that the dinners served in this dining-room were excellent, and had been even improved by the advent of the new cook Neokles; while by general consent in the gayer circles of the city, Evagrios' Nikosia was counted as comely and vivacious a "Spiritual Sister" as any such damsel flaunted by an unmarried churchman.

Evagrios ranked merely as a deacon, but to be deacon of Hagia Sophia, which reckoned over five hundred clerics in its service, implied the handling of a vast secular endowment. Wide landed properties, hospitals, poorhouses and orphanages all had to be maintained. Several hundred shops, on land owned by the cathedral, had to be rented out. The holy man therefore had often to talk confidentially with the Patriarch himself. It was said the Logothete of the Treasury once actually asked him to advance a thousand pounds of Hagia Sophia's gold to tide over a temporary stringency at the Exchequer. The popes of small churches cringed before such a deacon, and he could with perfect safety patronize all the lesser bishops and hegumens. Everybody spoke of him as "a man sure to rise," and as a consequence he was one of the most envied of the younger clerics in the capital. If a few grieved quietly over certain aspects of his career these captious souls seemed wholly without influence.

Evagrios therefore ought to have been a very contented man. When he returned home one afternoon immediately after Leo's departure for Asia, the deacon however was in a most unclerical ill-humour. He flung into his aula after a spiteful command to the driver of his mule car, and clapped his hands emphatically, bringing into his presence a pleasant-featured young girl wearing a long blue peasant smock.

"Where's Nikosia?" was his demand.

"She's out lurching with a friend," was the somewhat hesitant response. "She also said something about going to see the dancers, the farce and the performing bear at the 'Merry Wenches.'"^[23]

"More likely she stopped at the perfumers' shops on the Augustæum, spending my good money," fumed the deacon; but here his eye lit fairly on the damsel, his black mood fled, and he beamed fulsomely:

"Saloma, my dear?"

The girl cast down her eyes, flushed and bit her lip.

"We're quite alone, I think," suggested Evagrios, "won't you give me just a little kiss?"

Saloma's lips trembled: "Oh, despotes, not now! I pray you by the Mother of God not now. I was an honest girl at my father's farm at Dagne. Then I was induced to take service in the city, and you seemed so kind——"

"And haven't I been kind?" smiled the deacon, plucking her sleeve as she shrunk away from him. The girl, however, slipped back from his grasp, tears filling her large eyes.

"*Ai*, yes! Too kind! How can I ever go back to my parents? How can I even go to confession? The priest will ask _____"

"There, there," soothed the churchman, holding out a silver piece in his thick fingers, "let no grey hairs grow. I know a pope who'll confess you, and never let his questions or penances tax a flea. Here's a keration for some gewgaw on the

Mesē. Now let your red little lips give me that kiss.”

Saloma stood piteously hesitant. Whether she would have obeyed the order of Evagrios, or fled the room in distress, will never be recorded, for at that instant a heavy latch rattled with just warning enough to enable the deacon to assume an easy attitude and for the servant to pretend to be picking up dead rose-petals from the carpet. Nikosia entered, followed by her Coptic boy.

The lady had thrown back her ascetic’s robe, disclosing an inner tunic of fine pink wool. She wore extremely heavy earrings set with amethysts and a number of fine brooches. Her cheeks, reddened at the outset by too much rouge, were now more genuinely flushed by some sudden passion, and her dark eyes snapped angrily.

“Well, little dove,” remarked Evagrios coolly, “what sends you home in a flurry? Didn’t those Ephesian acrobats perform well?”

“By the Panagia,” began Nikosia, panting, “this is unendurable. I could have that fellow at Hagia Anastasia scourged!”

“Scourged? It must have been something extraordinary then; explain.”

Nikosia cast off her robe, tossed her black gloves to the silent Saloma and dropped into a chair.

“Merely this: I went to the ‘Merry Wenches.’ The tightrope performer was good, the puppet-show excellent, the mimes most amusing; but, you understand, all were rather broad, even for that particular theatre.”

“It never had fame as a nunnery,” sympathized the deacon.

“After quitting it,” pursued Nikosia, “I wandered with my friends into the narthex of Hagia Anastasia to match some ribbons at the stall of Malchos.^[24] After getting a few ells we bethought us that it were only pious (considering the worldly character of the farce) to enter the church and listen to the sermon just beginning.”

“Highly pious, *philotata*,” approved the deacon.

“I expected to hear that dear man, Pope Kedranos. He always takes you to the seventh heaven when he talks about the Holy Trinity. Absolutely nothing to offend the most tender conscience. Well, I was hardly in a nice seat just opposite the ambo, when behold! there appeared not holy Kedranos, but that abominable rustic Pope Michael, whom they won’t have in so many churches, and who, they say, hangs around the hospitals making miserable the poor and incurable. He mounted the pulpit and delivered such a sermon that I feel as if I had been carded alive in the prefect’s torture chamber.”

“My poor lamb,” soothed Evagrios compassionately; “but what’d he say?”

“He first denounced all kinds of sins in general, such as ‘Pride’ (I’m not proud) and ‘Gambling’ (I never dice—at least, not for very high stakes); and I was just thinking, ‘The fellow isn’t really so bad,’ when suddenly his tune changed. ‘I see before me,’ he cried, ‘not men but mostly women; let me therefore speak of the sins peculiar to their sex!’ And off he rushed with his whips actually snapping in the air.

“My dear gossip Eualia wept aloud, and Plotina, Deacon Kodrox’ ‘Sister,’ seemed ready to leap across and stab him right there on the ambo with her bodkin. ‘Why,’ thundered the wretch, ‘will you deform the faces God hath given you? Harken unto the words of St. Jerome: “What business have rouge and paint upon a Christian cheek? Who can weep for her sins when her tears wash her face bare, and mark furrows upon her skin? With what trust can faces be lifted towards heaven, which the Maker himself cannot recognize as his own workmanship?”’ And sometimes I vow he pointed his finger straight at me, and every eye was turned my way. ‘Yea,’ he shouted out, ‘there are even females in this church wearing the sober robes of nuns, when all the world knows they violate that law which forbids light women to appear save in garments scarlet and awful as their sins.’ Then, worst of all, when he had ended, a thunder of applause went all through the church.^[25] I wrapped my gown about me, and home I came. And now”—her passion wound up—“get you over to Hagia Anastasia and tell the pope in charge never to let that Michael speak there again, or I——”

“*Euge!*” ejaculated Evagrios, “you *are* in a pretty temper. If ever our affections cool, ask the director of the ‘Merry Wenches’ to give you a place in the farce. Theodora was a variety actress before she caught the Crown Prince, and soon became Empress. And so I see now that, as St. John Chrysostom once said, ‘Herodias is raging! Herodias is dancing! Herodias demands the head of John!’—I mean, of course, of Michael.”

“Holy Trinity!” screamed Nikosia in rising fury, “I come home asking for sympathy. I am met by this!” Then she turned viciously on the gazing Saloma. “Out of the room, quean! If you dare to eavesdrop——”

Saloma glided from the room in alarm. Nikosia ran to the door to make sure it was closed, then faced the deacon again:

“Haven’t I a right to a passion? Have I ever before been thus insulted? But it’s just as well. Now I’ve got up courage at last to talk about worse things than even that outrageous preacher. First of all, about Saloma: Is everything innocent between you two?”

“Absolutely, my little dove; absolutely,” assured Evagrios very hastily. “I swear by the spotless Mother of God——”

“I only half believe you; but let that pass. I’ll come to the point: When are we going to get married?”

The deacon’s jaw dropped, and his fingers twitched. “Married?” he echoed. “We? Are you serious, Nikosia?”

“Why not?” she demanded with returning calmness. “You are only a deacon. Deacons can marry. Then I can hold up my head as a Deaconissa of Hagia Sophia and nobody will shrug and point at me.”

Evagrios threw up his arms proclaiming the total inanity of the female sex: “Most beloved Nikosia,” he began, “in all things please be reasonable. Ask a new ring, a new shawl, a new waiting boy, if you will, but don’t thresh over *that* old straw! How often have I explained, and you seemed to comprehend, that although a deacon can marry, and after that can even be ordained a priest, no married clergyman can become a Bishop and still keep his wife. Then where’s my career? Where go my hopes, which you know so well, that some day the old eunuch—I should say the Master of the Palace—may recognize my abilities, and later if the Patriarch’s throne should become vacant——”

“Vah!” ejaculated the lady, sarcastically, “what a ‘Sacred Beatitude’ you’d make! Don’t hunt for moonbeams!”

“I assure you,” persisted the deacon, “my hopes are not groundless. The present incumbent, John, is feeble in health and weak as water. Any day may see his downfall. The patriarchate demands not a saint, but a keen man of affairs who can settle vast properties, who——”

“Just as you have managed the cathedral funds; you know all about the banker Elpidios and how he got the solidi for that ship to Cyprus.”

The deacon grew very red. “Silence,” he commanded. “You know that money was replaced. Let’s talk of something pleasant.”

“Well then, our marriage.”

Evagrios smote the table with fury. “Be reasonable, woman. What would become of you if I were made a bishop? Says not the canon that a bishop must send away his consort to a ‘tolerably distant nunnery’? How would you like to have your hair clipped and be interned for life?”

Nikosia shrugged her shoulders. “I’ll risk it. You’re not bishop yet.”

The deacon was ready with a yet more vehement answer, when the Copt boy thrust his head in at the doorway:

“The kyrios Petronax and another strange kyrios.”

“Show them in,” ordered Evagrios, not sorry to end so unpleasant a discussion, while Nikosia deliberately gathered up her gown and flounced towards an inner room.

Petronax, clad in a good walking tunic, entered and salaamed graciously; behind him walked a squatter figure, almost completely hidden in a huge brown chlamys hooded over his head.

“You’ve no guests?” asked the palace myrmidon, after the initial salutations.

“None, my dear Petronax,” assured the deacon.

“Then his Sublimity may safely uncover.”

Whereat, to the perfect astonishment of Evagrius, the second visitor thrust back his mantle, disclosing the fish-like eyes and hairless countenance of Paul. The deacon literally crouched at his feet when he paid his reverence. "I am overwhelmed," he began; "upon my humble rooms comes the greatest conceivable honour!"

Paul moved towards a chair, short-winded and puffing, and beckoned Evagrius to take another. "Don't name me," he enjoined; "don't act so your servants will chatter. I'm not here for compliments. There are enough of them at the palace." He reviewed the deacon's person and then his apartment with a shrewd glance. "Nice rooms, and in an expensive quarter of the city. You've a pretty 'Sister' also, eh? Costs money to keep her?"

"Yes, Sublimity; yes, yes," assented Evagrius, trying to collect his wits.

"Your allowance from Hagia Sophia is small. You could use a few solidi more?"

"Yes, Sublimity; yes, yes."

"And would perhaps prize my favour in certain other matters?"

"Oh! I'm your devoted slave; your least commands——"

"I understand all that," waved the eunuch. "Don't 'Sublimity' me so much. I want to be private. Now give ear: You know Petronax. He's procured me certain desired information. But to act on it requires a churchman. Therefore I come to you."

The deacon's face glowed. "Your condescension overwhelms me."

"Listen to the end. You wonder why I prefer to come here in a disguise and don't summon you to the palace. Understand then that the business touches the Strategos of Thrace and demands the uttermost delicacy. He must never learn my interest. At the palace he has friends and the very walls can have ears. This place is safest. Now to business."

Paul then stated briefly that for sufficient reasons he desired to break off the infatuation of the strategos for a certain woman who doubtless controlled him. Petronax had investigated her identity. Leo, it seemed, had been making frequent and unrequired visits to one Kallinikos, lecturer at the University. At first he may have gone merely to investigate certain military machines constructed by that absurd pedant, but Kallinikos, it appeared, had the additional asset of two daughters, reported to be well favoured, and quite able to cast their nets to advantage.

"Two daughters," quoth Evagrius in his churchliest accents; "but with which was he infatuated?"

"On that point," reported Petronax, "there was some uncertainty, but a female agent of mine had gossip with their maids. The latter assured her, 'It's plain to see that it's our younger mistress who has the strategos' eye!'"

Evagrius rubbed his hands knowingly:

"I recall the girl often in the churches. Very coy and modest, of course—part of her trade if she's after such big game as the War Minister. A pretty little thing, though you can't tell how much is rouge and paint. Can sing a little, too: probably therefore will take to the theatres if she misses with a rich lover. She's the one to snare his Serenity Leo, who, being by common report absolutely indifferent to women, will doubtless be a very Samson shorn and blinded by his Delilah when at last he *does* succumb."

"Admirably to the point," commended Paul, "no physician discovered a malady better. My worthy Evagrius, you should rise to great things."

The deacon bowed himself double, quivering with delight.

"Again I am transported. Assuming that we deal with this Anthusa—that's her name, I recall—graciously explain how the least of your servants can aid to handle her? As one in holy orders I hope that other means can be found than an abduction—at least, until other expedients fail."

"I prefer less blunted and brutal weapons," replied the eunuch coolly; "that is, unless pressed by necessity. You need not, Reverend Sir, mix up in anything unchurchly. I merely require your coöperation to prosecute a charge before the Patriarch of wizardry and dealings with the Devil."

A great light broke over Evagrius' countenance: "Oh! Sublimity, what surpassing insight! You mean to have such a charge brought against Kallinikos."

"I praise your quick understanding. Petronax will go over all the details he has discovered to support the case. The old driveller has said a number of things which certain jealous colleagues will perhaps maintain against him. There is good chance too of catching him partaking in the Nestorian heresy."

"The Blessed Apostles forbid," cried the deacon, hastily crossing himself.

"It is probably the truth. Perhaps, too, you could find some magic books in his library—the kind St. Paul got them to burn at Ephesus long ago, and which have since been forbidden by all our pious Christian emperors. However, it's probably simplest to base the main charge around a strange bronze device which we understand he possesses, a cylinder with curious metal arms that some of the servants admitted they had seen in their master's workroom, whirling around and emitting hot vapour."

"Undoubtedly from a demon inside," completed the deacon, again crossing himself.

"So it would seem," pursued the Master of the Palace. "This Kallinikos may be a very consort to the Witch of Endor, the possessor of a familiar spirit, and so God has wisely ordered it"—his tones broke with a pious snuffle—"that in guarding our more worldly interests we may also be punishing a gross spiritual wickedness."

The deacon drew himself up, his eyes gleaming:

"My duty as a churchman becomes clear. Charges will be laid before the Patriarch: the case investigated: the wizard deposed from his lectureship, and of course as soon as convicted"—he paused, catching something in the minister's eye—"but my Humility should recollect that it is not so much Kallinikos as that Anthusa you desire to entangle?"

The eunuch spat contemptuously. "Think you, sirrah, I'm here to war on mice? Don't imagine I want an ordinary ecclesiastical trial, long as a year of litanies, while your fool of a Patriarch decides just what shade of misbelief afflicts that doddering philosopher. Now give ear closely: This hussy is the mistress of the Strategos of Thrace. Last night I caused a small Saracen raid to be made the excuse for causing him to cross to Asia. He'll be detained there a week ere he finds his time wasted and returns. If he's in Constantinople and Kallinikos and his girls are arrested, look you, deacon—I'd not love to be one of the accusers."

"I would have your august protection?" meekly suggested Evagrius.

"Certainly not, fool. Leo's influence is becoming irresistible. I dare not quarrel with him. That's why the power of this wench must be broken, and some woman pliable to my will substituted. I can do nothing openly. If you fail, I must disown you. But take now your orders: stir up the monks of three or four fanatical convents. Press a charge suddenly before the Patriarch. I'll at least arrange to have the sworn affidavits ready. Sallustios the Advocate will help with the legal formalities. Arrest Kallinikos and his daughters with all speed. Get the monks to fill the streets with clamour and to make the mob join them, howling 'Death to the wizard and his brats!' Attalos, sub-captain of the Blue faction, is a handy man. He can go to the Patriarch demanding an instant trial lest there be a bloody riot. Then get the matter at once to the Patriarch's tribunal and there'll be only one issue. All will be over before Leo returns to Constantinople."

"You prefer the accused should be executed?" inquired the attentive deacon.

"Why, no!" Paul smiled benevolently. "As true Christians are we not bidden to love our enemies?—that is, so far as circumstances will permit—and capital punishment might meet legal obstacles. The moment Kallinikos is condemned, urge that he be merely blinded by having the hot bowls of glowing copper passed before his eyes, and as for the girls (his accomplices of course) suggest that their heads be shaven immediately and they be perpetually consecrated and sent off as nuns to St. Gastria—that's the convent for incorrigible profligates. Leo'll think twice ere he tries to recover them from *there*, and will accept the inevitable. After all, he's a matter-of-fact fellow, and we'll know how to console him."

Evagrius' smile had ever deepened during this speech, but now his expression slightly changed: "The perfection of your proposals justifies the fame of your Sublimity's intellect, yet consider: the time is short. Leo may return unexpectedly. His vengeance will fall on my unprotected head. Forgive me if I hesitate."

Paul's eyes closed enigmatically. "Very well, reverend deacon. You know of course I'm not ungrateful if all goes

properly; however, decline if you wish. Of course”—his teeth snapped suddenly—“I may have heard about the rentals of the cathedral properties in Pera, and could suggest an investigation.”

“Oh, Sublimity, those rumours were vile lies. I swear it by the True Cross. What was I saying? I’m wholly at your service. I’ll see the hegumen of St. Abraham’s ere sundown; I’ll burn up with activity to-morrow. The day after to-morrow at latest we will strike!”

“Wise words,” spoke Paul, not without a sneer. “I think we can at least make it hard for Leo to interrupt you. Here’s an advance for expenses.” A heavy purse was cast upon the floor. “Come, Petronax, when that girl, called Anthusa, has been duly consecrated and put under perpetual penance, remind me of this man’s services.”

The minister muffled the mantle around his head and went out, followed by his retainer. The deacon bowed them all the way to the door, then pounced on the purse as a cat upon a sparrow. In delight he poured the jingling gold-pieces into his lap.

“Two hundred solidi,” he cried to himself. “The costs won’t be half of that, with more booty to follow! Who wouldn’t take a little risk for such a stake, and what’s that Leo but only a thick-skulled soldier?”



CHAPTER IX

THE HOUSE OF PEACE IS VIOLATED

FERGAL had conveyed his master's apologies to Kallinikos, and duly conferred with Ephraim as to whether there had been other spies and intruders. No new incidents, however, were reported, and the same was true the next day, when the Celt's heart was rejoiced by an unusually extended conversation with Sophia. Glad of any excuse, however, Fergal announced he would return the following afternoon for a new investigation. In the morning of this third day after Leo's departure, Kasia directed her bodyguard to take an altar cloth of her own embroidering to the Church of St. Anna, the pope whereof was a peculiar friend of her chaplain, Michael. Fergal gladly obeyed the order, for the trip carried him far out towards the walls into quarters of the capital he could seldom explore. Kasia had procured him a quick-stepping black mule with a good vermilion saddle and silver bells, and the Armorican (vain fellow!) thought he made a brave showing of himself as he snapped his lash along the Mesē—and wished that Sophia might see him.

The messenger followed the great high street, first through the Forum of Theodosius, and then as it ran southward, through the plebeian quarters. After he had passed the Amestrian Forum, where a vulgar crowd was witnessing the beheading of two bandits, the Forum of the Ox and finally the Forum and lofty Column of Arcadius, the black mule trotted through the so-called "Broad Gate," which marked the limits of the city as originally laid out by the First Constantine. Here the crowds of pedestrians became thinner, the street mountebanks, jugglers and hawkers less conspicuous, the tall, wooden houses less huddled together. Villa-like structures surrounded by bright gardens appeared down winding lanes, and frequently the Celt came to high, masonry enclosures, above which rose the domes of churches or the red-tiled roofs of other buildings, indicating the wide compounds of monasteries or nunneries.

Presently the frowning battlements and massive towers of the great outer wall of Theodosius II loomed in sight. Fergal turned aside from the Mesē as it ran onward to the "Golden Gate" of the triumphal and coronation processions, and through verdant ways lined with garden walls sought the less-frequented Selymbrian Gate, near which nestled the little suburban Church of St. Anna. He quickly placed his package with the amiable papissa, who was filling her husband's holy water basin in the vestibule, and put his beast at best pace homeward. Then, swinging back towards the Mesē, he must needs pass the portal of the great Monastery of St. Diomed.

The gate was open; a whole cohort of black robes and tall, black hats was streaming forth. There was much gesticulating and shouting. A long-haired hegumen^[26] was waving a gilt cross upon a staff and giving orders:

"Hurry, brethren! We must see how the Lord will devour the wicked! Heresy and devil-worship shall meet their reward. Hurry, our summons came late, but we may be needed."

"What a strange religious procession," muttered Fergal, reining his mule to let the dark gowns pass; "no relics, no banners." Then suddenly his eye caught a layman's costume following the rear of the holy men.

"Neokles, as I'm a sinner," he cried, dropping his bridle and leaping to the ground. In a trice he had his erstwhile comrade-in-misery by the hand. The cook greeted him heartily, and the twain exchanged prompt confidences. Neokles was again reasonably happy. His new masters gave good dinners, allowed him easy hours, and did not beat him too frequently. Fergal was outlining his own more prosperous fortunes, when the cook showed signs of impatience to get away.

"Gladly I'd halt and gossip, but my hide'll pay for it if I don't keep up with those monks. Already they're turning into the Mesē."

"Keep up with those monks?" echoed the astonished Celt. "What have *you* got to do with those devout jackdaws? Your master surely hasn't forced you to take the vows!"

"Sacred Mother, no! But Evagrius sent me with a letter to the hegumen, something to bring down all his brethren to help countenance the arrest and punishment of a fearful wizard. I was to guide the holy brothers to this diabolical fellow's house near the Forum of Theodosius. My *despotes* is raising all the convents in the city. Something great seems afoot. All yesterday he was racing about Constantinople like mad."

"Near the Forum of Theodosius?" Fergal's ears had pricked up like a rabbit's. "And who might that wizard be?"

“Why, I think they named an old Kallinikos, who hobbles around the University—Prophets and Saints! What’ve I done? Why’ve you got me by the throat?”

A moment later Fergal, having literally shaken out of Neokles every morsel of information the cook possessed touching his master’s project, was sending the black mule along the High Street at a speed which made the spectators gape, and which far outdistanced the serried monks of St. Diomed. In desperation he flogged the beast to her uttermost pace, little heeding that he nigh upset the litter of a rich merchant’s lady, swerved against a pastry vendor’s booth, and splashed copious mud against a silk-clad, musk-scented young Senator who was just lounging across the Forum of Arcadius.

Yet with all his speed, the Celt knew in his heart that he was probably too late. At the Forum of Theodosius men were shouting and running towards the Aqueduct of Valens. “A fire,” cried many, and there were indeed watchmen hasting with their hooked-poles and axes, but the sight of companies of monks, some in small groups, some in the full strength of their convents, made Fergal’s soul sink within him. Frantically he forced the mule through the thickening multitudes, until he reached the parish church of St. Mary the Deaconess, then casting the bridle over a post he plunged down a familiar alley. He was just in time to see a force of the *collegati*, the city police, brush aside a less orderly rabble of monks, tradesmen and excited women, and thrust open the portal of the house of Kallinikos. A subaltern officer was directing the men, and was evidently trying to make his arrests in a lawful and orderly manner.

Dust was rising in the air. Strident and ribald voices were screaming. Scores of naked arms were tossing, or brandishing clubs.

“The wizard! The necromancer! To the fire with him! To the circus lions with him! The young witches, too, pluck them in pieces!”

“This way, Christians—don’t let the friends of the devil escape alive.”

“Pull down the house. The neighbourhood’s tainted. All our children’ll die of the plague.”

Many cries were of unspeakable vileness. Kallinikos had passed for years as a harmless pedant. Now every evil imaginable was suddenly being trumpeted against him. Fergal thought he could see certain black gowns gliding from group to group and whispering; then the yells redoubled.

Ephraim and the other servants had evidently defended the door against the first howling multitude until summoned to yield by lawful authority. Fergal saw a band of constables thrusting inside. Their swords were drawn as if for desperate business. After them a knot of gesticulating monks attempted to follow, but the Celt with a great elbow-thrust reached the mail-clad police centurion who was trying to flourish back the unofficial intruders with his spear. To his great joy he recognized a junior officer often seen about the War Department.

“Besas,” he demanded, “have you warrant for this?”

“You here, Red-Head?” cried the centurion. “What’s your business? Yes, we’ve very straight warrants, signed by the Patriarch himself.”

“Then as you love salvation, look to your deeds. There’s a fearful mistake. This old Kallinikos is the Strategos’ particular friend; his daughters are guileless doves. The old man invented that new catapult you admired. When Leo crossed to Asia he bade me watch over this family and bring him word——”

A howl that made the roofs and pinnacles shake drowned Fergal’s voice. Gasping and helpless in the clutch of two powerful “collegians” (who for all their strength half feared he would wither them with a spell), dumbfounded and dismayed, appeared Kallinikos. Behind him, a constable clutching each of their wrists, and white-faced with unspeakable terror were led Sophia and Anthusa. The very pigeons on the roofs rose flapping in alarm as the horrid shouts were flung skyward.

“The wizard! The young witches! That’s why Skopis, the Chandler’s girl, died yesterday. The region’s accursed. The Panagia’s blighting us. *Huz! Huz!* Away with them instantly! Pluck in pieces!”

A brawny butcher’s wife, flourishing a cleaver over her head, sprang forward, but Besas (a competent officer after his light) thrust her back with a timely spear thrust; and Fergal shot in his ear: “Keep the old man and the girls unscathed,

and their house unpillaged. I swear the Strategos' eternal favour or ill-will depends on it."

"I'll do my duty," tossed back Besas. "St. Theodore strike me if I like this work." Then he whistled shrilly to his men: "Form before the door. Beat back this rabble. Give 'em your sword-points if need be. Now Sallustios"—to a spruce young man in an advocate's crimson, standing by—"what's the extent of these orders? To arrest Kallinikos and his two daughters; to detain their servants as witnesses; to seal up all the chief defendant's books, parchments, and apparatus pending examination, but particularly to seize a certain bronze cylinder with all its parts and to transport the same to the Patriarch's palace under vehement suspicion that said device may be a means of intercourse with the devil."

"Correct," assented Sallustios; "and now the prisoners (since these good people must be denied their Christian but too abrupt desires) will be sent, I presume, the wizard to the Patriarch's own private dungeon for depraved members of the clergy, and the witches straight to St. Gastria, where the nuns can search their persons straitly for amulets, charms and devil's marks."

But Fergal had never taken his eyes from Besas, and the latter was inspired to answer firmly: "They'll all go to the Prætorium, the regular jail by the harbour. If this poor old fool invented that new catapult, I'll forgive not a little wizardry. Why's the case before the Patriarch, anyway? The folk aren't clerics. Now men, get up your closed litters, for these wretches can't walk. Bring out that bronze contraption, rascals. Don't be so afraid of it. You'll not find the fiend squatting inside. And you"—to another platoon—"push back those black gowns and screaming beldames. Clear the street if they won't stand aside!"

While a knot of very timorous "collegians" bore out the unfortunate engine of Hero, Fergal thrust himself beside the sisters. Sophia was almost fainting. Anthusa's ghastly lips moved as in prayer.

"Some hideous blunder," whispered the Celt. "Your father must have an enemy. Everything shall be done. Keep up good hearts. I'm off to Kasia and Michael. If they can't avail, I'm away to Asia to summon *him*."

It was sorry work to abandon Kallinikos and his daughters in the midst of a crowd still shrieking and cursing. The only open friend was the poor dog Dorkon, who sniffed and howled piteously around his benefactress Anthusa, but Fergal could accomplish nothing more, and Besas seemed resolute in discharging his strict duty, and vigorous in protecting the house from spoliation. The brethren of St. Diomed had just come up to join their fellows.

"So they've got all three," monk was calling cheerfully to monk; "the old sorcerer and the young she-ones. The devil couldn't save them. They'll get justice from the Patriarch to-morrow. The whole convent must be at the trial."

Fergal, having forced his way through the press, at last reached his mule, and flew away, kicking her sides until the creature tore across the military parade ground at a foaming gallop. A few moments later his own glib tongue was racing off the entire story to Michael and Kasia.

* * * * *

Michael departed immediately, first to the Prætorium prison and then to the Patriarchate. He was back in two hours with a very grave face. At the jail indeed a liberal fee had assured the prisoners tolerable cells and civil treatment, but the Patriarch's offices had been already crowded by excited popes, hegumens, and even one or two archimandrites frantically denouncing "the scandal," and how: "It surpassed belief that an outrageous wizard actually should venture to inculcate his soul-destroying blasphemies from a chair in the imperial university; and especially to construct a malefic machine operated beyond a doubt by demons, and keep the same in his dwelling, or rather lair, within arrowshot of a consecrated church and holy nunnery."

In the face of this tumultuous protest, and fearful lest he himself be assailed for tolerating sacrilege, the Patriarch had consented to try the wizard and his female accomplices the next day at noon. One or two of the unhappy lecturer's colleagues had indeed pleaded for a slight delay. There had also been suggestions that, since civilians were involved, the case should go properly to the court of the City Præfect, but the Patriarch had bridled at the hint that he was not a competent judge in the matter; the High Præfect Daniel was at his Bosphorus villa near Nikopolis, and his deputy professed complete indifference. Michael himself had tried to urge deliberation. "But," he added sorrowfully, "my influence is nothing. His Beatitude half laughed while he listened to me, and at once the great hegumen Hygenios cried out: 'If that servant of the devil waits for his deserts after to-morrow, my monks will pull down the prison, stone by

stone!’ A terrible agitation has been worked up. And so, Christ pity our poor friends; here I am!”

“Red-Head,” spoke Kasia immediately, “it’s time that son of mine was told that God needs him more in Constantinople than gawking around in Asia.”

“The Strategos was now to be in Nicomedia,” observed Fergal, tightening his belt. “How far is that?”

“Sixty miles from Chalcedon,” responded Michael gravely.

“And the trial is at noon to-morrow!” The Celt’s eyes darkened, then lit the reckless gleam of his genius. “Blessed Mother, but there’ll be spray around boats and lather around horses ere then—but what can be, can be.” ...

... A little later, Fergal was at the “Stairs” of Timasios, nearest the mouth of the Golden Horn, intent on negotiating at a familiar stand for a caique to Chalcedon. To his astonishment not a skiff was stirring. The harbour was almost motionless, and the Bosphorus was deserted by ships save those at safe anchor.

“No boats for anybody,” an idle wharf officer explained; “three hours ago orders came from the palace that a conspiracy against the Basileus had been unearthed. Not a keel is to cross to Asia or even to Galata, until they nip the suspects, unless with a special pass from high authority.”

Fergal measured the shimmering blue water with his eye. One mile away across the dancing wavelets, beckoned Chrysopolis and Chalcedon with their little white, yellow and red houses crowding down upon the marge, beyond them the domes of churches and the crests of enormous cypresses with villages half hidden in verdure uprearing on the heights behind. If Basil had been at the Navy Yard, possibly he might have supplied a boat and a pass, but the dromond captain had followed his military friend to Nicomedia. The messenger, therefore, took his rebuff coolly and walked away, whistling softly and deep in thought....

... When the shadows of the afternoon were lengthening, if any one had been interested in following Fergal, he would have seen him lurking about some empty sheds, under the very shadow of the Tower of Eugenios, the massive fortification guarding the southern side of the entrance to the Golden Horn. It was, however, a hot and dozy hour. The sentries on the battlements, ordered to watch sharply for any illicit boats, had found the view of the vacant channels very stupid, and were now giving one glance towards the sea-ways, and ten for the game of dice which was in progress in the shade of a certain guard tower.

Casting himself upon his belly the Celt crept out the length of a small deserted breakwater until at a point where its base was splashed by a sea of sufficient depth to risk a dive. In the shadow of the friendly masonry he stripped off everything save a loin cloth, wherein was carefully knotted a purse of Kasia’s providing. A glance towards the battlements revealed no unfriendly scrutiny. Fergal therefore slipped quietly down into the cool, blue water.

His heart gave a mighty bound as his strong limbs carried him onward through a once accustomed element. Immediately he dived—coming to the surface as slightly and as infrequently as possible. The strong, southward current of the Bosphorus was his friend. With little effort he was hurried away from the seawalls and out into the Marmora. He continued thus, drifting and diving until well beyond range of detection from the walls. From discovery by boats, he had, thanks to the mandate from the palace, absolutely nothing to dread. At last he raised himself boldly in the water, shook the brine from his eyes and looked about him. Constantinople rose behind in an imposing mass of domes and battlements. The current would have borne him steadily southward, but he could see the shores of Asia almost beckoning “hasten hither!”

The manly delight of being master of his fate possessed the Celt. He spat forth the bitter water, and shook his fist towards the receding Palace. “Ei! ‘Magnificence This’ or ‘Sublimity That’ whoever you may be who’ve cooked this thing,” he cried recklessly, “order your sentries and forbid your boats. You have not halted the fish in the sea or paralyzed the limbs of a son of Armorica!”

Then with his most powerful stroke he turned and sent himself across dark ripples towards Chalcedon.

* * * * *

Around the commandant’s residence in the cantonments at Nicomedia the sentries were exchanging their “All’s well!”

ere changing guard for the eighth hour of the night, when Leo was awakened with a start from his slumber. A seasoned soldier, he had long since trained himself to drop asleep under most untoward circumstances and to awaken and arise almost instantly. Peter was now stumbling into his chamber.

“Fergal is here, little *despotes*,” announced the old bodyguard.

The Strategos leaped from his hard camp bed and threw a chlamys about him. “My mother——” he began.

“The *despoina* is well,” replied Peter coolly, “but the family of Kallinikos is in sore danger.”

“Angels and apostles!” swore the general. “Have Fergal in.”

The Celt staggered across the threshold. Even under Peter’s feeble rush-light he had an astonishing aspect. He was half naked. His body was crusted with sweat and grime. He caught at the door-curtain to steady himself.

“When did you leave Constantinople?” demanded Leo instantly.

“Shortly before evening. The departure of boats was forbidden, so I had to delay till the light was waning and they couldn’t spot a swimmer readily from the walls.”

“Mother of God!” gasped the astonished Peter, his jaw dropping. “You swam?”

“He says so,” rejoined his master with better poise, “and I believe him. Now go on.”

“The current carried me well down towards the Isles of the Princes. It was some fight to make the mainland. When I reached Chrysopolis the market was closed and I needed a garment and a horse. It took more time to buy the one and hire the other. Then I was off. My beast foundered after ten miles to Pantichion. Got another that took me on to Karta. Then had to change twice again. When nearing Nikomedia two footpads tried to stop me. Never mind the story. They won’t stop other travellers, but there was more delay. Got here and of course the gates had been closed for many hours. The watch sent down a javelin at me when I clamoured for admission. He had good aim, but I won’t go to heaven yet!”

“*Ai*, woe!” broke out Peter again; “his shoulder’s bloody—see!”

“Merely a scratch from the barb,” continued the messenger. “Well, it took my finest talking, and about all the rest of the gold Mistress Kasia gave me first to get inside the gate, and then to procure a boy to lead me hither through this black, strange town. Last of all, the sentries here at the barracks almost speared me when I demanded to rouse your Lordship, but—here I am.”

Leo had waited calmly during the whole of this panting recital. Now he seated himself upon the bed, and merely commanded: “Take that stool and get breath. Peter, find him some wine and food. Now if you’re ready, tell what brings you to Nicomedia.”

In straightforward detail Fergal related all that had happened since his chance meeting with Neokles. Ere he had finished, the Strategos’ jaw had become hard. “You say the monks of many convents seemed excited against Kallinikos, and that this cook had been especially sent by his master to lead the Brethren of St. Diomed to the house of the lecturer?”

“Even so, *despotes*.”

“You also say that this order to stop the passage of boats from Constantinople was issued immediately after Kallinikos’ arrest. Were there the slightest other signs that a conspiracy had been really discovered at the Palace? Forum rumours? Concentrations of troops? Closing of public buildings?”

“None that I observed, Serenity.”

“Peter,” demanded Leo, as his bodyguard returned with a hastily piled platter and a silver flagon, “you have good ears for gossip; when before had this deacon Evagrius such zeal for pure religion that he would hunt out a harmless greybeard like Kallinikos as a wizard?”

“He could discover it if good solidi or pledge of patronage helped his piety.”

“But the motive?” cried the Strategos incredulously. “The old man had professional rivals, but they had no pelf to

scatter or patronage to promise.” Then suddenly he smote his head, “It cannot be—be *that!* The eunuch would not have the vile audacity——”

“I do not understand you, *despotes*,” spoke Fergal, looking up from ravenous mouthfuls.

“No matter. I need not explain.” The Strategos was throwing on his clothes as for a hard journey. “How’s the wind?”

The Celt assured him the breeze was from the eastward and the night was fair, whereat his master ordered Peter to make no ceremony, but rouse Basil and bring him with speed.

“I bless the Saints, Armorican,” remarked the Strategos deliberately, tightening his buckles, “that your parents were ducks or dolphins. Yesterday I sent a rebuke to the Chief of the Fire-signal Service for permitting the great beacons to be used for so insignificant a raid as that which sent me over to Asia. But at dawn I’ve promised to go with the Protostrator Helios, on his pressing request, upon a three-day hunt by Lake Sophron. If there’s been a plot to keep me from Constantinople and to stop news from the city”—his teeth closed hard—“they’ll recall soon, I’m named the Lion!”

After that the sleeping barracks woke to life. Basil appeared, rubbing his eyes and muttering questions, but transforming himself into a demon of activity when his friend and superior spread his problem.

“A barge and crew?” quoth the sailor, “and to be in Constantinople at noon? A shrewd pull, but thanked be the Trinity, the ‘Manger of Bethlehem’ lads are its equal. Spare rowers with the easterly breeze will do the trick. And if those black crows caw too loudly at the Patriarch’s hall, remember my marines.” ...

... And so it was that two hours after Fergal entered Nicomedia on horseback he was leaving it on the stern seat of a long barge, his patron deep in conference with Basil. The Celt was still grimy, bruised, bleeding even, and utterly weary. But he was happy. The shadow-veiled Marmora again was opening ahead, and thirty good oars were a-flying.



CHAPTER X

THE TRIBUNAL OF THE PATRIARCH

ON the great plaza of the Augustæum, and close to the Chalke, the state entrance to the imperial palace, stood the residence of the Patriarch, first prelate of the Christian East. It was a second palace itself, with huge offices for the numerous clerks busy with the protocols, briefs and codicils of a great ecclesiastical machinery: with suites of chambers for his Beatitude himself and all his ghostly lieutenants, and with mosaic-vaulted halls of audience for the incessant clerical synods or litigation. Last, but not least, there was attached to the building an elaborate garden where the saintly man and his holy associates could refresh themselves under magnificent fruit trees, almost equal to those in the orchards of the Emperor.

The Patriarchate was always the scene of bustle and crowding. The administration of the enormous church interests collected almost as many suitors and advocates as swarmed the Basilica of the Supreme Civil Courts at the head of the Mesē, or the lower tribunal of the City Præfect. Any day a visitor might stand on one of the three broad staircases leading up to the "Tricline," the great central hall, and witness the constant flux and flow of popes, bishops, hegumens and archimandrites, interspersed with as many laymen often of the highest dignity.

This day, however, the crowds were exceptional. The situation was growing tense, so that considerably before noon the Quæstor, the chief police officer of the capital, had ordered a heavy guard of Collegians into the Augustæum, while the money-changers and bankers in their stalls at the Chalkoprateia by the palace entrance put up their shutters and bade their clerks take cudgels and stand guard.

Not even on major festivals were so many monks wont to appear in the Augustæum, and the mere presence of the serried masses of sacred brethren drew increasing throngs alike of ordinary pious gazers and of those lewd fellows of the baser sort who found in every mob their opportunity. It was reported that several convents on the Isles of the Princes had sent up zealous contingents by boat. The monks of St. Michael, the patron saint of the Bosphorus, were present *en masse*. A whole sisterhood of super-austere nuns had crossed from Chalcedon. Men gazed with awe upon numerous ascetics of renowned self-mortification who had quitted their solitary cells in the suburbs and who now wandered around the great square barefoot, ostentatiously laden with chains upon wrists and ankles, and with long, unkempt hair and beards, and mantles unspeakably filthy.

These groups of holy men kept up an incessant chanting, or psalm-singing, sometimes in unison, but more often in a jangling of different anthems sadly suggestive of carnal rivalry. Nevertheless, at intervals a strange hush would sweep over the entire multitude. Then with one accord the thousands would beat their breasts, and join in a moaning "*Kyrie eleison! Christe eleison!*" Or again a powerful voice would lead off with the great "Trisagion" and all the multitude would thunder it together:

"Holy God: Holy Strong One: Holy Immortal One:
Have mercy upon us!"

The concourse was tolerably orderly at first, but when one famous anchorite after another appeared, and when finally a body of monks marched in from the outlying Church of the Chora, displaying an especially revered banner of the Virgin, the chanting began to give place to an ominous shouting:

"To the faggots with the necromancers!"

"Let the bones of the wizards be dug up!"

"Purge thyself, O Constantinople, or the Hagarines will purge thee!"

Such were the more intelligible exhortations; but, mixed with the same, rose increasingly mere hootings and noise. The clamour was waxing ever louder when Evagrius stepped out upon the upper balcony of the Patriarchate with the advocate Sallustios at his side. The pair exchanged glances of congratulation.

"I can name another wizard," exclaimed the lawyer, smiling slyly, "if the stirring of huge multitudes demands art magic. This mob is truly howling for blood. There'll be little need of *simulating* a riot to intimidate his Beatitude. The thing's too genuine! See, the Quæstor is posting a second line of Collegians already, and they seem too few. My head

cracks with the yelling. How did you really do it?"

"It was some slight trouble," replied the deacon, with a deprecatory gesture, "but I knew the right hegumens to approach, and my Nikosia (poor girl, she shall have new pearls for this) was most useful in handling the matter with certain influential nuns. Ha! I'd worked for this climax, yet I hardly hoped for it. Behold!"

All over the wide Augustæum men were dropping on their knees, beating their breasts, crossing themselves or holding out their arms in supplication. Many were calling, "Your blessing, Holy One; your blessing!" A few actually cast themselves prostrate on the stones. Looking not to right or left, but upraising his bony hand mechanically in benediction, moved the pillar saint Marinos himself, descended from his "throne" for the first time, perchance, in years, although hobbling "not a little stiffly for want of practice," as the irreverent Evagrios imparted in the congenial ear of the advocate.

Amid an abrupt silence, Marinos swept his rags around his filthy limbs, and sent his strident voice over the entire plaza:

"The word of the Lord is upon me: to publish a day of wrath: a day when the moon shall withdraw herself and the sun withhold light: when the first-born shall be stricken and the babe in arms perish, unless ye, sinful dwellers in Constantinople, cast out the abomination which is in your midst. Yea, saith the Lord, in the words of Micah the prophet, 'I will cut off witchcrafts out of thine hand,' and again in the holy law given unto Moses, 'A man or woman who hath a familiar spirit or that is a wizard shall be surely put to death!'"

The blood-curdling yell which drowned the anchorite's last utterance made Sallustios turn a little uneasily:

"They howl for prey like famished wolves. That smelly he-goat may excite them too far. It's all well enough to intimidate the Patriarch, but won't we somehow have to pay if matters should really get to a bloody riot? *Eu!* But here we're summoned to the hall, and I trust the thing's soon over."

* * * * *

The opening formalities, however, took some little time. To avoid mob-violence, the prisoners had been brought to the tribunal by a private way betwixt the Patriarchate and the Palace. Kallinikos, still apparently groping about in a bewildered dream, was heavily manacled, "lest"—the whisper spread—"he lift his hands and call up his demons." The two sisters, limp and speechless, had not been fettered, but they were clinging to one another, overwhelmed by acute consciousness of fearful danger. Despite the devious route, the howlings of the multitude smote their ears, and their piteous state evoked the obvious compassion of the squad of Collegians and others who were very willing to believe the worst about their father.

Nevertheless, the old lecturer was not wholly deserted. Several colleagues had aided Michael to secure a well-known advocate, Proterios, to appear for the defence. The learned jurist, however, was manifestly anxious and intimidated. Another attempt to induce the deputy-præfect to question the Patriarch's jurisdiction over a civilian had failed. "The case is doubtful, my superior absent, and the danger of a riot great," had been his unheroic response. Therefore just as the water-clocks were discharging six balls, his Sacred Beatitude John, Patriarch and Oecumenical Bishop, took his lofty seat under the canopy in the great chamber of the Tricline, while his assessors, the Bishop of Rhaidestos and the Arch-Priest Nicholas, took lower chairs beside him and the bailiffs bawled for silence in the already crowded and buzzing hall.

His Beatitude was in no happy state of mind. A mere political appointee of the reigning Emperor, and suspected himself of unorthodox opinions, he knew well that the ill-will of the monks might cost him the hat, veil and staff of his mighty office. The precipitancy with which the case against Kallinikos had been urged disturbed him. Every precedent of the venerable Roman and Canon Law alike demanded deliberation and honest inquiry. But the shrieks and tumultuous chanting rising from the Augustæum became ever more threatening. Even in the better-behaved audience admitted to the Tricline were gaunt hegumens and self-torturing anchorites muttering and gesticulating. Therefore the instant there was a sufficient silence in the courtroom, John nodded to Sallustios: "The accuser may stand forth."

The prosecutor knew all the trickeries of Roman advocacy. His red robe fell in statuesque folds. His hands glittered with costly rings. He used his voice perfectly. His speech was interlarded with an imposing number of Latin phrases and

references to half-forgotten “Novels.”^[27] He informed the court that edicts of Tiberius II and Constantine IV undoubtedly gave it jurisdiction over cases involving black arts and the invocation of demons. As for the general law against wizardry, why invoke more than the ancient rescript of Theodosius I? The case by its very nature admitted no delay. The same malignant power which had inspired the construction of that bronze engine (he pointed to the aeropile deposited before the Patriarch’s throne, while all the audience craned, shuddered and crossed themselves) would no doubt assist its vile servants, if only granted a little more time, somehow to slip unscathed out of the very hands of Christian justice. And even without formal evidence, who dared suggest that the unanimous instincts of so many holy monks, nuns and ascetics could be deceived?

Passing to particulars, Sallustios reminded his Beatitude that everywhere perils were now crowding upon true religion. Omitting the ravages of the Saracens, what evil tidings came daily from the Latin churches of the West! Soul-destroying phrases were added to the Creed. The sacred symbol of the Cross was being venerated with its lower arm made twice the length of the others, instead of being merely of the same size according to the unswerving usage of the Orthodox. Worse still, the so-called Pope or Bishop of Rome was actually sanctioning the omission of *yeast* from the consecrated communion wafer!

By this time the audience, mostly composed of ecclesiastics, was again groaning, and became so turbulent that the Patriarch was fain to strike loudly with his staff to enforce order before the orator could continue.

When Sallustios proceeded to his direct charges, however, Michael, who was standing within friendly distance of the prisoners, detected a change of manner. The advocate’s great voice still boomed across the hall, but his language grew vague. Why these vast botanical and mineral collections in Kallinikos’ house except to supply material for abominable incantations? In the defendant’s vast library of curious books could there fail to be found many dealing with forbidden magic? Certain colleagues of the lecturer would assist in maintaining the charge that he had harboured a domestic demon. His servants would confirm the accusation. His daughters—young, comely, but alas! partners in guilt—could be made to give convincing testimony. Finally, and with renewed assurance, the advocate pointed again to the aeropile. Would his learned brother Proterios ever undertake to convince the most Holy Court that this indescribably irrational contrivance could have the slightest purpose save as it was intended for animation by the devil?

When Sallustios concluded, the vaulting rang with applause. Even the Patriarch stirred a little impatiently when Proterios began his reply.

The defendant’s counsel was in bad voice, but he made his points clearly, and the three judges were constrained to hearken. “Sallustios’ charges were technically irregular. Even holy monks could weigh not evidence as could his Beatitude. The crime of wizardry was great, the more reason, therefore, the case should be convincing. The very witnesses the prosecutor invoked could not bear out the accusation.”

Proterios ended amid cat-calls, hissing and the insulting “*Huz! Huz!*” which were only silenced by threats of the judges to clear the hall. One Menander, a younger colleague of Kallinikos, was now sworn on the Gospels and True Cross, and submitted to interrogation by the Arch-Priest Nicholas. He avowed that Kallinikos had explained to him his collections and books, and his aims had been purely scientific. The sage was counted by his colleagues visionary but harmless and truly pious. He had never seemed interested in demonology. His lectures had been mostly based on Plato and Aristotle, and he had never trenched upon Christian theology. The witness admitted he had not seen the aeropile. Kallinikos must have made it only recently.

When Menander was excused, Sallustios’ smile became less complacent. However, a second witness and colleague, Saborios, caused even the Patriarch to sit upright on his throne. After admitting that he had quarrelled with Kallinikos about a theorem of Euclid, Saborios declared himself nevertheless obligated to speak out the whole truth. He understood only by hearsay that the old man befriended demons, but to his own ears Kallinikos had professed sympathy for—Nestorianism!

A veritable shock passed through the courtroom. Vainly did Proterios urge that mere charges of heresy were not at issue. The inquisitor instantly pounced upon the witness.

“Had the defendant expressed doubts as to precise statement of the human and divine natures of Christ as expressed in the official creeds?”

“He had.”

“Had he spoken of the Blessed Virgin as being the ‘Mother of Christ’ and not as the ‘Mother of God’?”

“He had.”

“Your Beatitude,” thundered Sallustios above the rising tumult in the hall, “what need for further witnesses? He who can harbour heresies like these will stickle at no commerce with demons!”

The Patriarch indeed enjoined “silence,” and the case proceeded, but Proterios’ countenance was now stamped with sheer despair. Outside the clamour was now sometimes fierce enough to drown the voices of questioner and witness. Saborios was just being excused, when an excited official thrust himself into the hall. By the conspicuous blue ribbons trailing from his dalmatic and his cap of like colour, all recognized Attalos, sub-captain of the Blue circus faction. He forced his way to the tribunal, plumped on one knee and spoke hastily:

“Forgiveness, O Beatitude, but the matter presses. The Quæstor fears the monks and laity are getting beyond control. His force is insufficient. The multitude cannot understand why judgment is delayed. The public peace cannot be guaranteed very much longer.”

In the excitement around the judgment seat, following this announcement, nobody noticed three laymen of military carriage, muffled with heavy cloaks about their faces, who elbowed themselves close to the tribunal.

The Bishop of Rhaidestos put his mouth to the ear of his hesitant chief.

“This is a case,” announced John, with a vain effort at extra dignity, “wherein the weal of true religion requires that attention be given the spirit rather than the forms of legalism. Let the chief defendant be at once interrogated.”

Blinking still, haggard and dishevelled, yet not without a certain poise and majesty, Kallinikos rose to face the Arch-priest. Vehemently he denied that in all his researches he had gone beyond the natural and permissible quest for truth. All his experiments had been merely attempts to reproduce the discoveries of ancient worthies, as contained in lawful books, obscure indeed, but not illicit, whereof copies lay in the imperial libraries. As for his own conduct, he had ever followed the injunctions of the sage Egyptian, Kosmos, who taught that the true scholar “should not laugh, should not swear, and should not lie.” Touching theological views, he had been too busy to read all the subtle books of the controversialists, nevertheless “love of truth compelled him to avouch”—his quavering voice rose boldly—“that he had known Nestorians in Syria who seemed honest disciples of Jesus Christ, and he had indeed told Saborios, in the heat of their discussion, that it ill became any man of real learning to brand them as godless reprobates until he had personally investigated their doctrines.”

The Patriarch, leaning forward upon his throne, was now seen to clasp his hands tightly at this fell avowal, but he allowed Kallinikos to be pressed further concerning the aeropile:

“He had made it,” the defendant openly confessed, “after the specifications in the books of Hero. It was a simple mechanical contrivance, as simple as a catapult.”

John rose in his vestments and stood pompously upon the judgment seat.

“And do you actually assert that this ponderous brazen device before us can be made to revolve rapidly through no other means than so absurd and feeble an agent as the mere vapour from boiling water?”

“Assuredly I do,” rejoined Kallinikos doggedly.

“I think we may consider the case ended,” remarked the assisting Bishop. “This insult to the judges’ intelligence surpasses belief. It is needless to investigate the old books, perhaps themselves charged with immoral magic. Reason teaches that if this cylinder can be made to rotate at all it is because it is made the abode of demons.”

The other assessor nodded likewise to the Patriarch, while Proterios made a vain gesture of supplication. John pulled at his long beard, then announced:

“The holy monks need not, I think, be kept in anxiety much longer. Still, technical proof of guilt seems wanting. No witness swears he has seen the defendants in intercourse with demons, nor have any of the accused perfected the case

with a confession. To investigate the chief defendant's library, doubtless full of implicating books, will require many days. To hasten proceedings therefore, let Kallinikos be examined next by torture."

"We save time," suggested the Bishop of Rhaidestos, "by selecting one of the daughters. This stubborn old man may hold out a long time. The girls will confess immediately."

John promptly gestured to a bull-faced functionary who stood near the tribunal fingering a terrific whip set along the lash with bits of brass.

"Question that younger wench under the whip," directed the prelate.

"All's ended now," confided Evagrios in Sallustios' ear, as hundreds of necks bent forward to watch giant hands gripping the helpless form of Anthusa, when suddenly the torturer turned as he stood, gazing in mortal astonishment.

Among the spectators, between two groups of ogling hegumens, had risen a martial figure. His scarlet general's cloak was thrown back to disclose silvered armour. Not one word he spoke, but a single wave of command made the torturer drop his arms while his eyes rolled in his head. Followed by Peter and Fergal, Leo the Strategos was advancing towards the tribunal, while the seated or standing multitude parted before him like waves before the speeding galley.

"Holy Mother preserve us," groaned Evagrios, his knees suddenly smiting together, and his jaws chattering. "How'd he come from Asia!"

Leo advanced to the step of the judgment seat, then, instead of kneeling to kiss the prelate's pallium, gave a stern military salute.

"If your Illustrious Serenity," began the Patriarch with an uneasy smile, "had earlier revealed yourself, a more honourable seat would have been provided. We welcome you to join our two assessors."

"A gallows high as Haman's is provided"—the Strategos' eye lit on the shivering Sallustios—"for whosoever shall urge a groundless suit before your Beatitude, and think to eke out feeble evidence with riotous intimidation. I was present when Attalos saw fit to insult your tribunal by an outrageous warning. I am more competent to speak for the authorities. Officially I would tell you not to fear to acquit these defendants because the secular government dreads the consequences."

He swung his mail-clad form betwixt Anthusa and the sorely perplexed whip-bearer, while Peter and Fergal stationed themselves significantly near Kallinikos and Sophia. John and his assessors exchanged very uncomfortable glances. The sudden intervention of the mighty war minister in behalf of the prisoners had been the very last of their calculations.

"We are waiting further your very noble suggestions," suggested the Arch-priest anxiously.

Leo saluted again with greater ceremony.

"In view of the paucity of testimony adduced, I am persuaded this most Holy Court was merely ordering the simulacrum of torture as a painless formality prior to acquitting the defendants. If it should be otherwise, it is but right to inform the tribunal that my friend the High-Præfect Daniel is directly on his way thither to demand lawful jurisdiction, the trial of a layman for wizardry being a matter touching closely his own prerogative. I need not suggest that to administer torture, much more to render any judgment in his absence will aggravate a serious situation."

A bolt of lightning could scarce have produced greater consternation on the judgment seat. Sallustios' blank dismay was heightened by beholding Evagrios worming his way rapidly towards the door. The advocate started to follow, but was detained by an iron clutch on the wrist by Fergal.

"You've raised the fiend," warningly muttered the Celt, "now you may wait till we see how they're going to lay him!"

John whispered in panic with his assessors. "How can we retreat? Daniel is all-powerful. He and the Strategos between them can ruin me. If our verdict is set aside we are the laughing-stock of Constantinople."

The Arch-priest turned pompously to Leo.

"With the most Sublime Præfect we are the last to invite a conflict. His Beatitude says that his natural and paternal

predisposition to lenity had already inclined him to mercy. The alleged Nestorianism is not part of the impeachment. However, the presumption of diabolical intent in constructing this bronze engine remains extreme.”

The remarks of the Strategos had been only partly heard through the Tricline; now, however, the word “mercy” sent an open murmur of dismay through all the closely pressed ecclesiastics. But the soldier stood as granite.

“Do I then understand the Holy Court that the chief allegation centres itself around this bronze cylinder?” he demanded.

“Most assuredly,” interposed Proterios with rising courage.

A look of almost boyish glee and anticipation flashed across the face of the general. He bent and seemed inspecting with a kind of merriment the aeropile, as if to ascertain whether its condition were perfect. Next he turned with no very dignified laugh.

“Then I assure these astute as well as holy judges that there is a far better method of learning the truth than questioning this unhappy lady. Am *I* suspected of wizardry?”

“*You—Serenity?*” cried the amazed Arch-priest. “The Panagia forbid! Do you condescend to testify?”

Leo gave him a gesture of extreme impatience.

“To save the time of his Beatitude and to warn accusers against iniquitous charges, let the machine itself testify. As visitor to Kallinikos’ studies I have often examined it. Are there demons in common charcoal and water? Let these substances at once be brought—from the Patriarch’s own most sacred kitchens, since those are least suspect.”

... A tense silence held the interior of the Tricline, broken indeed by the tumultuous shouting and chanting from the plaza, while attendants produced articles no more formidable than a large jar of warm water, a basket of charcoal and a torch. The leaning and muttering clerics saw the Strategos, self-contained and smiling, throw open sundry orifices in the engine, beckoning to the judges to note their nature. They saw water poured into the cauldron beneath the cylinder and a bellows force the underlying charcoal to a glow. Next followed moments of waiting, during which assurance never quitted the face of the officer, even though hegumen muttered angrily to hegumen, and outside the hooting and howling rose to an unearthly chorus. And then—but all Constantinople told the story in the evening. With a screech of hot vapour, and an unearthly grinding, behold, under the very eyes of the Most Holy Oecumenical Bishop and Apostolic Patriarch himself the bronze cylinder was whirling itself about, discharging hot liquid from all its flying arms, as it became possessed with some ferocious energy.

With the laugh of lad triumphing in a new toy, the War Minister sprang on the steps of the tribunal.

“*Euge!*” went out his shout. “Let now Sallustios impeach *me* for wizardry!”

The Patriarch took a second awestruck glance at the whirling metal as it gathered speed. A jet of boiling water spewed itself over a corner of his pontifical robe.

“The accusation breaks down!” exclaimed John, precipitately vacating the judgment seat. “Tell the Præfect not to interfere. We unanimously acquit the defendants. Bailiffs, clear the court!”

But even as he spoke, the roarings of the aeropile were drowned by a many-voiced clamour at the entrance of the Tricline itself and the rush of feet.

“The guard lines have broken,” shouted a terrified door-keeper; “the monks are swarming in!”

Leo made a sweeping survey of the courtroom. The nearer and more reasonable spectators were quite ready to acquiesce in the hasty verdict, but they were helpless to check the onslaught of numbers from without. A few superannuated doorkeepers, and six Collegians who had guarded the prisoners and the baffled public torturer alone made some signs of maintaining order. In at the doors swarmed the raging monks, cursing and shrieking together. Some flourished clubs. Others snatched up light benches. At their head advanced Marinos himself, brandishing a large brazen cross. At sight of the flying engine, and of Kallinikos who still stood in his fetters beside it, his voice rose as a tempest:

“Now is the abomination of desolation standing in the holy place! Hear ye not the angel flying through heaven and

crying with loud voice: ‘Woe! Woe! Woe! unto the inhabitants of the earth, for the day of doom cometh quickly!’ Death to the demon worshipper and his offspring! As the earth opened and swallowed up Dathan and Abiram, so shall it devour them and their impious protectors!’”

Leo flung off his cloak, and his naked sword danced in his hands.

“Do your duty, guards!” And at his trumpet-like command the watchmen swung themselves before their late prisoners. The three judges fled ignominiously. Dignified archimandrites in the spectators vainly implored their onrushing monks to stay and hearken; their voices were drowned in the tumult. Many of the earlier spectators were hurled down and trampled upon by the raging fanatics.

A brawny monk clutched Sophia’s robe only to be felled by a loaded club which Fergal had snatched from another anchorite, and now swung about with marvellous facility. The mob surged up to the ill-fated aeropile, and for one instant recoiled, terror-stricken lest it were emitting not steam but the breath of demons; then the press of numbers from behind upset the engine upon the floor, a gush of scalding water adding to the pandemonium.

The Strategos lifted Anthusa bodily and thrust her into the seat just quitted by the Patriarch. “Fear not,” he spoke in her ear. “I suspected this; help will be here soon.”

“How can I fear,” he caught the answer, “when you——”

A final rush of some of the more frantic monks almost swept the little knot of watchmen from their feet. Hyena-like rose their howl: “Death to the devil worshippers! Death to their defenders! Tear in pieces! Kill, kill!”

Leo turned on the fanatics, his own teeth snapping fiercely.

“O Lord Jesus!” he cried aloud. “Still do men scream their ‘Crucify! Crucify!’ and in God’s name.” Then to the guards: “Give them steel, men!” And with all the power of a mighty arm, his blade cut down a foaming anchorite who was aiming a bludgeon at Kallinikos.

The moments that followed were to the distressed sisters the lurid climax of what had been one prolonged, agonizing dream. Had the fanatics attacked with discipline, by sheer rage and numbers defended and defenders might have been swept down and plucked in pieces. But the watchmen were inspired to steady valour by the presence and example of their exalted chief. They plied sword and spear as became Roman soldiers. The torturer’s lash smote about like a flail, while Leo’s great blade leaped in a red circle around the dais which he kept inviolate amid all the roar and fury. Over the crash of combat, and the curses and howlings of the monks, resounded the native yells of Fergal, sheer love of combat possessing him, as he dashed his club now on one black hat, now on another, until a veritable barrier of bodies, stunned and bleeding if not slain, partly blocked the desperate attempts of Marinos to bring up yet other holy battalions.

Then in a lull in the strife, just as the monks were gathering for another rush, and as Leo was anxiously noting that thrusting to their front were low-browed fellows with daggers, the criminal scum of the city, there came a welcome shouting from the plaza, “At them, men! Give the old crows a lesson!” followed by the rush of martial feet, next the tramlings of horsemen and shrill cries of terror.

It took an instant for the mob that had stormed the Tricline to realize what had befallen. Then a surge of panic sent its fury flying. Hundreds fought together to gain the doors. Dismayed hegemens climbed from under benches or emerged from corners. Marinos indeed made one last effort to rally his followers:

“Lo, the wicked triumph! The blasphemers prevail! Turn, Christians, turn! Let not the Philistines destroy Israel!”

He ran into the powerful grasp of the watch-centurion, Besas, entering by a rear door, who twisted his hands behind his back in a twinkling. Soon all the portals were filled with spearpoints and armour. The noise from the Augustæum told that the military were clearing the square with ruthless energy. Following Besas, Basil himself appeared in the Tricline, followed by a forty of his marines, swinging great cutlasses. Caught as trapped foxes most of the monks who had invaded the courtroom submitted to being pinioned with silent meekness. The feeling between these brethren and the sailors was not the best, and the latter looked sorry at missing a chance to use their weapons.

Leo stepped from the tribunal and sheathed his sword. Blood was on his Armour, and a long welt over his forehead, but he acknowledged Basil’s salute with official dignity. The sailors were dragging apart the mass of groaning bodies

before the judgment seat. One of the defending watchmen was dead and at least six of the rioters.

“Shrewd work!” admired the naval captain, leaning upon his blade. “Becoming a Strategos hasn’t made you less of a soldier. Lucky you thought to send off those messengers to Daniel and to bring up extra men ere coming here. There might have been too much chance for valour. *Eu!* all those holy scoundrels can explain their pious deeds in the Præfect’s court to-morrow. Who egged them on, I wonder?”

“Basil,” urged Leo, with a solemn gesture, “no more of this now. These friends have been through hell since yesterday, and I darkly fear on my account. Anthusa was about to be lashed. Get conveyance as you love me. My mother’s house is nearest. Be quick.” ...

... Anthusa collapsed just as they took her to the litter to bear her to Kasia’s. Sophia’s state was hardly better. Kallinikos took long to realize that the ordeal was over, and kept begging piteously that they might torture him instead of his children. All that afternoon cavalry from the War Department coursed the streets, seizing suspected rioters and striking terror into evil doers. So ended one of the most hectic days for long in Constantinople.

* * * * *

Very late that night in a low wine shop in the slums of Galata, a haunt obscure enough to be safe from the police, Petronax was conversing with the white-lipped and demoralized Evagrius.

“It wasn’t *my* fault,” the miserable ecclesiastic was groaning; “that red-headed demon slipped through to Nicomedia, when they told me the port was tightly closed. The monks did everything just as I told them.”

“Everything and more,” pungently returned the myrmidon. “The risk was wholly yours when you undertook the mission. Don’t whine——”

“But his Sublimity,” began Evagrius in despair.

“His Sublimity can’t protect you. If you’re taken you’re lost. Listen: The Patriarch’s in a blind panic lest it be said he was in collusion with the accusers. Much property was destroyed. The great merchants are furious. Already your name’s ordered stricken from the cathedral rolls. Sallustios was arrested, and Leo got Daniel to give him a dose of the whip. He howled out enough not merely to implicate you, but to send Leo straight to my master with very ugly suspicions. Their talk was private, but I know that words passed brisk and bitter. The two are now anything but cordial. To clear himself Paul had actually to sign an order sending Sallustios to plead his causes to the fishermen on a remote island. You can see what’s waiting, if you’re taken.”

“The Holy Ghost pity me,” moaned the fugitive, “I’m ruined forever! What’s to be done?”

“Nothing at present,” replied Petronax blandly, “so don’t howl over spilled water. Now, however, take some comfort; I’ve at least seen to it that your girls, Nikosia and Saloma, got away betimes from your quarters. Luckily they haven’t found any evidence against *me*. I’ll send the women over here, and do you keep safe with them till this gale blows over. After that”—the emissary’s tone grew more soft and confidential—“his Sublimity bids me tell you this: that he hopes to find *other* means of showing his interest in our Serene Leo’s ladylove. In the meantime tuck away this little bag; it’ll keep you from starving.”



CHAPTER XI

THE UNMAKING OF THE EMPEROR

THE attack upon Kallinikos gave Constantinople seven days of gossip. Evagrius vanished from the police, but the fate of Sallustios (after Leo's not gentle interrogations) was a fearful warning to every pettifogger in the basilicas. The Patriarch cursed his chaplains whenever they made the slightest reference to the disastrous trial, but the better hegumens repented and punished their more riotous monks, while the great archimandrite of St. John of the Studium, the largest monastery in the city, actually preached in Hagia Sophia against "being carried about by every kind of doctrine."

At the Præfect's court the justly incensed Daniel dealt out fitting penalties. Two self-proclaimed ascetics who had used swords instead of clubs were ordered hanged. Many others received sharp lessons at the whipping post. Marinus, lest his admirers consider him a martyr, was allowed to reascend his "throne," but only as a sadder and sorer pillar saint. Saborios suddenly found it needful to quit the university for an obscure chair in mathematics in the schools of Nicaea; while Kallinikos' more friendly colleagues ostentatiously reconstructed the aeropile, and exhibited it again, as a useless but harmless curiosity, to a select audience in the great aula of the university.

So the outward crisis passed, but life at the "House of Peace" was not the same. Kallinikos would sit for hours with pathetically folded hands and vacant eyes amid his restored books and apparatus. Only gradually did his daughters recover from the shock of their ordeal. Leo and Fergal could see them seldom. Even Kasia sometimes found her visits denied.

Meantime, of course, wherever people gathered, tongues buzzed. At the variety theatres, at the water parties up the Golden Horn or to the Sweet Waters of Asia, female heads were often together. Why had the War Minister interfered so dramatically? Even if Kallinikos wasn't a wizard, what concern was it of *his*? Just because the poor old pedant had discovered the military engines? Wasn't there another reason? Who'd seen that girl, Anthusa? Was she really good-looking? Considering she had no mother, what wonder if her morals were perhaps deplorable?

Fergal caught some of this gossip, but dared not repeat it to his patron. Kasia, however, let a little slip through, and the Celt observed that Leo was becoming strangely restless and moody. His interviews with Paul, following the trial, he had disclosed to no one, but all his intimates knew for a surety that the eunuch had been left cowed and trembling by the War Minister's clearly voiced suspicions, and that between the twain there was now nothing more than a cold neutrality, capable of blazing easily into open war.

But the Strategos had his mind on more than private concerns. Every day came evil tidings from the frontiers. Over the Thracian passes came raids of the Bulgars even to the gates of strong Adrianople. In the Ægean Moslem pirates were half-ruining peaceful commerce. Worst of all, in Asia Minor the razzias of the Saracens through the Cilician highlands were becoming ever more systematized and formidable, and a great emir had led a successful attack upon the major fortress of Antioch-in-Psidia.

Greater dangers seemed behind. Reports were ever multiplying that the Kalif was meditating a vast assault by land and sea upon New Rome itself, to seat the Commander of the Faithful upon the very throne of the Cæsars. At Damascus enormous numbers of fanatical warriors were being mobilized ready to be flung whithersoever the Successor of the Prophet willed. Was their goal to be Constantinople?

Every day to Leo, as he returned home from the War Department, wearied by the endless routine of appointments, plans and requisitions, would come the passionate longing to be away on the Anatolian marches, with the horse-archers and spearmen of the themes, and show the Hagarines how Roman steel could smite. But every day duty plainly said to him that a faithful war minister was worth more than a headlong cavalry captain, and at his post he remained.

Nevertheless, he detected a subtle alteration in the public atmosphere. It was alike his pleasure and his policy to remain studiously aloof from the sordid networks of intrigue which were the curse of the palace and the great patricians' mansions, but he could not remain wholly ignorant. Constantly men whispered about Philippicus' criminal indifference to public duties; his laughable attempts to ignore the crowding dangers of the situation; his blank helplessness when compelled to act, and above all his insatiate passion for extravagant fêtes, pageants and revels, when every obol was needed for the army and navy. Wiseacres went about the long porticoes wagging their heads, hinting "Things will change." The only answering question was "When?" or "Who?"

So amid increasing tension, but with no open catastrophe the season advanced to the eleventh of May, the “Name-day” of the capital. Forgetful of evil rumours the great city celebrated its founding by the First Constantine. The law courts were closed. All the public baths, including the magnificent Baths of Xeuxippos, were thrown open to the populace without fee. Cakes were distributed gratis from the numerous government bakeries. Every theatre was open for performances, vile or noble. In the forenoon the populace held riotous carnival to pipe and tambour. Then in the evening a gilded statue of Constantine, along with another of the “Fortune of New Rome” was placed in an ivory chariot, and with semi-pagan rites was conveyed around the Hippodrome by a great escort of soldiers in white uniforms and bearing lighted tapers.

The festival had fallen on a Friday. The next Sunday was to be Whitsunday. The intervening day was given over to elaborate contests in the Hippodrome, such as delighted the sodden soul of Philippicus. At grey dawn, citizens of all ages, maimed and crippled even, battered at the gates of the race course. Those without the modest admission price had scrambled upon the very domes and pinnacles overlooking the huge oval. The Emperor surrounded by the Protectors and a vast civilian train took his station in the Kathisma, the magnificent imperial box, threw the official starting napkin upon the sands and sent the chariots tearing away.

There were four races that morning, each seven times around the great track; while the forty thousand spectators—“Blues” facing “Greens”—cheered, wagered, cursed and groaned like madmen. Betwixt the races were displays of acrobats, boxers and wrestlers, and even the fight betwixt a tiger and a bear.^[28] Nor was tragic excitement lacking. One charioteer was thrown, dragged in his own reins and picked up dead; a second was maimed for life. The Green jockeys won the decisive race-off to the indescribable rapture of their faction, and the corresponding anguish of the Blues.

More races were promised for the afternoon. The Emperor, it was proclaimed, would return to the palace for his “Sacred Siesta” and then would condescend to re-enter the imperial box. As his train swept out it was noted that certain patricians, including several opposed to the ruling clique, seemed missing, but the day was so hot that their absence was excusable....

... Leo had not gone to the Hippodrome. The War Department was closed, and its clerks were on holiday. The Strategos had brought home a mass of confidential dispatches, and had spread them on the table in Kasia’s little garden. At the other end of the short, gravel walk his mother and Michael were placidly discussing the case of an orphan girl. The day was warm and droning. A huge bee buzzed in the oleander plants. Small brown lizards darted across the patches of shade and sunlight. Even from the distance came the thunderous roar of the thousands in the Hippodrome, indicating the end of the morning contests.

The Strategos caught at his head. All was so peaceful, so very peaceful—yet the tablets in his hands told of nothing but the imminent threat of danger which could snuff out this vast teeming, luxury-loving Constantinople like a moth in the flame.

Another roar from the Hippodrome. Leo knew they were calling, “Ten Thousand Years to the Christ-loving Basileus Philippicus!” The futility of the whole pageant, its atrocious absurdity took hold of the soldier’s soul. How was it to be possible, do what he and other good men might, to rouse this enormous unwarlike capital to a sense of danger until all was too late? He nervously pushed the dispatches from him and began pacing the little garden walk, when Peter entered to announce:

“The Patrician Nikephoros Skleros and the Consular Leontios Berones.”

Leo hastily swept the tablets into a small coffer, and motioned to Michael and Kasia to withdraw.

Two elderly noblemen of smiling mien, but plainly dressed and unattended, were bowed into the garden. After the ceremonious greetings proper for visitors of rank, the twain approached Leo in a confidential, sidling manner.

“We are quite secure against eavesdroppers?” suggested Nikephoros, the senior of the pair.

Their host assured them of perfect privacy, and waved them into seats. Nikephoros immediately became talkative:

“We have not been honoured by your close acquaintance, but now will repair lost opportunities. You are aware we belong to the faction opposed to Paul the Eunuch and his associates at the palace.”

“I am entirely aware,” replied Leo, studying his visitors quietly.

“You are also aware, better even than we, that the Empire is drifting on the very rocks of calamity. A great assault by the Kalif can ruin us all.”

“I realize that every moment of the day.”

“In this crisis,” pursued the Patrician, “in his private capacity a devoted subject can do all too little. We need an Emperor who can prove a second Heraclius and turn back a peril greater than that from Persia a century ago.”

“Only a fool can dispute your opinion.”

Nikephoros edged closer and glanced at his companion. The latter, Leontios, spoke in a bare whisper:

“We have come to tell you something. There will be a new Emperor—to-night.”

Leo half started from his seat. His hands twitched. “What mean you? I’ve no dispatches that any of the themes have revolted, nor the garrison here.”

“The provinces and bulk of the army have little to do with it.” Leontios’ voice grew, if possible, still more confidential. “You know Rufos the Protostrator?”

“An officer of the Opsikian^[29] theme—a very daring fellow.”

“He’s at the palace even now—and some proper men with him.”

The War Minister leaped to his feet. “By the Trinity explain yourselves. If you’ve hatched such a plot, why are you here with me of all men?”

“Explanations in time,” returned Nikephoros blandly; “meantime, my dear Strategos, I’d say that we knew you were a man with—well, a few old-fashioned scruples. Therefore we can declare that matters are now gone too far for you to interfere, however much you desire.”

“Yet I adjure you!” cried the now agitated soldier. “If your scheme’s thus far advanced, why come to me? If you’ve been seen entering this house and your plot miscarries, I indeed am implicated. But where’s your gain?”

“Rufos will not miscarry,” reassured the old magnate. “All’s as certain of success as that to-morrow will be Sunday. The Silentaries and Protectors around the Sacred Bedchamber have been won over. Nothing has been left to chance. We come with perfect confidence in the result.”

Leo struck his hands together with angry impatience!

“You know I love Philippicus personally as I would love a street dog. But I’ve no part in your conspiracy. You did well to leave me out. I’ll not betray you, though silence may cost me my head; but now you’ll please me best if you’ll discharge your absurd mission and begone.”

Nikephoros deliberately produced a small parchment from his flowing sleeve and nodded significantly to Leontios.

“I repeat, Most Serene Strategos, we knew you were a man of honour. In preparing this revolution we left nothing to chance. I take you now into our full confidence. Here is a list of the destined honours and promotions for our faction: the new Logothetes, the new Theme-commanders; Paul, you observe, may be suffered to keep his titular position, but will be shorn of most of his real power. I have humbly selected for myself the Countship of the Treasury. The noble Leontios here is to be Exalted Chamberlain. The new Emperor will be firmly bound to marry at once the widowed Patricianess Ignatia Chopas, the great Chopas interest having assisted us to gain over the Silentaries.”

Leo raised his eyebrows; his manner grew calmer.

“A long list of names, my High Nobilities,” he commented; “the deliverers of the empire have not forgotten their own ambitions to serve in lofty office. They say, too, the Lady Ignatia is a widow of seasoned years, sharp-tongued and none too comely. But let that pass. You omit, however, the first actor in your stage play. Who’s the new Emperor?”

Nikephoros turned on his host with a smile of infinite meaning.

“Permit us the honour.” And simultaneously he and Leontios fell each on one knee, seized Leo’s robe and pressed it to their lips. “Let us be the first to salute the new Sacred Clemency.”

The Strategos sprang back, his eyes blazing fury. “Just God! What is my crime that I must undergo this insult?”

“Insult?” cried Leontios, the first of the pair to recover breath. “You call the proffer of the throne of the Roman Empire insulting, when you are selected above a thousand officers of higher birth! When the plot has been devised without your knowledge, without a single compromising act on your part! When you’ve but to go with a few attendants toward Hagia Sophia the moment the rumour of what’s happened at the palace spreads—and spread it will—and let your friends raise their acclamations! Soon all Constantinople will be chanting its ‘Ten thousand years to Leo Augustus!’ This sudden good fortune’s unstrung your wits. Nikephoros should have broken the news more slowly.”

Leo took three deliberate turns along the garden walk before he spoke. “I’m not unmoved that you think well of me, but I say to you clearly that he who takes the diadem after such a plot should make his peace right soon with God. Perhaps he can be proclaimed to-day. His post becomes desperate to-morrow. What’s your new Basileus pledged to do at the palace? To take the power from one clique of silk-robed Magnificences, and give it to another—perchance a trifle less incapable. Your sovran will be another Philippicus, a gilden puppet not even permitted to choose his own bride. The army has had enough selfish dictation by soft-handed civilians. It would never accept any man of your choice when lifted by such sponsors.”

“We think we’ve the Opsikian theme,” weakly objected the misdoubting Nikephoros.

“One theme in twelve, and that the weakest—if you indeed have it! All the others will be outraged to see the purple tossed about as a gamester’s bauble at Constantinople, while brave men are trying to hold back the Saracen on the frontiers. Philippicus is vile, but you prepare something worse than a sybarite in the palace—a civil war, with the Moslem soon at the gates.”

Both visitors flushed deeply; Leontios’ voice shook when he answered:

“When has Empire been refused? And by such as you, peasant-born from Isauria? We’d reckoned on every possible contingency save this. Your popularity with the garrison and city watch would assure us possession of the city the instant Philippicus was harmless. What’s to be done? That list of appointments can be revived!”

“Useless folly!” warned the Strategos with heat. “You have cooked this rank pottage without my aid. Go finish your banquet. If Rufos can be warned——”

“He’s acting now,” groaned Nikephoros in a frenzy. “It was arranged that we should go to you precisely as he went to the palace. Leontios and I especially craved this mission as one destined to make us your friends forever.”

“Your confusion be on your own heads,” thundered the enraged officer. “What in my life has made you dream I’d pawn my soul for a crown of wax and a robe of spotted purple, first to take your orders and then to meet with speedy deposition and blinding or a sorry death? Now get you gone as quietly as you can. I’ll not betray you.”

“I’m still unnerved,” muttered Leontios. “Everything was prepared. Everything anticipated—but this. Oh! Impossible! We’ve agreed on no other candidate. Such madness; lack of ambition; ingratitude!”

The two magnates, blank and shivering, quitted the garden with the most hurried adieus. Leo sat again for long moments, desperately twisting his hair and watching the shooting lizards; then he summoned his mother....

... One glance told Kasia her son was deeply moved. Concisely Leo told of his visitors’ errand. When he had finished, the old woman stood beside him as he sat, and cast her arms about his head.

“Ah, boy!” spoke she, “now I know that you are strong and that God has reserved great things for you. It was not thus that Barses and Chioba promised you should save the Empire.”

The soldier raised himself and kissed both her cheeks.

“No, my mother, for no Basileus who dons the purple after such a plot can save so much as his own freedom. Let us

trust in Heaven, and if at any time God should lay an awful burden of Empire upon me, it shall not come without fair show of worldly strength to bear it. And now—we must wait and pray.”

An hour passed, then a second hour. Leo and Kasia alike knew that if the plot miscarried at the palace and the visit of the two conspirators to the War Minister was traced, the latter would be in awful peril. Defeated plotters would be ready to accuse any one to avoid the rack. Soon there might be one more blinded monk in the island monasteries, if the Strategos' head did not fall before the howling thousands in the Hippodrome. Often the impulse returned to cry: “The only safety is boldness; the die is cast!” to summon a few personal followers, to rush to Hagia Sophia and risk all on one desperate pronunciamento. The soldier's brows knitted hard, but he put the demon behind him.

Presently even in their quiet street they heard the trampling of many. Voices sounded: “What's at the Palace? What's at the Hippodrome?” Then came confused and thunderous shouting as from the Augustæum. Leo calmly ordered Peter and Fergal to go forth and bring back sure tidings. Another mortal hour and they returned. Kasia and her son fell on their knees while Michael proffered thanksgiving. Leo was safe.

The tale brought back was the one which wise monks wrote in detail in their sober histories that it might not be considered merely as horrid legend. In all the blood-spattered line of Roman monarchs not one had fallen more suddenly and shamefully than Philippicus.

That morning he had delighted his puny soul at the race track. He had then spent much time with the President of the Sacred Kitchen arranging the dishes for the great banquet to be offered the entire nobility the next day. Full at last of food and wine, after a hearty luncheon, the Emperor had lain down for a long siesta. With his own confederates, now in perfect readiness, Rufos of the Opsikians had made his way to the very bedside, admitted by the treason of the Count of the Sacred Cubicle. The conspirators had seized the wretched Philippicus, heavy with sleep, hurried him out of the palace along privy passages, then had taken him to the dressing-room of the Green Faction behind the Hippodrome. Of all the menials they passed, not one was willing to recognize his Autocrat and Basileus. At the Hippodrome hot pricking-irons were ready. There were two agonized screams and Philippicus was blinded forever. Years afterward he would die a helpless prisoner in a distant monastery. And so the two-year reign ended.

But with this triumph Rufos' commission was at an end. Only a select circle even among the conspirators knew who had been the chosen candidate. At the very moment the deed of cruelty was being finished, Nikephoros and Leontios were seeking their confederates with the astonishing tidings of Leo's refusal. There could be no preconcerted rush to Hagia Sophia, no acclamations of the favoured successor, no clamorous demand on the Patriarch that he crown at once “the choice of the Roman Senate and army.” So passed an evening of wild rumours and waves of panic, while excited emissaries hastened from one patrician palace to another, and from ministry to ministry.

The moment Leo received formal word that the throne was vacant and the Senate was meeting to choose another Basileus he sent reply that he was a soldier, not a politician, and that his business was to obey emperors, not to create them; in the interval he would muster all his men to maintain public order. Then, late on Sunday morning, the heralds blew their silver trumpets in the crowded Augustæum. “Anastasius II,” the former chancellor, was to be the new monarch of the Romans, and all men knew that in the crisis the great noble families had composed their feuds to save their grasp on the government.

Constantinople said that a well-intentioned civilian had been chosen, a man of better parts than Philippicus, but that there had been no real revolution at the palace. Nikephoros, Leontios and sundry of their friends had received various offices, inferior of course to their hopes, to halt further conspiracy. But Paul the Eunuch still kept the Mastership of the Palace, with a fair portion of his old power, and Niketas and Theokistos retained their dignities. The new Emperor would take a more active part in the government. A real attempt would be made to prepare for the Saracens. As for the provincial armies, it was pretended that they would not mutiny. In short, some new wine had been poured in old and rotten bottles. Military men shook their heads and hoped for the best.

The renunciation by Leo could not remain an absolute secret; there was too much gossip as to why the climax of the conspiracy miscarried. Anastasius was honourable enough to be grateful for a modesty which he put down to Leo's distrust arising from his ignoble birth. Three days after the palace revolution it was duly placarded with the other official notices on the Chalke posting-boards that the new “Sacred Clemency was graciously pleased to continue in office the present Strategos of Thrace and to commend his abilities and fidelity.” It was also announced that to ascertain the real intentions of the Hagarine Kalif a special embassy would be sent to Damascus headed by Daniel the High

Præfect of Constantinople.



CHAPTER XII

THE VILLA AT THERAPIA

THE military themes sent in their allegiance to Anastasius so grudgingly that Leo was given the worst forebodings. Everybody knew that the provincial armies felt outraged at seeing the government still in the power of soft-handed, greedy civilians when every thought should have been given to meeting the Saracen. The Strategos of Thrace set an example by his loyalty to the new ruler, but other high officers blew hot and cold. Leo knew what was pretty surely impending.

In Constantinople, however, life continued with perfect normality. The coronation of the new sovereign excused a round of magnificent pageants and processions. Never had the purveyors of silk and gems, of silver plate, ebony furniture, and precious nard rejoiced in better sales along the Street of Lamps, nor the great Senatorial palaces in more magnificent banquets, for which the depths of the Euxine and the forests of Thrace and Bithynia were robbed to provide fish and game. In the churches the popular preachers constantly expounded the comfortable doctrine, "Fear not, dearly beloved: rightly is our city named 'The Guarded of God.' This Roman Empire is ordained to stand forever. When ye hear (as saith the Bible) of 'wars and rumours of wars see that ye be not troubled.' They shall not touch Constantinople!"

Vainly did Leo inspire Michael and a few other seriously minded popes to try to rouse the people. The warnings fell on indifferent ears. "We are," lamented Michael, "even as in the days before the flood, 'when they were eating and drinking and knew not until the flood came and took them all away.'" Thus the great capital with its million made light of the Saracen danger, which every rumour and messenger from the East incessantly confirmed.

Yet the efforts of the War Minister were not wasted. The new Emperor at least supplied him with tolerable funds for his projects. The city fortifications were carefully repaired. From the dockyards rose a mighty hammering upon new dromonds. Into Constantinople, thanks now to Leo's far-flung recruiting officers, streamed uncouth companies of Franks, Avars, Lombards, Slavs, and Circassians, battle-worthy barbarians, enlisted to take the Basileus' solidi and service. A new vigour infused through the Asiatic garrisons turned back a vigorous Saracen raid into Cappadocia. And Leo, when he saw the effect of the powers that were in him: when he knew that he possessed the ability to stir his lieutenants to high resolves and to get the best out of a man, thanked God humbly in his heart, and when one misdoubting voice in his soul questioned, "Can the Hagarines be turned back?" another clearer voice answered, "Under Heaven they can!" Therefore the soldier persevered in his work at the War Department.

Yet his thoughts often ran to other things than the appointment of staff officers, and Basil's design of an improved beak for the dromonds. Once more he was finding his way to the House of Peace, and once more he was finding a welcome.

Kallinikos indeed had been shaken by the recent catastrophe. Not even a patent from the new Basileus, creating him "Consul of the Philosophers," could help him to resume his old studies with ardour. His torpor became pitiful. Fortunately, the University lectures were closed for the summer, and when Kasia suggested to his daughters that their father would be happiest at his Therapia villa, her words fell on congenial soil. Early in June the House of Peace was let to a caretaker, to the great sorrow of the mongrel Dorkon who howled mournfully around its deserted portal. Its inmates had departed up the Bosphorus.

The day that Kallinikos went thither, Kasia and Fergal observed a marvel: the indefatigable Strategos suddenly discovered the need for a day of relaxation. Basil's speedy barge was easily available. "The rowers need the practice," with a wink remarked their captain. Under the stern canopy Basil's rosy-cheeked and broad-zoned wife Placidia, with three over-active babies, gladly matched gossip with Kasia. For the sixth time Fergal told the wholly receptive Sophia of his adventurous trip to Nicomedia. As for Leo, he listened with all politeness to a meandering discourse by Kallinikos on the siege of ancient Byzantium by Philip the Macedonian; and Anthusa (still a little pale from the court ordeal) sat at her father's side, looking at Leo—of course in a most respectful manner. If his Serenity the Strategos also looked often at her it was simply unavoidable in following the discourse of Kallinikos.

Thus it was that upon a fine June morning the *Manger of Bethlehem* glided forth from the crowded harbour and out into the Queen of Sea-Ways. The domes, cupolas, marble piles and blooming terraces of the palace point dwindled behind. On the right stretched the cypress-crowned heights of Chrysopolis, on the left in Europe sprawled the commercial suburb of Galata overlooked by the high tower of Anastasius I^[30] and backed by the lofty hills of Pera. Blue and beautiful the Bosphorus opened before them, covered with caiques and the yellow sails of superior shipping, lined

with palaces, villages, vineyards and villas, and vaulted over all by a limpid sky.

Kallinikos' dim glance lighted as they turned headland after headland, giving him the satisfaction of learned observation on every winding prospect. Now he must remind the Strategos that the whole Bosphorus was sacred to Saint Andrew, who, coming to Byzantium three years after the Crucifixion, found the deep azure of the channel astonishingly like his native Galilee. Now it was to descant on the seventy species of fish taken on their constant migrations betwixt the Euxine and the Ægean. Now again he must talk of the two shrines of St. Michael on opposite banks a little above Galata, and of how they had replaced pagan fanes to Artemis and Apollo.

Perchance Leo and Anthusa heard all this; perchance they studied the garden-fringed shores and forest-crowned hills as the barge pulled up the swift current of the Narrows; perchance they reckoned the distance across the shimmering waters when they glided over the wider stretches and saw the towns and country seats retreat in the flashing distance. Certain it is that never before had the Strategos realized that Basil's barge could ply too swiftly, and seldom had he felt more glad than when Placidia said to her husband (Therapia being now abreast), "The men are not weary. The day is fine. Let us keep on to the Rocks."

Therefore up to the end of the Bosphorus they glided, beyond the bleak Kyanean Rocks, where the great surf spouted and the dark waters of the broad Euxine stretched away to the sky-line; then the helm was perforce swung back and into the Straits again they ran. Now Europe was beckoning them from the embowered heights of Polichion^[31] with its guard towers for the imperial customs, now Asia from the opposite ridge of Hieron^[32] where a grey temple to the "Twelve Gods" was crumbling away after the downfall of paganism.

Everywhere were the white-pillared villas of the magnates of the lordly city; everywhere garden walls, orchards, brightly-painted wooden villages, the domes of parish churches, the waving groves of cypress and yew, of box and plane trees. The women wearied of counting the flying caiques and the stately barges plying to and from the little quays. At "Great Valley," where a deep meadow led back to villages and charming woodlands and hills, they glided by a great company of revellers disembarking. Already on the greensward youth and maidens were ordering the dance. The citharas were thrumming, the castanets tinkling, and some old half-heathen drinking song was recalling the days of Bacchos and his nymphs. Every sound, sunbeam and ripple spoke of luxurious peace.

Long before the voyage ended Kallinikos had grown silent. His weary gaze wandered along the passing shores. Anthusa and Leo were alone together in the extreme stern of the barge. Kasia and Placidia were discussing the newest fashions in embroidered sleeves. Fergal was holding Sophia fascinated with some weird tale of Armorica. The Strategos strove to catch Anthusa's eye but her glance persistently sought the distant hills. There was a long silence. The soldier, by wont so ready of speech, felt a great awkwardness coming upon him, then in simple desire to say something he uttered mere banality:

"I have never seen the Bosphorus more beautiful."

"Peaceful indeed it is," replied Anthusa, apparently as he was merely seeking for words. "Who can imagine anything to disturb this? And yet you talk of Saracens."

"The Saracens have not come yet," he replied as unready as a schoolboy. "Of course you know my fears. Does not the possibility of a great attack upon Constantinople affright you?"

"Sometimes," she answered truthfully, "but not as much as once."

"And why is that?"

Anthusa grew red. Her gaze was now down upon the darkling water, but she replied without evasion: "Because after our day and night of deadly peril, I have come to think that if God can interpose thus to save just three of us from hideous danger, He cannot in His mercy commit to destruction the million of helpless ones—old men and women and guileless children—in all Constantinople. He will raise up a strong deliverer for this great Christian city, even as in our extremity He raised up for us—a brave and mighty friend."

Her last words were nigh inaudible. She would not meet Leo's eye. The soldier also studied the fleeting wavelets, then replied stiffly:

“God must indeed send us peculiar help or all is lost.”

Anthusa raised her head. Her lips were white but she seemed to have plucked up courage: “Will you be angry if I tell you something?”

“How can I be angry with anything you say, *kyria*?”

“Sometimes I think our own deliverer whose bright sword saved us in our helplessness from those raging monks is the selfsame man whom Heaven will ordain to save Constantinople.”

Leo forced a scoffing laugh. “God avert a burden like that. You’ve been listening with too much indulgence to my good mother’s vagaries about her son!”

“That is wrong. I’m not too secluded to miss what they are saying everywhere, ‘Philippicus is gone, Anastasius is in the palace: what matter so long as he leaves the Isaurian in the War Office? He’s our “Lion” to face down the Kalif.’ ”

“I’ll not pretend to ignore your meaning,” replied Leo a little frigidly; “the populace has its favourites. Would to God they praised me less and aided me more to get ready for the Hagarines. Little you know, dear *kyria*, how grievous it is to have great things expected of one, and then know in one’s inner heart, ‘You’re but a very feeble man. Try your best you are very like to fail.’ ”

“Ah!” cried Anthusa, the warm colour springing to her cheeks, the light glancing suddenly from her eyes. “Say not this, for you’ll *not* fail!”

Then her hands dropped suddenly at her side:

“Most Serene Strategos,” she said blushing, “what have I done? An untaught girl counselling an imperial minister. Your friendship for my father has made me presume too much. Can you forgive?”

“Forgive never, for to forgive there must be offense.” The soldier only knew that he was sitting close behind her, and that the sound of her voice was inconceivably sweet. “Most honoured *kyria*, to-morrow I shall again be at my bureau. I shall be perplexed with problems and petitions. I shall be very weary. But I shall be less weary and make fewer mistakes because I shall remember your words to-day.”

“And I,” spoke Anthusa, still charmingly red and embarrassed, “shall find Therapia very stupid and tedious—until—until your mother can come with report of everything you do.”

A rope of the canopy was trailing away in the breeze. Anthusa caught at it, but failed to knot it down readily. In assisting her, Leo must needs pass his own hand over her own. Both pairs of hands were very close as they plied together, and the time required to make fast that rope grew excessive—and all the while Kasia watched shrewdly out of the corners of wise old eyes.

Having no further excuse for loitering, they made for Therapia, where stretches the little crescent of a bay scourged from the north in winter but balmy in summer and outlined with a charming village. Here was a luxurious complex of garden walls, bright vineyards and cool orchards wherein already the fragrant fruit was ripening. Close to the shore, and slightly apart from the other pleasantries, lay the unpretending villa of Kallinikos, where Ephraim and the other servants had made ready for their master.

Basil disembarked the latter, his daughters and sundry household gear. There was laughter and scurrying when Tobias slipped from his basket into the water, to be speedily rescued, mewling desperately, by the more aquatic Fergal. Leo assured Kallinikos with wholly needless repetitions that as soon as official duty would permit him, he would revisit Therapia and enjoy a hunting expedition in the adjacent forest of Belgrade. His farewells to the sisters were very brief, but when from the receding quay Anthusa waved a blue handkerchief (of course to Kasia) the soldier was observed very chivalrously to lift the small gonfalon from its sockets in the stern and flourish it vigorously in reply.

All through the pull homeward Leo sat saying little, with eyes only for the flying water and seemingly oblivious to the shifts of brilliant colour upon the Asian hills. But Fergal observed that his patron’s lips were smiling, his brow untroubled, and that he even hummed unconsciously the rowers’ chant when the men struck up a deep-toned chorus. As for Kasia and Placidia they exchanged glances, as intelligent women, which told one another an important story.

That evening Sophia and Anthusa sat long together on the benches beneath the patriarchal chestnut trees which spread their majestic boughs almost over the swift current of the Bosphorus.

After sunset the stars came peeping forth over the “Bed of Herakles”^[33] which loomed darkly on the heights of Asia and flashed back the steely ripples in the water. Now and then small fish, chased by one greater, leaped from the waves. Far away towards Miloudion where nestled a summer palace of the emperors, flared the red torch from the skiff of some fisherman, luring his evening prey. Overhead from the black masses of foliage began the tremulous notes of an early nightingale. It was a moment to provoke sisterly confidences, and Sophia, as the elder of the twain, was moved to speak with more than even her wonted freedom.

“The Strategos was very gracious to-day,” she began.

“He is always gracious. He is a good friend of our father,” replied Anthusa, gathering Lethe, Tobias’ sleek companion, into her lap.

“Are you sure he is only a friend to our father?”

“If he did not admire his work, appreciate his learning, expect to use other devices of his contriving, what can be his purpose?” responded the younger sister innocently.

“My dear Anthusa,” exclaimed Sophia, snatching up the jealous Tobias in her turn, “our father named you for the most pious mother of St. John Chrysostom, hoping, I suppose, that you would turn out a saint yourself. Heaven knows the only saint you imitate now is St. Mary Magdalene before her conversion. I never conceived that you possessed such art and ambition as you have of late displayed.”

Even in the darkness Sophia saw the quick gesture of her sister.

“As you care for me, explain yourself,” demanded the other.

“My dear Anthusa,” reiterated Sophia in that superior manner known to elder sisters since the first daughters of Eve, “I speak thus openly because you know my love for you is great. It is time you realized your position, before grievous mortification or still worse comes upon you. If your ears have been deaf to certain rumours as to why the Strategos so often visits our house, not so have been mine. I know that your heart is really as innocent as a young pigeon’s. I am older and bound to try to protect you. The other day Fergal said——”

“What said that red-headed whip-scoundrel?” demanded Anthusa, casting aside the cat and leaping up with energy.

“Oh, never mind; I shouldn’t have mentioned him. It was nothing. Well, to return to the Strategos: You can tell me many things, my beloved sister, but not that you have never dreamed the reason the War Minister is so kind.”

Anthusa stood with her back towards the current, waving her arms in angry silhouette.

“*Kyria* Sophia,” cried she, “never for long have we quarrelled. We’re about to quarrel now. How dare you speak thus of Leo, of the man who in sheer goodness, at direful peril of being slain himself, saved us all from a horrible death?”

The elder maiden remained provokingly calm.

“I’m compelled to anger you,” she resumed sweetly, “that you may awaken to the truth. Perhaps it’s too late already. Our father is so wrapped up in his impossible learning he does not give us the protection befitting girls of our station. Long since if he had cared more for his daughters than for that wretched aeropile, he’d have sought us out proper husbands, or if that were too much trouble at least employed some old-woman match-maker^[34] to find him the right sons-in-law. Not so; all is left to chance until at last fortune sends to our house the Strategos.”

“And Fergal!” darted Anthusa, her lithe body swaying with sheer anger.

“Fergal,” responded Sophia hurriedly, “is different. Perhaps his father *was* a great chief away off in Armorica, but here he’s only what his keen wits and guardian saints make of him. Fergal is a much safer friend.”

“For you,” shot back the younger sister, struggling to control her wrath.

“Let us leave Fergal out of the discussion,” asserted Sophia, her voice in its turn rising. “Hear then, my fine patricianess, what I was trying to tell you more delicately. I don’t blame any woman for admiring the Strategos, but don’t raise your own eyes too high. You’re pretty enough to snap his fancy, or many another man’s who angles more than does he for women. No doubt he thinks well of you. No doubt (as men of his class go) his deeds and words so far are honourable. He comes of course to our house without great state, and his mother makes no bones about her peasant birth, but think you who he really is! Not Spatharios now, but actual Strategos, the next thing to a full patrician in rank and sure to be that right speedily. When in cold reckoning he determines his career, whom will he decide to marry: the daughter of some great and wealthy house, or the daughter of a feeble old philosopher of modest fortune and as little worldly influence as Lethe here or Tobias?”

“How dare you speak these lies, Sophia?” demanded Anthusa, fighting back the tears.

“Are they lies?” answered her sister with exasperating inflection. “I fear there’s been overmuch gossip already. I know you’d never consent to anything base; therefore I merely suggest that, to save you much pain——”

But these last words were spoken to the great trees. With a cry of fury and anguish Anthusa had fled precipitately into the villa.

* * * * *

That selfsame evening Leo sat in his mother’s little garden, meditating long. His thoughts were not on fortress plans, the court-martial of an embezzling protostrator, or the new Khazar auxiliaries, but on another garden and a certain slim girl in Therapia. The next day shortly after noon he amazed his clerks and subalterns by deliberately quitting his bureau (though important dispatches were unanswered) and proceeding to the Mesē.

At the great establishment of Sosthenes, the most exclusive purveyor on the Street of Lamps, he made the obsequious clerks turn over their costliest dalmatics until he found one of crimson silk, heavy with gold embroidery and seed pearls, which set off his military form rarely. He added long hose to match and red shoes of the finest Persian leather. At Merdas the cutler’s stall he bought a silver inlaid dagger with large gems in its golden hilt. Finally, from the master jeweller Ibas he took a great necklet of pearls, no despicable gift for Theophano Dukas herself. The orders he sealed on Ardazanos the Armenian banker would threaten for a while his balance, but he was well content. He had reached a firm decision. The next day he would go again to Therapia, and say to Kallinikos: “Give me Anthusa in marriage.”

Leo knew perfectly well what a storm of reproach would immediately blow behind his back. He knew such an alliance would advance his worldly prospects not one iota. Every magnate who reckoned him a possible son-in-law would puff with anger. Every Senatorial matron would commiserate, scold and blame. Anthusa’s station in life was simply high enough to prevent the charge of a gross mesalliance and a formal scandal. All this he knew perfectly. Nevertheless——

It gave him joy to think of how he would confound the scheming high-born matchmakers whose pretenses he despised; how he would proclaim his true estimate of the self-seeking Magnificences who honoured and flattered him because his services had become indispensable, though never ceasing to sneer privately about his “peasant birth.” Gladly he could picture Anthusa learning, as he and Kasia might never learn, to accept the social prerogatives of rank and to shine at court among the brightest stars. Nay, it would give him new incentive to reach forward, even to things highest, when honours which might bring him new burdens would bring also to his best beloved new opportunity to show forth the grace and beauty which God had set within her.

Leo lived in no age of romance; he composed no lyrics; he tortured not himself with self-analysis; he indulged in no tedious sentimentality. But he knew that the honest instincts of right-minded men had mastered him, and that Anthusa had become as needful to his happiness as food or breath. Being in all things a soldier, he therefore drove bluntly and immediately towards a determined goal.

To his mind there were many reasons for action, none for delay. Any moment the fire-signals might blaze again their call which would send him to Asia, this time perhaps for many months. He intended to marry Anthusa after as short a betrothal as decent formulas would suffer. His ardent desires and the pride that was in him did not permit the thought that

either Kallinikos or she would raise objection, and of course he knew the mind of Kasia. His salary as Strategos would permit him now to take a good mansion near the Mesē, and to live as became a high official. To the War Minister, therefore, it all seemed very simple, just as it seemed to send a dispatch to the commandant at Ancyra ordering him to degrade two centurions for gross inattention to duty.

The next morning he dressed himself in his new gala robes with unusual nicety. "He was going to Therapia," he said to his mother, but he did not ask her company. Kasia's little body swayed with happiness as he strode out the door. Basil's barge was again ready, and the men pulled with more than wonted vim. To their passenger the Bosphorus flew by in perfect beauty. Every caique was full of happy revellers, every cypress on the shore was waving in fair greetings. For once on terms of absolute content with himself and with all the world, Leo leaped upon the little quay at Therapia. He had already framed the words of his demand to Kallinikos, his speech presenting the pearls to Anthusa....

... At the quay he saw old Ephraim. The Syrian ran to him with streaming eyes, seized his hand, and gasped out a tale of bewilderment and distress.

The preceding night Sophia and Anthusa had vanished. In the garden there were a few signs that they had been seized by the water-side after a struggle. Otherwise the Bosphorus might have closed over them.

CHAPTER XIII

A NIGHT ON THE MARMORA

THE night before the second trip of Leo to Therapia a dense fog had crept again out of the Marmora and wrapped itself over the Bosphorus and the Golden Horn. The great beacon on the palace point, and the opposite light on the outer promontory of Galata sank to red glimmerings. Once the sentry by the last-named guard-post heard quick oars, as from a boat of some size, entering the harbour from the north. The Golden Horn was supposed to be closed at night, but there had been no Saracen raids inside the Hellespont, and the business of most craft was presumably innocent. The sentinel therefore did not even take trouble to report the noise to his decarch.

Inside the harbour the fog was slightly less dense. Along both shores loomed the forests of masts, or the bulk of ungainly ship- and warehouses, dimly traced against the darkness. There were no bridges as yet across the lower harbour, and the boat which the sentry had noted pulled swiftly and unchallenged past the ferry stations, and reached the "Stairs of Sychæ," just beyond which reared the gloomy outlines of the huge timber market.

Here under the sunlight would have been observed the vast piles of lumber and fuel needful to the metropolis, while the streets behind would have proved among the vilest and filthiest in Constantinople: the purlieu of hap, cut-purses, and the mangiest dogs of the city. Even now, under the merciful darkness, a fetid odour told of the evil haunts barely concealed. The night, however, was very still. A couple of storks were rattling in their nest. A lonesome cur howled at intervals. From a ship in the harbour drifted the song of a few tipsy seamen. Otherwise, save in one quarter, there was silence and darkness.

The strange boat was approaching an old ship-house—a long timber-roofed structure running far out over the water, black, weather-beaten and smelling of rotten wood and general decay. At the piling a merchantman of some size was moored, and her crew were finishing her lading. Dim torches and lamps flashed over figures bustling actively upon her decks. There was the rattle of blocks and tackle, and the banging of casks being trundled down a gangway.

Upon the wharf, a little away from the ship's side, a single lantern light gleamed through its oiled parchment upon four persons who manifested many signs of impatience. Their voices speedily disclosed the presence of Nikosia, Evagrios and Hormisdas, while the fourth of the party was none other than Satyros, the master of the *Jacob and Joseph* nearly ready for the sea.

Nikosia's tones were sharp and impatient: "They're calling off another hour already. We might have known the time allowed to get from Therapia was insufficient. Can't you stay a little longer, Satyros?"

"By St. Phokas of Sinope, the sailor's guardian," cast back the mariner, "d'you think I love this business enough to risk daylight? If I'd known your matter touched the War Minister never would I have sworn to the bargain at the first. The risk makes my nerves tingle. The time's calculated for too nicely. But I'll wait till two hours before first dawn, and then the ship's off—will you, nill you. Till then the compact holds."

"Don't get uneasy, *philotata*," soothed Evagrios, "there's still plenty of time. It's been troublesome business to arrange, but if all goes well the eunuch is bound to give us enough to let us both slip off to Ephesus and live splendidly until this Leo has somehow stopped his roaring and we can return here in fine fettle."

"Yes," assented Nikosia, "it'll take a pretty reward to recompense for your being struck from the clergy lists, and our having to hide all these weeks in those nasty quarters in Galata. I hope you compounded in this business better than the last time."

"I've taken due precautions, my little dear," replied her consort. "The Master of the Palace has lost part of his public authority but not his private fortune. He still thinks that with that necromancer's girl out of the way a good understanding with Leo is possible. If we succeed——"

"The last time we succeeded altogether too well. The Strategos of Thrace is a dreadful enemy. If we're nipped it'll be hanging for you and a harsh convent lifelong for me. Now, one thing I've on my mind: that hoyden Saloma isn't going with us to Ephesus."

"Isn't?" mildly rejoined Evagrios. "Why, what've you now against her?"

“You know very well, faithless wretch”—Nikosia’s voice became unsteady—“all I’ve borne from you—and from her.”

“This isn’t the place,” replied the deposed deacon unconcernedly, “for such a talk. We can’t well abandon Saloma because—well, because she knows too much.”

“The pest upon me,” vowed Nikosia, “if I don’t get Hormisdas to handle her just as he handles those poor wenches we’re now waiting for.”

“*Ei!* Something in my line of business, gracious *despoina?*” suddenly queried the slave-dealer, who had been apparently ignoring the others’ conversation.

“Saloma’s not here, fortunately,” announced Evagrios; “let’s have no more of this. Ha! At last, thanks be—oars!”

Around the bend of the ship-house shot the dim form of a boat, from which came the low whistle of some signal. The craft drew alongside the wharf. Men ran with a torch and made her fast. Figures scrambled out upon the quay. Nikosia, Evagrios and Hormisdas ran forward together, to stumble upon the looming form of Plato, evidently very glad to see them.

“Success?” demanded the trio together.

“Success in the Holy Mother’s name!” cried the gleeful coaster. “We’ve the two beauties for you here, trig and tight.”

“The Blessed Trinity be praised,” murmured Nikosia, stopping to cross herself. “I vow my patron St. Barnabas a ten-pound candle on his next name day. And did you all get off safely and quietly?”

“Without the peep of one sparrow. In the morning at that villa they’ll think their young mistresses flitted off on two clouds.”

“God is indeed with us,” spoke the ex-deacon unctuously. “Later we can acknowledge our mercies. But now to details: Satyros is waiting and we’ve much to settle. Where’s that handy man of yours, Kannebos, as you call him?”

“Here, your Reverence”—and another powerful figure came forward under the torchlight.

“You must give Kannebos the main thanks,” confessed Plato generously. “You remember when we learned the old wizard was going with his girls to Therapia, and that our chance would come, I told you he was a proper fellow for our job. You remember, too, you warned me, ‘No murder; the line’s drawn there’—very proper of course for a churchman. But, barring such a little matter, you bade us to be handy Christians. St. Nicodemus, but didn’t all go nicely! What luck that the poor girls’ father had that villa so close to the waterfront! You know how the current runs near Therapia; the channel’s so deep and swings in so by the shores that sometimes the ship’s booms hit the houses.”^[35]

“I understand,” assented Evagrios. “But just how’d you do it?”

“Why, simple as sailing out to Pityusa, if you know the trick. Your Reverence’s money got us this good boat and crew. We slipped up the Bosphorus at first dusk and lay quiet over at Miloudion. Then when fairly dark we pulled over to the Therapia shore. There’s a tiny breakwater just by old Kallinikos’ villa, the very thing for our purpose. Kannebos had been ashore earlier, and that maid in our employ (you know all about her) passed him the news. Kannebos got her to watch and give a kind of bird-whistle when the servants had quitted the garden and had mostly gone to bed. The two girls must have been chatting under the trees, thinking themselves as safe as in their chambers; high garden walls on three sides, and a deep salt channel on the fourth!”

“Excellent!” cried Evagrios breathlessly.

“*Phui!* But it was quick work at the end. We glided near in the dark, slid up to the shore, and while I held the boat steady Kannebos and three other good hands leaped on the bank and nipped the two girls in less time than your Reverence could say off one ‘Our Father.’ The poor things couldn’t have known what was really befalling them ere we had them both nicely gagged and laid in the bottom of the boat. Kannebos got the younger girl as neatly and quietly as one would choke a kitten. The lads with the other weren’t quite so brisk. She struggled a bit and they had to squeeze her throat pretty hard to stop a scream. The maid had been ordered to tell old Kallinikos that his brats had gone to their chambers for the night. Whether she betrays us in the morning or not won’t matter. She wasn’t told anything about the plot

that wasn't strictly needful, and had no dealings with anybody save Kannebos. However, for her own sake she'll probably keep still as long as possible."

"You have done well," proclaimed Evagrios with dignity. "Your reward will be immediate. Nevertheless"—here Nikosia nudged his arm—"lest there be some mistake, we must identify these young women before paying you. Get them up upon the quay."

Plato muttered sundry orders. Kannebos and his helpers dragged upward from the boat first one, then another female figure, with arms and feet firmly bound, and both also gagged with a stifling quantity of rags. The two prisoners stood stiff and helpless as statues, their limbs barely twitching.

"Be careful," whispered Nikosia in her consort's ear, "those fellows can cheat us."

"Remove the gags so we can see their faces," ordered Evagrios, waving a lantern before the prisoners. "Now, my fine *despoinai*, screaming won't do any good. You'd best be resigned to the ways of your friend Hormisdas, who'll take you as safely and sweetly as two girls were ever abducted. He'll tell you how there are worse things for such pretty maids than a trip with him to Syria. Yes, that's the older girl, Sophia, they call her. Quiet, my dove, we don't want to hurt you. 'Twas your sister we wanted most, but if you both are missing they'll be more likely to think it's just a common kidnapping. Better gag her again, Plato, until the ship sails, and let me have a look at Anthusa, the other—she's the one really on our minds. Prut! If she isn't trying to kneel and weep out something about 'her father and her sister.' As if other likely girls fallen into bad luck hadn't had fathers and sisters also! Well, quiet her, too, since she must needs squeal. And now get the brace of them aboard quickly. The sooner you're off, the better. My stomach's turned by this stinking wharf."

While ungentle hands were again securing Anthusa, Evagrios had caught Kannebos' arm and pointed towards her:

"Plato and Hormisdas aren't looking; you see clearly which one of the two she is. There mustn't be any mistake."

The tall sailor nodded. "I understand the arrangement: nothing to any of the others. When we're near the Isle of Cedars I'm to take the younger."

"Very good; now come with the rest and be paid off."

"With the forehead, your Reverence; with the forehead."

While Evagrios was gathering the entire boat crew about him by the magical chinking of a heavy wallet, Nikosia had edged herself over by the helpless Anthusa. The latter was struggling against her bands like some wild animal newly caught.

"Don't take on so, *philotata*," remarked Nikosia through her fine teeth. "It isn't every girl who can come so close to snaring a strategos. You'll have that much consolation till you're dried and grey. And of one thing don't be afraid: whatever happens to that sister of yours, *you* won't get a chance to dance before the Kalif."

* * * * *

By the following evening the *Jacob and Joseph* under her huge lateen sails had glided far down the Marmora. Satyros had prudently taken his clearance papers the night before departure, and his ship had been allowed to slip down the Bosphorus through the fog like a white ghost. A strong cool breeze from the Euxine had afforded good speed. Not infrequently after the sun dispersed the vapour the shipmaster had cast uneasy glances astern in dread of a pursuing dromond. "In which case," he cheerfully informed Hormisdas, "it's overboard with the two wenches, with weights on their ankles." However, to the great relief of the slave-dealer, "who hated nothing so much as cruelty," no craft more formidable bore up from behind than a cargo-boat with decks piled with empty casks to trans-ship at Cyzicus. As the day advanced, Satyros' fears had dwindled, and Hormisdas became talkative about his trade prospects:

"I wasn't planning to go clear through to Syria," he finally confided; "it's usually best to change at Rhodes. But d'ye see, that churchman stipulated I was to see these girls clear out of the country, and since you've letters of protection sealed by the Grand Vizier to stave off Hagarine pirates, you're just my man."

"There'll be no trouble after we near Syria," rejoined Satyros. "Bless me if nowadays men of spirit don't change their

religion just as they change their cloaks. Several times at a pinch I've raised a finger and said, 'There's no Allah but Allah, and Mohammed's His prophet.' And I meant no disrespect to the Panagia and the Saints either."

"Business would multiply," assented Hormisdas affably, "if everybody showed your liberality. Of course, it's my return cargo which'll make my gains; but these two girls should fatten my bag not a little. Wish I knew why Evagrius picked them. They're rather finer peacocks than I get in common trade. All we're told is that somehow the War Minister is friendly to one of them, and somehow some other Serenity or Sublimity is interested to break the thing up. St. Elias call his fire on me if that deacon shouldn't have turned slave-trader himself. A very proper man for business!"

"Well," responded Satyros, "if I get fairly clear with the pair, there my business rests. A sailor of fortune like myself won't revisit Constantinople right away. We left Plato on the quay, but that Kannebos and one of his men enlisted in the crew. Know anything about Kannebos?"

"Nothing," replied Hormisdas, pulling reflectively at a golden earring, "except he seems a clever waterman. Comes from Parion, I hear, a little lower down the Marmora. Seems a rather pious fellow, always saying his prayers or fumbling his crucifix."

"He'll have to quit that when we get to Beyrut," said the master. "*Ei!* Thanked be St. Phokas, we're not likely to get overhauled if this wind holds. Better untie and ungag your little ladies; all the screaming in the world won't make a bit of difference now except to fill the sails."

"A good idea; you know how I hate *needless* cruelty," rejoined the trader, bustling off.

The sisters had been lying in the noisome little cabin as helpless as the bales of woollens and metalwares in the cargo. Now when Hormisdas released them the time for stormy raging was passed. Each had clearly realized her situation, and had mustered enough dignity to refrain from frantic and futile protests. Hormisdas set food before them, and with much smoothing of his well-oiled locks assured them of good treatment. Then, to their infinite relief, he quitted the cabin. The two girls rushed into each other's arms in an agony of tears. For long their sobs prevented all words. At last Sophia threw back her dishevelled hair and spoke with despairing calmness:

"We shall never see our home again."

Anthusa cast herself at the other's feet:

"Oh, I know why! I know why! Wherefore was Leo suffered to save me from the harbour? Would that I had drowned; then you at least were safe. Why was I fool enough to drift into the favour of a man who might have great enemies who saw in me some barrier to their schemes! You heard what Nikosia said. First there was the prosecution before the Patriarch, and now that cruder blow. Dear God, take away my life! Nay, let me die twice over, once for myself, once for my sister—if only she can go free!"

Sophia lifted her up and kissed her. "Poor little sister," she said, "you are innocent as a fledgling swallow. Forgive my heartless words the other night. I wished to spare you pain, but never I dreamed of this. Yet there's a chance we can still be rescued."

"I think not," said Anthusa hopelessly. "I overheard the sailors saying the wind was fair. You can hear the water rushing around the ship. To-night they will be in the Hellespont, next out into the open sea. Every one in Therapia thought we had gone to bed, and we won't be missed till dawn. Even when Leo hears, it will be many hours ere a few things are sifted out. All was horribly well planned. You are right. We shall never see our home again."

Then followed hours of silent torture, the girls sitting side by side on a crude bunk, clasping each other's hands. Nature asserted itself enough to compel them to drink a little sour wine and eat a few barley cakes. Guarded as their lives had been, they had not escaped the stories of kidnapped Christian girls shipped to the marts of Syria to vanish forever in the harems of Damascus or Ispahan. The blow which had smitten them was so numbing that in mercy imagination was partly baffled. Neither sister could bring herself to think of the worst; neither to dwell on the possible consequences of their loss to their father.

The afternoon thus drifted by. The shadows from the small cabin portholes shifted. Then darkness closed around them, and nothing for a while disturbed their desperate thoughts save the creaking of the booms, the purling of the water, and the occasional shouts of Satyros to his men. At length the odour of hot, rancid pottage suggested that supper was

prepared forward for the crew. There was a trampling of feet towards the forecastle, the jargon of coarse voices, then a more complete silence. Probably the deck was deserted save for the helmsman; and Anthusa was just begging Sophia to eat again when the hatch was slid noiselessly aside, and then was darkened by the huge form of Kannebos.

The sailor landed in the cabin with a single leap, and in a twinkling his great hands closed over Anthusa with a grip so potent that even the strength to scream passed instantly from her. For one moment he held her face to the pale western light still creeping through a porthole. "She's the one!" Sophia heard him mutter; then, clutching his prisoner under his arm he sprang through the hatchway. The elder sister made a frenzied effort to snatch his sash, but was dashed aside by a blow of his fist. "St. Theodore curse you, girl; she won't be murdered!" he tossed at her, as he disappeared on the deck, after which the hatch was closed immediately.

Anthusa (who had been in that terrible clutch the night before) struggled not. A great surge of mingled relief and horror told her that her troubles were about to end at the bottom of the Marmora, despite Kannebos' announcement. His grimy hand was crushed over her mouth. She was dimly aware that another sailor was helping him: that they were lowering her into a boat towing alongside the *Jacob and Joseph*, and that next they were casting the small craft off as quietly as possible from the vessel, which, under a fair wind, was rapidly slipping away from them into the darkness.

"Bend to it, Bassos!" ordered Kannebos, still pressing his paw over Anthusa's lips. But presently his hand was withdrawn. "The ship's far enough now so a scream won't matter," declared the older sailor, taking up a second pair of oars.

Anthusa, who had closed her eyes, quivering in mortal terror, opened them again. She was once more on the bottom of a skiff much smaller now than Plato's barge at Therapia. Overhead she saw the great vault of the stars, swaying to and fro as the boat tossed on the waves of the Marmora. Kannebos was pressing the prow of the boat around until it pointed in the wind's eye. For the *Jacob and Joseph* to have overhauled them now would have required many tacks. Interception was practically impossible.

Bewildered and desperate, Anthusa leaped up in the skiff, only to be thrust down again by the irresistible Kannebos.

"Here, you *kyria*! You're not to make a meal for the tunnies, if that's what's crossing your mind," he admonished; "keep quiet and all's safe."

"For the love of Christ," adjured Anthusa, "what means all this? Why did you not take my sister? Do you intend to save me?"

"As for saving, if you mean saving from a trip to the Infidels, yes," returned Kannebos slowly, throwing a mighty power into his oars. "As for your sister, you'd best toss the memory of her out of your nets as worthless fish. You're likely to have another kind of sisters for the rest of your days. That's my thinking."

Anthusa struggled again to her feet, as if to seek refuge in the black water. Again Kannebos repressed her with one thrust; but the second sailor, Bassos, was not quite so obdurate.

"Best to tell her, mate," he suggested, "if she'll swear not to try to leap overboard."

"I promise anything; only let me know what has happened," moaned the captive.

"Well, then," resumed the elder boatman, "it'll be an hour more of good pulling, and the better speed if you lie quiet, so you may as well know. I'm only a handy man around the Bosphorus, but I'm known for a Christian, mind you—a Christian. Evagrios knew that if I swore by the Blessed Sacrament to do this little business for him without telling Plato, Satyros or Hormisdas, I could be trusted. So then: have you ever heard of the Isle of Cedars?"

"No," came from Anthusa.

"You'll hear of it often enough hereafter. It's between Proconnesus and Parion, my old birthplace, well down the Marmora. Now, d'you see, it's this way: Evagrios is working for some great lord—I don't know who—and what Plato and I did last night I needn't tell over again. But while we were arranging for things at Therapia and Constantinople, Evagrios and that fine lady of his (blessed St. Barbara, but she knows how to wear her paint!) got me aside and put extra gold in my hand. And the sum of the second part of this merry stage play is this: When you're missing, no doubt there'll be a stir, court warrants and rewards. Plato is a leaky tub. A few keratia and a little fear of the rack can get anything out

of him, oaths or no oaths. And once your friends hear 'Syria,' won't there be all sorts of schemes for ransoms and rescues? Something which his Reverence Evagrius didn't seem to enjoy. So it was arranged that when we were off Proconnesus, without a word to Hormisdas and Satyros, Bassos and I should whisk you into this skiff and take you to the Isle of Cedars. All the rest can think what they please. You'll be safe for the rest of your days, and I"—Kannebos' gruff voice grew measured and pious—"I shall have cancelled not a few sins by saving a sacred virgin for the service of the Panagia. And of course, if you're 'gone to Syria,' never in the world will man or mouse think of finding you *there*."

Anthusa pressed her hands to her throbbing temples. Out of the background of memory came vague tales of communities of female ascetics, fanatical in their austerities, who inhabited certain islets in the Marmora. With maddening clearness it came over her how absolutely ingenious had been Evagrius' plot. Even if her friends exerted all their power, captured or corrupted Plato or Hormisdas, sent agents to Damascus, and offered great ransoms, this could avail nothing for her. She would be within a hundred miles of Constantinople, and her friends would be merely beating the air for her rescue.

She peered over the gunwale. Far away now against the stars by the sky-line were traced the sails of the *Jacob and Joseph* bearing Sophia from her. In that instant of utter desolation, even the prospect of Moslem captivity would have seemed sweet could she have rejoined her sister. The strength had gone clean out of her. She had not even the power to lift her head a second time and consider whether, despite her promise, she should not strive to leap into the sea.

The two sailors rowed on doggedly. Bassos, the younger, was not quite calloused to their passenger's misery. "Blast me," he muttered, "if I like this way of earning even a lot of solidi. Something else next time!"

"We've sworn on the Blessed Sacrament to go through with it," returned Kannebos, "and if we don't, our luck's cursed through all eternity. After all, aren't we saving her soul from the Infidels? Conveying her to a holy life? Lay on, mate. I think I see the Tall Rocks through the dark!"

The rasping of the thole-pins continued monotonously, but to their noise Anthusa now lay mercifully unconscious.

CHAPTER XIV

THE CAPTAIN GENERAL OF ANATOLIA

COULD Evagrius and his familiars have seen Leo the Strategos for the few days following the disappearance of the two sisters they would have trembled in very truth. Never had the War Minister shown himself more visibly the raging "Lion." Every engine of government was invoked to unravel the mystery. The clues were scanty, but in the garden at Therapia a chair had been found upset, and a table whereon the unhappy girls had spread embroidery had been cast down and the needlework strewn over the little lawn; also a handkerchief identified as Anthusa's had been found on a shrub as if suddenly plucked from her head.

Other evidence speedily came in. The keen eyes of Fergal detected heavy foot-marks upon an adjacent sandpit indicative possibly of a landing from a boat. There was also much vague testimony from villagers as to various craft which had been seen passing in the Bosphorus just before nightfall. Leo next proceeded to interrogate personally Kallinikos' servants, and suspicion was promptly directed upon one of the maids, a sly and slatternly girl from the Islands, one Malgina, whom Sophia had taken into service shortly before quitting Constantinople, and whom Ephraim had already taxed as an incompetent busybody.

Confronted by the terrible War Minister himself, and with Peter significantly flourishing a loaded cudgel, the unhappy girl broke down and confessed that soon after she had entered the household she had been corrupted by a strange sailor (whom she could describe only feebly) first into supplying him information as to her mistresses' movements, and then into meeting him the night of the abduction, giving him a signal when the sisters were alone in the garden, and finally conveying a false message to their father that they had gone to bed.

That was as far at first as she would go. But when at a gesture from Leo they bound her to a post and bared her back for the stripes, her memory was refreshed. She remembered that she had actually lurked in a corner of the garden and had seen a boat glide up and part of its crew leap ashore and carry off both the sisters. She was ready to swear by the Panagia, the True Cross and her personal hopes of heaven that this was all that she knew, and Leo believed the wretched girl spoke truly. He had gained sufficient information to put the whole police machinery into violent action.

During the next few days all the panders, cut-purses, tavern-bravoes and water-rats of Galata and the great wicked Pharnar district cursed the energy of the police. The Collegians raided and arrested in every low haunt and hovel. Many a lurking miscreant found himself whining in the Præfect's court. A score of coarse hoydens were consigned to St. Gastria. A whole gang of robbers was suddenly trapped and then duly beheaded in the Amestrian Forum. But all the zeal of the police, supported by the Quæstor (anxious to do the War Minister a service) at first did nothing to unravel the original mystery.

Then a nosing decarch came upon a comfortable den in Galata where evidently Evagrius had been in hiding since the earlier affair at the Patriarchate. Leo with shrewd surmise ordered renewed search for the ex-deacon and Nikosia. The birds had flown, disappearing the very day after the affair at Therapia. They had left, however, certain traces behind them, and it was learned that Plato had been often seen in their company; and for Plato therefore diligent search was made.

The master of the *Holy Elias* assuredly played in poor luck. Evagrius had paid him liberally, and, very confident that he could cover his tracks, Plato had indulged in a sousing orgy with boon companions, exhibited his gold, resisted an inevitable attempt to rob him, and had been consequently not merely stripped but bludgeoned half-dead. As a result, he was too mauled and wounded to make his projected flight to Crete. The police found him in a familiar tavern while recovering, and the Quæstor rolled an incredulous eye when he endeavoured to prove that he had been taking a cargo to Selymbria on the night of the kidnapping.

"A little salt on your hand will make you explain differently," remarked the official pithily, ordering him off to jail.

Plato understood the remark and blanched. He was placed in the great court of the Prætorium prison, where hundreds of captives were allowed to wander about, and even to gossip with outside friends through the heavy bars of the tall, iron fencing. But the coaster was not merely hobbled with a short chain between his ankles; his right hand was strapped behind his back and enclosed in a leather bag full of coarse salt. In four weeks the member would be rigid and withered for life, and Plato, wisely considering how a right hand might prove much more useful to him than keeping his oath to

Evagrius, and also the great chance that other peccadilloes might be fastened upon him, soon told a turnkey that he wished to talk again to the Quæstor.

Under promise of his life if his confession proved reliable, Plato accordingly provided the official with a reasonably full and honest account of Evagrius' intrigue and crime up to the moment the *Jacob and Joseph* put forth from the Golden Horn. It was now six full days since the affair at Therapia, nevertheless the following night a dromond with a double relief of rowers flew away for the Hellespont, and a placard among the Hippodrome notices in the Augustæum promised five pounds of gold to whosoever would procure the arrest of Evagrius, unfrocked deacon of Hagia Sophia, and of Nikosia, falsely reputed his "Spiritual Sister." ...

... In those six days Leo had aged. The boyish eagerness, the humorous playfulness of his manner seemed gone. There were heavy lines upon his forehead and about his eyes, as of a man who slept little and sorrowed much. To his subordinates his manner was still gentle, but they obeyed him with trembling, fearing the power behind his frown. By a great effort of will he had brought himself to resume his work at the War Department, leaving to the Collegians the sordid hunt for the criminals. Only to Basil and his mother did he impart some of his inner thoughts.

"When I find the mortal who inspired this thing—Christ pity me if I pity him!"

"You have envious rivals in the army," suggested the sympathizing sailor.

"Enemies in the army, who will stab at a comrade's heart like that? Who send forth ruffians against frail women? Don't malign the army, Basil, even if you are in the navy. Dear Lord Jesus! If only for those helpless poisoning words 'I suspect' I could speak the manly words 'I know!'"

Then after the bitter days of waiting, of the hopes deferred, which made the heart sick, came the messenger from the Quæstor, "Plato has confessed," and an apparent solution of the sorry mystery. But even while the Strategos was debating with Basil what desperate chances might exist of intercepting Satyros off the coast of Cyprus, came again an official mandator from the palace. The presence of Leo was required, not this time for pompous consistory, but for an urgent meeting of the "Sacred Council of State."

* * * * *

Anastasius II had vainly striven to prove himself an efficient Emperor. Everybody knew, however, that he was a man of parchments and sealing wax, entirely at the mercy of the great civil officials and patricians, and that he felt helpless before the great storm blowing up from Syria, although well-meant proclamations had been issued, ordering non-residents to quit Constantinople, and for residents to fill their cellars with corn for a long siege. Court expenses had been ordered curtailed, and a well-meant effort was made to humour the soldiery; but the chiefs of the army hardly made any concealment of their contempt for the civilian régime. Every day rumours ran around the great fora: "The Macedonian theme has mutinied," or "The Armeniacs have risen." Yet one man never seemed connected with grasping ambition, listened to no ambitious hintings, and appeared to be consumed with a holy passion for preparing against the Infidel. That man might now—by general confession—have blown the trumpet and had four-fifths of the army support him instantly. He was the Strategos of Thrace.

As their best hope to avert a mutiny of the army, which seemed more probable every day, the civil magnates around Anastasius resolved upon a last move to save at least the simulacrum of their power. They summoned Leo to the palace.

In other days and moods the son of Kasia would not have been unmoved by the manner in which this time his retinue crossed the Augustæum. The forum loungers, the idling advocates under the basilica porticoes, the pushing throngs of traffickers and sightseers had long since learned those signs which meant in Constantinople: "Salute the rising sun!" There were salvos of applause, "Ten Thousand Years!" when with cracking whips the escort cried its "Way for the most Serene Strategos!" There was a full platoon of Protectors to salute with their bannered spears, while Leo reined in the Chalke. When the smiling silentaries led him across the marble-paved courts of the Daphne it was between two lines of salaaming officials and courtiers, each man striving desperately to catch his approving eye. Leo walked straight forward with solemn brow. Only mechanically did his stiff salute return the homage. "He's like all the rest," one envious moirarch^[36] muttered to a comrade; "a little good fortune, and all men become dust to his feet."

The centre of all this envy was that instant saying in his heart: "Now I must meet the eunuch. I must not burst out with

foul suspicions. I must remember my duty as a Roman soldier. Would that I might close my hands around his hairless neck!”

And when with distant lofty mien he looked across the long files of congeing officers, he saw neither bowed heads nor gorgeous uniforms, but before his mind after a manner was floating the form of a girl in a soft, blue dress, with white flowers upon her brown hair, with features alike befitting Artemis and the Panagia, and a voice like the songs of heaven; while his thoughts ran off asking himself: “What could be done if I went to Syria?”

“Ten thousand years to the Darling of the Army!” The plaudits died behind him. With more than his wonted poise he entered the glittering corridors, and at the door of an inner chamber a ten of the new guard of Frankish giants saluted with their huge battle-axes. Leo passed into an apartment of no great size, but gleaming with superb mosaics. At the head of a long table, ranged above the arch-magnificoes, was a higher seat under a baldachin of gilded copper. The personage beneath its shadow wore a voluminous purple dalmatic and a small circlet set with emeralds. He was a small, timid-appearing man who fidgeted upon his cushions, and looked towards Leo with an uneasy smile.

The soldier drew near and reverently but formally knelt, kissed the purple hem, then rose and stood with folded arms.

“Flavius Leo, we are not unmindful of your zealous labours at the War Ministry,” began Anastasius.

“I am rejoiced at the notice of your Sacred Clemency,” replied the soldier, fixing his eye not upon the Emperor, but upon the eunuch Paul, seated near the head of the table. The minister returned the glance, shiftily and uncomfortably.

“Too well we are aware,” pursued the Basileus, “of unfortunate prejudices which exist in certain sections of our valiant army against our imperial person. With singular pleasure we have observed the implicit loyalty of all your acts.”

“A soldier’s duty is to obey,” returned the Strategos, “a Roman’s to defend the Empire, a Christian’s to turn back the Hagarines. For all these reasons I have supported the throne against all waverers.”

“When every day brings tidings,” resumed Anastasius in studiously official tones, “brings tidings of how our Asiatic fortresses are beset, our subjects harried, our very realm menaced, our impulse inevitably is to lead in person our military themes, even as the great Heraclius departed from Constantinople to carry fire and sword into the heart of Persia.” Anastasius halted to rub a retreating chin. “Nevertheless the solemn remonstrances of our most competent ministers have taught us that our duty is still at the capital.” The Emperor glanced towards Paul, who interposed hastily:

“His Sacred Clemency is very right. His duty *is* at the capital.”

“I concur,” rejoined Leo with an emphatic nod.

“Therefore we have ripely determined,” hastened the Emperor, “to appoint a high deputy of accomplished science and valour, who shall have undivided authority as in our own person over all the Asiatic themes save those nearest Constantinople, and who—with help of the Blessed Trinity—shall protect our dominions from the Infidel.”

“From the standpoint of a soldier, I commend your Sacred decision,” replied the War Minister coolly.

“Zounds, how he takes it!” complained Niketas, sitting beside Theokistos. “One would think the Emperor was merely saying ‘Stay to dinner!’ ”

“Therefore, Flavius Leo,” concluded Anastasius, speaking rapidly as if anxious to hasten to his end, “imitating the example of our august predecessor, Justinian I of immortal memory, even as he promoted the renowned Belisarius, it is now our pleasure that you be advanced forthwith to the extraordinary rank of ‘Hyper-Strategos’—of Captain General of Anatolia, with the power, attendance and emoluments suitable for such a lofty dignity.”

The fortunate general stood as impassive as the carved pillar beside him until the silence following the Emperor’s speech was becoming awkward. He smiled not; only his eyes burned with a deeper fire. Then very deliberately he dropped again on his knee and lifted the purple to his lips. With real anxiety monarch and council listened to his measured words as he rose.

“This is no time, your Clemency, for courtly compliment. If these noble lords did not deem me worthy of this trust, I would not be at this council. If I do not deem myself now able to serve this Christian Empire of the Romans I were a traitor to the Saracen. A hundred rumours tell us the Kalif is preparing a deadly stroke. I hope the embassy of Daniel may

bring back to us the truth. Meantime I will face the facts. We may not besiege God with prayers to save us by miracle while we have keen swords and strength to grasp them. I shall act in all things as a soldier, for to men of peace the days of peace. I must go to Anatolia with full powers or not at all. No officious orders from Constantinople must hamper me. The Asiatic revenues must be mine. Is this clearly understood?"

"It is understood," spoke Anastasius blankly. "These are indeed military matters. We are in your hands. To-morrow will be the formal consistory for your investiture."

Leo's brow clouded and he struck the table with a mighty fist:

"To-morrow I shall be in Nicaea! Do these silken-robed magnificoes of the Council think the Saracens will delay for the drafting of purple protocols and for our pompous functions? Did St. Michael await a patent signed by St. Gabriel when he went forth for warfare with the devil? To-night I quit Constantinople with my chosen officers. Let the rest wait until after peace with victory."

"Since your confidence seems so great," quavered an elderly patrician, "doubtless you can explain your military projects, this honour to-day not being, I think, wholly unexpected."

Leo turned with cold courtesy. "I will not burden the Count of the Privy Purse with martial details. Long since competent soldiers have known what ought to be done. We must not stake the Empire upon any single battle. We still possess one good army, where the Roman name is still matched by Roman discipline—the Anatolians helped by the Armeniacs. We must hold fast the Cappadocian and Phrygian fortresses, wear down the Infidel and make him dash himself on our strongholds. Then either he will shrink back altogether, or if he dare to move on Constantinople it will be with a hostile country along his line of retreat and our own Anatolian themesmen sound and ready to recall to the capital to give him blow for blow."

"You really think the Hagarines will get as far as our walls?" queried a second Logothete hastily. "My villa at Rhegion—it'll be very exposed."

"Your Magnificence had better be more concerned about the safety of your family palace near Hagia Eirene." Leo concealed not his scorn. "There are over a million Christians in Constantinople. We of the army intend to save them all—your household with the rest."

The patricians looked at one another with flushed foreheads. The imperial fingers twisted under the purple sleeves. Leo saved the Council further embarrassment by himself concluding the audience:

"This is a private conclave, therefore let his Sacred Clemency endure plain words, befitting a Roman soldier to speak and a Roman emperor to hear. I stand here to-day not because I am loved, but because I am needed. The Isaurian, peasant and interloper, deserves not the breath of many of these lordships' anger, but the Strategos who can control the Anatolian army and perchance turn back the Saracen, must be clothed with authority. So there are no subtleties between us, and if by fell chance"—his eye swept the gathering and lit again on the uneasy Paul—"there are those who have thought to work harm to Leo the man while exalting Leo the soldier—when I find leisure, let them look to their safety."

Amid silence again oppressive, Leo a third time bowed to the Basileus.

"I thank the imperial Clemency for its confidence; to-morrow I am in Asia," he announced, and then to the intense relief of the confounded magnates he strode out of the door.

The instant the council dissolved, Niketas and Theokistos laid their heads together with the Master of the Palace. All three were white and furious.

"Can we retrace nothing?" stormed the first named. "Must we be incessantly thrusting this brutish yokel upward? His insulting manner and threats! Better endure the Saracens!"

"He is not wontedly so blunt," added Theokistos. "Something has enraged him or turned his head."

Paul, however, compelled himself to put on a calmer countenance.

"Control yourselves, dear colleagues," he enjoined; "I confess events have indeed forced our hands. He has proved ungrateful—which I should have known—and we have been driven to promote him far higher than I had ever expected."

Nevertheless let us make the best of evils. While the Hagarines prevail we must dissemble. Were he disgraced, you know the army would sack Constantinople, including, I fear, your own very pleasant palaces. But this Saracen peril will wane. Once over we can handle so crude a man with perfect readiness. I say this the more confidently—despite his black looks just now—because I have at last removed a certain alien influence that has been perverting him from us.”

“Where is the girl?” inquired Theokistos sharply.

“Ah, my beloved Secretary; that’s a secret wisely kept to myself. It’s enough that after our fickle swashbuckler has forgotten his loss, we can revive the old Dukas alliance for him. Count Maurice is still hanging on in hopes. After all, this peasant’s son can’t prove indispensable much longer, and perhaps you recall what Cicero said—I’m a little vain of my learning—concerning young Octavius when the Roman Commonwealth perforce had to employ him and his army, ‘The young man can be praised, complimented and—thrust aside.’ ”

“I’m a poor student of distant history,” rejoined Niketas with a disgusted frown, “but my remembrance is that Octavius merely cut off Cicero’s head and went on to empire. I hope our Leo won’t prove his pupil.”

And with that, in no cheerful humour, the three erstwhile triumvirs separated.

* * * * *

At the little house by the War Department, Leo was in grave conference with Kasia, Michael and Fergal. All the way homeward from the palace the streets had been roaring with applause for the new Captain General. Basil almost had been obliged to use force to keep back the officers who would have thrust into the house to congratulate, even while the object of all this envy was sitting at his mother’s feet, clutching his hair, and in all things miserable. “*She* a captive to Syria, and I go to Anatolia! Oh, blessed Lord God, why must such things be!”

Nevertheless, after a little, this black mood passed. The situation was accepted calmly. If Leo could not go to Syria, at least Fergal was no prisoner of his own greatness, and he had not spent his years in Damascus in vain. The Celt might go on Daniel’s embassy to the Kalif, and what five sharp wits and indomitable energy could do, by Fergal could be done. A little hair-dye and bronze might make him pass for a very Arab, and Leo, no mean judge of men, knew he could trust his protégé as his own soul.

So the Armorican went with his patron’s request to Daniel, and Leo was left standing now and facing Kasia. The little woman’s eyes were very bright despite her distress at the fate of the sisters.

“God is with you, boy,” she kept saying. “God is with you. Now I know how he guided you when you said ‘Nay’ to Nikephoros and Leontios. Barses and Chioba did not prophesy in vain!”

“Best of mothers,” answered the soldier, “pray for your son. Never needed I your prayers more than now. A great cup of happiness seemed to be raised to my lips. Perhaps I let my own bright hopes swerve me a little from my hard round of duty, though why the sorer calamity should fall on that pure saint, not on me directly, let Heaven tell. Now a great public burden is set more than ever upon my shoulders. I am forbidden to think of private griefs or summons to private vengeance. I am a man of simple faith. I cannot believe that God can say to me, ‘Save this Christian Empire,’ and then deny me strength to obey His behest.”

“He will give it! He will give it!” cried Kasia. “Lonely I shall be without you. The poor sisters—gone. Their distraught father is with his kin in Pera. I’ll have only Michael’s charities to occupy my stupid old mind. But you, my glorious *Lion*, joy of my heart, when next you enter Constantinople—I know it well!—it shall be through the Golden Gate.”

“My mother,” said Leo soberly, “remember this: he who rides in at the Golden Gate to be crowned Basileus, will enter to fight the most fearful battle since Constantine founded New Rome.” Then he turned to the waiting Michael. “Care for my mother; I cannot leave her in care of a daughter, as I had hoped; but now, dear Father, bless me.”

Forthwith he fell on his knees and the good pope uplifted his hand with the fingers raised, made the sign of the cross, and spoke aloud:

“In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, Amen.” ...

... That evening the new Captain General crossed to Asia. He ordered to follow him not merely all his favourite officers, but many of the great corps of technical experts he had assembled at the War Office. He dispensed with any but the barest military honours. Peter was his sole body servant. His proclamations were of Spartan brevity. He would make his headquarters, he announced, at Amorium and from that strong city direct the defense of Anatolia against the Saracen.

CHAPTER XV

THE ISLE OF CEDARS

A SHAGGY, BROWN rock, rising from the breast of the blue Marmora; its crags beaten by crisp waves; its long spine crowned with dense masses of cedars—such was the island. Dim in the distance rose the loftier heights of Proconnesus, the isle of marble; still more dimly in the opposite quarter were traceable the azure mountaintops of Bithynia. To the north, far out on the horizon, drifted the sails, red, tawny and white, of the great commerce betwixt Constantinople and the Hellespont. No ships, however, came near the Isle of Cedars. Placed though it was within a few miles of the busy fairway, it was one of the most isolated spots in all the Levantine waters.

Near the western end, amid a clearing in the forest, rose the Doric columns of a one-time temple to Aphrodite. The building was still in fair condition, although Christian zeal had torn down some of the sea-gods from the pediment, and had mutilated the luxurious forms of the dancing nymphs, who flung out their limbs and drapery in bas-reliefs all around the great altar by the portal. About the temple were a number of huts and cabins built partly of boughs, partly of stones and rubble. These were for the sisterhood of St. Asella, the most austere of nuns betwixt Trebizond and Corinth.

Every pious Christian knew of St. Asella, how she had so devoted herself to God that from the age of twelve she had never conversed with a man, how her knees had become “hard as a camel’s” by constant genuflections and prayer, and how the great St. Jerome himself had commended her as an example of sanctified womanhood worthy of all possible imitation.

Record there was not when the last priestesses of Aphrodite had fled, following the collapse of paganism, and the nuns of St. Asella had replaced them. Every Sunday now for generations a fishing skiff pulled over from the mainland bearing a priest, the most dried, deaf and palsied who could endure the journey, and he said mass upon the smaller altar inside the old temple. The skiff, too, brought a modest supply of beans, onions and other vegetables, whereon the forty-odd nuns subsisted. The two boys with the boat were not suffered to roam any distance from their craft, and barring the priest, no male human—with one exception noted presently—was tolerated long upon the Isle of Cedars.

Certain of the nuns, indeed, repined because the Church forbade the ordination of women. Was not even the weekly presence of Father Hierokles, for all his snowy beard and whistling accents, a detraction from perfect virtue? The Monks of Mt. Athos were so much more fortunate. Not merely could they exterminate all female cats and mice in their domains, but they could enjoy all the consolations of religion without the distracting presence of a single member of the opposite sex!

Nevertheless, there still remained a few contacts with “The World.” The seraphic perfection of St. Asella was not for all her votaries. Certain of the older nuns were allowed at rare intervals to converse with male relatives always supposedly in company and at a safe distance; and it was the sub-hegumena Salvina herself who had not quite forgotten her brother Kannebos the sailor. To her on a certain night came a summons through one of the younger sisters to “go down upon the beach.” Salvina arose from before the chapel altar, where she had been lying rigidly, spread out like a cross, and went forth under the starlight. Despite the darkness she knew that a skiff had landed and a voice, which she recognized, spoke to her across the pebbles and sands: “I am Kannebos, and here with good reason.”

Holy thoughts and much fasting had not softened Salvina’s tongue. She spoke with asperity: “Good reason there must be to call me away to the world and its lusts at such an hour, though you be my brother after the flesh.”

“You will beg the Blessed Saint to forgive me. I also am performing a sacred work. I have brought you a novice.”

Salvina’s tone grew more cheerful. “A novice? Another brand truly plucked from the burning?”

“You say well, Sister. At least plucked she’ll be if she don’t pass from this sinful world altogether, for there seems little life now left in her. Here, Bassos, get her up from the boat and lay her on the sands.”

“If, Brother,” spoke the nun somewhat mollified, “you have actually brought hither a sinful woman, who may now be reclaimed to the glorifying of God, you have done well. Whence and what is she?”

Whereupon Kannebos plunged into a long tale, which he partly believed himself, how his prisoner had been the brazen minion of a certain great lord at Constantinople, how various enemies of her master had caused her to be seized

to be transported among the Infidels, but how that he—Kannebos—anxious for the rescuing of her soul, and the profiting of his own, had stolen her from the ship and brought her forthwith to the Isle of Cedars. And there, he concluded, she must remain forever, because he had sworn by the Blessed Sacrament to put her where she could never return to Constantinople, and Heaven would blast him if he had promised for nought.

“Fear nothing, Brother,” quoth Salvina, rubbing her bony arms, “the Isle of Cedars never surrenders an immortal soul entrusted to its austere mercies until the spirit returns to Heaven. You have done well. I shall request the Hegumena for a special intercession in your behalf.”

After a little more conversation, in which the nun brought herself to ask the carnal question, “Does our father still live?” and received a bare affirmative, Kannebos—who felt himself trespassing on very holy shores—bade Bassos launch forth the skiff, and Salvina saw the boat fading away in the gloom towards the mainland.

The new arrival lay on the sands, only a fluttering pulse indicating that still she lived. One of the other nuns ran for help from the cabins, and between four sisters Anthusa was carried to the sleeping quarters and laid on a pallet of boughs and needles. The chief Hegumena Arkadia came from her own vigils to applaud the piety of Kannebos and the discernment of his sister. The advent of a new member, and in such a remarkable fashion, was enough to shake the entire community, for—as Arkadia assured the delighted women—“If there was joy amongst the angels over one sinner who merely repented, how much greater now the rejoicing in heaven when a daughter of the world was born into the very kingdom of righteousness which was in the sisterhood of St. Asella!”

So Anthusa, all unwitting, was received that night upon the Isle of Cedars. The nuns shook their heads when they took off her dainty clothes—“the prinkings and ornaments of Satan.” Salvina and Arkadia gazed disapprovingly, too, upon her softly moulded neck and arms, and delicate face.

“A child of the flesh; and met to work the works of the Devil,” observed Salvina.

“Grievously true, Sister,” rejoined the superior nun, “but for that same reason the greater merit for us in reclaiming her. Stripped of her luxurious vanities her earthly allurements will fade. Her face will put off the comeliness of an evil life, and will put on the more enduring beauties of heaven.”

“Her long hair may prove a snare to those sisters whose thoughts still partake of the unregenerate,” spoke the other.

“That offense endures not for danger. The shears!” And Arkadia snipped off the offending tresses close to the unconscious stranger’s head....

... Nevertheless the nuns were not without a certain skill and kindness in their treatment of Anthusa. They had no desire to see her die. Her limbs were warmed and chafed. The one gurglet of wine upon the island was produced and a deep draught poured within her. For two days she lay in an exhausted stupor, tended assiduously, but on the whole mercifully consigned to the best physician—Nature. The double shock she had undergone would have broken the strength of many, but youth and the health of honest living were on her side. On the third day she began to realize where she was, to question, to look about her.

The nuns had clothed Anthusa like themselves, in a gown of brown sacking, and had given her sandals of plaited straw. Kerchief or hood she had none. The sisters boasted that on their unmasculine isle a veiled head was a needless vanity. She touched her hair. It was clipped close as a boy’s. When she had strength at last to look in a mirror-like pool in the rocks, she recoiled in horror from her own aspect. Was this uncouth, unwomanly creature the daughter of Kallinikos? Ere she could turn around, in her ears sounded the shrill laugh of Rhoda, a grey and fleshless nun who had been her chief nurse.

“Admiring your charms, my pretty peacock? Never mind. It’s in that same pool I looked myself after they’d cut off *my* hair thirty years ago, and wondered if I’d ever be handsome again. I know your thoughts. You’ll be in a more holy frame of mind six months from now!”

“Thirty years,” cried Anthusa, trembling as she gazed at the creature; “you were once young and——”

“Beautiful,” completed Rhoda with a malicious gesture. “Why not? Don’t think yours was the first pretty face to see this island. Did you ever hear of Sergios Malukas?”

“A great Senator under Justinian II, as I recall.”

“You recall rightly. Well, I was his ladylove; no, not his wife, oh, no! But for all that I had rings on my fingers, rubies in my ears, negro boys to carry my litter on the Mesē, my own box in the Hippodrome, my own caique for the islands. Well, Sergios must needs lose the Basileus’ favour. They pricked out his eyes. My eyes were in danger, too, but somebody said: ‘Let her spend her life repenting on the Isle of Cedars.’ So here I came. I raged and took on the first six months more than do you. It needs all that time to break your spirit. After that I stopped struggling. I began chanting and wearing out my knees with the rest. So I’ve been redeeming my soul. The world’s lost its hold upon me—glory be to the Panagia!” Whether there was sincerity or sarcasm in these last words, who could tell?

“Oh, my hair, my hair,” lamented Anthusa, this small sorrow for the moment swallowing up all the greater.

“Bless the Trinity, Sister, that your friends have obeyed the precept of the great Saint Ambrose, who urges women to shear away ‘that which by vain glory might have tempted them to the sin of luxury.’ Be grateful in your erring heart that we are not even as those strait Egyptian nuns who shave their heads instead of merely cutting short its carnal ornaments.”

In a torment Anthusa fled into the dense forest covering the island. All was monotonous. Trees, rocks, a few green dingles, and then more glimpses of the ever-imprisoning sea. Nowhere appeared life save in the little cluster of huts by the temple. The only sounds were the droning of great bees and the wailing chants of the nuns from the chapel, where they were renewing their prolonged litanies.

... Now, inasmuch as from first to last this narration concerns itself not with inward thoughts, but with outward deeds, let the story of Anthusa’s exquisite misery when the horrors of her condition dawned upon her, of her days and nights of frantic anguish, of the piteous beatings of the wings of her spirit, be suggested rather than told. Arkadia the hegumena was not without a certain wisdom. Many were the unwilling novices who had come to the Isle, herself in their number. Anthusa was suffered the freedom of the island—an absolute prison. She knew when the nuns solemnly filed to chapel thrice a day and twice in the night. She saw when for long hours they toiled in little groups, weaving wicker basketry for the skiff, which brought their food, to bear away to sell for the support of the community. She joined their meals and conversation, but there was no direct coercion upon her. The monotony of the life, the hopelessness of escape, the consciousness of a complete and seemingly irrevocable breach with the past were to be allowed to sink into her soul. After that there would be time enough to talk of perpetual vows and their assurances of salvation.

Nevertheless Anthusa presently discovered that an astonishing thing was permitted on the isle. At the eastern extremity there abode a strange and awful being—a *man*. Rhoda and other nuns talked of him in low whispers. His coming had been directly permitted by Arkadia. The presence of a suitable anchorite would “serve to remind the sisterhood of the gross temptations of the world, and incline them to thankfulness for having escaped the same.” Other nuns misdoubted, but now for seven years the hermit had existed near them.

Anthusa came upon the awful intruder during one of her early wanderings about the island. She had strayed down upon a little beach, at the point farthest from the old temple, and was gazing wistfully towards distant sails upon the calm horizon, when an angry voice boomed from some cliffs behind her.

“Get thee hence, daughter of Beelzebub! I adjure thee in the name of God the Father, torment me not!”

The mere sound of a masculine voice in that abode of virgin treble was far from terrifying Anthusa. She deliberately pressed nearer the sound, notwithstanding a more fierce exhortation to depart.

Speedily the source of these warnings became manifest. In a shallow cavern, half artificial, half natural, under the brow of the cliff, sat a man or at least a shaggy being covered almost entirely with grey hair, save for a single garment of extraordinarily filthy sheepskin. A face indescribably dirty and unkempt glared out at her with eyes like bright coals. Anthusa could see that one ear had been clumsily shorn away. The long arms which were stretched out as if to repel her were branded in several places with crosses. A rattling of iron mingled with the execrations; and Anthusa presently perceived that this being’s foot was fettered to the living rock by a chain about three fathoms long.

“Come ye still on, accursed one?” screamed the ascetic. “Must I drive hence your leprosy of soul even as men do the lesser leprosy of the body? Unclean! Unclean! I will cast stones against you! Wherefore at the summons of the devil have you come at this selfsame instant when by the holding of my breath and fixing my gaze upon my navel, the Lord was vouchsafing that I should be surrounded by His uncreated light; yea, that I should be enjoying a vision of angels

ascending and descending the very ladder of Jacob up to the glories of Paradise!”

Anthusa stood at safe range. Her evil genius had been unable to rob her of one great consoling gift. Her hair was gone, but not her sense of humour.

“Verily,” spoke she, “you are the extraordinarily holy hermit Symeon, whereof the nuns spoke in such praise. Only a man gifted with insight into the things of a better world could see in me a daughter of Beelzebub. There is little of the earth earthy about me now, I fear.”

“You ‘fear’; therefore you are still of the unregenerate.” The ascetic’s voice, however, seemed mollified. Conceivably he was even a little flattered. “I understand now that you are one of those children of Sin who, carried against their will to this pious abode, are not yet rejoiced to put off the Old Adam and his works. I will wrestle in prayer for your redemption. Inasmuch as my holy vision has unhappily departed, I may perhaps, without perilling my salvation, converse with you a little for your soul’s betterment, provided you will stand behind yonder bush so that I am not tempted by sight of your carnal face and figure.”

Anthusa did as commanded, and the other developed a certain garrulity. “Yes, of a truth I am that Symeon—not holy but merely the prince of sinners. Seven years ago I was an inmate of St. Thomas’ at Prusa, but the ordinary life of the monastery became to me even as sounding brass and tinkling cymbal. I read how the mighty Saints Pachomios, Hilarion, Basil and Gregory of Nyzianzos endeavoured to redeem their souls. A voice sounded in my ears, ‘O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?’ I recalled, too, the word of the great St. Anthony ‘He who sits still in the desert is safe from three enemies: from hearing, from speech, from sight, and has to fight one only—his own heart.’ Therefore I sought this opportunity to come to the Isle of Cedars. I cut off my right ear that I might testify in the words of St. Paul how I do ‘keep my body under and bring it into subjection.’ I caused myself to be chained that I might not be tempted to return to the works of the devil. I refrained from all cleansing water, save the rain, to justify what has been written, ‘For one who is washed of Christ, what need for him to wash again.’ In this manner I trust to be found innocent of the great transgression, on the final day of God’s wrath.”

“Nevertheless I marvel,” questioned Anthusa, “that you practice holiness best not in the naked desert, but where so often you must hear and even see womankind, even if in the form of consecrated sisters.”

“True it is,” responded Symeon, “that the holy St. Anthony himself has said that, ‘The mere sight of a female afflicted him.’ But I have long considered that the sorest foe of all anchorites was pride in their own holiness, whereby many who practiced great virtue nevertheless became castaways. Therefore to remind me of the world and its lusts, and to teach me pious humility I sought to be fettered upon this island, where I can see and hear just enough of the more iniquitous sex to be reminded of the mysterious ways of Providence, yet be spared the grosser temptations and deceits. And you, sister,” he persisted, “you, too, in a little time will bring forth fruits meet for repentance, even as the rest; yea, you will rejoice that you have died unto this sinful body that you may live unto life immortal.”

Anthusa held her peace. The hermit retreated into his cave and seated himself in a corner, his chin pressed upon his breast, his eyes carefully fixed upon his middle. She knew he was one of those solitaries who held their breath just as long as possible as a means to promoting extreme abstraction. Rhoda later taxed her sorely for interrupting the “Saint” in his visions, but Anthusa speedily discovered that Symeon—although always first denouncing her for coming, and styling her “the very spawn of Jezebel”—proved perfectly willing to converse on all manner of pietistic subjects. Indeed, she soon was assured that the good man found *silence* the sorest of all his mortifications, and compromised with the fiend by putting this particular virtue often from him.

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The interviews with Symeon were scanty enough interruptions in her life on the Isle of Cedars. That life was unspeakably monotonous. Summer passed into winter: icy blasts swept the island: the nuns used barely enough fire to cook their meagre victuals and to avoid, not hardship, but mortal sickness. Gradually the hints to Anthusa that she should consider taking the vows became stronger. She felt herself growing numb in spirit as the wintry winds chilled her body. She knew her face was becoming colourless and fleshless. She made no resistance when again they clipped her hair. After all, what now had life away from the island to proffer? Her sister was lost in Syria, doubtless doomed to die of old age in a Moslem harem. Only by a miracle, she told herself, could her father have survived the shock of double

bereavement. There were no other near kinsmen. And some one else? Concerning him, Sophia's words at Therapia ran for ever in her ears, "I know you would never consent to anything base, therefore I would save you much pain." One mild and sunny day Anthusa crept again to the mirror pool, but then shrank back from the reflection in horror, shuddering in her heart: "There would be no need for Sophia's warning now!"

The nuns, however, regarded her hopefully. "Her face becomes less wanton, Heaven grant her soul becomes more beautiful," remarked Arkadia to Salvina. But Anthusa had called up all the powers which were within her. Against an inward voice which said, "Your case is hopeless. Surrender. Submit as have all the others," there answered from another and mightier quarter in her spirit: "Be strong. Preserve your womanhood. Be not as these drab-souled enthusiasts, or as these women who expiate a life of profligacy. God has taken away all else, but not the kingdom of your mind. Defend the same."

And as she sought strength for resistance, strength came. She preserved the integrity of her intellect. Over the nuns, dried of soul as well as of body, she learned presently to establish that potency which the superior mind (given fair chance) can always assert over the inferior. She would weave baskets with the nuns, and join with them in the chapel prayers. She helped to cook their food. From memories of her father's lore, she assisted most successfully to nurse their sick. But for long months that silver voice which had comforted the House of Peace had been sealed behind her lips. She could not bring herself to sing when all that had made life beautiful and worthy seemed cancelled for ever. Then on one Sunday, while the harsh notes of the untaught women rose in the chapel, suddenly it seemed as if a restraining hand had been taken from the tongue of Anthusa. There was a pause in the crude chanting, then in an instant all the nuns were spellbound. It was as if angels were taking up and carrying skyward their song.

The "Children's Hymn" of Clement of Alexandria, oldest of Christian melodies, rose and swelled through the erstwhile temple, and never in the days of Hellenic glory had the marble naiads and Oceanids listened to music like this.

"Shepherd of tender youth
Guiding in love and truth,
 Through devious ways;
Christ our triumphant king
We come Thy name to sing,
And here Thy children bring
 To sing thy praise.

Thou art our holy Lord,
The all-subduing Word,
 Healer of strife;
Thou didst Thyself abase.
That from sin's deep disgrace,
Thou mightest save our race,
 And give us life.

Ever be Thou our guide,
Our shepherd and our pride,
 Our staff and song.
Jesus, Thou Christ of God,
By Thy perennial word,
Lead us where Thou hast trod,
 Make our faith strong.

So now and till we die,
Sound we Thy praises high,
 And joyful sing;
Let all the holy throng
Who to the Church belong,
Unite and swell the song,
 To Christ our King."

Carried right marvellously out of herself, Anthusa passed from song to song. At the end, old Father Hierokles, deaf though he was, almost forgot to intone the last prayers. After the benediction the simple-hearted nuns crowded about her. Some were ready to kiss her feet. Some wept because they had called her carnal and sinful. In one instant she became the most favoured member of the community. After she had held them spellbound a few times more, there was almost nothing she might not have asked save that they set her at liberty. And Anthusa's heart was almost melted into yielding when Arkadia besought her to take the vows of the order.

"We are but ignorant women, striving how best to please God," confessed the deeply moved hegumena. "The Panagia has bestowed on you wondrous gifts. You will make a saint far above us all in Heaven. I grow old, and perhaps my thoughts as to how to save my soul and those of all the other sisters have been somewhat crabbed and wrong. The sisters will never unite on Salvina as my successor. They will choose you hegumena, and soon, under your direction, the Isle of Cedars will be famous from Trebizond to Sparta as a true antechamber of Heaven."

But Anthusa shook her head.

"Dear Sister Arkadia," she said, "do not press me. I am perhaps a trifle resigned to my present lot with the sisterhood. Perhaps it is God's will that I should abide here for ever. But I cannot determine that it is so decreed, and that I cannot serve Him better somewhere else. If I have found favour with you, do not press me. I shall be as one of the sisters, but I will not take the vows."

"For one year then," spoke Arkadia.

Following these events Anthusa's peace of mind in a measure returned. She knew that most of the nuns, simple and artless souls, had truly learned to love her, and when Rhoda spoke spiteful words about "one who is with us but not of us," Arkadia bade her "fast three days to cast out the demon of jealousy and backbiting."

Every day Anthusa sang, and every day the wonder of the nuns grew, and soon not at her singing only. In a chest among the poor possessions of the convent she discovered precious books, a worm-eaten Bible, sundry sermons of the Fathers and even a few pagan scrolls. These last the nuns looked at with anxiety and Anthusa was fain to read them in strict privacy; but no one scolded when she undertook to teach certain illiterate sisters to read, nor when she selected certain others, blessed with fair voices, and taught them how to improve their chanting. Even more, when springtime brought back sweet breezes and flowerets, the weekly skiff carried something besides provisions in its cargo, the actual parts of a small organ purchased on the order of Arkadia herself.

Salvina had mildly protested at this innovation. It was departing from the strait and narrow usages of the sisterhood, but Arkadia reminded her of King David's exhortation, "Awake, psaltry and harp!" and asked if she, a mere sub-hegumena, set herself up as more holy than the Psalmist?

After that the delights over Anthusa's singing were doubled. There was even some worldly contention among the nuns as to their turns in working the bellows. Also during the summer it was submitted by certain sisters that inasmuch as "the newcomer" had taught them how to improve their basket-work and command a higher price for the same, it might not be sinful to erect a warmer and better place for their labours during the coming winter.

Thus glided the months. Even while she strove against them, Anthusa found a new set of interests growing around her. She was consulted in all things from reconciling two quarrelsome sisters to the means of inducing Symeon to believe that he could practice holiness upon cabbages instead of onions one week when the skiff failed in its quota of the latter. And the voices which had once been saying in Anthusa's soul, "Resist!" at last seemed to be growing silent, while others spoke still louder, "The past is dead, but a new life is opening. Join the sisterhood. You can rule it and mould it absolutely to your will." And then it was that Symeon himself provided the means which made Anthusa's heart again as adamant.

He had indulged in a conversation "touching carnalities" with Father Hierokles, and the hermit was fain to pass on his gossip. Even to the Isle of Cedars had come fearsome rumours of the Saracen menace and raiding by land and sea. Symeon now, however, was reassured in mind.

"The Hagarines are breaking their teeth in Cappadocia. No more fortresses are falling. The Lord has raised up a mighty champion for his people, a very David to overthrow Goliath."

“And who is that?” asked Anthusa, from her respectful distance.

“Why, the great Captain General of Anatolia.”

“Captain General? I’ve never heard there was such.”

“Cursed be my memory! What was his name? The fleas have been biting under my sheepskin too sorely.—Why, now I remember what Hierokles said,—he’s Leo, the one that was Strategos of Thrace,—glory be to God!”

“Leo!” almost screamed Anthusa in echo, and left the hermit so precipitately that he assumed some nun had called to her from a distance.

That night the sisters who shared a cabin with Anthusa deemed she was ill: she was sleepless, and she prayed aloud with unwonted fervour and agony. The next day she besought Arkadia not to press her for the present to join the order: and the hegumena—who was fast reaching that state when she could deny Anthusa almost nothing but freedom—yielded to her importunity. “One year more then—but after that——” So the younger woman went back to her work with the nuns, and strove by renewed devotion to their problems to conquer her own heart, and another autumn and winter passed over the Isle of Cedars.



CHAPTER XVI

THE PIETY OF NEOKLES

AFTER the departure of the new Captain General, Constantinople settled down to unwonted quietness. The great court and religious ceremonies attracted less attention. Shopkeepers complained, "These rumours about the Saracens are ruining trade." The elaborate summer races between the Blues and the Greens were run off with half the Hippodrome benches empty, and the two factions refrained from their customary rioting over the outcome. From Anatolia presently came reports from the Captain General: no major victories—his army was too precious for great risks—but stories of sieges raised, of Moslem raiding parties cut off, of blockaded cities saved; in short, of the complete halting of the Kalif's policy of devouring Anatolia piecemeal, ere risking a great blow at Constantinople. There were even paraded in the Forum of Constantine some hundreds of turbaned captives who cried their "Allah! Allah!" marvelling at the greatness of the Christian capital—eloquent testimony that Leo's efforts had not been in vain.

But all knew that the vital question was whether or not the Kalif intended to direct the whole strength of wide Islam against Constantinople, and to clear this very point Anastasius, weak but not blind, had sent Daniel the Præfect with a great embassy to Damascus. Peace against heavy concessions he was authorized to proffer Kalif Solymán; but he was also to use his eyes and ears while at the court of the Omiads, and discover whether such an overwhelming onslaught was directly preparing. On this expedition Fergal's presence was most welcome. There was danger enough in the mission to make the Celt's spirits rise with joyous abandon. The Captain General had supplied him with abundant money. So forth he went with Kasia's and Michael's blessings; and the report presently spread that the ships of the embassy had fared safely beyond Rhodes, and had doubtless reached Syria.

Matters thus became tame at the little house by the War Department. Kasia had emphatically refused Leo's suggestion to take a larger mansion near the Mesē or on the pleasant Adrianople Street going out to the walls. "It makes me almost mistrust God in promoting you, boy," had been among her last words ere her son left for Asia, "to see how little wisdom you possess. What would your old mother do alone in a great house, with scores of pomaded lackeys idling around with 'Wishes your Magnificence this?' or 'Commands your Sublimity that?' while all the time smirking behind my back? No, no, boy! I'll be lonesome enough with you gone, without having *such* things added to my troubles!"

Therefore Kasia was left to her charities and to Michael, and found quite enough to keep her occupied. Michael, indeed, had somewhat come to his own. Anastasius had plucked up courage to dismiss the Patriarch John, already openly discredited by the wizardry affair, and to appoint in his stead Germanos, Bishop of Cyzicus. The new patriarch was a man of narrow and imperfect piety, but there was at least a drastic change of personnel around his palace. The Captain General thereupon sent the new prelate an emphatic letter commending Michael for his eloquence and works of charity, and as a consequence the good Pope was suddenly translated from a minor appointment at Hagia Anastasia to a regular post among the high presbyters of Hagia Sophia.

Fine ladies now knelt for Michael's blessing. He was asked to solemnize fashionable weddings. When he scourged iniquities from the ambo, all of the audience that was not immediately attacked applauded vehemently. The good man even began to be troubled lest on him was falling the Scriptural menace: "Woe unto you when all men shall speak well of you," and he was not a little tormented lest he was imperilling his soul by admitting the demons of worldly prosperity and pride.

* * * * *

The wheel of fate had likewise brought new destinies to Fergal's erstwhile comrade in misery, Neokles. The cook had followed his master Evagrius during the latter's hiding in Galata, but when the ex-deacon fled Constantinople after the kidnapping he had abandoned his servant to the latter's own devices. Neokles had been consequently arrested along with Plato, but after a week in the Prætorium on very scant rations, since nothing was found against him, he was set at liberty. Left to himself, he easily got employment at fair wages in a frequented restaurant over against the Philadelphian Forum and the Aqueduct of Valens.

Neokles thus led an agreeable life, and indulged in many shrewd carouses until one evening, continuing with his companions in revelry until well after midnight, a heavy sin came upon his conscience. He feasted upon a trencher of spiced mutton, and not till he had partaken heartily did the sinister fact come home to him that it was now already Friday.

The next day, while dicing with kindred spirits, he lost fifteen keratia. Manifestly the Panagia was angry, and the only remedy against still greater woes was prompt confession and absolution—preferably by a priest that would not ask too searching questions.

The chaplains of the local parish church of St. Timotheus perhaps knew him over well. Neokles therefore furbished up his most gloomy and penitential dalmatic, anointed his head with pungent nard, promised two Armenian girls of familiar acquaintance he would be back in time for a boating party to the Sweet Waters of Europe,^[37] and set forth for Hagia Sophia. The priests there would be tired out listening to the sins of fine ladies—the beatings of maids, slandering of friends, liaisons with Protectors and such matters—and his offense would be only one drop in the clerical bucket and soon dispatched.

It was Sunday, but the mass in the cathedral was already over. Being tainted as a penitent, Neokles could not enter the interior, although he could catch a gleam of innumerable altar candles and the glories of gold and jewel-set mosaics, when the magnificent bronze “Royal Gates” swung to and fro, as the crowd of worshippers streamed forth into the narthex. The cook piously went up to the great sculptured basin in the outer court, whereon was significantly carved, “Wash thy sins and not thy face only,” and carefully sprinkled himself with holy water. Then he entered the inner narthex, the great vestibule proper, a vaulted hall, narrow but of imperial length, its walls revetted with variegated marbles and its ceiling brilliant with mosaics equal to the finest in the Daphne.

Earnestly Neokles hoped that his confessor would order him to perform some easy, inexpensive penance, such as adoring the sacred relics within the church—the feather dropped from Gabriel’s wing when he visited the Virgin, the gimlet and screws used in making the True Cross, and the trumpets blown at Jericho. The whole place gave a comfortable, opulent, holy feeling. He was glad he had not gone to St. Timotheus: therefore, with scant delay, he sought one of the closely set bronze gratings between the columns, where penitents were kneeling and whispering their misdeeds to the confessor concealed behind the elaborate grille work. The cook saw a handsomely dressed lady rise from one of the kneeling steps. She lowered her veil hastily yet he noticed tears and caught sobbing. Had she been a great sinner, or had the confessor been too harsh? Neokles thought of turning away, but no other confessional seemed vacant, time was pressing, and he dropped on his knees.

The deep, rich voice of the priest within reassured him. He made haste to unburden his conscience. The affair of the spiced mutton on Friday was contritely stated. Neokles then waited for the assignment of a reasonable penance and the words of absolution. To his great discomfort the confessor did not dismiss him.

“You have done well, my son, to begin with such a small matter. Pass now to weightier things.”

“Weightier things? Oh, venerable Pope, I can’t recall any.”

“Take heed. God is not to be mocked by a pretended confession. By your own words that food must have been partaken of amid scenes of carnal frivolity or much worse. Confess concerning them.”

“Oh, holy Father, but——”

“Have I choice in the matter? Where is your proper parish? Is it not enjoined in the ‘Penitential Book’ of that saintly Patriarch John the Faster, ‘Let the confessor enquire strictly concerning the sins of those penitents who for reasons hid come to him from strange jurisdictions’? To forbear might prove my own damnation. Answer, therefore, my questions.”

Only because all the strength had oozed out of his limbs did Neokles fail to flee instantly. As it was he felt as helpless as a trapped fox. The interrogator pressed him shrewdly but not unkindly from one point to another. First came out the facts concerning his recent orgies, but then the cook’s past was delved into. Neokles admitted that he was a slave and tried to throw off certain misdeeds upon his master.

“Your master—and what manner of man was he?”

“A holy deacon of this same church; at least, so he was—once——”

“Once? Yet he is not dead? Who then was he?”

Whereat the writhing Neokles found himself forced to tell many things concerning Evagrius for which that worthy, if present, would have rejoiced to flay him alive. At last he came to a particular event and stopped.

“I had no part therein, I swear by my hope of salvation. I only knew thereof. Besides, it was not wholly wrong. The young women were seized to be sold among the Saracens. But it was arranged by my master that one of them, I’m sure the younger, should be taken from the ship soon after leaving the city and delivered unto pious nuns, lest her friends follow her to Syria with ransom or rescue. Surely it is not wickedness to conceal the fact that a worldly damsel, so far from being lost among the Infidels, is to become a holy sister—even against her will?”

The voice behind the bronze grille became silent for an instant. Seemingly the priest suffered from a husky throat. He appeared to be at a loss, also, for prompt words, but at length he pursued:

“Even as voluntary virginity is among the highest virtues, so is worldly compulsion to take the sacred vows abominable in the sight of God. But was this project of alleged piety actually accomplished?”

“It was; at least, so Kannebos told me when I saw him again in Galata.”

“And what was the convent willing to receive such a strange novice?”

“As I trust to escape hell fires I do not know. Kannebos doubtless would not tell any one save Evagrius. He only let drop something about ‘a distance,’ and ‘a super-holy sisterhood.’ ”

“And where now is this Kannebos?”

“Again I swear, Father, I do not know. He has disappeared for months, doubtless upon some vessel.”

The questions ceased, as if the confessor were deliberating whether to press further, then to Neokles’ relief he was informed: “You have great sins upon your soul. Bread of affliction and water of affliction should be yours for long, but in mercy I direct merely that you refrain from flesh or wine from now until Christmas, and from trimming your hair and beard for two years.” Then followed the words of absolution, and “The Lord grant you His peace.”

Neokles went from Hagia Sophia by leaps and bounds, cursing himself for going thither, and cursing the priest for his inquisitiveness and penance. A little later, Michael, having given honest counsel to an erring grocer’s wife who had unburdened her conscience, surrendered the confessional to another presbyter. With speed equal to Neokles’, he made straight for Kasia.

Michael well understood the obligations of the confessional. He could not betray Neokles’ confidences, demand his arrest and stimulate his memory perhaps by the same drastic means that had made Plato talkative. But he conveyed the substance of his information to Kasia, and the little woman was agog with excitement:

“The cook said ‘the younger sister’? Yes? O dear Lord Jesus, if we had only known this while *he* was still in Constantinople!—But nothing must ever get to the boy now to distress his mind and turn him from his work. Only we two must do all we can——”

Then Kasia plucked up courage to go with Michael on a private visit to no less a personage than the new Patriarch Germanos himself. The mother of the redoubtable Captain General was not a lady to be lightly turned away, even if she did bob a very awkward courtesy before his Beatitude instead of politely kissing his pallium, and talked in an astonishing peasant dialect. Michael, however, was her efficient spokesman, and without giving Neokles’ name he explained how traces had been found of one of the unfortunate daughters of Kallinikos. The Patriarch was duly impressed, and since the favour cost him nothing he gladly issued missives under his apostolic seal, commanding all hegumenas, nuns and any other religious persons of either sex forthwith, under pain of excommunication, to surrender one Anthusa Maria who might be in their convents, as well as any other inmates perchance detained without voluntary vows or lawful commitment.

During the next three months the convents and nunneries around Constantinople were combed with energy. The fanatical nuns of the Maccabees in Galata had to release two unlucky girls practically kidnapped by relatives who had clutched their dowries. A woman was rescued from the Isle of Panormos who seven years before had given up hope of seeing her family. Many other strange things were discovered, but nothing of Anthusa.

Michael was not discouraged. Well he knew the multitudes of self-torturing ascetics all around the Propontis and at greater range from Constantinople. He was preparing to visit the nunneries at Nicomedia, while the quæstor’s men (spurred by a large reward) doubled their search for Kannebos, when an untoward event halted all these efforts:—the

Opsikian theme revolted against Anastasius.

With gross folly, the Emperor and his civilian pedagogues, while entrusting Leo with much, had withheld from him the great military district south of the Marmora. With grosser folly, although knowing the Opsikian troops were furious at the rule of the great nobles at the palace, Anastasius had set over this corps the "General Logothete" John, a silken-gloved churchman attached to Hagia Sophia. With crowning folly, the Emperor had finally commanded this "Pope John" to mobilize his men at Rhodes preparatory to a naval attack upon Phœnicia to avenge many Saracen raids.

When he knew of this order, vainly had Leo written begging the lords of the council to rescind their action. The expedition had already started. At Rhodes, the disgusted Opsikians rose in mutiny. Pope John was clubbed to death, and the whole force of malcontents turned their ships back towards Constantinople.

The insurgents dared not appeal to the Captain General; his honour was plighted to Anastasius. To secure a respectable figurehead therefore who would be completely at the mercy of the rebel officers, the latter seized upon a reluctant tax commissioner in Mysia and literally flung the purple over him. Then in the name of their new "Theodosius III" their fleet swept on to the capital. The civil authorities had raised enough irregular troops to beat off their first attacks. Leo, from the interior of Asia Minor, denounced the insurrection, but stated vigorously that his task was to slay Saracens, not Christians. Resolutely he conserved his forces and let events at Constantinople take their course.

The mutineers therefore seized Chrysopolis and for some months there was petty naval fighting in the Bosphorus. Then treachery opened the northwestern gate of Blachernai, and the brutal soldiery plundered and slew recklessly until resistance collapsed and the city submitted to Theodosius. After a little, being deserted on every side, Anastasius II capitulated. He was granted humane treatment and departed to take the vows of a monk at Salonica, while Theodosius III, "Christ-loving Basileus of the Romans," reigned in his stead.

His dominions ended at the Bosphorus. Leo was still only Captain General, but all over wide Anatolia his writ ran unquestioned, and Artavasdos, strategos of the Armeniacs, the second figure in the army, obeyed solely his orders. In Constantinople, indeed, the rough Opsikian officers lolled in the marble halls of the Daphne, while such personages as Paul the Eunuch saw their power still more slipping from them: yet Theodosius seemed hardly more than another pompous nonentity. When he showed himself in the Kathisma, the imperial box in the Hippodrome, the thousands would rise and thunder disloyally together, "We are tired of races, show us *the Lion*." Before the high altar in Hagia Sophia the priests prayed with loud voice for "Leo, our defender, who under God shall save us from the Hagarines." Even the soldiers who had lifted Theodosius to empire drank healths to "his Sublimity the Captain General." And all the time came in the tidings that the Saracens were actively mustering by land and sea for a deadly blow against Constantinople itself.

During these troublous days Kasia had remained unmolested in the little house by the War Department, busy with her charities, while Michael, if prevented in a wider search for Anthusa, at least never relaxed his vigilance to discover some traces of Kannebos. Time thus passed until the beginning of the year 717, after which many great things befell quickly.

CHAPTER XVII

BY THE RIVERS OF DAMASCUS

THE afternoon sun was streaming across the peaks and gorges of Anti-Lebanon over the “oldest city in the world”—Damascus, set on the edge of the vast Arabian desert.

From the heights, as the road wound down from the mountains, there expanded the view of the circular plain made green by the rushing Abana. Down through a narrow gorge leaped the gleaming water in cataracts, then spread itself upon the erstwhile desert, creating a wide compass of luxuriant verdure ere it lost itself in stagnant lakes near the horizon. Close at hand now, the river could be seen foaming in its rocky walls, then bursting through many channels across the plain. Far away in front extended the red brown of the barren hills, beyond which lay the weary reaches to Babylonia, but who could grieve at the distant desert, when behold! at one’s feet was the vast island of greenery, and out of the teeming orchards and fields spread the noble city—massive grey walls, the long white arms of stately avenues, the domes, pinnacles and the new Moslem minarets rising above the capital of the Empire which reached from the Atlantic to the Indus—the realm of the Omiads.

Down the road swung the Roman embassy, its members not without inward repining, for scarce eighty years earlier had the Moslem torn Syria from the Empire and robbed the Basileus of one of his fairest provincial cities. But Daniel the Præfect conducted an embassy fit to represent the power that ceased not yet to rule over a noble portion of the civilized earth. The horses of the envoys and of their train were worthy to match the best of the desert steeds. The dalmatics of the Romans were heavy with gold embroidery. The gems gleamed on their caps. Handsome slave boys carried their equipment of splendid carpets, deeply carved furniture, damasked silk hangings and even gold and silver plate, elegantly chased and engraved. It was reported five hundred pounds of gold^[38] had been given the ambassador for travel money, while with him went men learned in medicine, architecture, mechanics and mathematics, to dazzle the Kalif with the knowledge and ingenuity no less than the wealth of his imperial rivals.

Daniel, a venerable, benignant patrician, rode near the head of his party. At his side was a tall youth, handsomely liveried, who was to all appearance a native Syrian by his dark hair and swart complexion. Fergal (despite his transformation) was quite in his element. A return to Damascus implied serious danger, but it also brought the Celt back to scenes of a captivity which had not been wholly grievous. Somewhere behind those waving palms and orchards doubtless were held the unhappy sisters, and if his thoughts lingered longer on Sophia, who was present to cavil?

Fergal pointed out to his chief the public buildings of the far-reaching city; the Great Mosque, once a church, but now, alas! a church no more; the stately “Green Palace,” named for its flashing tiles and roof ornaments; the seven imposing gates with their defiant towers; the race course, where the Saracen chivalry found substitute for the Byzantine Hippodrome; the great “Bazaar of the Coppersmiths,” the finest mart in all the trading East, and last, but not least, the numerous white-walled villas outside the walls, bowered in foliage, wherein the lords of Islam lived in silken ease, half forgetting now the days when their grandsires had been thirsting camel drivers, before the Prophet had arisen in Mecca.

The embassy had landed at Beyrut, had been properly received by the local emir and given suitable escort. Tidings of their coming had, of course, speeded ahead, and now even as Fergal spoke there was a flurry of dust up the road, and the clangour of kettle-drums; next appeared a hedge of moving plumes, tossing lances, running footmen in scarlet liveries, and a twenty of horsemen on coal-black steeds, with white mantles and turbans and silver reins. A powerful bronze-visaged officer dismounted and salaamed before Daniel, then spoke in fair Greek: “The Commander of the Faithful salutes the ambassador from Rome. He sends you his slave, the fifth vizier, the *Kaid*^[39] Faadin, to conduct you to his city.”

Daniel returned the greeting with grave punctilio. The dignity of neither side permitted prompt sociability, but Christians and Moslems swept down the mountain road, through the cool gardens and under the massy Eastern Gate of Damascus, Fergal looking about him with falcon glance. His great adventure had begun.

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The embassy was hospitably lodged at the “Casket of Felicity,” a pleasant villa just outside the Southern Gate. Seven full days were ceremoniously expended, while visitors and hosts exchanged banquets, compliments and costly gifts, till

the ignorant might have supposed that Rome and Islam were about to swear to eternal friendship. Only on the eighth day did the chief envoy and the Grand Vizier allow the real object of the embassy to intrude into their flowery conversations. Meantime, Fergal had been using eyes and ears—not in vain.

First of all, to his great relief, he learned that his quondam master, the Emir Thabat, had departed this life under the bowstring one year previous, having been over friendly with the fallen generalissimo Hajjaj.

His second mercy came when on the third day after arrival he discovered an old friend.

Fergal had been standing in the Damascus bazaars, where then, as always, “all the world meets the Arab,” where amid brown bales, rolls of carpets, piles of green melons, baskets of wheat, and cases of leather wares, there jostled grey Jews, mahogany Egyptians, clean-skinned mountaineers from the Lebanon, tall Bedouins under enormous turbans, and stately Persians in brocaded kaftans. Suddenly down out of one of the dark tunnels of shops and into the dazzling light appeared a pair of handsome Coptic boys, clattering their staves and shouting their “*Ya! Ya!* Way for his Excellency!” Then forth upon a white ass rode a personage whose formidable mustachios, flowing white Abayeh and silver-hilted scimitar proclaimed him a man of consequence.

The Celt took a first glance, then a second, then darted past the runners and touched the ass’s bridle. Its rider reined angrily and made a half swing with his whip. “Son of a Jew!” began he, in fiery Arabic, only to have his lips curl in an astonished smile while he gazed hard on the bronzed features of the other.

“Fergal the Armorican as Allah may grant mercy!”

The other placed his hand upon his forehead, his mouth and his breast and bent low. “The same, O Cyrus, despite my present hair and skin. I know you won’t betray me. I’m with the Roman embassy.”

Cyrus looked about him hastily. “This is no place to patch up old comradeship. I’ve a good house now just where the canal crosses the ‘Straight’ Street. Ask for me there just after they call to evening prayers and we can drink violet sherbet and match our fortunes.”

Thus they parted, Fergal of course punctually to keep the appointment. Cyrus met him in his pleasant *aiwan*, the richly carpeted reception hall beside the pillared court, where ivy twined over horseshoe arches, and a fountain tinkled amid the fragrance of the new Indian curiosities—the lemon trees. For a while the friends chatted indifferently while an almond-skinned Persian boy scraped a tall two-stringed viol. At last Cyrus beckoned him “begone,” and signed to Fergal to sit beside him upon the great pile of rugs crowning the divan. The Armorican looked about him with shrewd approval.

“Allah or the Saints,” he began, “I know not which you would have me invoke, but some power has been kind to you! This house, these servants and all therewith come not from thin air. Five years ago we were slaves together in Damascus, and then you gained liberty by the road which I refused. You are doubtless very happy!”

Cyrus gave his head a defiant toss. “You know the choice offered me, freedom with promotion or endless captivity? Well, I haven’t your constancy and daring. I’ve seen my fellow Copts turning Moslem by thousands. I think it was before you fled that I said the Fattah.^[40] My chains fell off, and my skill as steward and accountant was recognized. Now I report directly to the ‘Emir of the Sea’ concerning all relating to the payment and equipment of the Kalif’s fleet. My work is commended. I wear the kaftan of honour. All my friends congratulate me.”

“You should be happy?” repeated Fergal, with the least shade of interrogation.

“My private life,” went on Cyrus, boasting, “is equally lucky. I have three wives of the four allowed me by the Prophet (on whom be peace!). They are all handsome and affectionate, and do not quarrel—not, at least, in my presence. Besides, I have three comely slave girls, who are good dancers. I am now considering the completion of my harem by taking in marriage the daughter of the Second Carpet Spreader of the Kalif himself. At a banquet lately I was given the seat of precedence above the Distiller of the Imperial Rose Leaves.”

“You should be happy?” inflected Fergal yet again.

“The efreets devour you!” cried the Egyptian, with a slight flush. “Don’t you believe my professions? You’re not uncharitable towards a friend because he embraced Islam and profited much! I’m no priest or imam to wrangle over theology. Both religions teach that God is very merciful.”

The Armorican fixed a penetrating gaze upon his former companion in bondage.

“My dear Cyrus,” he observed, “dear always to me whatever your faith, I suppose in your new happiness you’ve forgotten all about Miriam?”

The Egyptian leaped with a curse from the divan.

“Eblees roast your soul! The little Cyprian, the oil merchant’s daughter who gave me her troth though I was only a slave, who was carried off to Khorassan by Emir Al-azid when her father wouldn’t turn Moslem? D’ye prove yourself ‘friend’ by opening old wounds like that? Wasn’t I helpless to save her?”

“Assuredly,” replied Fergal calmly; “I am merely glad that you can forget so fortunately, and become consoled in the mosque if not in the church.”

The workings of Cyrus’ faith were ghastly. He swept his gaze around the aiwan, then put his lips close to Fergal.

“Consoled?” echoed the miserable renegade. “I know you’re trusty as one of these Damascus blades. You won’t betray. Five times a day I say my prayers towards Mecca and five times I recall the tale of Peter who betrayed his Lord. Yet Peter repented and became a great saint, but as for me——”

“Your case is piteous,” responded the other, with unfeigned sympathy. “I know the temptation myself and I almost surrendered.” The Celt crossed himself. “Perhaps some day you can reinstate yourself with the saints——”

The Egyptian shook his head gloomily. “How and when? You know it’s death if you lapse back to Christianity; they’d impale me on a stake if the wild dervishes didn’t pluck me asunder first.”

“The wonted charity of holy men!” laughed Fergal, recalling keenly a certain scene in the Patriarch’s hall.

“Well,” cried Cyrus, defiantly slapping his thigh, “who knows whether monk or dervish understands one jot of what becomes of us the instant after our soul quits the body? But one thing I know—yet need I tell such as you?—this Islam is a terrible thing, resistless by human power.”

“I almost confess it,” assented the other.

“What was Mohammed a hundred years ago?” boasted Cyrus. “A driver of mangy camels. What are his disciples to-day? The lords of half the world and every day waxing more mighty. Yesterday to the Green Palace came messengers from the Far East, ‘O Kalif, more rajahs in India have confessed the one Allah and the prophet.’ Came others from Turkestan, from beyond the mysterious Oxus, ‘O Kalif, the Turkoman nomads submit themselves to you and to Islam.’ Came others from the farthest west, from the shores of the great limitless sea, ‘O Kalif, the resistance of the Spanish Visigoths ceases. The emirs carry the banners of the true faith northward into Gaul.’ Where now are limits to this conquest? If the Son of Mary is indeed Son of God, where are the sharp scimitars to keep His worshippers from becoming bondsmen and piteous spoil to the Faithful of Islam? Answer that—and I will take heart.”

Fergal’s own head was also tossed a little defiantly. “Touching Gaul and the West, let the emirs wait till on a fair field they test the might of the Frankish axemen. Touching things nearer at hand, with my own eyes have I seen the walls of Constantinople. Many times will they call on the Prophet for aid ere storming *them!*”

Cyrus’ smile was pessimistic. “Your Romans are without strength. They have silken robes and soft hands. Walls will never replace men. They change Emperors too often. They let Syria slip from their fingers, and then Egypt, without one brave effort to recover, and resigned us all to bondage. And this general Leo you talk about, when the blow comes he’ll prove no stouter than the rest.”

Fergal shook his head but turned the subject. With all his vauntings, Cyrus was manifestly tormented in conscience and his visitor wisely prodded no more. With renewed precautions lest some servant were eavesdropping, the Celt broached his more private reasons for visiting Damascus. At Beyrut he had already learned that Hormisdas and at least one female captive had passed through that port en route for the capital. At Damascus tactful inquiries had brought out that the slave-dealer had disposed of this prisoner to the purveyor for the imperial harem. Whither Hormisdas had then disappeared Fergal cared not, save as he might trace the fate of the second unfortunate sister. And now could Cyrus, for old friendship’s sake, take the risk of aiding him to discover who actually was that new inmate of the Kalif’s House of the

Women; nay, could he aid him in the perilous and astounding feat of securing an interview with the damsel herself?

At first hint of such a risky adventure the Copt began distractedly to commend himself impartially to Christian saints and to Moslem welees,^[41] but perhaps the memory of his own loss made him a friendly listener to Fergal's entreaty, and a desperate desire to do something to square himself with the faith he had forsaken eked out his courage. He recalled that he had rendered a financial service to the third eunuch of the imperial harem, a fellow Copt and renegade like himself, one Cyril, styled officially the "Guardian of the Lilies." He would take on himself the task of introducing this functionary to Fergal, and after that the peril would not be his, but theirs.

So for five hectic days the Celt strove and intrigued. He met the eunuch, a fat brown creature, laden with earrings and armlets, and perfumed with indescribably powerful nard. Never before had Fergal plied his smooth tongue to better advantage. Never were red, golden solidi more adroitly placed than those which Leo had entrusted to his emissary. Never was an apostate's conscience more skillfully awakened, and the hope stirred within him that somehow, if only he did as Fergal prompted, the Day of Judgment would prove to him a little less dreadful.

Therefore at last the Armorican had his way. To his infinite satisfaction he learned that it was Sophia who was in the Mankusha, the "Painted Palace"—the alabaster villa of the Kalif in the outskirts of the capital. "Where was Anthusa?" Cyril knew not. He had not dealt directly with Hormisdas, but had received Sophia after she had become the property of the Empress Mother. She had bought the girl to have her trained as a dancer. At the festival ending the holy month Ramadan Sophia would be presented to the Lieutenant of the Prophet as the customary testimonial of his mother's affection; after that he might decide to give her to a favourite officer the next day, or she might possibly become the most fortunate and powerful woman in Islam—it would all rest on the sensuous caprice of majesty.

After Fergal had heard these things he spent long hours upon his knees thanking his patron saints and beseeching their continued countenance. And a climax to his efforts came one soft starlit night when Cyril, taking his life in his hands and assuring Fergal that "Sawing asunder was the least they could expect if caught," suffered the Celt to creep close to a certain barred gate in the rear garden wall of the Mankusha. The night birds were calling from the feathery trees, the swift water was purling and tumbling in the sluice from the Abana, in the distance the watchmen were making their rounds on the walls and proclaiming in sonorous Arabic "I extol the perfection of the living King who sleepeth not nor dieth." And Fergal, full of courage and very much in love, would not have cared perchance at that moment if one told him "The Kalif's executioner-mutes await you to-morrow."

He saw a figure wrapped in a great mantle. Through the bars their fingers barely touched, but the voice was the voice of Sophia, and the Celt spent one long fleeting moment in paradise—whether Christian or Moslem, who dare ask?

Sophia had borne her disaster as might a nature mobile, intelligent and winsome, but less spiritual and tenacious than her sister's. She had at length resigned herself to her apparent fate, and had striven desperately to forget all about Constantinople and the old life which seemed blotted out for ever. The disappearance of Anthusa was to her a blank mystery. Hormisdas had acted like a man beside himself when he had found the younger sister and Kannebos gone. The sailor was known to be ultra-religious, and the slave-dealer's guess had been that for some fanatical end Kannebos had deliberately drowned Anthusa and then made his own escape. Fergal was sincerely grieved. He had liked Anthusa and had hoped to rejoice Kasia and Leo, but her vanishing filled him with a selfish gladness as he realized that to succour one was far more possible than to succour two.

What need in peevishness to tell of the things they talked upon that magic night, unseen by any save a sage owl blinking down from a flowering judas-tree? But by the Holy Trinity, the Blessed Mother and every Latin or Eastern saint Fergal adjured Sophia not to lose courage—no, not though he vanished again from view and she heard nought of him. Ramadan was a good three months away, and in three months what might not be done!

A warning whistle from Cyril; the interview was over. Through the grille a hand dainty white shone against the starlight. Fergal kissed the hand. It disappeared. There was the retreating flutter of robes within. The Celt stole away across the orchard paths by the rivers to the "Casket of Felicity." He was treading for the nonce on air and in a mood to match his unaided strength against a thousand.

* * * * *

Daniel the ambassador had found Fergal indispensable. Alone of the suite he could talk Arabic like a native, and as interpreter he was present at many interviews, although the Omiad officials (like all upper-class Syrians) could express themselves fairly in mongrel Greek. Secure in his dark disguise, the Celt actually played the dragoman for Daniel when the latter was received at the Green Palace by the Distributor of Crowns, Solyman the Omiad himself.

To the sophisticated Roman envoys the Damascus court seemed a kind of barbarous parody of the magnificence of the Sacred Palace. There was infinite bustle and confusion, and even an undignified shouting when the Kalif appeared. The Lieutenant of the Prophet was robed in a golden tissue, veiling trousers of green silk. He was surrounded by a glittering hedge of princes of the blood of Omiah, of the hierarchy of viziers, of the silver-mailed negro guardsmen swinging steel maces, with a counter-platoon of white eunuchs, and even a crowding, grinning retinue of buffoons, dwarfs and jesters. All was brilliant, garish, and, despite the lavish display of gold and jewels, not a little tawdry. "How much better we do things at Constantinople!" muttered one Roman to another complacently.

But the head of the embassy noted most seriously the magnificent physiques of the guard corps: the "Red Brigade," the "Yellow" and the "Purple," named from their uniforms, which crowded the palace court; nor had it escaped his eyes when approaching the imperial residence how all the vast parade grounds were covered with clouds of banners, forests of plumes and spears, and turbans multitudinous as summer leaves. There was the potency of innumerable sword-hands behind the dirt and tinsel of this garish court.

All, however, was gracious at the audience. The Grand Vizier, moving stiffly in his white brocaded kaftan, presented Daniel and his colleagues. The envoys prostrated themselves before the throne as before their own Basileus. The despot motioned them to rise, listened affably to the reading of a long letter from "his Brother of Constantinople" dilating on the virtues of peace, then signified that he would consider carefully all therein. When the envoys retired, gold-embroidered kaftans of honour were cast over them, and Daniel was presented with a magnificent bay desert steed "of the breed which once had been ridden by the Prophet.

That night nevertheless Fergal was suffered to be present at a most anxious council held by Daniel and the junior envoys. The embassy had been authorized to adjust in the Saracens' favour every boundary dispute in Anatolia and Armenia, and to add a heavy indemnity to stop the raiding of the coasts of Cyprus and Sicily. The viziers had listened most amiably. The Kalif had declared that his thirst for peace exceeded that of the Basileus. Compliments, flattery, vague promises had been endless, but every proposal to draft a solid treaty had been evaded. Meantime to every member of the suite had been coming incessant evidence that vast forces were being mobilized, that fanatical dervishes were preaching "The Way of Allah," that apparently Syria, Arabia and Persia were about to be stirred by a new summons to the *djihad*.^[42] Whither were all these preparations tending? Against India, Turkestan, the western Franks—or Constantinople?

"Are we not," concluded the misdoubting Daniel, "in the plight of men saying 'Peace, peace,' when there is no peace?"

When the discussion ended, Fergal took the senior envoy aside. Already Daniel held him in perfect confidence. The Celt said he believed he knew the means of discovering that which passed in the Kalif's inner divan. The means he would not reveal even to the ambassador. There would be peril but the risk must be taken. If he failed, let Daniel tell the Lady Kasia and the Captain General that he died in the service of true religion, calling blessings on them with his dying breath.

"But"—and the youth's eyes brightened defiantly—"I'll *not* fail!"

CHAPTER XVIII

THE DIVAN OF THE KALIF

A FEW days after granting audience to the Roman embassy it pleased the Commander of the Faithful to exhibit in the Maidan, the great race course by the rivers, the four thousand blooded steeds in his stables. After the manœuvres were over, the Kalif also condescended to delight the Damascus populace with games of javelin hurling and archery from horseback, ending with a contest at polo, wherein the younger princes of the blood partook in person. Meanwhile in a hall of the Green Palace, where under a stalactite-hung dome a pale light filtered downward through panes of translucent marble, the eunuchs were making ready for the imperial divan. Dispatches of weight had come from the provincial emirs, and the High Emir Moslemah, the Kalif's own brother, was said to have grave matters to lay before the council.

Above the lofty seat on the dais were slabs of closely-pierced marble, let into the wall. The patterns in this scroll-work recited in floriated letters a few of the ten thousand names of Allah, and were matched by similar titles, albeit in golden script, blazoned elsewhere around the entire base of the dome. As two Abyssinian eunuchs set the last white and purple cushions upon the imperial chair, one of them nudged his fellow, and the twain looked up slyly towards the marble piercings over their heads:

“There's to be a fine bird listening again. I thought they'd all grown weary of it.”

“Their curiosity comes and goes like their whims in perfumes, jewels and face-paint,” rejoined the other; “it was the late Kalif Walid who set them agog by that great scandal. Don't you recall the story? It was a Friday and the then Shadow of Allah (may his soul be justified) was sitting at feast with his reigning favourite, ‘Little Rose Leaf.’ ”

“She that's since grown so fat?” inquired the first menial.

“The same; she can scarce waddle now. Well, when they told him it was time to go to the great mosque and preside at the Friday prayers, what in levity should he do but bid ‘Little Rose Leaf’ put on his flowing garments, cover her face with his abayah, proceed to the mosque and sit in his very place. *Wallah!* What a cursing and gesticulating among the imams and other holy sheiks when the fact leaked. What fury had ‘Little Rose Leaf’ when the Kalif forbade her to repeat the prank! She almost tore out the Disposer of Thrones' beard. To propitiate her she was allowed to go behind yonder marble grating and listen to all that passed in the divan; for the Imams can't complain about doings inside the palace. Then the other women claimed the right and kept it up under our present master Solyman (Allah burn up his enemies!), but as you know as well as do I, when a thing's freely granted it soon becomes worthless. Fewer and fewer of the Kalif's women have come to sit through tedious debates about the revenues of Irak. I've heard the chief eunuch say that the listening post was to be closed altogether; but no, here's some one again to-day.”

The first speaker glanced at the marble piercings again.

“We can see nothing. All's dark, and of course she's wrapped and veiled. Perhaps it's ‘Full Moon.’ ”

“She also is graciously fat. This one, by her shadow, I think is leaner. Perhaps it's ‘Early Ripening Grape.’ ”

“Here, you chatterers,” ordered an upper eunuch, “you've set the Grand Vizier's stool no higher than the Sub-Chancellor's. Pile another rug upon it to exalt the Lieutenant of the Lieutenant of the Prophet, or you'll get your fifty stripes apiece on your bare soles when the Council comes in!”

“Full Moon” and “Early Ripening Grape” completely vanished from the Abyssinians' thoughts while they bustled about their task. They had barely finished when a violent pounding on a kettle-drum, followed by the martial clank of guardsmen, announced the approach of the Lords of the Divan.

First, two powerful negroes, naked save for scarlet cinctures, and fingering enormous naked sabres, took their station by the entrance; then followed four secretaries—bent, long-bearded men, with ink-stands, reed-pens and parchments, and with boxes of rolled documentary dispatches. Then entered the councillors, some ten appointive viziers and chancellors-over-ministries—keen-eyed, smooth-tongued, obsequious—and with them about as many more princes of the blood of Omiah—tall, lordly personages, carrying their jewel-set white turbans as became the chiefs of the conquering race. The drum rattled again; and side by side entered the Grand Vizier, a fine-featured Persian, Nizam ul-Mulk, and with him the haughtiest individual of them all, the High Emir Moslemah, brother of the Kalif, and in popular judgment the greatest

power in El Islam. A third time the drum, and with it now the clash of cymbals and the shrill scream of a trumpet. The entire divan fell on its knees at the advent of Solyman himself.

The potentate was all in white from his leather shoes to his pointed silken cap. Even the jewels on feet, belt, neck and forehead were pearls or diamonds. On his finger gleamed a single ring—the actual signet of the Prophet. His thick black beard swept his breast. Looking neither to right hand nor to left, the Lord of the Age sate him down in his exalted place upon the silken rugs. In silence the councillors rose and sat down also. “Proceed,” commanded Solyman.

The Grand Vizier salaamed and shook out a scroll:

“The report of the Emir Abd-ur-Rahman in Spain: He says that the remnant of the Christian Visigoths have fled into their mountains. With a reasonable supply of men and money he declares he can not merely take their last strongholds but conquer the rich lands of the Franks to the north. The Distributor of Empires has put all this into the Kalif’s hand.”

“Let this matter be delayed,” spoke Moslemah from his brother’s right. The Kalif nodded, and Nizam proceeded with a second document.

“The Empire Yahya in Cilicia has been less prosperous. Believing the Romans discordant and distracted he assailed the strong city of Cæsarea. But Allah (whose decrees are inscrutable) brought down on him the army of the new Captain General of Rum,^[43] whose name is Leo, that is to say ‘Lion.’ Betwixt craft and valour he inflicted such damage upon Yahya the latter was fain to raise the siege. The emir confesses to heavy losses. Many of his men are indeed now fortunate martyrs seated under the date-palms of felicity attended each by the two-and-seventy black-eyed houris. Others, however, are prisoners, and the Christian misbelievers doubtless take great encouragement.”

The Kalif stood erect, his long beard shaking with his fury:

“Now by Allah That created heaven and earth, by Mohammed His Prophet, by the Koran His revelation, and by the soul of my father and those of all my ancestors, I swear I will set the head of that craven emir upon the summit of the great mosque here at Damascus, that all men may behold and tremble.”

“Be moderated, O Imperial Brother,” spoke Moslemah, even venturing to lay a hand on the broad sleeve of majesty. “Let Yahya be replaced, but recall that many competent generals will resign their posts if they come to believe that some innocent mishap, ordained by the Establisher of Destinies, shall not merely bring to nought their valour but place their necks under the scimitar. Yet this matter is grievous. Every report magnifies the craft and valour of this Leo. A new spirit for war possesses the Romans.”

The Grand Vizier nodded approval and took up the word: “Let the Shadow of Allah endure my opinion. Since this Leo has been in Anatolia we have had nought but reverses. In the days of Justinian called ‘Slit Nose’ or of Philippicus we could have conquered all the Christian Empire by one notable effort. Now the Romans wax strong. We may scoff at their effeminate luxuries and glozing eloquence, but to-day we meet our match in battle. This Leo is a true soldier, such as the chronicles say the Romans possessed of old. The walls of Constantinople still rise like those bulwarks wherewith our august monarch’s namesake Solyman girdled Jerusalem to fend off the besieging genies. We gain nothing by half-hearted warfare in Cappadocia. Yahya has failed. Let us therefore either make peace, as the envoy Daniel craves, or let us unfurl the Holy Banner before all El Islam, call the faithful to the *djihad*, and spare not our last camel or last dirham to take Constantinople itself. Feeble measures only breed new losses.”

“And what is computed the cost of a proper expedition against Constantinople?” asked an Omiad prince half way down the divan.

“If Allah grant His disciples speedy success,” replied the sedate Vizier of the Treasury, “we estimate the cost of such an expedition by land and sea at over a million purses.”^[44]

“Wallah!” exclaimed several in consternation; and one added, “Though the Kalif’s treasures were as those which Noah (on whom be blessing) preserved in the Ark, how might they suffice?”

“This thing is for consideration,” resumed Nizam smoothly. “For as the glory of taking Constantinople would be great, so would failure be a reproach to all El Islam.”

The Kalif shrugged his broad shoulders. “It is a hard matter,” he commented. “While my brother Walid reigned, the

Romans seemed weak. Yet the divan then saw fit to advise pushing our conquests in India and Spain. Now the conquest of Constantinople will be exceeding costly. The present embassy offers advantageous peace; nevertheless, what says the Excellent Book, 'O Believers, take not the Jews and Christians as friends.' How can we make a lasting pact with them?"

"The words of the Kalif are as the words of Abu-Bekr, the arch-counsellor of the Apostle," began the supple Second Vizier, fingering the golden ink-stand before him, "yet is it not possible to refrain from treaty, and make merely a truce for a few years? Then we can accumulate treasure, men and ships, meet for assailing even Constantinople."

"It cannot be," rejoined Omar the Omiad, heir presumptive; "the hour for a great blow passes. This Leo waxes in strength; if he become Emperor he will doubtless so order his dominions that soon our best power can be resisted. If our word is 'Peace,' let it be spoken now, and now if it is 'War.'"

"A hard matter," reiterated Solyman; "you know how the misguided kindred of Ali, the insensate nephew of the Prophet (on whom be peace), conspire against our dynasty. To win Constantinople will silence their tongues in confusion, but to fail will make every evil fellow point the finger and cry 'Aha!' while seditions spread like locusts over the provinces."

"The Lord of the Age," spoke again the Grand Vizier, "will permit me to speak forth my heart. The old zeal for the djihad perchance is waning. Half of the world pertains to El Islam already. The rest will come by degrees. The wars against the Christians of Spain and Frankland and the heathen rajahs of India cost little and bring great glory to the Kalif. In Allah's time Constantinople shall duly fall to us. Let us therefore alike spare the treasury and the blood of the Faithful, and pledge amity to the Emperor of Rum."

More than half the turbans of the council nodded assent, but Moslemah rose, his tall frame shaking under his flowing abayah.

"O Son of an unbelieving genie"—he spat in the Vizier's face—"well do you show yourself Persian born and no son of Arabian Omiah! When since our father's fathers went forth from our deserts to conquer Syria, Egypt, Persia and then Africa, have we ceased to gaze towards other awaiting conquests as caravaners over the night-hung sands gaze towards Sirius, their guiding star? Is not Constantinople the reward of rewards for the servants of Allah? Can mere conquests in Andalus,^[45] Sind or Bactria replace the glory shed on the house of Omiah by having the tidings fly to all the emirates, 'The riches of the Cæsars are become the riches of the Commander of the Faithful?'"

The Grand Vizier flushed angrily beneath his great turban; the Treasurer scribbled a memorandum which he pushed before a colleague.

"My brother's words are sharp," commented the Kalif, much disturbed; "he should not question the loyalty of our devoted Nizam. Nevertheless let courage never fail the head of the House of Omiah. Considering the greatness of the task we must deliberate. We should await the coming report of the revenues of Irak and Khorassan to know our resources."

"Let the Lord of the Age," spoke the Grand Vizier, "remember that the envoy Daniel becomes importunate. For all his stilted manner he is truly wise. Already he suspects we play with him. Soon he will demand an answer, and, if it is unfavourable, depart in haste."

"He could be detained," asserted another prince.

"Ten days, perchance; if for longer such distrust would arise that we could more honourably and profitably refuse him now outright. Treaty we must have or Constantinople will soon know we are resolved on implacable war."

Moslemah stood again erect before the council, his voice rising with passion: "Hearken, Imperial Brother! Where now is the spirit which carried the Moslems victorious over a thousand leagues of prostrate lands? Was it by prudent counsellings that the armies of Abu-Bekr and the first Omar were sent forth against the might of Rum and Persia, the few against the many? Where now is the might of Khalid the 'Sword of Allah,' of Amr who with only four thousand subdued all Egypt, of those captains who broke the power of all Persia at the 'Victory of Victories,' fighting one against six? Have the True Believers come to have the hearts of doves, and do they yield to the efreets of base discretion?"

"Be appeased, O Moslemah," remonstrated an emir. "Allah will ever rebuke the rash."

“I charge no cowardice,” retorted the fiery prince; “yet know that where Allah grants much, much will He demand. Now let my brother condescend, I shall bring a fit witness even before the divan.”

Hardly waiting the sovereign’s nod, the High Emir clapped his hands. Through the door two expressionless eunuchs guided in a man bowed with age. His limbs trembled under his thin frame, his beard of driven snow reached to his girdle, the flesh about his eyes was red and raw, but above his wrinkled brows he wore the green turban of the kinsmen of the Prophet. All the council rose at sight of him. Even the Kalif stirred upon his throne. “The Sheik Er-Rabab,” went the whisper; “come from Medina to testify somewhat concerning his recollection of the Apostle.”

Solyman beckoned to the statuesque menials. “Spread carpets,” he enjoined, “for a seat for this venerable Sheik.” But the stranger shook his head and stood close beside the Kalif, leaning upon his staff and gazing about with eyes bright and piercing as an adder’s.

“O Admirable Welee,” queried the monarch, “wherefore have you thus honoured us?”

Er-Rabab continued to stare from one magnate to another, then spoke with the whistlings of toothless age. “O Kalif, let the words of compliment be to another. I am meditating upon these riches, these silken robes and gems here on every hand, and recalling how with one garment, two gourds of water and a bag of wormy dates swung under his camel, your predecessor Omar the Conqueror rode from Medina to Jerusalem to receive the surrender of that city. Marvellously has Allah prospered you! Take heed that you render unto him the service due for his measureless bounty.”

Solyman gazed awkwardly upon the many-patterned carpets.

“Be it known to all,” spoke he in conciliatory tones, “that the Sheik Er-Rabab was a boy in Medina when the Apostle (on whom be peace) there dwelt and taught. Alone of all the living sons of El Islam this man has heard the veritable tones of him whose voice was the voice of Allah. If our brother Moslemah has brought him to Damascus and into the divan, it is because he has weighty matters to unburden.”

The High Emir bowed his great turban, responding: “Let the holy man speak. Already I have told him that the counsellors of the Kalif are divided, some advising peace with Rum, some a Holy War for possessing Constantinople.”

Without awaiting the pleasure of the monarch, Er-Rabab flung his fleshless hands aloft:

“O Merciful Allah, take away my life, that I may not behold fellow Moslems clothed with the robes of power and yet saying ‘Peace’ unto the Christian! Heard I not with my own ears when the Apostle uttered that great Sura the ‘Cow’^[46] saying ‘Fight for the religion of Allah, for He loveth not the transgressors’? And yet again, ‘Prepare ye all possible forces, that ye may smite terror into the foes of Allah.’ And yet again, ‘If twenty of you wax strong ye shall overcome two hundred.’ Wherefore then do ye fear? Are the Moslems to-day all turned women, and are the swords of the Kalif’s hosts become spindles?”

“Let the Sheik know,” interposed the soft-toned Nizam, “the divan merely deliberates where to strike the next blow for El Islam: in India, or in Spain, or at greater cost and hazard against Constantinople.”

“When the merchant seeks out a ring what desires he first,” cried the sheik, “the gold, or the great emerald beside which the gold is but the setting? Who shall counsel the Kalif that the petty spoils of the East or West outweigh the winning of the Monarch of Cities? Hear now the word of the Apostle. When I stood as a lad in the court of that first mosque of coarse bricks and palm trunks, not splendid as now are yours with marbles, verily he admonished from the pulpit: ‘Whosoever taketh the City of Constantine, though his sins were black as those of Eblees, they are forgiven him.’ And likewise spake he: ‘Constantinople shall be subdued. Happy the prince, happy the army which taketh it!’ How, therefore, may ye call yourselves Moslems and withhold your hands, yet hope to escape the Gehenna fires on that Last Day?”

The divan sat in uneasy silence, the members stroking their beards and twitching their shaggy eyebrows. Suddenly Er-Rabab cast himself before the monarch and seized his knees.

“O Solyman, to whom Heaven hath given power exceeding the famous kings of old: look on me, the last who has heard the true word of El Islam spoken by the Chosen One of Allah. Year by year have I seen the messengers come in to Medina saying, ‘Another, and yet another wide province has turned unto the Way of Righteousness.’ But there is one

message which has not come. Vouchsafe ere these dimming eyes are closed I may hear the cry in the streets, 'Rejoice all Moslems: for Allah hath crowned His mercies! The City of the Cæsars is in the power of the Faith!' O Kalif, if indeed you are rightly Kalif, vouchsafe me this."

Solyman arose and stood with his white robes flowing majestically around him. The pearls and diamonds on his tall cap flashed. His voice rose ever louder:

"The voice of the Sheik is the voice of Allah! Wherefore were we given empire surpassing that of Pharaoh, or Darius, or the two-horned Alexander if not to accomplish this great thing? Let the proper decrees be published. Let the dervishes preach the *djihad* in every hamlet and every oasis from the Western Sea of Darkness to the rivers of Ind. Let the sword-hands count over their spoils, the gold, the fair garments, the fairer women awaiting in the Roman's city. Let all other wars be stayed. Let all taxes be increased. Let my brother, Moslemah, since his heart is set on this most pious war, be leader of the host. Then shall it not be said that the grandsons of the companions of the Prophet have lost their valour because their mantles are no longer of hair-cloth, nor that the zeal for the Way of Allah cooled because the Most High has set us in ivory palaces!"

Er-Rabab prostrated himself before the Kalif, trembling with ecstasy. The emirs and princes all bowed themselves thrice, touching their turbans and then their breasts, and Nizam the Vizier addressed the throne with a profound reverence:

"The Monarch of the Age has spoken; his servants obey him. To-morrow I will give the Romans fair words, but will tell them a binding treaty must wait until we can head a counter-embassy to Constantinople."

"Wherein *I* will be chief envoy!" cried Moslemah, while his fierce laugh was echoed around the divan....

... A little later, as the counsellors departed, the third eunuch, Cyril, dismissed through the rear gate of the palace a young Syrian who had come to sell perfumes to the inmates of the harem. His prices had been low. His bags of musk, oil of sandalwood from the Far East, essence of bergamot and the still more precious essence of rose-leaves in its golden vials, had been excellent in quality. The old women who always did the haggling in such matters urged him to come again. He departed without danger or difficulty, the visits of such traders to the palace being an everyday routine.

In the hushed excitement over the Kalif's decision the two Abyssinian eunuchs quite forgot to ask whether it was "Full Moon" or "Early Ripening Grape" who had overheard the momentous discussion. Nevertheless it is true that the Syrian, just as Cyril dismissed him, whispered cautiously, "Call on Cyrus to-morrow; he has the two hundred solidi waiting—and there may be a much more profitable thing a little later."

That night Fergal communed long with Daniel. The next morning the ambassador seemed quite at ease when Nizam informed him: "The Kalif hesitates to make a final treaty now, but speedily he will send an embassy to your master empowered to make a peace to endure a thousand years."

A few days later, with much ceremony and apparent good-will, the Romans quitted Damascus. The envoys were laden with presents, and charged by Solyman to bear his peculiar greetings to "his Brother of Constantinople." The Fifth Vizier rode with them a day's journey, then turned back. Unmolested, the Romans ascended the stately ridges of Lebanon and hastened across the rich Phœnician coastland to their shipping. On the way, however, one member of the company vanished and all search for him was vain. They were obliged to proceed without him.

The day that Daniel's embassy reached Beyrut the young perfume vendor could have been seen reëntering the Northern Gate of Damascus.

CHAPTER XIX

A HAREM TRAGEDY

It was approaching noon in the great mosque in Damascus. Soon the muezzin would intone his call to prayers. Everything about the august structure seemed Moslem, save the inscription above the southern door: "Thy Kingdom, O Christ, is an everlasting kingdom and Thy dominion endureth throughout all generations"—testifying still the protest of the Cross against the usurpations of the Crescent.

The Syrian light was gleaming across the tessellated pavements between the richly-carved columns. Before the *mihrab*, the niche in the southern wall, showing how the faithful should turn themselves towards Mecca, already a score of devotees were touching their turbans upon the flooring. Other worshippers stood erect like statues, their hands held before their faces, as if studying the lines in their palms. Yet others sat cross-legged at the base of the columns as if beneath the shadow of trees. A majestic sheik was seated before a great lectern unrolling the Koran. From a remote corner came the droning chant of schoolboys where an imam was expounding the *suras* of the Sacred Book.

After a little, the Syrian perfume vendor aforementioned took his station by the third column to the right of the high pulpit used for the Friday preaching. Just now a bony dervish was exhorting thence a rather apathetic group of prosperous merchants and sedate palace-attendants:

"Give ear, O ye faithful, to the advantages of the Way of Allah! How barely, though ye give alms, fast through Ramadan and go as a *hajj*—as a pilgrim to Mecca—will ye escape the final torments of Gehenna! Will not your sins, every one, be weighed against your few good deeds in scales where the ten-thousandth of the weight of a sparrow's least feather will determine your eternal abiding place? Will not after a million million years the torments of the wicked still multiply and never decrease? Then consider, though your iniquities be as those of the impious who stoned the Apostle (on whom be peace), yea, sought his very life, if ye but fall as martyrs fighting for the Faith, ye receive instantly the rewards of the all-righteous. Do they not sit in tents of pearls, jacinths and emeralds? May they not eat forever without satiety, drink without drunkenness, converse without contention, hearken to the songs of the archangel Israfil, and enjoy the caresses of the black-eyed girls whose complexions are as rubies and pearls?"

"And our present wives, O Sheik," demanded a stolid citizen. "Are they also to be with us in paradise?"

"Concerning your present wives, O Believers, those that ye desire shall rejoin you in the Gardens of Eternity; but not those that ye desire elsewhere."

"Then my Fatima can't follow me," muttered the contented listener. "I've the greater desire for the *djihad*."

The perfume vendor drew the deep folds of his blue abayah around him, covered his head, and seemed deep in pious meditation. His devotions were not so deep, however, that he failed to observe a certain court eunuch take his stand close beside him. The eunuch plucked at his striped kaftan of brown and white brocade, fell on his knees, beat his breast, then began to pray loudly:

"O Allah, have mercy upon the ewe lamb in my charge, the maiden of innocency. The sickness is heavy upon her. The great physician El-Azab abandons hope. Wherefore are spared so many whose bosoms are not as silken pillows, whose breaths are not as rose-essence and honey, when she, alas! is so stricken? Who now will win the rewards of honour from the Commander of the Faithful for me, her preceptor and guardian?"

"Verily," whispered one worshipper to a companion, "it is evident that some damsel of the Kalif, placed in this eunuch's custody, is sick unto death."

"Then it's the fourth girl that has sickened this year," replied the other. "The present favourite, Um-ul-Banin, the Kalif's cousin, is vigilant and jealous. I've heard it was as safe to feel the bowstring around one's windpipe as to have it said in her presence, 'Such a wench is likely to win the master's favour.'"

The eunuch, recognized by a few as Cyril, continued to pray with fervour, the perfume vendor of course hearing with the rest.

"Alas! My sweet dove. To-night doubtless they will bear your litter away. Through the palace gate will they bear it,

unless Allah turn back the sore sickness. Alas, all my pains for your training! Who can contend against Destiny!”

The lamentation was cut short by the sonorous booming tones of the muezzin from the summit of the minaret above the mosque.^[47]

“... *Allah is most great! I testify that there is no deity but Allah! I testify that Mohammed is his apostle! Come to security! Come to prayer! Allah is most great! There is no deity but Allah!*”

Instantly all in the mosque (who had not previously done so) hastened to the great tank, where at many flowing jets they ceremoniously purified themselves, hurrying through the act with precipitation and muttering pious formulas; then, turning towards the *mihrab*, the whole company began bowing and ejaculating together. These devotions continued some few minutes until some of the less religious began one by one to leave the mosque.

The eunuch and the perfume vendor remained close together for some time, continuing their piety aloud. “The perfections of Allah! Extolled be His dignity!” sounded so clearly that departing worshippers whispered, “What devout fellows: one would think them both dervishes!” Gradually, however, their ejaculations became less distinct; nevertheless they prayed on until the rest of the mosque was almost silent. Then the twain went out, as it chanced, side by side, and with no stranger in easy earshot. Whereupon the vendor spoke suddenly in Greek:

“We are then to be by the garden gate about the third hour to-night?”

“Even so; you remember your oath: Beyond the gold you’re to get me the prayers of the Patriarch that with the saints this deed may offset my apostasy.”

“What I’ve sworn, I’ve sworn. The saints will forgive anything for a holy work like this.”

“The Trinity favour us. It’ll be desperate business, but so far all’s well. They think she has the spotted fever, and that’s keeping off a hundred busybodies. (Talk Arabic—that imam’s approaching.) The blessings of Allah be on you!”

“And on you, O Guardian of the Lilies, and on all your friends.” And so, quitting the mosque, they went their ways.

* * * * *

That afternoon the sound of wailing went through all the great colonnaded harem courts of the Painted Palace. The voice of a negro eunuch was heard intoning, “*Allahu akbar!* There is no strength nor power but in Allah! To Allah we belong! To Him we must return. Allah have mercy upon us!”

Immediately all the other eunuchs, the company of elderly serving women, and the score of girls, Egyptians, Persians, Armenians and Indians, who were being trained in dancing, took up the lament. They beat their breasts, tore at their hair and uttered piercing shrieks, crying aloud: “O my sister! O Hyacinth of the Greeks! O my misfortune! O death of all my happiness!”

Every ordinary business of the harem was suspended. The whole company seemed dissolving in grief. Three young women who had been Sophia’s dearest enemies screamed the loudest. The clamour penetrated to the outer courts of the palace, and the sentries at the gates said one to another, “So the damsel called the Hyacinth of the Greeks is dead: she that was expected to ensnare the Kalif. Is this truly the spotted fever as by report, or another of *Sitt Um-ul-Banin*’s tender mercies? Strange are the ways of Destiny!”

Speedily the professional washer of the dead thrust herself towards the sick chamber, but was repelled by the Guardian of the Lilies. “The case is infectious,” warned the upper eunuch. “The physician declared it the spotted fever. I am already exposed and will discharge your duties. Here is your perquisite, the price of the clothes wherein she died. Now depart!”

Cyril did not, however, prevent six blind men, usual on such occasions, from stationing themselves at the harem gate and maintaining a monotonous nasal chant, now together, now singly, and never ceasing their noise for hours:

“I extol the perfection of Him who created all forms,
And subdueth His servants by death:

Who bringeth to nought all His creatures with mankind:
They all shall lie down in their graves," etc., etc.

The clamour in the court of the women kept up until sunset, when it was announced that owing to extreme fear lest the unhappy girl had died of the spotted fever, the funeral would not be the next morning, as usual with persons who died on an afternoon, but would take place immediately, and also that the Guardian of the Lilies, who had been her peculiar mentor and friend since she entered the harem, would courageously assume the entire risks of preparing the dead for burial.

The excitement of the women now increased. The inmates of the imperial household were buried in a cemetery outside the Gate of the Rivers. The opportunity for participating in a funeral procession made even the best friends of Sophia almost reconciled to her fate. Their shrieks accordingly redoubled. Presently the great courts of the women were lighted with resinous flambeaux. Kettle-drums boomed, pipes wailed and dulcimers twanged sadly. Eight solemn imams standing before the gates now began reciting the most melancholy verses in the Koran, and were ready to head the procession. To these holy men joined four black slaves, two with silver trays already smoking with burning incense, and two with jars of rose-water to flit over the bystanders. Inside the court the closely-veiled women began clustering around the asses whereon they were to ride, the beasts being led by eunuchs who also carried torches, and six professional female wailers meantime began to practice their screams when they should bring up the rear of the procession.

To assuage his grief, the Guardian of the Lilies was particularly active. All knew his terrible loss. If the Hyacinth of the Greeks had won the actual favour of the Kalif, her social guide and tutor might have divided power with the Grand Vizier. Was there ever such disappointment!

"But wasn't he bribed by *Sitt Banin*?" whispered more than one woman to her intimates. Cyril, however, was deaf to such mutterings. When everybody else seemed distracted or busy, he slipped away very quietly to the sequestered gate at the end of the wide enclosed park in the rear of the harem. Two low whistles sounded, and then two cloaked figures emerged from the shrubbery outside.

"Be silent as the clouds," urged the eunuch, through the gate-bars. "All has gone marvellously. I had to give El-Azab forty dinars to say it was spotted fever and to administer a potent sleeping draught. Unavoidably a few others had to know. A hundred dinars has gone off to them. They think the young Emir Almustali caught sight of the Hyacinth unveiled, and has planned this abduction through you. I'll have Mahdi and Shaäm, two of my trustiest, bring her down by the gate. The coffin must of course be closed on account of the malady, and the weight will be all right. I must perforce accompany the procession; but as soon as it is fairly out, the two will pass the Hyacinth forth to you. She's quite stupefied. You'll have to carry her. But I'd best unlock the gate. You're most safely concealed behind this thicket inside. Everybody'll be at the other end of the palace, and you can whisk out immediately."

"If the Kalif were wise he'd make you chief of the divan," complimented Fergal as the gate swung back. "The whole sum given me by the Ambassador is with Cyrus. This will enable you to retire from court whenever you wish; to buy a rose garden at Emesa and live wealthily."

"Yes, yes; and the prayers of the Patriarch? You've sworn to get them for me. That'll make my conscience quieter by nights. The risk's been dreadful, but it's now soon over. Keep under these bushes and you're very safe.—The fiends seize me, what's this?"

From the further end of the garden the piping voice of an under-eunuch was crying: "Unveil, ye maidens; the Shadow of Allah!"

Even in the dark Fergal could see the knees of Cyril smite together. Out of his head in sheer panic the myrmidon turned the key in the gate and drew it forth.

"The Kalif visits the harem," chattered the eunuch. "No warning! He's entered by the little privy gate by the canal. We're undone. It's sawing asunder or burying alive if——"

"Keep your wits, sirrah!" adjured Fergal from the shrubbery; "unlock the gate again."

But down a leafy avenue, with half a dozen bronze eunuchs holding their torches around him, was already advancing

Solyman himself. The Kalif was in a light blue banqueting robe, and seemed striding along in a fury. An enormous negro stalked behind him carrying a bared scimitar. Cyril made a motion indeed to unlock the garden gate, when a ray from the flambeaux fell upon him. He shrank back into the gloom almost ready to collapse, while Cyrus, his confederate from without, crouching now at Fergal's feet, gave a stifled groan in his fright.

"I dare not unlock the gate," chattered the eunuch. "If we're discovered, you——"

"If discovered," rejoined Fergal coolly, drawing a long dagger, "I'm not to be taken alive, but you both will be impaled. By Christian saints and Moslem efreets, eunuch, keep your wits. Lie boldly, and all's safe! And you, Cyrus, if you keep not quiet, here's silence to your whimpers forever!" And his dagger point touched the quivering renegade's throat.

"The Commander of the Faithful summons the Guardian of the Lilies," called again an under-eunuch.

Cyril by a mighty effort drew himself together. Fortunately the darkness hid the beady sweat upon his brow, and his blanched countenance. He advanced from the gate, justly anxious to keep the Kalif and his party at a safe distance from that particular clump of shrubbery. He won further delay by casting himself slowly and ceremoniously upon the path, and touching his head to the ground before the monarch.

"O fortunate evening after a day of misfortune!" he forced his lips to speak. "The Kalif himself visits the Painted Palace. And what may the least and most worthless of his slaves do at his august behest?"

The Chief of the White Eunuchs, Cyril's immediate superior, who had followed closely behind the potentate and the executioner, addressed him chidingly:

"Wherefore are you not with the women in the harem?"

"Alas! my distraction. I am nigh beside myself with grief. I pray for compassion, having wandered away for a moment to weep alone."

"Tell the wretch why I am here!" commanded the Kalif ominously.

"Hear, O Guardian of the Lilies," resumed his chief. "The Sovran of the Age sat at wine^[48] in the Green Palace. With him was the Sister of the Moon, the ever-renowned *Sitt Um-ul-Banin*. At an interval in the music and juggling it was said before them, 'The Painted Palace resounds with lamentation. The dancing girl, "The Hyacinth of the Greeks," whom the Empress Mother was to present to the Kalif after Ramadan, and whose beauty was already famous in the harem, lies dead.' Then said my Lord and your Lord to *Sitt Banin*, 'Is this again your handicraft? Cannot my mother buy me a maid but that you must prepare her poison?' Whereupon *Sitt Banin* swore by the soul of the Kalif's father that she knew nothing of the matter. If the girl had sickened, the sickness came solely from Allah. Then demanded the Sovran of the Age, 'Why then was not my first physician summoned for this wench? Why was I not informed of her illness? As Allah scattereth the stars, I will with my own ears learn of this matter.' Therefore behold the Distributor of Thrones suddenly come hither. What have you to say to him?"

Cyril rose to his knees very slowly. The long speech had given him chance to collect his thoughts.

"May the least among slaves speak unto the Shadow of Allah? Who has so maligned the never-to-be-too-much-praised *Sitt Banin* as to suggest to the Kalif such iniquity? Life and death now as always are in the hands of the Most High alone. Concerning the sickness of the Hyacinth of the Greeks let your slave be questioned. Was she not dear unto me as the first calf to a heifer? Am I not distraught that the spotted fever smote her down in her beauty?"

The Kalif and all with him recoiled a step.

"The spotted fever, say you?" cried the ruler.

"Such was her calamity. Woe! My misfortune!"

Solyman's hands nevertheless twitched and his voice shook with suspicion:

"Then tell me, child of a sow, wherefore, whatever her disease, was not my first court physician, Ghazali, summoned when this my mother's gift was first stricken? Wherefore was this strange leech El-Azab permitted upon her case?"

“May the Distributor of Thrones condescend to remember the fourth consort, the Sitt Khadija, four days since gave birth to a daughter; the Sheik Ghazali has never quitted her side. Only to-day it is said with gladness, ‘Her danger is past.’ How could I call him away for a mere dancing girl?”

“There are other court doctors, fool,” returned the Kalif.

“Yet again may I speak and live? Is not the second physician himself celebrating a marriage with the daughter of the Under-Vizier of the Posts? And the third: is he not confined to his bed, unable to walk these ten days from the bastinado he received for giving the seventh consort, Sitt Zubaida, an overdose of physic? How then could I fail to summon the Sheik El-Azab, who is the refuge in sickness of half the emirs’ families in Damascus?”

“You speak truth,” assented the monarch, a shade less irascibly. “Yet wherefore was I not told the spotted fever, most dire of plagues, was in the Painted Palace?”

Cyril’s arms were outstretched to the inky heavens as if adoring the gleaming planets.

“Extolled be the compassion of Allah which causeth interest to be taken by his Vicar in the fate even of his slaves! Who was I, dust and ashes, to burden the Sovran of the Age with the ills of a mere Christian dancer?”

“Gehenna fires consume you,” swore the Kalif. “I care nought for the girl; what I desire to know is whether she truly died of the spotted fever (Allah forbend its spread!) or of a less general plague perchance carried about in Banin’s pretty vials. I like not your glib tongue. Your excuse is thin. Even if it were fever, I should have been informed. We can seize and wring the truth out of that El-Azab later; meantime I am minded to bid Muzaffar”—with a gesture towards the negro—“to take home with him your head.”

The black sprang forward, swinging his scimitar aloft. His eyes were as shining coals in the torchlight, while he watched for that horizontal sweep of the Kalif’s hand, which should order “Death” without a spoken word.

Cyril crouched again upon the earth in mortal agony. The frantic impulse seized him to betray Fergal and confess everything with some shifts of the blame. He was held back by the fearful consideration that no belated confession now could prevent impalement once the real facts were sifted, and that beheading was a merciful exit.

Solyman deliberately stroked his beard, looking first upon Cyril, then upon the negro, then back upon Cyril. The Kalif was visibly enjoying the anguish which he was causing. But suddenly, at no slight personal risk, the First Eunuch interposed in behalf of his despairing subaltern:

“The Sovran of the Age will condescend to remember that the girl was only a Greek slave, comely to be sure, and perhaps a fair dancer, but it has never been enjoined every sickness in the harem should be laid at the foot of your throne. There is nothing to suggest that the Sister of the Moon has so much as condescended to notice her existence.”

Through all scenes of later life, Fergal forgot not the picture of that moment: the red circle of the flambeaux, the array of white-robed, puff-faced eunuchs, the gigantic negro with his gleaming blade, the stony-visaged Kalif now poisoning his hand, the miserable Cyril writhing like a worm. Then after a mortal interval Solyman let his arm descend. He put his foot upon the neck of the creature crouched on the turf before him.

“*Ya!* It’s good that you tremble. Put up the sword, Muzaffar! He won’t get the stroke—yet! I’m too tender-hearted. After all, the wench is dead, and all of you swine have had a lesson. Doubtless it *was* the spotted fever, and Allah grant that it stops with her. A quarrel’s a bother and I’ll take Banin’s oath, but do you, ‘Regent of the Roses’ ”—addressing the First Eunuch—“get me a better girl for the feast. I’ll take the cost out of Banin’s ‘girdle money,’^[49] that’ll be my revenge. And now you, first brother of the curs”—spurning Cyril again—“get through with your funeral, and stop these slatterns screaming. I’ll go back and see the new dwarfs performing at the Green Palace.”

“O miracle of generosity! Ocean of mercy!” burst out Cyril.

“Silence, or my mind changes. I’ll be ruined by my compassion.”

The Kalif’s blue kaftan swept away in the torchlight before Cyril could scramble to his feet, and dissolve in a torrent of incoherent thanksgiving. The climax to his peril had nearly destroyed his wits, but even as he stood quivering, Fergal glided from the shrubbery.

“Pull yourself together,” commanded the Celt. “Bless your fortune. Not merely are you safe, but you’ve the eternal favour of the First Consort herself. If you had quavered a syllable the Kalif would never have believed her innocent. Now lead out your procession and finish quickly.”

Cyril wiped the deathly sweat from his face. “Manifestly,” he muttered, “the Holy Mother has forgiven my apostasy and accepted my prayers. I could feel that scimitar tingling on my neck. I’ll never take such risks again. No, not for all the solidi in the world and the Patriarch’s promise of Heaven. Well, what’s begun must be finished. There—I’ve unlocked the garden gate once more, and Mahdi and Shaām will come presently.”

He disappeared towards the palace. At length the melancholy music and the shrieks of the wailing women announced that the funeral was started out of the central gate. The noise served effectively to draw away all nocturnal loiterers in the narrow lanes by the gardens. After a prudent interval, there were again heavy steps under the lemon trees, and two figures appeared dimly, carrying a heavy object between them. Fergal glided from his shelter, and, despite the risk, insisted that the under-eunuchs uncover the face of their burden where there was starlight enough to identify....

... No imposture. Sophia stirred slightly, but the powerful drug kept its mastery over her. Aided by the still trembling Cyrus, Fergal carried her through the garden gate and strapped her into a litter swung between two even-paced asses that had been tethered in a convenient shadow. The wailing noise of the procession died in the distance. On the near-by walls again could be traced the pacing sentries with their faintly gleaming armour. Allah or the Panagia (what matter which!) guarded the rescuers against roistering parties of young Damascus bravos or more vulgar bandits. They reached a small house by a rushing channel of the Abana, where Fergal had carefully made ready. Once again Destiny had favoured the bold.

Two days later, after swearing to a careful pact with Cyrus as to certain contingencies should the Saracen fleet appear before Constantinople, the perfume vendor, his asses laden with cases of vials and bales of aromatic drugs, rode unhindered through the Northern Gate and took the road for Aleppo. With him went an old Christian Syriac woman and a slim boy, his assistant.

CHAPTER XX

AT AMORIUM

IN the books wiser than this is told what befell following the Kalif's great divan. Never since the first zeal for El Islam sent forth the Faithful from the Arabian deserts to conquer Christian Syria and Zoroastrian Persia had the Gospel of the Sword been preached with greater fury. The imams, dervishes, and ulemahs exhorted the sword-hands alike on the steppes of Turkestan and the oases of Sahara. Their message was ever the same:

“Our fathers conquered a little; we will conquer much. Follow the new ‘Way of Allah.’ Desire you gold? The City of the Cæsars contains the greatest riches since the genies hid their treasure in the bowels of the earth. Fair mansions? The marble dwellings therein are like the pavilions of Allah. Fair women? At Constantinople are virgins full-zoned, rose-lipped, with eyes like gazelles, awaiting the embraces of the Faithful. If you die fighting as martyrs what incomparable rewards in paradise! Up, then, and testify your zeal for El Islam!”

Daily from every province the hosts rolled towards Damascus. It was a mustering of uncouth nations such as scarce had been since the days of old Persia and the hordes of Xerxes. Yellow Tartars, bronzed Moors, and darker Ethiopians; Hindoos and Persians, Arabs and Egyptians, with the multitudinous swarms of lighter-skinned “Greek” and semi-Greek renegades, wherein the Levant abounded—all these were flocking together, being welded into a single host by two mighty impulses: fanaticism and lust for plundering the greatest treasure-house in the world. Allah alone knew which of the two motives was the stronger.

The imams exhausted themselves chanting the militant verses of the Koran: “Fight for the religion of Allah! For whosoever so fighteth, be he slain or be he victorious, great is his reward!”

Merchants past the military age were exhorted to open their purses for the army, because “Whatsoever ye shall expend in defence of the religion of Allah, it shall be repaid unto you.”

All the Phœnician havens and the harbours of Egypt bustled with the shipwrights. The slopes of Lebanon were stripped of their lordly cedars to frame the new war galleys and transports. At all the Kalif's arsenals gangs of artificers wrought on new battering engines, and turned out arrow- and spear-heads like the sea sands. Women took the gold and silver coins from their tinkling head ornaments and cast them into the great chests set by the mosques to receive gifts for the holy warriors. Beggars thrust in part of their gains. On a certain day Damascus wondered at a marvellous sight: Down the Straight Street rode a band of fifty robbers, scarred and villainous of countenance; not a man was without his hilt well notched with tallies for his victims. But now with their bejewelled chief they all were come to square with Heaven by following the djihad.

All Islam, in short, from the far salt deserts by the Aral Sea to where southern Arabia looked out upon tropical Africa, at length seemed in motion. The Damascenes gave up counting the thousands of camels, the tens of thousands of horses clattering through their gates. All said that the High Emir Moslemah was an organizer incomparable. In the bazaars long hands gesticulated and white beards wagged as the expectant traders reckoned the probable spoil from the Christians in specie, jewels, precious stuffs and slaves, and how far the future commerce of Constantinople could be diverted to Damascus, henceforth the uncontested capital of the conquered world.

Northward the hosts rolled, down the teeming Orontes Valley and towards Cilicia. At the seaboard some prepared to take ship directly to the very gates of Constantinople, while another host under Moslemah thrust onward through passes in Mount Taurus, seeking Phrygia and Cappadocia, where the Captain General still maintained that grim line of Roman fortresses whereof the emirs had already counted the stones in vain.

In Phrygia presently arrived Moslemah himself, his proud heart full of contempt for the Christian leader. Knowing that the latest puppet, Theodosius III, still preened himself in Constantinople, the Saracen attempted specious negotiations with Leo. “We know the Empire will soon pass to you,” he wrote. “Come then, let us discuss the terms of peace.” And when the Saracens came before the strong walls of Amorium they strove in vain to disarm the defenders by crying “Long live the Basileus Leo!”

But in the Isaurian the High Emir found at once the fox and the lion. Leo met the Moslem envoys with specious friendliness. He even boldly entered their camp to negotiate, and then slipped away from them when secret tidings came

to him that Amorium had been newly garrisoned and was safe. All that summer he thus held at bay the invader, matching intrigue with intrigue and valour with valour. So at last arrived the winter. To join with the overwhelming Moslem hosts in pitched battle had been beyond the Captain General's limited numbers. But not one of the great Anatolic fortresses had capitulated; Moslemah had not dared tarry to besiege them, his myriads would have exhausted the forage of the open country and miserably starved. Baffled in a hundred petty actions, with only the plunder that could be swept out of the open villages, the hungry Islamic horde at last was fain to force its way on to the Ægean, where it could be reprovisioned by its fleet. It might, indeed, proceed to Constantinople, but it must perforce go on with the full width of hostile Asia Minor sundering it from friendly Syria, and with its only supply and communications through its ships.

Old Rome had once owed a mighty debt to Fabius the Delayer. Already New Rome owed an equal debt to Leo the Isaurian, contending against a deadlier foe to Western civilization than ancient Carthage.

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Leo was again at Amorium after a long campaign in the saddle, when the welcome news came, "The High Emir has raised the siege of Laodicea and is passing down to the sea," and the Captain General knew that he had won the first round on the war's great gaming board.

The lines now on the Hyper-Strategos' brow were deep, his laugh infrequent, and no longer, in boyish fashion, would he go about humming catches of light songs. Seldom would he join his officers at their wine parties. Seldom he openly chided, but the highest commanders could tremble at his silent frown. His life was rigid to austerity, setting an example to every luxury-loving subaltern. He slept on a hard camp bed. Peter cooked his simple rations. His armour and accoutrements were meaner than those of many of his turmarshs.^[50] The monks complained that he laboured at his dispatches on major saints' days, but his staff wisely declared, "The Saints must approve, for he always defeats the Infidels." The soldiers had long since worshipped the ground whereon he walked, but were greatly crestfallen when during the winter a deputation of centurions begged him to assume the purple. "I was not sent to Anatolia to seize the Empire, but to hold back the Hagarines," he rebuked. "Grievous may be the misrule in Constantinople, but think you God is well pleased to see yet more Christians fighting one another with the Infidel in the land? Back to your barracks!"

Then came the day when Peter came into his cabinet in the government house in Amorium, and stood silently where his master sat with his tablets on his lap.

"News, little *kyrios*."

Leo looked up. The leathern face of the servant seemed to show a confusion of feelings.

"What is it? My mother——"

"Nothing from her, *kyrios*. Fergal has reached Amorium."

The stylus clattered from the general's hand upon the floor. His colour went. As if collecting himself for bad tidings, he demanded, "Who is with him?"

"Only the damsel Sophia. He saved her. You will hear his tale."

Leo's forehead turned, more ghastly yet, then he drew himself together and reached for the stylus. "Laodicea saved, Anthusa lost. Just God! Why should I not rail against Thy strange decrees!"

Peter, who knew his master's every mood, touched his hand with the freedom of a lifelong comrade.

"The little *kyrios* is distressed?" he adventured, with a tenderness not easily expected from a toughened camp follower.

"We are what God has made us," rejoined his master. "I can order forty thousand men to deadly conflict. I cannot rule my own spirit." Then again his voice shook. "Sophia, say you, and not Anthusa! Send—send that Celt in!"

The newcomer entered and dropped on his knees. He also had aged and had lost that youthful pertness which had carried him through all earlier adventures. The dark dye was still on his hair, the bronze stain on his skin, and he wore a

Saracenic dress. Not without just perturbation, he looked on the forbidding countenance of the Captain General. Leo gazed on him sternly.

“I rejoice you live, but you come with one and not with two.”

“My lord has said it,” and the other bowed his head with fear.

“Where is she? Where is Kallinikos’ younger daughter? In some emir’s harem, lost therein forever——”

“I will not dissemble from your Sublimity. I believe that the *kyria* Anthusa perished before she ever reached Syria. Her fate is a mystery, yet hear my story. I believe her dead.”

Leo lifted his face with an unnatural laugh, next crossed himself with unwonted carefulness. Evidently Fergal’s statement had brought him a terrible manner of relief.

“If dead,” spoke the soldier gravely, “she is at least a pure saint in God’s own keeping. What dutifully should I say? ‘The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.’ ” Then, with an evident summons to self-command, he turned to the Celt and the old power came back into his eyes.

“Rise up, sirrah!” he cried, with almost forced graciousness. “It’s not your fault, I warrant, that there’s wormwood mixed with all our honey. At least, I see you safe and sound. Your fate’s been on my conscience, and long since, not I, but every Christian, should have thanked you for that report brought home by Daniel. It saved us many months of preparation and many fortresses. And Sophia rescued! But I must hear all—tell me every whit since you turned back from Daniel.”

So pelting Fergal with questions as if to beat back his own black thoughts, the Captain General had out all the story: of the masquerade in the divan, of the escape from the harem, of the subsequent shrewd adventures in Syria. From Damascus, the escape had been easy enough, but there had been a stiff encounter with bandits near Apamea, when Fergal, as he modestly put it, “populated hell with three more rascals,” but when, also, he had suffered an ugly wound from an arrow. In that obscure North Syrian city, they had perforce to wait his recovery, but fortunately at a colony of friendly native Christians, who half guessed the cause of their flight, but did not betray them.

At length, when Fergal again could travel (“having been blessed,” as Leo keenly interpolated, “with no unwelcome nurse”), they found all the havens of Phœnicia and of Antioch crowded with the Kalif’s navies, and of course all peaceful communication with Constantinople at an end. Then the resourceful Celt again turned northward, found a caravan making for Melitene on the confines of Armenia, through a region not yet involved in the war. They reached Melitene safely, and, learning that the Captain General was again in Amorium, made for that city as soon as the last of Moslemah’s raiders retreated from Phrygia and made peaceful travel possible.

When Fergal had completed, Leo shot one more keen glance at him.

“You have done well.” He spoke in tones which would have brought joy to his highest officer. “I believe you—every word.” Then he added, not without gravity, “Yet the daughter of Kallinikos, she was with you, and through all these months——”

“Yes,” assented the Celt, but he knew the other’s meaning, and held up his head. “*Kyrios* Leo, you do well to ask me this thing, but remember, though I was sold as a slave in Constantinople, I am reckoned the son of a king in mine own country. My honour was engaged. Old Hilaria was always with us. Sophia was to me as my sister—and never otherwise.”

The commander laid his strong hands on the younger man’s equally strong shoulders. “*Euge!* I should have known more than to cast at you such a thing. If the Panagia denies me one great gift, shall I be mean and churlish enough to refuse to join in the joy of others? You have played the part alike of a king’s son and of a Roman soldier. I will, therefore, make you a promise. You shall not have Sophia for ‘sister’ long.”

Fergal, in ecstasy, caught at Leo’s dalmatic and pressed its skirt to his lips. The general burst into an honest laugh.

“O Dear Lord Jesus Christ, why cannot I be vouchsafed the power to make true lovers ever joyous, instead merely that of sometimes thwarting the High Emir!” Then he clapped his hands, called back Peter, ordered him to provide for Fergal

as his special aide-de-camp, and directed that Sophia be taken to the quarters of Placidia, her Basil being in Amorium on detached service from the fleet.

That night, when the younger officers of the staff were at mess, absolutely unexpectedly the Captain General joined them. Casting aside his wonted melancholy, Leo jested with them, told tales, drank a little beyond moderation, threw dice with some recklessness, and continued his mirth until late. The subalterns were delighted, and Peter commented on the happy change when he assisted his master to retire. Leo's answer was unevasive:

“Good fellow, I know you would die for me and so I will tell you this: on a certain day on the Bosphorus I thought to swerve from my duty. I thought to turn from that single task which is more and more manifestly laid upon me every hour, even as Bares and Chioba spoke, and to divide my thoughts by giving way to those private joys which God often gives to the lowliest peasants, and then denies unto kings. My punishment was swift. To-day, if Fergal reports aright, my dream of worldly happiness has passed for ever. Henceforth I can have but one bride—the Christian Roman Empire. Till she is saved from utter destruction how dare such as I spare thought for other marriage? After that, let it be as God wills. So, then, I have resolved to face the future gallantly, for sour heart never delivered a city!”

It was a bright, cold day in the Phrygian winter a little later, when all the officers in Amorium put on their bravest armour and their wives (if with them) their brightest pepla and veils. In the great hall of the Hyper-Strategos' residence, blessed by the local bishop himself the solemn betrothal vows were exchanged between Fergal, the new spatharios, and Sophia. The shadow of the war did not prevent unbounded mirth. Late into the night they danced, men with men, and women with women, but all the company standing by to clap, applaud and shout their “Up-a!” at every clever march and pirouette, and gladdest of all were the true friends of the chief himself when they saw him joining in the frolic of the junior tribunes.

... Yet very early in the morning following Peter roused his master from his pallet. Hardly had the good bodyguard cast a mantle over Leo when into his simple quarters were thrusting all the senior officers in Amorium, at their head Basil and the great strategos of the Armeniacs, the potent Artavasdos. When Leo had seated himself on a camp chair, lo! all the company fell on its knees before him, and from behind the generals stepped an imperial mandator. His gaudy livery was mud-splashed for he had travelled in hot haste. Down at Leo's feet he cast himself, touching his forehead upon the cold pavement, then rose to his knees to extend a parchment bound with purple ribbons and dangling huge gold seals. Artavasdos took it from the messenger, broke open and in dead hush read aloud:

“The Logothetes, Patricians and Senators of the Romans to the Noble, Serene and Valiant Strategoi, Protostrators and Moirarchs in Amorium and throughout the Roman Empire, greeting:

“Know you that this day, Theodosius Augustus III, overwhelmed by the cares of state and the dread lest he be incapable of coping with the Infidels, has abdicated the Empire. The power thus reverting to us, the most Venerable Senate, we have called to the supreme power Flavius Leo, Captain General of Anatolia, to whom as Christ-loving Autocrat and Basileus take heed to render your full obedience. To confirm this our unanimous pleasure there are on their way the most holy Patriarch Germanos and their Magnificences the Logothetes——”

The reading was drowned in one spontaneous roar from the assembled officers. Done, in the only manner it could have been done! Leo the Isaurian had been called to the throne of the Cæsars by the free consent alike of army and civil bureaucracy, and the deliberate abdication of his rival, and without the spilling of one drop of Christian blood.

Basil's great voice led off all the rest: “Ten thousand years to Leo Augustus!” The soldiers were in ecstasies. The army, the refuge of the old undying Roman spirit, had come to its own at last. An end now to puppet emperors, an end to civil wars, an end to sordid exploitation in the palace. “Now we can face Moslemah!” ran joyously from lip to lip, and then followed another shout still louder, “*The shield! The shield!*”

On a great infantry shield they thrust the new Basileus, casting over him a purple robe, then lifted him shoulder-high, while once more from their knees all the generals swore with loud oath: “Yours to command. Yours till the death. In the name of the Holy Trinity.”

Not without emotion and very pale, Leo thanked his officers for their vows and loyalty. Then he desired, “as my first command, if I am to be your Emperor,” that for a little space they should leave him. Away they went to rouse the city and put all the garrison en fête. Only Peter, lantern-jawed and unperturbed, waited just outside the chamber door. He knew

that Leo was at prayer. At last his master opened again and desired that he be clad in his usual undress armour.

“And Peter,” he added, with a touch of his old playfulness, “think you to be able to learn to buckle the straps of a Basileus?”

“I can try, Sacred Clemency.”

The servant was sent reeling by the blow of a mighty fist. “If I’m ever ‘Sacred Clemency’ to you, I’ll be *clement* enough to cut off your head. Never say that to me again.”

“Very good, little *kyrios*.”

“That’s better; forget it not.” Leo’s laugh sounded as light as once it had been in Kasia’s garden, but there was no laughter left in his eyes when, with a little more than his wonted poise, he strode down to the military council.



CHAPTER XXI

THE DISCOVERY OF KASIA

A SOLEMN consistory of all the magnates was held at the Daphne when Basil arrived at Constantinople to signify Leo's acceptance of the empire. The new monarch's first official act had been to name his steadfast friend the sailor as "Grand Dragonary"—High Admiral. The new patrician bore a letter from the Emperor to which all the kneeling dignitaries listened with anxiety in their hearts. Not love for the Isaurian, but animal fear lest no other could turn back the Saracen had led them to persuade the whimpering Theodosius III to abdicate, and now Leo confirmed their forebodings.

The new Basileus wrote graciously indeed, but he said that every lesser consideration must bend to the war. Ere coming to the capital he must secure Nicaea and Nicomedia against the Hagarines. The former Emperor Theodosius was assured of a comfortable retreat at Ephesus, and the great civil officials were told they might keep their titles and the perquisites, but their powers must largely be suspended during the crisis. The moment the Saracen danger abated there must be a drastic overhauling of the finances to see whether unhappy rumours of serious embezzlements during the public confusion had been correct. Meantime, Leo expected implicit obedience during the great public emergency.

Again there was an Emperor over the Romans and all Constantinople knew it. Crumbled in dust was the top-lofty project of Paul and the high logothetes to build up a government by the palace bureaucracy. All the capital, according to its mood, rejoiced or lamented: "Leo already shows himself the 'Lion.' "

The moment the consistory dissolved, a small group of those haughty spirits who had striven to rule the Empire met to condole and recriminate. Bitter was much of the speech and many the shafts aimed at the Master of the Palace.

"This is your doing, eunuch," stormed the dismayed Niketas. "If the Infidels take Constantinople we're ruined. If they fail and Leo demands our accounts it's no pleasanter. Noble statecraft of yours! Pah!"

"But what if the Saracens fail," deprecated Paul, "and then, by the Panagia's mercy, this Leo fail, also, to demand our accounts?"

"Don't hunt the impossible," snapped Theokistos, "we're all undone."

"Pray don't despair too soon." Paul waved about a fat and heavily bearded hand. "Our accounts are not due—yet. Much can happen. At least, thank me for one great service."

"Tell it, then, in St. Theodore's name," commanded Count Maurice Dukas testily.

"Well, our fine peasant's brat, ahem! I mean his present Sacred Clemency, is still unmarried. There's no father—or brothers-in-law—to cook more trouble for us. Of course there'll soon have to be an Empress——"

"The Apostles smite you, eunuch," retorted Maurice, more angry than ever. "Don't add insult to injury. Isn't the fellow cold enough towards women for a pillar saint? Hasn't my Theophano already nigh wept her eyes out waiting and longing? He'll die a monk."

"Yes," calmly observed Paul, "if he gets deposed in his turn and blinded when the crisis is safely passed. In the meantime, nevertheless, observe that he has had one mistress already, concerning whom I take credit (merely between ourselves) for having done a little to—well, let us say 'remove.' I actually gather he actually had some ideas of marrying the creature, though she was of very ordinary birth. So you see what power a wife'll have over him when he really surrenders. At present we must repair past blunders, and there's one sure way to lay siege to him—his mother."

"But while the swashbuckler was in Constantinople," declared Maurice, "he'd never show her in public—good sense there! A coarse old peasant woman, I'm told, born in Isauria, who later lived with her sheep and pigs up in Thrace. With all his sins he's too shrewd to let such as *her* have a word to say now."

"Wrong," corrected Paul. "I vainly tried to persuade him to dismiss her when he was a mere strategos. Now he'll take her wishes ahead of the Panagia's. She'll be nigh the most powerful person in the Empire."

"Saints and angels!" swore a listening patrician. "A Roman Emperor ruled by such a mother! The Saracens'll have us; our doom's sealed."

“It will be,” observed the eunuch dryly, “if women not of our party get at her favour first. She’s our best hope.”

“Theophano shan’t fail us,” vowed Maurice, with loud oath; and when he quitted the Daphne he forced his groom to lash the carriage horses all the way to the Dukas palace by the Arcadian Forum.

Theophano Dukas, with other young patricianesses, was in the very act and article of setting forth on a water party down the Marmora for Kartalimen. The gilded cars of the company were waiting in the courtyard. The great Dukas barge was ready in the convenient Theodosian Haven. The young Consular Aitios Bringas (“not without hopes” in case higher projects for Theophano fell through) was also ready, curled, pomaded and robed in silk, to hand the heiress into her cushioned vehicle. Then Maurice ended all this engaging process by sudden arrival and one imperious gesture:

“You are not going to Kartalimen, daughter.”

“Not? Why not?” The flash in Theophano’s eye warned even a father that here was a great lady, not lightly to be crossed.

“Because the new Basileus has a mother; because he obeys her least whims; because if you do not fly to her, ingratiate yourself with her, grovel to her, let her tread on your neck and thrust needles into you, if that’s her wish, some other woman very quickly will, and pretty soon you’ll have a ‘Beauty of the Purple’ in the Sacred Palace that’s little to your liking.”

“Mother of God!” swore Theophano in consternation. “Why didn’t we realize all before! I knew that Leo, while he was spatharios and strategos, had a mother—yes, but she never was seen with him in the Hippodrome or at the Palace. That she had any influence over him, I never dreamed——”

“She has! She has!” exclaimed her excited father.

“Merciful Saints, what am I to do? I’m all dressed for the water party. To get into my court peplon——”

“Will take too long,” reiterated the patrician. “No matter! Glory be to the Trinity the woman’s so great a boor that she won’t know whether you’re dressed for a fête or an execution, provided you throw on plenty of gold and jewels. That new tunic embroidered with the ‘Palsied Man carrying his bed’ will do. They say she’s pious and charitable. But haste! The heralds are proclaiming the new Emperor in all fora. Hark! You can hear the people roaring their ‘Ten thousand years!’ ”

“Where does she live? Where does she live?”

“A little house by the War Department. Hardly good enough for a second-rank linen merchant. The woman’s quite impossible, but what of it? Every other eligible patrician girl will be going there, too. Fast, I say, fast! Put on your best tiara. The one with the big topazes. She can’t understand pearls. It’ll take her fancy!”

Never wrought her Magnificent Ladyship’s maids a more rapid toilet than in that hectic moment. Luckless Aitios Bringas slunk away to console himself with a visit to the stables of the “Green” jockeys. Dukas himself accompanied his daughter. Their running footmen raced along the Mesē, knocking aside dozens of pedestrians with their staves. The whips cracked above the frantic horses. In the Theodosian Forum their wheels crushed over a boy. At the turn by the Parade ground they nearly collided with a second carriage—the car of the great heiress Euphoria Boilas. She, also, had dressed very hurriedly (one glance told Theophano *that*) and her horses were lathered, panting and headed straight after the Dukas car. Behind them, like hounds in full cry for their quarry, were at least six other state carriages whirling with uncourtly haste.

The Dukas car, thanks to a skillfully reckless driver, was the first to reach the narrow street of Kasia. The way was already blocked, however, by a surging crowd of every type of the populace from great merchants to scavengers, howling, gesticulating and huzzahing. An excited centurion of the “Collegians” was stationing his men to prevent the house from being carried by main force. With no slight pompousness, Maurice Dukas, followed by his daughter, endeavoured to thrust himself forward.

“I have been commissioned,” he announced loftily to the centurion, “to escort the Empress-Mother with becoming ceremony to the Sacred Palace. Put your men under my orders.”

“Show your authority,” demanded the Logothete Libanios, suddenly appearing behind, accompanied by his wife and daughter. “The commission is mine.”

“Step aside, your Magnificences,” demanded the Arch-Chamberlain Theodotos, with three damsels at his heels, “you know my lawful prerogatives.”

The young centurion stood the picture of despair. “Gracious *kyrioi*,” he protested, “what shall I do? The servants shout to me through the grille of the door that ‘the old lady’ (‘her Most Sacred Majesty,’ I presume they mean) ‘won’t admit anybody until Basil and Placidia come.’ By which are implied, I take it, his new Serenity the High Admiral and his illustrious consort.”

The group of patricians with their feminine retinue, steadily reënforced by numerous arrivals, exchanged glances of keen embarrassment. Dukas muttered in fury, “Barbarous old harridan!” then shuddered under his pearl-bespangled robe lest his rivals had overheard him. The first tension was relieved, however, by another voice through the grille.

“The mistress,” announced a shrill female voice, “not to seem rude, will let in the first twenty of the *kyrioi* and *kyriai* who arrived. The rest will have to stay out. The garden’s too small.”

“Now forward, girl, the first impression counts,” enjoined Dukas in his daughter’s ear. “Don’t let pride ruin you.”

The less pedigreed multitude were forced to stand aside when the door was unbarred, and a full score of patricians and patricianesses, the fair sex in the majority, surged through with scandalous haste and ignoble elbowings. Many more were fain to enter, but vigorous hands slammed the portal the instant the proper tale of twenty was complete, leaving several of the proudest dames on the Mesē vowing steel and poison against their more lucky rivals who had pushed inside. The fortunate twenty scuffled through the small aula—where several had the presence of mind to praise in loud voice “the exquisite taste of the statues and mosaics”—and then into the little garden.

It was a mild day of early spring. The sun was falling pleasantly across the tall shrubs in half barrels, and upon the reviving ivy and clematis. Upon the uncushioned bench, stiff and upright, was seated Kasia. She wore a long grey frock, not without culinary stains. Her grey hair was fastened in a single hard knot upon her crown, and in her lap were embroidery needles, a half-made garment and a great ball of brown yarn. When she saw the approaching platoon of visitors she made haste to rise, seized her skirts and dropped an exceedingly rustic courtesy; then, evidently much bewildered as to what to do next, resumed her seat, and looked confusedly upon the splendid dresses of the intruders.

The twenty fairly stared about the garden twice, when it suddenly dawned on Euphoria Boilas (by an inspiration Theophano could never forgive) that before them was not an underservant, but the object of all adoration. Down on the gravel plumped the heiress, sparing not her silk, clasping her hands in transport, and crying, “The Panagia blesses me; I behold her Sacred Majesty herself!”

In a twinkling all the nineteen had imitated. “Ten thousand years to the Empress-Mother!” they echoed together. “Ten thousand years to the august Fosteress of the Romans!” And Theophano, to retrieve her numbness, darted ahead of Euphoria, seized Kasia’s coarse woollen dress, and pressed the hem thereof devotedly to her lips.

The object of adoration stared at them with her little beady eyes, half scared, and half possessed apparently by a mighty impulse to laugh. She said nothing, however, ere a befrizzled young man, in a pink dalmatic of fantastic cut, arose, then again bent low and craved “her most gracious condescension to let him speak.”

“And *who* are you?” came back her incisive tones.

“I, Sacred Majesty? I am by patent the imperial court poet. This day, only one hour since, suddenly overwhelmed by the greatness of my theme, I was inspired to prepare these verses in the meter of Archilochos, and according to the precise rules of the Alexandrian school of poetics. Doubtless if your Sacred Majesty should command me later to recast them in Sapphics, or in the meters of Theokritos——”

“Say them off——” cut short Kasia.

The bard cleared his throat thrice and began in high tones:

“When the bright hand of Eos gilds the skies,

When through the doors of Night's black dungeon flies
The stately chariot of victorious Day,
Lo! with mad transports we exultant come
To hail the Mother of the Newer Rome,
Voicing our homage in this solemn lay."

"Solemn what?" demanded Kasia.

"'Lay,' Sacred Majesty. The word, I avow upon my honour as a votary of the Muses, is used in this sense for 'stately ode' by Pindar, Aristophanes and Sophocles."

"Pray talk like a Christian," entreated the old woman, fumbling with her needlework.

Maurice Dukas rose from his knees with a great air of authority. "Master Poet," he commanded, "your intrusion is untimely. Would you monopolize the Empress Mother's august attention when so many of her subjects must tender their profound homage? Let your Sacred Majesty deign to look favourably upon certain of these young women who have come to place their dexterity, wit and beauty at your admirable disposal. My daughter Theophano here is sighing with anguish lest she should not be permitted to minister to your imperial necessities."

"And *my* daughter, also, please your August Omnipotence," thrust in Libanios most politely. "Oh! how faithfully she'll serve you."

"And my three," cried the Arch-Chamberlain, "pious and proper girls, skillful in needlework and cookery."

"Needlework and cookery! When did they learn them!" muttered Euphoria, in a venomous whisper to a companion, then she raised her voice: "Oh, Ever-adorable Mistress, if only I might be your tire-woman, your bond-slave!"

Kasia clapped her hands over her ears. "Good people," she pleaded, "a little silence, or by the Gospels I'll turn mad."

By this time everybody was again standing and exchanging glances, some angry, some sheepish.

"I don't believe any of you," went on Kasia, her needle now plying furiously. "I've been in Constantinople ever since Leo's father died, and my boy was made spatharios. Never any of you have been half civil to me before, though fawning enough on him. He'd have showed his anger about it, if I'd permitted. And now, because you need him against the Saracens, he's been made Emperor. Perhaps he deserves to be—if it is his mother who says so. But as for me, I'm what I was the day before yesterday—a simple old peasant woman, to whom the Saints (beyond my deserts) have given a son who's become a great man. And for all your kneeling and robe-kissing and honey-dripping words, I can see clean through you. You're all inwardly laughing at me, and will call me names the moment you quit this garden."

Libanios the Logothete was the first to recoil in a kind of horror. "Laughter? We call your Sacred Majesty names? Who are the authors of so vile a calumny?"

"Stop before you begin to forswear yourself," ordered the old woman. "I'm not quite so foolish as I look. And you—all of you, painted, curled and perfumed mistresses,"—her disapproving glance smote terror through all the simpering young patricianesses—"I'll have competent tire-women without your assistance—thank you. And if you're thinking, any one of you, to trap my son Leo through his mother, find some other way!"

"Refreshing frankness!" cried the Logothete.

"Sparkling wit!" chimed Dukas.

"Felicitous epithets!" exclaimed the poet.

What further applause Kasia might have evoked history records not, for this same moment a very ill-dressed serving boy rushed indecorously into the garden.

"Pope Michael to see the *despoina*," he bawled, never bending his knee, "immediately! Says it's very important!"

"Don't stand gawking, then," commanded his mistress, "send him in. If these fine people can endure me, they can

endure Michael, who's far better than most of 'em."

The good pope entered almost at the servitor's heels. His black robe was sprinkled with dust, his tall hat set awry, his long hair and beard were in a tangle. In his evident excitement he hardly comprehended that the high-born visitors were even present. He made straight for Kasia.

"*Kyria*," he began, without the slightest reverence, then perforce stopped to catch breath. The noble spectators all shivered together.

"*Kyria*?" groaned Theophano, in an anguished whisper. "He addressed the Empress Mother as if she were a centurion's wife!"

"No matter," urged her father, "he has her ear. Cringe to him."

"Get your breath, pope," enjoined Kasia. "Holy St. Demetrios, have you been racing in the Hippodrome?"

"*I've found Kannebos*," gasped the priest, evidently bursting with his news. "He's at the Hospital of Samson. He's confessed."

Kasia sprang from her seat with her arms swinging above her head, as if routing a swarm of gnats.

"Out with you!" sounded her command. "Out, out, I say! My time's taken. You're not wanted. If I'm Empress-Mother, I'll test out my power by having the man or maid who lingers whipped. Whipping-post and stocks—or something worse! Out, or when Basil comes——"

"Her Sacred Majesty's leisure seems preempted," announced the Arch-Chamberlain with his best dignity; "we can wisely withdraw."

The whole company retreated with ignoble haste. They were greeted not without satirical looks and mock congratulations by their peers excluded earlier. Already a cordon of Protectors had been flung around the house, and the neighbouring streets were black with heads. Theophano Dukas wept in sheer misery.

"Oh, intolerable insult—that unspeakable woman! To think that she must dominate the palace!"

"At least, she treated us all impartially with the same outrageousness," soothed her father. "We must wait our chance. She's so doltish she doesn't take in her elevation. You can still conquer." ...

... While the cars of the disconsolate patricianesses were rattling them back to their paternal mansions, Michael, treating Kasia precisely as he might in the olden days, told his story. And as he told it the little woman's eyes fairly danced in her head.

Michael, it appeared, had been keeping back a part of his secret for several days. All through the confusions attending the rise and downfall of the unfortunate Theodosius III, and the excitement of the elevation of Leo, the pope had steadily held to his search for Kannebos. The police had done their best, although the sailor seemed to have vanished completely, but the tenacious priest never relaxed, and shortly before the day in question a nursing sister at the great public Hospital of Samson sent word to him that a seaman had been brought in, grievously wounded in an affray with coast pirates off Heraclea.

The fellow had gasped out his name as "*Kannebos*," but for two days it seemed doubtful whether life would stay in him. He was too weak even for a religious confession. Then his tide turned, and for many hours Michael hardly quitted his bedside. Presently it was easy enough to make him talk about a wild and sinful past, but not "of certain matters he had sworn on the Sacrament to keep secret." However, Michael was a master in winning the confidence of the unfortunate. Partly by genuine kindness, partly by a show of religious authority, partly by skillfully creating the belief that Plato had already betrayed nearly all of the business, Kannebos was brought to feel that the sin of breaking an oath was outweighed by the greater sin of concealing a crime. At the very moment the trumpets blew all over the city proclaiming the formal accession of Leo, Kannebos (under pledge of every kind of immunity) had whimpered the essential fact that on the night after the abduction at Therapia he had delivered Anthusa to the nuns of the Isle of Cedars with injunctions to keep her there for ever. The instant these words were from him, Michael had set forth on his unclerkly run for Kasia.

The old woman veritably quivered with delight. "Oh, happiness! What news for 'the boy'! 'Sacred Majesty'? What's

that pleasure compared to this?"

"Contain yourself, dear *kyria*," urged Michael. "I fear many things. Much time has elapsed. Those nuns are unspeakably fanatical. If Anthusa's alive, her health may be broken for ever by their austerities. Very likely they've forced her to take the vows, in which case only a solemn brief from the Patriarch can release her."

"The more cause for haste!" cried Kasia. "What's to be done?"

"Why, if available, a dromond can be sent to the Isle with his Beatitude's orders."

"Basil," screamed the old woman, when that officer, with Placidia, entered the garden, not, indeed, to bow the knee, but to salaam and courtesy, "are all those gay-plumaged simpletons right when they call me 'Empress-Mother'?"

"Very right, please your Sacred Majesty."

"Then take my first command. Give Michael a dromond—the fastest one in the navy yard. Let it go to Spain, or Egypt, or any other outlandish place if he orders it. And you, Placidia, I'll give you something harder. I suppose for 'the boy's' sake I mustn't disgrace myself again. If I can't act like an Empress, at least I need not act like a fool. I take it they won't let me live here much longer, though this house is quite to my liking and I've just rearranged the furniture. Find some proper clothes for me to wear, and hunt out some nook in the palace where I can tuck myself without being stared at by everybody. Then I can wait until Leo comes. After that I'll tell him to give those lily-fingered Magnificences quite enough to think about without bothering his poor old mother."



CHAPTER XXII

“LEO, TU VINCAS!”

WHEN the cold retreated and the first spring winds blew over the Isle of Cedars yet another time, Anthusa realized that the nuns were again expecting her to join the sisterhood. More and more had they come to depend on her knowledge, her judgment, her powers of firm command. At first they had been merely delighted by the melody of her voice, and by her superior accomplishments; now they recognized in her a being as it were for a nobler sphere, one through her sweet influence to be obeyed in all things.

Simple as children, as the nuns for the most part were, by this time such was Anthusa's control of them that she could perhaps have managed her own escape. She often thought thereon when in the delicious evenings the southern wind blew through the cedars, the little waves lapped the pebbles, and the stars swung up from the violet dark water. But in truth she dared no longer to look on her vanished world with hope. Sophia was swallowed for ever in the Moslem East. Even if her father most improbably should have survived the shock of the loss of his daughters, he was near his last goal. And Leo? “If”—Anthusa told herself—“when he was strategos, Sophia must needs warn me against foolish dreamings, what now—when he is Captain General, and perchance with a foot upon the throne?”

Where then had she home, welcome, friends left to her, save among the nuns of the Isle of Cedars? Anthusa would bow her head after such thoughts and say, “Is not my life here God's will? Who am I to strive against it?” Whether she took the vows or refused them seemed a matter of indifference. Her lot was fixed upon the Island all the same.

The nuns no longer were repellent to her. It mattered not their hair was shorn and their faces shrunken. She knew the characters of them all: some were wise, some foolish; some superstitious, some truly pious; some petty, full of gossip, jealous; some charitable, unselfish and high-minded. The Isle of Cedars was, in short, merely a little world by itself. It appeared to be the part of the world where Heaven desired her to live and labour.

Arkadia the hegumena had become Anthusa's devoted slave. She had herself been forced into the order to expiate the sin of killing in self-defence an utterly brutal husband. The burden of the deed was still heavy upon her soul, and often she had dreaded lest by accepting the headship she was not admitting the perilous demon of pride. With other nuns she actually discussed abdicating her honours that Anthusa might immediately succeed her. Anthusa fought the suggestion resolutely, but could not silence it. Yet had she become hegumena her actual power could scarcely have increased. She constantly had to resist having responsibility thrust upon her. It was now “Ask her,” or, more affectionately, “Ask *makaira*” (the “blessed dear”) in everything. And therefore simply because she was gracious, patient, intelligent, and withal in all things efficiently good, her authority ever grew; and not without inward amusement she found the nuns dating community events by a kind of era, “before, or after, *she* came.”

Nor did the chained hermit, Symeon, escape her spell. The holy man indeed complained at set intervals, that “the sight of that Daughter of Sin afflicted him,” and that he had done ill not to betake himself to the monastery of Xeropotamos at Mt. Athos, famous for its austerities, or at least to a cell on the slopes of Bithynian Olympos. For all that, he grumbled exceedingly if Anthusa did not come for long conversations conducted at safe distance around the corner of his boulder. It was she who persuaded him from cutting off his other ear, lest it be a vanity preventing constant visions of angels. And the nuns having duly whetted his curiosity, he actually requested Anthusa to sing within easy hearing, after which he often complained (if he did not enjoy her music at least every other day) that he was tormented by constant apparitions of fiends, sometimes as serpentlike monsters, sometimes as wanton and alluring Sirens, but always seeking to pluck away his soul to Hell.

Thus one day slipped into another, and Anthusa more than ever tried to cease looking back, and to compel herself to look forward. The sense of inward power, to be used for just and loving ends, possessed her. What if Constantinople and the old life were lost? Here were half a hundred women, dried and perverted souls, many of them, but made in the Almighty's spiritual image, ordained unto immortality, and likely for the present life to become as wax in her own hands.

A few of the nuns who had “known the world” somewhat as she had known it, and who had been broken forever in their first six months upon the island, marvelled at her serenity, her self-control, nay, many a time at her guileless humour, and her rippling laugh.

“How have you done it, Anthusa?” demanded old Rhoda one day. “You are thinner than when you came to us, and

paler. No one grows fat on our beans and cabbage. But save for your hair, you could go back to the city and have all the dandies on the Mesē turn to stare at you, if you tossed aside your veil. Why aren't you crushed down, like all the rest of us?"

Whereat Anthusa laughed the laugh of musical water.

"Dear Rhoda, I don't understand what you mean. I haven't gazed into the mirror pool for months, and very likely I look as withered as old Maistrichia. Yet this I have read, and great happiness it gives me, 'Behold the Kingdom of God is *within* you,' and possessing this boon what matters it so greatly whether I can go to talk with Symeon and ask him whether he had another vision of Jacob's ladder last night, or can go to the Theodosian Forum to ask a gossip if there'll be a court procession out to the Convent of St. John?"

Rhoda shook her short grey locks, sorely puzzled. "You're past my understanding," she confessed; "but then we all know that you are a saint."

At length came a day late in March when the whole island seemed awake with bursting greenery. Anthusa delighted in all the little flowerets peeping out amid the rocks. She culled a great basketful of their fragrance to pile upon the chapel altar. The encircling sea seemed no longer so estranging to her; it was very blue and appeared almost friendly. Half-way to the horizon was a tall galley bearing closer to the Isle of Cedars than came the run of shipping. She could see the long tiers of oars, pumiced white, flashing under the morning sunbeams. But the sub-hegumena had beaten the gong summoning the nuns to chapel, and Anthusa quitted the beloved vista. She had promised to sing, but some of the older nuns had insisted that the sisterhood first chant through the long dull hymn of Gregory of Nazianos, "In Praise of Female Celibacy." Anthusa groaned inwardly over its unpoetic strophes, but for the sake of the others forbore open objection, and the lifeless chanting went on:

"Thy poor and tarnished wear,
Thy unadornèd hair,
I value more than pearls
Or silken dress or curls.

"With paints let others dress
The Living God's likeness;
Live tablets they of sin
And all that's base within.
Whate'er thou hast of beauty,
Die let it all to duty.

"Of men, though good they be,
The sight were best to flee;
The Tree of Life's thy care,
The serpent's guile beware."

But just as the next slow stanza was quavering, a very aged sister, nearest the chapel door, burst into a scream of horror: "MEN! A shipload of men! Landing on the island!"

The chant died instantly. Anthusa was with Arkadia and Salvina when they ran out with all the rest to confirm the fell tidings. Very true! A tall ship, a great imperial dromond with scarlet and purple streamers flapping from prow and poop, swung close to the little beach. Her decks swarmed with the ogling sons of Adam. A pinnacle was just grating on the strand. Upon the shore leaped half a dozen vigorous mariners, next two tall officers in the flashing armour of the Protectors, then with the dignity due their black robes, two churchmen—apparently a young deacon and an older pope. With them was an elderly and soberly clad woman.

The seamen made fast the boat, and the two Protectors waited for the elder clergyman ere advancing in a little knot towards the ruined temple. The nuns fluttered like distracted doves. Such an event had not been in the history of the community. What store of painfully won merit in Heaven might not be forfeited by even this unwelcomed intrusion of the hostile sex?

In their dismay full half the sisters looked instinctively to Anthusa. “What shall we do?” was their call to their mentor. Before, however, she could advance and accost the strangers, a cry of sudden intuition burst from the hegumena, “They’ve come for *her!*”

The words had scarce slipped from Arkadia ere a dozen nuns had their hands on Anthusa: “They’ve come to take away our saint. Hide her, sisters; hide!” And before their victim could cry out they were hurrying her by main force into the densest growth of the cedars upon the shaggy hill of the island.

With grim countenances Arkadia and Salvina turned to confront the intruders. But precious time had been lost; the invaders had been advancing and the flurry attending the seizure of Anthusa had not wholly escaped them. As Arkadia advanced with threatening gestures, the elder priest—that is to say, Michael—stepped forward with his right hand raised in the sign of blessing. In his left hand he bore a gilt-bronze crucifix upon a tall staff.

“Do I salute the Venerable Hegumena of the Sisterhood of St. Asella?” he inquired blandly.

“You do,” responded Arkadia, torn betwixt feelings of outrage at this astonishing intrusion and the respect which she knew was proper to a superior member of the clergy.

“Know then,” continued Michael, “I am commissioned not merely to convey to your nuns my own poor blessing but the peculiar benediction of his Beatitude the Patriarch, the fame for their piety having spread through all Orthodox lands.”

“His Beatitude is good,” rejoined Arkadia, unappeased; “but have you landed merely to tell me this?”

“Not entirely, Venerable Mother. I have also briefs, sealed by the Patriarch’s great seal, empowering me to lay on you a certain injunction.” He flourished a scroll whereon she could see great crosses and a heavy leaden seal.

“Say on,” requested the misdoubting woman.

“It is known to his Beatitude that you have on your island a certain Anthusa Maria, daughter of Kallinikos, Consul of the Philosophers. She was stolen from her home by criminal violence. You are enjoined to respect this summons and deliver this girl to me and to the Reverend Deacon Hippas, my brother here, whether or not she has taken the vows of your order.”

The lines on Arkadia’s jaw grew rigid, and her tones defiant. “Sir Pope,” she lied stoutly, “we have no such damsel on the island. We know not whereof you ask.” The moment she had spoken Salvina hissed in her ear, “Fool, why didn’t you say that she was dead?” But it was then too late.

“Speak with caution, Venerable Mother,” replied Michael with firm courtesy; “a deliberate falsehood answering a lawful question from the Patriarch’s deputy can undo the accumulated merits of many years of fasts and vigils. We are not come without weighty information.”

“We know nothing,” said Arkadia, flushed and desperate.

“Very well, Venerable Mother,” asserted the Pope calmly, “in that case you and your nuns cannot refuse each separately to take your oaths to that effect upon the Holy Sacrament, invoking upon yourselves eternal damnation if you lie.”

The simple-minded hegumena broke down, and fell on her knees in tears: “Oh, we cannot! I always knew this would happen—that God would take her away. She has become the joy of our hearts and the light of our eyes. We loved her to the point of sinfulness, hence this punishment. Go, Salvina, tell the others to bring her. It’s useless to strive against Heaven.” ...

... When they brought Anthusa to Michael at first he was startled by her boyish hair, her coarse brown robe, and the pallor of her countenance; but her mouth, eyes and lofty forehead were the same which had made the Strategos of Thrace dream dreams. She recognized Michael, yet seemed to look on him and his escort in a daze as on apparitions from a strange world, a world once hers but eons since closed to her for ever.

The nuns clung to her dress, kissed her hands, wept aloud and piteously, beseeching her not to leave them; and at first Anthusa, wondering and distressed, seemed quite open to their pleas.

“Dear Father,” she said, with troubled countenance, “I was just becoming very happy here. What makes me go away?”

“It is the Empress-Mother’s command.”

“The Empress-Mother? And why she?”

“Why, she was *Kyria Kasia*, to be sure.”

“Kasia?” Anthusa pressed her hands to her temples and laughed unnaturally. “I think something in my head has snapped. Kasia? I can’t understand. Why’ve you come for me with the great dromond and the Patriarch’s seal? Who wants me back in Constantinople? Who is there?”

“Sophia. Fergal saved her. They are betrothed. They want you for their wedding.”

Anthusa laughed again, and again wildly. “But my father?”

“Contrary to all expectation, the good God has spared him despite your calamity. Your Pera kinsmen were very kind. He wants you to comfort his old age.”

“And—*him*?” she demanded in unnatural tones; “but I forget—he’s Captain General now, and when he was only strategos Sophia warned me. She was right. I ought to remain here. But——”

The knot of men and nuns was brushed aside, as from the boat came flying old Marsa, her grey robes streaming behind her.

“*Philotata! Philotata!* Why do you tarry? We all want you so. Our hearts ache for you.” And her strong arms closed around Anthusa with the grasp of lawful possession.

“I—I must go from you,” half laughed, half wailed Anthusa to the nuns. The latter, however, were almost ready to fight Michael and the man-of-war’s men when they tried to take the rescued prisoner away. The scene became so hectic that the good pope abruptly announced, “Speed’s the best mercy!” and bade the others hurry her down to the pinnacle. The sisters shrieked and pleaded on the shores:

“You have given us a better way. You have given us a sight of Heaven. You must come back. You must come back.”

“I shall never forget you. I will come back,” cried Anthusa, with streaming eyes, while some of the nuns, quite beside themselves, threw sand in the air and called down curses on the seamen, on Michael and on the very Patriarch. Michael himself, not unmoved, assured Arkadia: “Your island shall not be forgotten. The Empress-Mother herself shall study your needs. You shall not be left desolate.”

But nothing could pacify the nuns, and they stood a forlorn weeping company upon the narrow sands until the pinnacle reached the dromond’s side and they saw Anthusa passed up and into the state cabin.

“Give way!” rang the rowing-master’s call, and the great oar-banks began heaving and clanking together.

As the galley sought the broad breast of the Marmora, Marsa, on whose kindly bosom Anthusa had sobbed out her troubles since a very little girl, vainly strove to tell all that had happened since that night at Therapia; but Anthusa seemed hardly to comprehend. The nurse spoke of the new Emperor, but Anthusa only talked more wildly of “the Captain General—now in Anatolia.”

“She’s been hard smitten, poor lamb,” spoke Marsa at last, abandoning all attempts at narration. “The Panagia pity her; it’ll take much time to comprehend everything.” And so, on the nurse’s congenial shoulder, Anthusa wept long and passionately.

All through that day and into the night sail and oar swept the dromond onward. In the darkness they anchored off Pityusa, and with the bursting light the returned captive could once more see the imperial city.

* * * * *

The third morning hour of March 25th, in the Christian year 717, a perfect spring day by land and sea and bending

heavens.

A hundred state galleys, twice as many tawny-winged merchantmen, a thousand caiques were strewn out over the Marmora as far as the Isles of the Princes or up the blue river of the Bosphorus and along the towering southern walls of the capital to their southwestern angle where the great battlements of the Golden Gate lifted proudly against the azure. It was the coronation day.

On the Asiatic shores the white houses of Chrysopolis and Chalcedon were decked with innumerable flags; thousands of other flags waved in the soft breeze all along the city walls from the summit of every tower and from the vast forest of spars. Every master of skiff or coaster, tall trader or warlike dromond was on the glittering water. From the poops or forecastles sounded pipes, harps, rebecks, or the clarion call of brass. Musicians, passengers and rowers, all in carnival mood, were crowned with spring flowers. Where were the Saracens? Constantinople seemed living confidently in the joyous present, defiant of the morrow.

In the city itself for those unlucky mortals denied the water festival there was music in all the fora. At the twenty public bakeries and at the one hundred and twenty public grain shops there were free distributions, not merely of bread, but of oil, cooked meat and wine. The public baths were thrown open gratis. In the Hippodrome tightrope dancers, tumblers and conjurers were dividing the applause with boxers and wrestlers. The variety theatres and puppet shows were thronged. A million people, pleasure-loving and beauty-loving, were *en fête*. Above their temples stood the crosses, but below appeared a carnival meet for the Hellenic gods.

Now at last above the Pharos, the lofty lighthouse by the Palace compound, broke out an enormous purple banner. The sight thereof was greeted by a shout from every ship and caique; then the tumult rippled along the crowded walls: the imperial trireme was quitting the Asiatic haven of Eutropios. Out into the centre of the thronged channel she advanced, bearing herself proudly as became the floating chariot of the new Majesty. Gold flashed from prow and stern, gold and purple from the liveries of the hundred and seventy oarsmen whose blades moved with the rhythm of a vast machine. Her many gonfalons were gold, scarlet, blue and purple. At the masthead lifted the imperial eagle, golden again, and with widely outspread wings.

Under a canopy of scarlet silk the spectators could see the protostrators and strategoi in their silvered armour, but even from afar was also visible the lofty seat near the stern whereon sat a single figure, with the great purple robe showing clearly under the dazzling light. "Leo Augustus! Ten thousand years to the bulwark of the Empire!" Thus ship called to ship, and long before the great trireme had crossed the mouth of the Bosphorus, waters and walls were tossing on the acclamations.

The water pageant moved the length of Constantinople, the trireme being followed by all its thousandfold train. At a quay beyond the walls the Emperor disembarked with his magnificoes. Some of the attendant craft discharged their noble passengers who were themselves to march in the coronation procession. Others hastened to the Theodosian and Julian harbours in the southern seawalls, that the carnival seekers might hasten through bystreets to the Mesē, there to cast wreaths and flowers upon the imperial cortège.

* * * * *

The dromond which bore Anthusa had moved leisurely in the wake of the great fleet. Off Proti a swift barge had come aboard: It brought Sophia herself and, with her, Fergal washed of his disguise, distinguished and noble in his spatharios uniform. The sisters met alone in the cabin, so different from that other cabin where Kannebos had wrenched them asunder. Michael and Fergal, holding wisely aloof, only knew that they were nigh hysterical on first meeting. So much there was to tell that almost nothing could be said between tears and laughter. But while they embraced the oarage of the dromond had swept them into the Julian haven. Sophia indeed protested that Anthusa was in no wise herself and needed instantly to be borne homeward, but the Celt assured her that it was impossible for their mule cars to cross the Mesē until the end of the great procession. The land pageant had already started from the Golden Gate; the High Street was one mass of people, and the best they could do was to proceed to a viewing stand waiting privileged folk under the porticoes of the Forum of Constantine and then proceed the moment the train had passed and the ways became passable. Anthusa still gazed about in a manner apparently distraught, but there seemed no alternative; and Fergal forced them a way to the coign of vantage.

The returned captive was just collected enough to realize that before her distracted sight was passing an enormous spectacle. Later the court poet was to hammer out formidable strophes in praise of the wise and pious, the brave and mighty that swept down the Triumphal Way. In the Golden Gate (a soaring mass of white marble and gilded statues, whence the portal's name) they had unbarred the great central entrance permitted only to monarchs at their coronation or returning from victorious wars. Over it spread a colossal figure of the Virgin, in flowing draperies, extending a laurel crown. Under it, then up the whole Mesē, swept, and sprinkled with perfumed water, and festooned with innumerable flower chains, had moved the imperial procession.

In the van tramped the thousands of Leo's own Anatolic army—veterans hard and fit, true heirs of the Roman legions, whose weapons even now flashed with keen steel and not with silver. Then in gorgeous vestments, raising their hymns, advanced the almost equal hosts of the clergy of Constantinople, bearing their banners blazoned with holy pictures. After that rumbled the gaudy cars with the families of all the magnificoes—consulars, senators, patricians, logothetes—each escorted by a platoon of servants in their lordly master's livery. Next followed the chiefs of the Green and Blue factions, followed with all their favourite jockeys driving prancing quadrigæ. Next, amid clashing of cymbals and clarion brass, came the head of the "sacred" cortège itself. The tall files of the Protectors moved in arrogant columns—the Patriarch in blazing cope and mitre on a white mule led by a patrician, then two by two the major palace officials, and finally the military commanders, their floriated dalmatics sweeping down from their gilded armour almost to the hoofs of their horses.

All these and many more Anthusa saw, yet saw not. Sophia was distressed at her sister's wandering eye.

"Cannot she understand," she demanded, "why we are here?"

"Marsa told her many times," replied Michael, pitying, "and I also. She cannot take it in that Leo is Basileus. To her he is still always the 'Captain General.' "

"We should not linger," announced Sophia; "she is distressed. Take us straight home, Fergal."

"It's impossible to cross the Mesē now," responded the young officer, "but it's all soon over. Hear that shouting."

All the uplifted columns along the High Street, crowned by their pagan gods, were quaking. A rhythmic chant was being carried along by a marching choir from Hagia Sophia.

"The blessings of God rest on Leo Augustus!
The favour of the Holy Trinity rest on Leo Augustus!
The compassion of the Almighty rest on Leo Augustus!"

From every palace top, from the crowds blackening the crests of the triumphal arches, from the dense throngs on the pavement, swelled now the official acclamation in the nigh discarded Latin:

*"Leo, tu vincas!
Leo, Cæsar et Imperator, Pius, Felix, semper Augustus!
Leo, tu vincas!"*

And the very volume of the noise at last seemed to force its way into the brain of Anthusa.

"Leo? They are calling him?" she spoke, Sophia barely hearing her through the din.

"Why not? He is Emperor as we've so often said. See."

Twenty coal-black steeds led the imperial car, their golden frontlets set with pure white plumes. White or red were the robes of the ten patricians and strategoi who walked at the bridles of every pair. Closest to the car swung the great shoulders of Basil.

Leo sat on a throne of ivory draped with purple, and purple was his gold-embroidered robe. He was bareheaded. Upon his breast hung a heavy gold chain with a single gem-set medal. He held not a gilded sceptre but a black truncheon of command, the token of the warrior. Straight ahead he gazed, pale of forehead, earnest of eye, ignoring the throngs, the shouts, the homage—looking to where Hagia Sophia's gleaming dome uprose, under which he would be clasped with the

purple buskins, touched with the holy oil, crowned with the pearl-set diadem and so be consecrated successor of Constantine in sacred truth.

“*Leo, tu vincas,*” again the thunders. Then from the upper porticoes girls began casting flowers. They fell around the car like fragrant hail. “Terror of the Saracens! Our *Lion* who will save us!” was the hopeful call of many.

Anthusa had listened transfixed. From her vantage she leaned frantically. “Leo, they are calling him?” she cried once more. Then some genius prompted him to lift his eyes. From the heights of the car the Emperor looked straight at Anthusa.

Marsa had long since cast a veil about the captive’s shorn head, and a blue cloak over her coarse nun’s vesture, but the face of Anthusa, white as the vision of an angel, shone forth to Leo as though the thousands of other visages were blotted out. The multitude saw the black truncheon shake in his grasp; they saw him half rise as if to leap from the moving throne. The car advanced. He sat him down again. To all at a distance he was once more the image of martial power, but Basil close to the car saw that his lips and eyelids were quivering...

“... *Leo, tu vincas!*” acclaimed the Forum as the monarch swept on towards the Augustæum. But Anthusa had risen with a piercing cry, “He is the Basileus!” and fell back into her sister’s arms.

“Home, Fergal,” ordered Sophia decisively. “You were a fool to thrust her in this tumult.”

Duly rebuked, the Celt carried Anthusa in his own arms down to the carriages, and his spatharios’ uniform made even the dense crowds give way. Only when they reached the familiar streets by the Aqueduct of Valens did Anthusa open her eyes.

The House of Peace at last. The rescue and return of its younger mistress had been very uncertain. Most of the servants were at the fête. But as they swung Anthusa down before the barred portal, lo! a leaping and joyous barking. Dorkon, the street dog, all unforgetting, was beside himself with delight. And now the open door, and Ephraim weeping great tears of gladness; and then with tottering haste a figure white and worn, in one hand a parchment, in the other a glowing crucible. At sight of the homefarer, Kallinikos strove desperately to keep his philosopher’s pride: “As Euripides says concerning the recall of Alkestis from the dead——” But here parchment and crucible crashed perilously upon the pavement together. Wide extended were his arms, and his hoary locks fell over Anthusa: “The blessed child! The blessed child!” For long that was all that he could say.

Anthusa once again cried long in Sophia’s arms that night, but in the end seemed not a little comforted. Heaven granted the mercy of peaceful sleep. The next morning she went about the house, peeping in each familiar nook; entered her father’s workroom and rearranged his confused apparatus and manuscripts. She gathered Tobias and Lethe into her arms and duly praised the latter’s newest kittens. Sophia rejoiced even to hear her sing. Save for her shorn locks and her pallor, she seemed much herself, although there were lines of maturity and sore experience upon her face which no time could take away. The freshness of cloudless youth had passed for ever, and Marsa caught her talking later to Dorkon as he wagged his stubby tail and looked up at her with wistful, loyal eyes, “Ah! Dorkon, you will never become so very great that I shall not dare to learn to love you.”

CHAPTER XXIII

THE GUESTS AT SOPHIA'S WEDDING

SEVEN days long the coronation festivities continued. It was as if the new Basileus would give his subjects one last grand carnival ere the days which must try men's souls.

The palace grounds were thrown open, and weavers, dyers, metal-workers, carpenters and their wives were suffered to wander through the onyx and marble colonnades of the Chalke and the Daphne, drink wine in the state galleries and gape at the mosaic pictures recounting the mighty deeds of the emperors. They were even allowed to peep into the imperial bedchamber where the couch of Majesty was set under a vast crimson canopy spangled with stars of pure gold, or to saunter through the enormous Tykanisterion, the "Sacred Gardens," where in protected houses bloomed rare tropical plants; or again to stand around the cages of the menagerie, where lions, tigers and great apes gazed forth sulkily from behind their bars.

On coronation night, from the point of St. Demetrios to the Golden Gate, Constantinople was illuminated. The next day the Basileus with all ceremony took his seat in the Kathisma at the Hippodrome, and with his own hands threw the white *mappa*, the napkin signal for starting the races. The victories were happily divided between the Blues and the Greens. The next day the games were repeated, and the next, so that the humblest citizen should have at least one chance at the spectacles.

Each day the Emperor with amazing condescension *ate* in public, cakes, figs, and wine being passed along the enormous tiers of benches, while the sovereign himself in plain view was seen devouring the same victuals proffered the meanest porter. Everybody thus became the ruler's personal guest. To supplement the feasts there was a wholesale scattering among the people of lottery tickets, redeemable in everything from a clay vase to a small Bosphorus villa near Chelai. A woman was actually killed and two men seriously hurt during the frantic scrambling. What matter? The enthusiasm for the new reign became unbounded.

But after the last victors had been crowned, and the last sweet cakes and vials of oil had been distributed, one morning squads of the imperial heralds appeared in all the twenty fora, from the glittering Augustæum to the dingy "Long Market" by the Golden Horn. Keen and shrill were the notes they blew from their silver tubes; then when the noise of chaffering had ceased, they sounded their proclamation:

"Flavius Leo, Christ-loving Basileus of the Romans, to all his subjects in Constantinople:

"It was fitting that the Roman people should rejoice together, and it is fitting that now their rejoicings should find an end. Know you, therefore, that God desires to test most sorely your courage and steadfastness in His Faith.

"All the powers of the Hagarine East are directing themselves by land and sea against your city. They rage against your holy religion, and desire your homes, your riches, your wives, and your daughters. Their power is as that of the Beast which riseth up out of the sea, upon whose head is the name of Blasphemy.

"Get you to your churches and pray. But do more than pray: Look confidently to God and be strong. Make ready to quit yourselves like Romans, like Christians, like valiant men. Let the Hippodrome and other wonted places of idle resort be closed, and let the city organize itself for war.

"Your Basileus will live or die with you. The Holy Trinity and the Panagia whom the Infidels blaspheme will fight for you, if you but fight for yourselves. So shall the Hagarines shrink back discomfited, and all the nations once more tremble and say, 'Behold Constantinople—the city guarded of God.' "

The closing of the Hippodrome and variety theatres was a shock even to the most thoughtless. Equally startling was the sudden descent of strong press gangs upon every haunt of the vicious and idle, dragging off stout fellows by thousands to tug at the oars of the dromonds. The jockeys were given prompt choice: enlistment in the cavalry or heavy labour upon the walls. Every hegumen was commanded to admit no more novices—presumably escaping conscription. The syndics of marble and mosaic workers, silk weavers and holy-ornament makers, and other ministers of luxury, were

ordered to close their factories and send their craftsmen to the great arsenal, the Mangana, unless the workmen preferred to enlist in the spearmen. Edict followed edict, striking the peaceful with consternation, while through the streets clanged the squadrons and bands of Leo's Anatolians, men of iron, true sons of the Roman conquerors of the world, and the living bulwarks still of an Empire stretching from the Caucasus snows to the capes of Sicily.

The great trade on the "Street of Lamps" slowly ebbed away. The patricianesses forsook their marble villas along the Bosphorus. The flitting caiques were less numerous for their rowers were with the fleet. But the churches became ever more crowded. Incessant the chanting and the wailing responses, "*Kyrie eleison! Christe eleison!*" Young men of family discarded their gold-embroidered dalmatics and took lessons in fencing. Even such spirits as Theophano Dukas began to haunt the Hospital of Samson and harass the nuns with officious zeal to nurse the sick.

The popular mood was inevitably a great boon to such Job's comforters as Marinos. There was always a fascinated crowd gazing upwards as he raved from his pillar:

"Verily wherein are ye better than the Jews of old? Ye have waxed fat and wanton in your sins. Ye have said, 'The evil day is not for us.' And now upon all descends the great Judgment of the Lord. Shall ye not become as an unclean thing, and all your boasted righteousness as filthy rags? Of a truth Constantinople for her whoredoms and witchcrafts shall be as a wilderness and a desolation. Yea, even Hagia Sophia, that beautiful temple wherein your fathers worshipped, shall be burned with fire. Bow to the dust, therefore. Submit to the great doom of an angry God!"

After that, words cannot tell the agony of his hearers.

Nevertheless, despite the general pall above Constantinople, the life of multitudes went on quietly as though the next year was to be even as the last. And within the House of Peace there were neither military edicts nor anchorites' warnings. Simple as her preparations perforce became, Sophia could not without decent feminine deliberation meet Fergal at the altar. So about four weeks after the coronation of Leo she and the new spatharios were wed.

* * * * *

Hagia Sophia was the cathedral, but the Church of the Apostles, the second fane of the city, was nearer the Theodosian Forum and the University, and there they had the wedding. With sound of pipe and lute the marriage procession streamed thither, late on a balmy April afternoon. Under the five-domed vaulting and before the great paintings on the iconostasis, the gilded altar screen, Pope Michael met his young friends and pronounced the marriage liturgy. Then, just as the twilight fell, with many of Fergal's new comrades in the guard-corps to bear the torches, forth they set with song and shouting for the little house by the War Department, made ready now for the bridal pair by the special orders of Kasia.

Anthusa walked with her Pera kinsfolk behind the car that bore Fergal and his happy bride. Her own thoughts had been all on Sophia, the innumerable little complexities of the wedding, and how henceforth she, Anthusa, must care more than ever before for her father. Bridal processions were common enough along the streets, and the threatened war had caused many weddings to be hastened, but as they turned into the broad Adrianople Way the torchlight and the singing made many spectators turn to fling them a merry wish or a "Christ bless you!" Then, suddenly as they passed a deep portico, Anthusa was startled on beholding three figures in plain mantles step from among the groups of gazers. The next moment the trio, two men and a woman, had joined the procession, and the woman was at Anthusa's side, whereupon a familiar voice sounded in her ear:

"Keep quiet, girl; don't be scared at us. It's only 'your cousins from Thrace' who want to try the dishes at Sophia's bridal party."

"*Kyria* Kasia—I mean Sacred Majesty," began Anthusa in alarm, only to have a vigorous hand thrust over her mouth.

"Silence, hussy," ordered the old woman energetically, drawing her hood closer with her free hand; "none of that! It's awful at the palace: treated all day like the Panagia, with not a mortal but Leo, and (praise the Saints) also Peter who dares to look me in the eye. Even Michael's learning to scrape and bend double. Suffer us for one night. You see Peter has managed this for us."

"I am glad to see you safe and sound, *Kyria* Anthusa," spoke a man's deep voice now at her side. Well that her gala veil shaded her face from the torchlight. Anthusa had not heard that voice since the parting on the quay at Therapia. She

did not dare to answer.

“*Kyria Anthusa*,” Leo spoke again, “your ‘cousin from Thrace’ did not know of your happy deliverance when he saw you—the day of that procession. Not till that evening did my mother have chance to tell me all. The news filled up an eventful day. You know of course how I rejoice to see you well. And where is my learned friend, your father *Kallinikos*?”

Anthusa knew Leo was speaking with marked constraint and was picking and choosing his words. Her own temples glowed, and she answered with extreme embarrassment:

“He rides in the car with *Sophia* and *Fergal*. He has grown very feeble.”

But here the flute-players drowned all converse with a wild orgiastic melody. Some of the younger men broke from the procession and began leaping about like harmless satyrs. The spirit of the moment was infectious. *Anthusa* beheld Leo snatch a red torch, toss it high and join in the shout and chorus with the rest. Once more she saw in his carnival mood the abandon of the long-repressed schoolboy, momentarily escaped from the master’s rod.

When he returned more decorously to her side she had lost all fear of him, answered gaily, chaffed him upon his rustic clothes, and demanded if “such were the fashions on his new farm in Thrace.” And he gave back like badinage or along with the other wedding guests let his strong voice roll out in deep campfire songs as if on the Phrygian marches. It was all as if they had suddenly renewed the artless intercourse that had prevailed at the House of Peace. *Anthusa* forgot all about *Sophia*, *Fergal*, her father. She forgot that Leo was now *Basileus*. The procession was at *Kasia*’s little house ere she came back to herself.

Kasia’s own gaze was wistful when she gazed around her narrow aula, hers truly no more, but swarming now with *Sophia*’s wedding guests.

“And are you not happy at the palace, dear lady?” *Anthusa* was fain to ask, noting the shadows on the older woman’s countenance.

“Happy?” echoed *Kasia* testily, making her round body sway. “I suppose God’s happy when all the angels prostrate themselves before Him. But unluckily I’m not God. Chamberlains, ushers, silentiaries, and the Master of this and the Logothete of that—under your feet everywhere! And then the vast shoals of women with their mountain-like headdresses, and white veils, and squeaking voices, with the Grand Mistress of the Palace at the head of the whole tribe—a patricianess who wouldn’t have let me touch the sole of her red shoes a year ago! And it’s my ‘Sacred command’ here and my ‘Sacred pleasure’ there—until the next time I’m called ‘Sacred anything’ I vow I’ll scream.”

“And your son?” asked *Anthusa*, laughing her old melodious laugh. “Is he equally bored by the splendour?”

“Leo’s younger and more versed in courtly ways,” confessed *Kasia*. “He says they are the price an emperor must pay for being suffered to do his duty—and he adds something, too (I don’t understand it), about the necessity of imposing upon imaginations of the people. That’s perhaps all right for him, but it’s woe for his poor mother. And even he”—with a sly wink—“I notice enjoys being just plain ‘Leo’ for to-night.”

The Emperor, in fact, was taking obvious pleasure, under his thin incognito, in mingling with the innocent feasters, and joining *Fergal*’s comrades who made merry with the groom and bride. Presently, however, he slipped from them, and *Kasia* took *Anthusa* by the arm and led her aside to where she and her son could hear her entire story; and for the first time Leo knew directly all that had happened, especially since the second kidnapping by *Kannebos*.

Ere she had finished, his great hand had pressed the arm of his chair until the firm wood cracked, and at length he burst forth, “After all, it’s a joy to be an Emperor!”

“And why, bumpkin?” demanded his mother.

“It gives one better power to chase down this infamy. When the Saracens are gone let those who plotted this deed pray for God’s mercy.”

Anthusa crossed herself. “If my sister and I do not pray for vengeance, wherefore should others?”

“Because,” replied Leo bluntly, “you women are sisters to the angels. We men are otherwise. The stroke was aimed at

you, yet was meant for me. I am keenly touched in my honour.”

“I do not understand,” ventured Anthusa.

The soldier beside her shrugged his mighty shoulders. “No matter, tender-hearted *kyria*; it profits not to explain. Despite my boasts just now I can nevertheless do nothing till we have reckoned with the Saracens—and that won’t be to-morrow. Private hopes, private desires, private vengeance—all must tarry. To-night I steal a few moments only from days that all belong to the Empire. But, God willing, there will come a time——”

Not completing his words, he arose with a gesture of deep feeling, and went to Kallinikos, who was gazing somewhat helplessly upon the revellers in the aula. The sage recognized the other, but in the simplicity of his soul was neither abashed nor astonished, promptly recalling aloud that Hadrian had visited the house of the learned Favorinus and Marcus Aurelius had made an intimate of the equally erudite Fronto. With artless delight he explained how, now that his mind was relieved by Anthusa’s return, he projected compiling a “Myriobiblion,” a grand encyclopædia of excerpts from three hundred obscure authors, as the crown of all his researches.

“Then you forsake your physics and crucibles?” asked Leo, with apparent carelessness.

“Indeed, good son,” Kallinikos spoke as he would to a pupil, “I am satisfied that the quests for the philosopher’s stone and for the ring of Gyges are but sinful emptiness. In gratitude for Anthusa’s return I have vowed to pursue them no more.”

“Nevertheless, father,” rejoined the patient monarch, “you recall the improved catapult which hastened our first acquaintance. If now, in this public danger, you could but think of some other military device——”

“I am a servant of the Muses,” repeated the patriarch a little sententiously. “My life belongs to pure learning. Would that my end could be even as that of the admirable Archimedes, who was so intent upon a mathematical problem he could not recall himself enough to answer the Roman soldier, who then, in the anger of ignorance, killed him.”

“Even so,” suggested Leo, “noble learning is in no wise degraded when put at the service of those on whom rests the awful burden of public defence. You have heard constantly of the Saracen peril?”

“Fergal and Sophia talk thereof at table,” confessed Kallinikos, “and even Anthusa seems taking alarm. I observe that her mind is not so well fixed as formerly upon assisting me with my researches.”

“Venerable father,” Leo laid his hand upon the sage’s gown, “it is said to be the privilege of rulers to make request even of the deeply learned. Consider then my words. The Saracen attack will be terrible, more terrible than I dare proclaim lest I demoralize the city. To turn back the High Emir may exhaust our uttermost valour, and the responsibility of saving this vast Christian city and all this Roman Empire is mine. Have pity upon me. Condescend to search the vast treasure house of your mind. Is there no old, nigh-forgotten device, is there no new device of your own inventing, which may make it easier for me to hurl back the alien, to save thousands of Christian lives in battle, nay, perhaps to save from slaughter and sack unspeakably mighty Constantinople itself?”

The eye of the philosopher lighted. Leo knew he was understood.

“Good son,” said Kallinikos, not unmoved, “manifold times am I your debtor. If not with silver or gold, but by the poor harvest of my thoughts, I can repay your vast goodness to me and mine, debtors we shall not stay. Yes,” he touched his forehead, “a thing that flitted across me the other night as Fergal chatted of war comes back again. I recall an experiment. It might prove of use. To-morrow I will go over the old material. I shall postpone the ‘Myriobiblion.’ ” ...

... The wedding party broke up after the guests had shut the bridal couple into an inner room and sung boisterous verses before the door, Leo joining with loud voice in the rollicking chorus. The other guests each imagined, indeed, whom he might be, but just enough warning had been passed to keep them from unwelcome questions. When, however, Anthusa made to accompany her father homeward Leo motioned to her. “Behold! At your service.” And she saw two strong-limbed archers swinging in behind the mule car. Henceforth she understood Kallinikos and she were to be constantly guarded.

Kasia, too, had her aside one instant. She pushed back the kerchief from Anthusa’s head and ran her hand over the younger woman’s shorn locks. “Your cousins from Thrace,” spoke the Empress-Mother, “think your stay at that island

hasn't harmed your looks, but Heaven never made you to be a nun. Let your hair grow, girl. Mind what I say. Let your hair grow."

* * * * *

In the loftiest tiers of the Daphne, Leo and Kasia had settled their private apartments. All the former gilt, silver and citrus-wood furniture had been removed, though not the shining walls of green Thessalian and white Carian marble. The rugs and mosaics were no finer than those in a prosperous merchant's aula, but there was a profusion of flowering plants, and more of the same upon the roof garden whereon opened the high windows.

From this coign of lofty vantage one commanded a sweeping view over half of Constantinople, the Golden Horn, the Marmora and the Bosphorus. Just now the magical darkness veiled alike domes, battlements and hovels. The innumerable twinkling lights, the blending noises from the vast dim city would have produced an eerie effect had mother and son been that night in a mood for romantic contemplation.

Kasia dismissed the cringing silentaries at the door. "Go!" she commanded rudely, puffing vigorously from the many staircases and having positively refused to let herself be carried. Leo followed her, helped to remove her mantle, and set her chair by the open casement, where she could catch the spicy air now wafting up from the Greek Isles and Africa; then he drew a lower stool and sat beside her.

"A very pretty wedding," panted Kasia, fanning herself with her ample hand, "considering the times, and that we couldn't have the festivities here at the palace. Sophia's a charming bride."

"All brides are," asserted Leo cynically, leaning his elbows on the casing and gazing forth into the night.

"I know what's in your mind, boy," continued his mother. "Well, just because you're Basileus, have you got to cease to be a man? Is Sophia's to be the only wedding at present?"

The Emperor let his hands drop with a gesture of helplessness.

"Must I say it again? I am a prisoner, a prisoner of the purple. When only strategos I dared to turn aside from this awful task which God has laid upon me. And I was punished—even as God seems usually to punish, by having sorrow heaped upon the innocent. Now, in vast mercy and to our vaster joy, the saints have relented. She's given back, but how can I, of all men, bring home a bride in times like these, and give the city even one day of festival, when I have just had to close the Hippodrome and warn the people to quit their pleasures?"

"Ah, but she's a wife worth having," returned Kasia, with warming enthusiasm. "Where were your eyes to-night, lad? The nuns cut off her hair, but they put new power and beauty in her face. She's a strong woman now, one to command, one to be a tower of strength to him that gets her. If stern days are ahead you'll meet them the better if——"

"Have I not thought of that! Don't torment me," pleaded her son.

"It needn't be a great state wedding," continued Kasia pragmatically, "a few witnesses before the Patriarch, a proclamation to the court later and the deed is done. You are Basileus and it will all be very lawful."

But Leo sprang up with an unwonted oath:

"No, by the Blessed Cross! Shall I have Constantinople forever sneering, 'The Isaurian wedded his mistress by stealth to avoid vile scandal'? Shall I not protect her? When I give you a daughter, I must give a Basilissa worthy of full honour to the Romans. Every lamp in Hagia Sophia must blaze, the Patriarch must crown her, all the patricianesses kiss the hem of her robe, and all the city shouts its 'Ten thousand years!' Till then God's will be done. My sole bride must be the Christian Empire."

"How long?" asked Kasia, with unwonted gentleness of speech.

"Till the Saracens have come and gone." Leo's speech was very deliberate. "Till the vast incubus of fear which rests on this great city and all the themes has departed. And that cannot be until after swords are red, and ships are shattered, and destroying fires have blazed high; until women and children have wept, and thousands of better men than I have died."

“Yet you do not mistrust the issue,” spoke his mother confidently.

“You remember what Theodora said to Justinian I,” was Leo’s significant reply, “when the Great Seditio raged and their fearful counsellors urged flight: ‘I agree with the old adage, *Empire is the noblest winding sheet.*’ As for me, I do not fear to survive disaster.”

“But the Great Seditio, I’ve heard,” said Kasia, “was crushed, and only many years afterwards Justinian and Theodora lay upon the ‘Bed of Tears.’ ”^[51]

“One must be ready with the price,” returned Leo, leaning again on the balcony and letting his eyes rove over the twinkling vista of the night. After a long reverie he spoke again:

“Sometimes, O Best of Mothers, I have a prophetic mood. You know my love of books. A man cannot have great burdens laid on him and not also sometimes enjoy long thoughts. This Roman Empire doubtless will not last always. This Constantinople cannot be for ever the ‘City guarded of God.’ Long ago the Frankish barbarians tore away the Western provinces. Our last hold on the crumbling relics of Old Rome slips rapidly. The Saracens have snatched Syria, Egypt and Africa. But here in our remaining themes, and wide and rich they still are, survives even yet the culture that was born in Athens and by the Tiber. Here in our provinces and our capital that old culture stands at bay. Ours is the task to maintain it across the years, until the Christian West has caught again its brightness; until the Moslem East has ceased its threat against the entire world. After that—no matter, we must trust to God.”

“My boy is talking like a philosopher!” exclaimed Kasia, scarce able to follow. But Leo ran on, pointing out across the night-bound city:

“O Constantinople, do I not know you well? Hypocrisy and lies are within you. Foul luxury, wanton pride and uncleanness are within you. Arrogance, rapacity and oppression, fanatics and false priests are within you. But within you, too, are honesty, faith, fair learning, manly honour, womanly virtue, noble piety, and seeking after God. I will save you if I can.”

Kasia was touched. Leo was not often in this mood. “Is then the Saracen peril so great?” she asked in tones at last not unmixed with fear.

“So great, my mother, that every day I have one awful consolation. I shall never live to see the moment when you and Anthusa and countless other women pure and good may fall into the hands of the hordes of Moslemah. With the Infidel at the gates there is but one manner for a Roman Basileus to die.” But then he straightened himself and stretched out his hand in solemn oath: “Hear, O Blessed and Holy Trinity, whom the Moslem hordes blaspheme. May my soul writhe for ever in Judas fires if one Hagarine sets foot save as captive in Constantinople. The odds are sore, but not too sore for Christian courage. Bareses and Chioba cannot have spoken in vain. The Power which lifted me from the shepherd’s crook to the sceptre of Empire cannot have done so save for some worthy end. I swear it, Leo the Isaurian, born peasant and now Roman Basileus.”

Kasia touched his face lovingly, and his manner calmed. He bent and kissed her.

“I have frightened you, my mother,” he said contritely. “The Saracens shall never take Constantinople. It will not be I that can turn them back, nor all the ships and the themesmen, but the prayers of such as you, and——” He hesitated, but continued still more softly: “Anthusa.”



CHAPTER XXIV

A COUNCIL AT GALATA

WHEN the hot winds of the advancing summer blew from Africa and Constantinople sweltered in the heat, every breeze brought tidings of the Moslem advance.

“The Hagarines had landed near Samos. From Chios they had dragged all the handsome girls to glut the Syrian markets: the strong city of Pergamum had fallen after a brave defence!” In every barber shop along the Mesē, in every trading stall by the Golden Horn, under the marble porticoes by the Julian port where the pompous advocates had their walk, in every frescoed aula of the noble the might of the Infidel was discussed and magnified. The city grew ominously quiet. The days were at hand which should try men’s souls.

A few recklessly cried out against the new Emperor: “They call him ‘Lion’—where are his teeth and talons?” But most citizens dumbly waited. For centuries Constantinople had been the “City guarded of God,” wherein a million might live, labour, and enjoy in peace, while the professional army for which they paid taxes held fast the frontiers. Now through twenty years of tyranny and anarchy the imperial armies had been nigh torn to pieces, and all the efforts of the Isaurian had not half reconstituted their strength when a foe more relentless than Goth, Hun, or Persian was about to beat upon the gates.

The populace was being levied into huge militia bands, but competent officers watching the recruits struggling through their first spear drills groaned in dismay: “Send those untrained shopkeepers against Moslemah’s dervishes—suicide!” Leo’s Anatolian veterans, of course, made a brave display upon the parade ground. There were also strong mercenary bands of Armenians, Slavs, Lombards and Franks. But when enough reliable troops had been told off to hold the thirteen-mile circuit of the walls, plus Galata and Chrysopolis, there were few enough left for any powerful sortie.

It was the same with the fleet. In the execrable civil war betwixt Anastasius and Theodosius many galleys had been sunk or burned. Now the shipyards rang as never before, but when Basil, after inspecting the dromonds, was asked, “Can the fleet keep the Bosphorus from blockade?” he pulled long on his huge mustachios and answered, “If the Panagia is extraordinarily merciful perhaps there is a chance.”

Therefore to the Isaurian was permitted only one game—to await Moslemah with his own strength unwasted, to train the city bands as rapidly as possible, to risk nothing avoidable, to trust to the mighty walls, and to hope that St. Michael and St. Theodore would in the end give him a chance to strike hard. If he knew when and how he told no one, not even his friend, the new high admiral.

Day after day silent crowds in the Augustæum read the placards on the whitened boards: “The Hagarine ships are at Troas,” and again, “They are entering the Hellespont.” Day after day the praying crowds in the churches multiplied. Many escaped to safe and distant cities. Many more, fleeing from the rich open farmlands of Thrace, made haste to enter Constantinople. Patricians made a last anxious visit to beloved villas to remove their valuables. Great herds of kine were driven inside to bellow in all the fora and other open spaces. Deep-laden grain ships swung down from the north. Strong gangs of labourers wrought upon the walls. Everywhere was seen the Basileus, without pomp, distinguished from his centurions merely by his purple leggings, inspecting, praising, reproving, rectifying, hastening. If he ever was discouraged or dismayed he gave no sign thereof until the doors of Kasia’s rooms closed behind him.

So passed the weeks. One million folk, peace-loving, luxurious, ultra-refined, were making ready, at last, without base panic to plead their cause before the Judge of Battles.

* * * * *

Half way between the squalid Forum of Honorius and the lofty Watch Tower of Anastasius ran the Street of St. Joseph, one of the least filthy thoroughfares in all the squalid suburb of Galata.

A tall wooden house, somewhat lacking in paint, reared itself above its neighbours. The lower front upon the street was occupied by a large wine shop frequented by sailors, and even now (though it was not yet midday) the dice were rattling at one of the little tables as a yellow-polled Bulgarian and a swarthy Cyprian cast for the drink money. In the rear, however, there was a little garden, set with flowering plants in tubs, and a winding stair led to the upper stories,

the outer windows whereof commanded a sweeping view of the Bosphorus and the verdant hills of Asia. Here at one of the casements, his eye not intent on the distant scene, but upon the teeming harbour life, moving almost at his feet, sat a man whom second inspection would have revealed as Evagrius.

“Another dromond has just slid down into the water,” announced he. “Blessed Apostles, where do they find timber for so many new ships!”

“It’ll take more galleys than those to stop Moslemah,” replied Hormisdas, who, somewhat hidden under a very large turban, sat beside him, complacently quaffing rose sherbet.

“It’ll take more wits than you both possess to keep us away from the watch, if you persist in leaning in broad day from that window,” declared Nikosia from a divan. “You may have shaven off your beard, Evagrius, and clipped your hair, but the disguise won’t avail long once the quæstor’s men fairly get you.”

“Truly, my little dove,” replied the ex-deacon impatiently, “you’ve done nought but croak instead of coo since we felt it safe to come back from Ephesus. You know the disorders when Theodosius seized the city made the Collegians drop all their old trails for small game like ourselves; besides, when Leo was proclaimed didn’t he publish a general pardon?”

“Pardon, yes,” retorted the lady, flinging upon the floor the silken panel whereon she was embroidering a Holy Lamb, “as if that Isaurian upstart couldn’t find plenty of pretences for breaking his word and trading out a grudge, once they report to him, ‘Sacred Clemency, we’ve got Evagrius and his friends safe in the Prætorium.’”

“I think you’re right, Nikosia,” assented her companion, withdrawing his head and pulling a curtain over the window, “though the chance of being identified up here’s very slight. The people in the wine shop are of the right kind. They won’t betray us, their rooms are comfortable, the cooking tolerable——”

“*Hei*,” warned Hormisdas, hastily barring the door, “what’s that below?”

The clattering of pike-staves, snarling protests and angry yells, the deep commands of some officer, the rush of feet and furious scuffling were rising together from the wine room.

“Come along, you two fellows!” a voice sounded imperiously. “If you’ve nothing better to do than dicing, your thews can bend at the oars on the ‘Hagia Eirene.’ Don’t struggle; you know you’ve no chance! And take along that tapster’s boy, he’s too strong to tug about nothing but wine pots.”

A volley of oaths and curses intermingled with hoarse laughter told how the press gang was accomplishing its work. After an anxious moment the seamen with their three captives were heard departing noisily down the street. Relative silence prevailed in the tavern, broken chiefly by the lamentations of its keeper at being robbed alike of his myrmidon and his customers.

Nikosia crossed herself with extreme care. “This place makes my heart turn over. What if they’d searched the building? I’ve vowed a candle to St. Demetrios for our deliverance just now. We *must* find a safe lodging.”

“Pray, dear *kyria*,” said Hormisdas in tones smooth as warm butter, “when I urged you, and our most reverend Deacon to return to Constantinople, didn’t I promise that you should be as safe as the holy vessels in Hagia Sophia? Is it my fault you delayed until I was momentarily in Prusa, and so couldn’t take you out to that excellent place near St. John’s monastery, where you’d be so quiet and comfortable?”

“We’re safe for the present,” replied Evagrius in a relieved tone. “They won’t raid this place again for some days. I wish, however, Petronax would come, so we could strike our bargain and get to business.”

“There are things to talk of without him,” declared the slave dealer, rubbing beringed hands; “for example, how did that younger girl of old Kallinikos get back to Constantinople—nay, return with pomp like a magnifico in a state dromond?”

“And how,” retorted Nikosia, “does her sister come back to be the bride of a spatharios?”

“Ah, my dear friends,” laughed Hormisdas good-naturedly, “I see we’re all men and women of the world. I mustn’t fall out with you just because of a few crossings of interest and necessary lies.” His sentence ended in an eloquent

gesture.

“Very good,” smiled Evagrios, “let us drop the past. You promised it would pay us well to come back from Ephesus straight into the lion’s jaws—Leo’s, ha! Is it because you want us to take up the old plot against the girls? I told you at the time that though I wouldn’t soil *my* hands with cruelty, there’s no oblivion like a sack and the bottom of the Bosphorus. Now are we to begin all over again?”

Hormisdas beckoned the man and woman to draw nearer. He cast one glance at the barred door, another at the window. His voice sank to a confiding whisper:

“*Philotatoi*, you know me for a man of versatility, of daring, of genius. You know that I have been in Damascus. Now that we should have to abandon our holy Christian religion the Blessed Trinity forbid——”

“The Blessed Trinity forbid!” echoed the listening pair.

“Yet what if it should *not* forbid?” continued the slave dealer. “I mean, what if it were manifestly the will of Heaven, by the constant award of victory to the Moslems, that we should be forced to invoke Allah and not the Panagia, and call our clergy not reverend Popes but venerable Imams?”

“Impossible!” cried Nikosia in pious horror.

“So be it, I pray,” replied Hormisdas, smoothing his redolent locks. “Still ’tis a wonder how the Hagarines progress. From the first advance of the Prophet unto this hour, not a city, not a province, not a kingdom against which they have truly set themselves has resisted them long—and now, with all their might, they seek Constantinople.”

“Hark you, sirrah,” spoke Evagrios with unwonted energy. “I’m not a squeamish man, but there are some matters at which I balk. If you’re in correspondence with the Hagarines to betray the city, pray to seek other helpers.”

“I correspond with the Infidels? I?” Hormisdas gesticulated in frantic denial. “Am I not the best of the Orthodox? Were not five of my uncles bishops and the sixth an archimandrite? I was merely throwing out that the forces of Moslemah are vast, and that many grow fearful lest he may prosper. Of course in a city like Constantinople there are bound to be *some* well-wishers even for the Infidels.”

A rap on the door sounded. Nikosia reconnoitred hastily through the keyhole, then unbarred. Petronax entered, swinging a smart mouse-coloured chlamys around his graceful person. Nikosia was charmed at his salaams, which would have been fitting before a senatoress. He took the proffered seat on the divan, stirred his sherbet, complimented the lady on her excellent colour (she had rouged most carefully) and remarked on the growing heat of the summer. All this led up to Evagrios’ question:

“And what are the wishes of his Sublimity?”

Petronax cleared his throat with becoming importance. “His Sublimity Paul, you are aware, is a sorely disappointed statesman. Piously, however, has he repeated that verse in Holy Scripture, ‘Put not your trust in princes’; nevertheless, when the Isaurian entered the Sacred Palace my master assuredly expected some tokens of confidence and affection, such as might come fitly from one who was lifted from the dust by his benevolence.”

“They say,” interposed Hormisdas dryly, “that the Isaurian thinks the Master of the Palace only promoted him perforce to silence the demands of the army, expecting a servility he didn’t find in Leo later.”

“Calumny!” Petronax gave a timely whimper. “My master has, of course, his traducers. Well, you know his present plight: relegated to his own mansion; never once summoned to council; his perquisites absolutely dried up. It is even rumoured that if Moslemah’s repulsed he’ll be forced to account for every obol of the public funds he’s handled for many years. As if he were a money-changer’s clerk. Oh, vile humiliation!”

“Gratitude and justice are surely dead,” asserted Evagrios, raising his hands.

“Pitifully true. But coming now closer home, you know that those jades of Kallinikos have escaped. His Sublimity might rail at your mismanagement, but in his generosity he simply commands you to take greater pains another time.”

“The girls are firmly guarded now,” cautiously suggested the slave dealer.

“Fortunately,” answered Petronax, “we can disregard that Anthusa for the present. The Emperor, perhaps, cares for her, but he has become a mere creature of spears and javelins. Till the Moslems are gone he avers he will spend no time on women, and he has been heard to assure several logothetes—who named over certain noble damsels for his august consideration—that until the siege is safely ended he will, under no circumstances, marry.”

“We’ve time, then,” declared Evagrios.

“Yes,” confirmed Petronax, “but time that’s to be used. And his Sublimity has been graciously pleased to entrust me with bearing to you a new and special commission.” Whereat, obedient to his beckoning, all the congenial four drew close together....

... After Petronax had glided off in one direction and Hormisdas in another, Nikosia looked at Evagrios long and cynically.

“I don’t like this,” she remarked, showing again, by habit, her fine teeth.

Her companion shrugged his shoulders. “There’s no danger. The plan’s clever and feasible.”

“I mean this using of Saloma. I know what you’ll be forced to say to the hussy. We ought to have shipped her off to Syria when we had Satyros’ boat.”

“I disagree,” returned Evagrios impolitely. “The girl’s useful in a thousand ways. Just because you’re jealous is no reason.”

Nikosia made a gesture of disgust. “Follow your path, then. I can’t spoil Petronax’s scheme now. But don’t trifle with me again. *Eu!* Call her in, if you will. I suppose I must pretend to be far away.”

The lady therefore disappeared in her own turn through a door. Evagrios had a firm conviction that she was somewhere listening, but the matter disturbed him not. After a suitable interval he clapped his hands, then called, “Saloma!” From a neighbouring chamber the erstwhile farmer’s lass appeared. She was less slender than when she had entered Nikosia’s service. There were a few hard lines about her lips and eyes. She had learned the use of paints and wore cheap ornaments, but Evagrios was not wrong in his mental estimate: “Handsome and still rustic enough to serve the purpose very well.”

“Saloma, my dear,” he began, “Nikosia’s gone to visit a nun at St. Rabula. Aren’t you going to permit me a kiss?”

Saloma hung her head and submitted to his affection, unresisting, but without enthusiasm.

“*Philotata,*” continued the ex-deacon ingratiatingly, “how wonderfully you’ve stuck to me in all my misfortunes! Another girl would have deserted. Don’t believe that I’m ungrateful.”

“You needn’t thank me,” she replied directly, “what else could I do? How could I go home to dishonour my parents when my story would buzz through the whole village? How could I quit you in Constantinople or Ephesus when only the common dens would receive me? Perhaps at St. Gastria would they take me as a nun—a life in death.”

“But now your eyes are going to shine and pop out of your pretty little head. Listen—it’s arranged that you shall enter the service of a very great lady.”

“A rich merchant’s wife?”

“Greater than that.”

“A senator’s wife?”

“Greater than that.”

“Why, then, a real patricianess?”

“Greater than that.”

“By the Panagia, *despotes*, what do you mean?”

“Listen, then, and bless this day. You are to become the hand-maiden of the Empress-Mother.”

“Oh, what a jest!”

Evagrios smiled very benignantly. “I’m wholly serious, my pert little sparrow. Attend closely. You know the new Emperor comes of peasant stock. His mother, the present Sacred Majesty Kasia, is—well, I fear more at home amid cow-pens and hay-ricks than in the halls of the Marble Palace. The regular staff of attendants is in despair about her. She refuses to let them serve her on bended knee, or address her with becoming titles, laughs and jests in a most unimperial manner, and I’m told she actually insisted that his Hyper-Eminence the Proto-deipnotist—the first palace cook, I mean—should suffer her to go into the Sublime Kitchen, where the Sacred Refections, the dishes for the imperial table, are prepared, and make ready, all herself, sundry eggs, because, quoth she, ‘My son likes to have them thus and thus, and none of you, hulking fools, seem to know how!’ Such doings have not been in the palace since Constantinople was Constantinople.”

Evagrios’ voice had worked itself up to a quiver of high emotion. “Well, to cut these horrors short, their Distinguishednesses, the palace menials, have determined for their own peace to seek out a damsel of sufficient rusticity to commend her to the Empress-Mother, and to let her wrestle with the old woman’s august moods as she will. No one with the slightest knowledge of the palace or even of courtly households will answer. It must be a girl smelling of the cow barn—one, no offence, exactly like your comely self. Now, through favouring forces which I needn’t explain, this great honour becomes yours. Very speedily you are to be taken to the palace and become the Empress-Mother’s serving-woman.”

Saloma was duly impressed. Her colour came and went. She breathed quickly. Evagrios feared she was about to faint, but she did not. Then as her flush returned she gave him a look not without shrewdness.

“*Despotes*, if you aren’t telling lies, I know that I’m not to enjoy this great thing for nothing.”

“I enjoy your frankness, girl!” exclaimed the ex-deacon, not without an admiring glance. “Let’s have no misunderstandings. Your position will enable you to overhear much, possibly it may even be conversations between your mistress and her son himself; not, perhaps, at the outset, but after you win her confidence. Be as awkward and rustic at first as you please: it’ll commend you better. What you learn can be passed along to Petronax, who’ll give you new directions. All that will be arranged. Just be discreet and no harm can follow.”

Saloma looked him fairly in the eye. “*Despotes*, the risk of what I’m to do is great. I’m to be rewarded, of course?”

“Certainly, my pretty, certainly; anything within reason. If your plans go well, why, say, a thousand solidi.”

“I don’t mean that,” asserted Saloma meaningly.

“What, then?” Evagrios was not without his suspicions.

“First, I must know what means this plot against the Emperor. I don’t care for this Leo and Kasia, but I won’t ruin my soul by helping betray Constantinople to the Hagarines.”

“Nothing of the kind! On the Blessed Cross, not the least of that, I assure you. Only an ordinary palace conspiracy at most.”

“Very well. But, second, you must swear to make me an honest woman.”

“An honest what?”

“An honest woman, I say. Swear to marry me openly. Swear it upon the crucifix and upon your hope of salvation.”

“I give my solemn word——”

“Your oath or nothing.” Saloma’s voice rose and her gesture was menacing. “You’ve said too much or too little. Swear now or I’ll scream ‘Treason! Help!’ from this window. I’ll not be fooled again.”

“By the Panagia,” vowed Evagrios, not without a fearsome admiration of her pose, “I believe you mean your threat. Well, hearken then.” He pulled from his bosom a small gilt crucifix, kissed it devoutly, and repeated a satisfying number

of imprecations upon himself if he failed to marry Saloma one month after Leo ceased to be Emperor. Upon completion Saloma's hauteur slowly passed. She listened with a certain degree of anticipation to the explicit directions given by her master....

... A few days later the palace menials breathed a sigh of relief. A serving maid, admirably suited to the Empress-Mother's rustic whimsies, had been installed in her chambers and their own aristocratic ears no longer had to be pained too frequently by uncouth commands in uncouth language. Kasia was heard to declare that her new tire-woman was modest, sensible and capable, and she was graciously pleased to commend Petronax (always useful about the palace) for having secured her services.

CHAPTER XXV

KALLINIKOS MAKES AN ANNOUNCEMENT

THE day following Sophia's wedding, Kallinikos dismissed his disciples and once more suspended his lectures upon Plato at the University. The public demoralization made this seem only natural. His colleagues had long sighed over his desultory pedagogic methods even while praising his "absolutely useless learning." Around the academic aula the few youths still trying to study law and mathematics jested slyly as to whether the "Consul of the Philosophers" was going to waste his declining days trying to improve his toy, the aeropile.

The multiplying rumours of the advance of the Saracens seemed to leave Kallinikos as impervious as the recital of the wars of Ninus and Semiramis. However, after spending a number of days in abstracted cogitation in his workroom, broken only by a few manipulations of various strange compounds and crucibles, the sage left his home to bury himself almost literally first in the Imperial Record Office near the Forum of Theodosius, next in the second great public library at the Octagon, near the Augustæum, and finally he requested, through Fergal, official permission (immediately granted) to delve into the secret military archives at the Mangana, the public arsenal.

Amid an atmosphere of yellow papyri and worm-eaten codexes the philosopher lived so incessantly that for days he refused to return home save for very limited slumbers, and Anthusa was constrained to bring him a little food and coax it into him even as he sat amid great piles of books. To the remonstrances of younger associates he replied very simply, "Remember the word of the great Themistios when these libraries were first instituted, 'The souls of wise men are in their wisdom, and the monuments of their wisdom are their books.' The Emperor has laid a great command upon me. How may I discharge it fittingly unless with God's aid I take first to myself all the pertinent knowledge of the ages gone?"

Then he dazed even his gravest colleagues by his rambling citations of Hermes Trismagistos, Zosimos of Panopolis, Dioskoros the high priest of Serapis, and that great master of alchemy Ostanos the Mede.

"It is manifest," spoke one savant to another, "that he is staking all upon discovering the transmutation of metals: a pitiful end for so massive an intellect. It is even as Festus cried unto Paul, 'Much learning doth make him mad!'"

Anthusa heard these whisperings without a frown. No one else knew her father's mind as she. No one else possessed the power to summon him out of his learned reveries and make him return somewhat to the problems of the hour. Then of a sudden (to her great relief) Kallinikos announced that he was finished with the libraries. With a vast quantity of formulas and memoranda, he imprisoned himself again in his own workrooms. Presently his chimney was seen to be smoking night and day, now with thin blue, now with greenish, and now with a densely black vapour. Ephraim was incessantly visiting the Street of Lamps to buy unusual substances. Twice he had to report that none of the ordinary apothecaries supplied the desired articles, but Kallinikos suddenly remembered an elderly Cilician drug seller who kept a little shop in an obscure and filthy quarter of the Pharnar district. Hither went Ephraim and returned with sundry small bags which gave his master joy. So for nights and days Kallinikos continued to live, eat and, at irregular intervals, to sleep in his workrooms, nor did any enter therein save Ephraim and Anthusa.

Sophia at first, engrossed with her new happiness, was very willing to leave her most peculiar parent to her sister, but at length she could return to her old home often enough to realize the situation. The neighbourhood was full of unpleasant gossip. Several times a great blast of flame had been seen shooting from Kallinikos' chimney. The old charge of wizardry had nigh been forgotten as preposterous, but now, most dangerously, it was being revived. An irresponsible Slavic girl in an adjacent house had even sworn by the Panagia that she had peeped through an unbarred shutter and seen Kallinikos in familiar colloquy with an enormous red demon which at intervals discharged his flaming breath up the fireplace.

With good intention, Sophia undertook to penetrate into her father's arcanum. As she flung back the door the sudden gust of air caused a lurid flame to shoot up from the hearth over which the sage was bending. Kallinikos leaped back with singed beard and eyebrows, an uncanny fire-light springing all around him. For one of the few times in his life he cursed roundly: "Out of my way, woman! Was it not by one of your sex, that first sinner Eve, that man forfeited Paradise? Shall now it be because of your insatiable feminine curiosity that Constantinople is delivered over to the Saracen? By Zeus, by Styx, by Chaos and black Night" (Christian and pagan anathemas all mingling together), "except you leave me alone——"

“This is intolerable!” cried Sophia, retreating in consternation and meeting her sister. “We shall have every outrageous suspicion renewed. The monks will storm the house. Even though the Emperor *did* instigate him, that’s no reason for him to work himself distraught. If anything were coming from these perilous experiments they’d have succeeded weeks ago.”

“He says he is making progress,” replied Anthusa simply, “and that if we will only suffer him to work in peace he will save Constantinople.”

“Save Constantinople?” echoed Sophia, with all the contempt of daughterly familiarity. “Alas! our poor father, his mind——”

“You do not understand him.” Anthusa spoke swiftly, holding down her head and with reddening cheeks: “Only I understand him, and sometimes I think—one person else.”

“What do you mean?” demanded the elder sister.

“Let us not argue,” rejoined Anthusa more peacefully, but here Kallinikos threw open his door again. The hearth fire had died. The whole place reeked with the smoke of sulphur and of a mixture of many noxious substances which set Sophia to shielding her eyes and coughing. Kallinikos’ face and hands were coal-black.

“Go, somebody,” he announced with absolute directness, “tell Leo, I mean the Emperor, that my labours proceed well. Now I want him to send me a siege engineer; a man acquainted with the actual use of fireballs, and all the means of casting inflammables, pitch, oil and naphtha, such as they used in the old siege when the Saracens came forty years ago.”

This request was duly transmitted, and presently brought to Kallinikos one Leander, a keen-eyed Lesbian, an engineer at the arsenal, who understood entirely the practical problems of pitched arrows, the flinging of burning hoops, and the devilish utilization of tallow, rosin and turpentine for human destruction. Self-confident and somewhat conceited, however, was the brisk young officer when he entered the workroom. Only the direct intimation from his chief, “The Basileus personally commands this,” made him come quickly and act with outward deference, for Kallinikos’ erudite researches at the Mangana had already become a byword among the subalterns of the technical corps.

“You can find all this in the Emperor Maurice’s *Strategikon*,”^[52] he remarked half rudely, when the sage began to unfold the first of his problem.

“True,” replied Kallinikos, with grave courtesy, “but can you find also this?”

He held before Leander a seared papyrus sheet covered with minute characters.

“I do not understand,” confessed the bewildered officer.

“It is not amazing,” was the calm answer, “that you cannot read Egyptian demotic. A few, however, still can, and I am of that few. I found this among a sheaf of crumbling scrolls upon alchemy. It is by the wise Orsirandes of Memphis, ‘Concerning the Substances Which Take Fire by the Application of Water.’”

“Take fire by water?” cried Leander, looking to see if the savant before him were not already beside himself.

“And why not?” replied Kallinikos dryly. “Every night, when we survey the starry heavens, we behold a greater and a more inexplicable marvel wrought by God. Enough, now, that in my youth I once read this manuscript, and once later I made a slight experiment based upon my recollection of the same, while seeking the philosopher’s stone. But this particular manuscript I originally read in Egypt, as a part of the remnants of the old Alexandrian library, after the scattering of its last nucleus by the Saracens. Then when the Emperor spoke concerning how my poor knowledge might avail against the Infidels, it came to me, ‘Orsirandes’ treatise may also exist in Constantinople, for I knew that the Emperor Constantius caused a vast collection of demotic manuscripts to be brought together. But in which library? Well, in a nigh-forgotten cupboard at your Mangana I discovered it.”

Leander was listening humbly enough now, and grew intent while Kallinikos explained that he had had much trouble to discover which of several possible ingredients certain Egyptian terms had indicated, and how (after sundry experiments) he had “humbly conceived that the sage himself was wrong in one very important matter.” Nevertheless, he had persevered until at length he desired “a more practical knowledge of how inflammables could be utilized in war, for

many things which blaze fairly in a crucible might smoulder under the gross circumstances of battle, and when used by unskillful hands.”

So Leander stayed with Kallinikos until late into the evening, and went away sorrowful (for he was a man of honest mind) at the manifest insignificance of his own learning, and also a little regretful that stern professional demands had kept him from more than formal greetings with the philosopher’s “very pretty daughter.” To an acquaintance who rallied him on “having to waste his time at the Emperor’s whim on that old dotard,” he answered flatly, “I will tell you something—that ‘old dotard’ of yours is no fool.”

But after Leander departed Kallinikos resisted all Anthusa’s earnest appeals to take rest.

“The time is upon me, girl,” he told her, with unwonted sternness. “What are food and sleep when God is reading unto me a new page from the great book of His truth? As spoke Nehemiah unto his hindering foes, ‘I am doing a great work, and wherefore should the work cease whilst I leave it?’ ”

So she merely coaxed a little bread and wine into him, then, excluding even Ephraim, he shut his door. Listening outside, Anthusa could hear him handling his boxes, vials, mortars and pestles with the dexterity and speed of inspired genius. The night advanced. All the servants went to bed, save only the grey old steward, who took his chair and nodded opposite to Anthusa at the entrance to the workroom.

She gathered Lethe into her lap, while Tobias snuggled, purring, at her feet, but presently both cats were sleeping peacefully, and the only sound was the rasping ticking of the great clock in Kallinikos’ rooms, save when the sage himself rattled about at his task. Outside the house, at long intervals, the watch called off the hours, or huddled groups of street dogs rose to yelp when something disturbed them, then sank again in slumber. At last Anthusa dozed in her chair. She was again on the Isle of Cedars and Symeon the Hermit was engaged in his eternal diatribes against female flummeries, when she woke to hear her father noisily opening his door.

By the night lamp Kallinikos looked a very Ethiop to the tips of his tangled and usually snowy beard. His eyes were gleaming with preternatural brightness. He held in one hand a large ball of a soft, pasty substance which he flourished above his head in sheer excitement. Both cats leaped up in fright.

“In the words of the immortal Archimedes,” he cried, with shaking voice, “*Eureka!* ‘I have found it!’ *I can save Constantinople!*”

“What has happened, *despotes?*” demanded Ephraim, rubbing his eyes.

“Come, come!” Kallinikos veritably shouted. “Behold!”

With his free hand he dragged Anthusa into the workroom. The lamps were flickering low in their sockets, casting a fitful gleam over the dark presses, the sculptured busts, the tables crowded with vials, boxes, bags and alembics. Anthusa saw, with some surprise, that there was no fire upon the capacious hearth, although the admixture of noxious smells was almost overpowering. Kallinikos forced his marvelling daughter close beside the fireplace, seized an iron rod and poked vigorously among the ashes.

“You see,” he asserted, “all is cold—no fire, no sparks even.”

Anthusa nodded, still wondering. Familiar as she was with her father’s moods and methods, for an instant she was fearful that his ill-wishers were right—that his intellect at last had failed him. Ephraim looked on with loyal helplessness. Kallinikos flung the dark, pasty substance he had grasped into the farthest and securest corner of the hearth, and Anthusa thought that now she understood.

“You would try a new and better fireball,” she asserted. “We can get a taper for lighting it from one of the lamps _____”

“Not so, girl,” ordered her father imperiously. “Behold the wonderful secret of God revealed for the deliverance of this great Christian city from the Infidel—see!”

As he spoke she saw him thrust a brass dipper into a convenient bucket, and splash the contents over the inert mass he had just placed amid the ashes.

Ephraim wrung his hands in sheer dismay. "He brings water instead of fire. Verily the *despotes* is mad. Alas! my poor master."

But Kallinikos was bending towards the hearth, with even the chuckle of a childish anticipation. When, however, Anthusa leaned nearer, and her thin robes swept close to the ashes, he plucked her suddenly away, leaping back himself.

"Keep afar!" he cried. "Danger! Look!"

At his words there was a puff of smoke from the hearth corner, then a thin blue flame, whereupon the workroom shook and all its cases rattled as with a muffled explosion. A great volume of fire sprang out into the room in a single terrifying blast, next roared away up the chimney. The explosion passed, but the flame itself seemed leaping higher and higher. They could hear the frightened pigeons scurrying on the roof, and from the street the awakened dogs set up a howling. Anthusa, by first instinct, made for the water bucket. "What have you done, father? The fire is leaping above the chimney! The thatch is in danger even if the bricks do not grow red-hot. We will have the night watch on us immediately." And she lifted the bucket. But the philosopher forced her away and stood regarding his fearsome handiwork with unconcealed pride.

"Water, daughter? Would you have the flames shoot up beyond all control? But witness!" He seized a small ladle and tossed its contents of water on the fire. A perilous volume of flame shot once more into the room. The fire seemed doubled.

But now there was a beating at the door. Ephraim admitted frightened maids and serving boys. "It's all true!" screamed a half-dressed Armenian scullion. "He's got a familiar spirit. I can see the fiend raging on the hearth."

"Father," pleaded Anthusa frantically, "I at least can smell charring wood if you cannot. Quench this fire immediately or call in help."

Kallinikos turned to the terrified group with the professional wave of the lecturer completing a neat syllogism. "You have seen. You can testify. Now behold something else." From a copper beaker he took a pale liquid which Anthusa did not recognize. "Look you all!" He cast the liquid into the raging heat. A terrific rush, now of gas and smoke, drove every person save Anthusa and himself from the room. The flame died almost instantly. Soon the hearth contained only a few glowing and harmless coals, although the pungent vapour long rendered the workroom nigh uninhabitable.

"*Eureka!*" cried Kallinikos, in renewed triumph. "Send for Leo. Tell him that I can save Constantinople."

The fire had been quenched just in time to prevent an inroad by the nightwatch with buckets, hooks, hand pumps and axes. Ephraim pulled himself together just sufficiently to convince the decarch that there was no real danger, although that sergeant went away vowing that the monks were right, after all—the old wizard had obviously called in the devil, and the blaze had come when the latter popped up the chimney.

Anthusa at length persuaded her father to wait until dawn, and then a message was sent to Fergal which he was to pass further at discretion. Kallinikos fretted about impatiently, but not in vain. A little before noon a plainly painted wagon with closed curtains halted before the House of Peace, and two passengers descended, their cloaks muffled closely about them. They were Leo and Basil.

Little time was wasted in salutations. Kallinikos greeted the Emperor and the High Admiral perhaps a little less courteously than he had formerly greeted the spatharios and the dromond captain. The joy and pride in his discovery nigh overwhelmed him. For some moments he left his guests bewildered while he confounded them with a mass of learned details, then at last he calmed enough to take them to his workroom, to place another small mass of the fateful compound upon the hearth, and submit it again to the marvellous ordeal of water. The explosion, the intense flame, the new ferocity after the second wetting, the fire leaping almost beyond control, the sudden extinguishment—all these were repeated. When again the officious watch officer appeared at sight of the smoke and flames he was astonished to be met on the threshold by a tall Protector dismounted from the wagon, and the order: "Keep your distance, sirrah, and for your own good don't ask who's inside."

Long and careful were the conversations betwixt sage, monarch and admiral. When Leo emerged from the workroom his own hair and person reeked with the smoke, and he blinked with smarting eyes in the sunshine, but his carriage was buoyant, the curl of his lips confident, he seemed possessed with a great delight. Anthusa had retired to her own

chambers, but Leo directly sent for her. When she came, she made to do him reverence; with an imperious gesture he checked her, then, stepping directly before her, bent and kissed her hand, saying:

“Suffer me in one place at least to be myself and not the Basileus. Remember that in this house my mother and I are always ‘your cousins from Thrace.’ Have you seen your father’s invention?”

“Yes, Sacred Clemency, or, if you command it, *kyrios*; but is he not mad? Can this substance truly save Constantinople?”

“Not without the added valour of man and the favour of God; but answer me, nevertheless, this: If the King of the Lombards were to send twenty thousand stout troops to succour Constantinople what ought we to say of him?”

“I suppose he ought, if he desired it, to receive a golden statue set in the Augustæum.”

“Gracious *kyria*, I tell you this. No twenty thousand sword hands, the best from Frankland to Armenia, can avail so much as your father’s discovery if only he can prepare sufficient of his new substance in time. War is not merely a thing of scimitars, brawn and valour. All these the Saracens have, matching our best and I fear in greater numbers. But now in mercy the Panagia adds to the strength of our army’s sword the power of your father’s brain. Maintain the clearness of his vision, the health of his body. That task is yours, as truly as it is mine to look to the walls, the ships and the thememen. Then all the world shall know how far the Christian mind surpasses the Moslem spear. Yet let him haste with the work; we have only four weeks more. When I accepted this great task I knew that God would send His helpers. That trust I am confident is about to be fulfilled. More than ever I know this—I can save Constantinople.”

... That afternoon a draft of Protectors headed by a firm but tactful spatharios suddenly appeared at the House of Peace. The officer exhibited an order written in purple ink in the Emperor’s own hand to convey Kallinikos, all the contents of his workroom, and, in short, his entire household to a convenient dwelling inside the compound of the Mangana. The protests of the sage were overcome by gentle violence. The guardsmen gathered everything in his dwelling into ready carts and proceeded away with marvellous rapidity. The second house had been completely cleared of its old occupants and Leander had been directed to prepare for Kallinikos a workroom equipped with every device or ingredient for which he breathed a desire. At his disposal were to be all the artificers and engineers at the arsenal. The philosopher, of course, complained bitterly, but the second day found him partly reconciled. The third saw him deep in the process of preparing a new quantity of the “Maritime Fire,” as the name ran among his few initiates.

A cordon of guards of unimpeachable fidelity surrounded Kallinikos. Only his children, Ephraim, Leander and the latter’s technical assistants had access to him. Of course, some curiosity was aroused. Spiteful monks spread the rumour that the Emperor had employed “that wizard” to defend Constantinople by mobilizing a whole theme-force of demons. Perhaps, too, a certain palace attendant informed certain outsiders that the Empress-Mother seemed to believe her son possessed some remarkable secret which would greatly assist the defence. However, when an unlucky Egyptian boy was caught lurking too much near the Mangana he was ostentatiously hanged at the Galata ferry landing, and an over-prying Cretan sailor underwent the same fate in the Amestrian Forum. All this made espionage too risky for treachery and bribes. Kallinikos continued his work uninterrupted.

One month after the sage had summoned Leo, the first Saracen hulls were seen against the shimmering sky-line of the Marmora.^[53]

CHAPTER XXVI

THE COMING OF THE SARACENS

THE fifteenth of August, 717 A.D. Through a closely guarded postern in the Golden Gate pricked a messenger on a blood-spattered steed. Right up the thronging Mesē he charged, the crowds parting in panic before him. He stayed in the Theodosian Forum only long enough to shout, "The Hagarines are past Rhegium; you will see them from the walls before night." Then the bronze valves of the Chalke were flung wide, as he rode straight into the palace. It needed neither the placard in the Augustæum nor the call of the heralds to speed the word to the remotest corner of Constantinople, "The Saracens have come!"

Through all the seven public gates streamed now the last piteous companies of the Thracian peasants, fond and foolish villagers who had trusted to the Panagia to hold their peaceful fields inviolate. Old men and children they came, youths, girls and old women, their little carts piled high with household gear, seeking the refuge in the great city. All the gardens and available areas were thrown open to them, and the nuns and charitable women wrought zealously; nevertheless many scenes were pitiful.

... So at last the dread hour had come. The Hagarines were about to set their impious might even against the "City guarded of God." Men and women met and talked in low whispers, but there was no panic. Hitherto the authorities had indulged in little military display. Now the palace and barrack entrances were opened and the thousands of the garrison paraded towards the walls. The sight of the theme cavalymen in full coats of burnished mail, the flaunting of standards above proud infantry divisions who called the old legions their forbears, the confident stride of the heavy files of the gigantic Frankish axemen, Leo's newest mercenaries, made the hearts of the women grow bigger. When the heralds blew again in the fora and proclaimed, "The foe is at hand. All is provided; remember you are Romans!" there were answering cheers from the dark masses of listeners.

Late in the afternoon another common impulse surged through the city. Everybody spoke it together: "To the seawalls." By tens of thousands the people mounted the five miles of lofty ramparts along the Marmora from the Palace Compound to the Golden Gate.

The military indeed sternly barred access to the walls nearest the Bosphorus, but from far down the fortifications the spectacle was spread out in perfect clearness. The red August sun was dropping slowly and sending a tawny brightness and haze over the Bithynian hills. Small flocks of birds flapped by on lazy wing. A few venturesome fishing craft were now flying back into the Theodosian and Julian havens under full oarage. Along the great brown promenades upon the ramparts, the multitudes spoke in tense whispers. No laughter, no excited shouting. It seemed otherwise greatly like a thousand other luxurious afternoons when half Constantinople had gathered to view the changing lights upon the Marmora, to discuss the next sports at the Hippodrome, or perchance to plan water pageants to Therapia or Kartalimen. But there was scanty trade for the few comfit and sherbet vendors who were untimely enough to hawk their wares. All the little tables by the wine shops under the walls were vacant. Like men transfixed stood the thousands, all outstretching their fingers as at some archangel's summons, and speaking one word, each to his neighbour: "*There!*"

First, merely a few brown dots lay on the gleaming horizon; then the sun caught fairly the red and yellow sails while the mild southwest breeze carried them onward. To straining eyes at length became revealed the massive hulls, masts like forests, sails like the plumage of enormous water-fowl, and scores, nay hundreds, of rising and falling oar-banks like the advancing feet of uncanny sea-monsters. "This is but the van of Moslemah's fleet," ran the awestruck whisper; "they say at the Palace he has of ships great and small full eighteen hundred."

The strange array drew nearer. Hopes there were that round the Palace Point would swing the dromonds pent up in the Golden Horn, to teach what it meant to violate waters which girded the imperial city, but no Roman beak was visible. In perfect silence from the walls the Moslem armada approached the capital—one mile, half a mile, a bare two stadia. By this time from the nearest walls the Saracen decks were distinguishable. One could even see the whip-masters going up and down the gangways among the toiling rowers, and at last came clearly the deep "Ha!" and ever again "Ha!" of the naked wretches as they delivered each stroke. Now also arose the din of drum and cymbal, clarion and dulcimer, lifting defiance and mingling with the unearthly yells and defiance of the seamen on prow and poop.

"*Ya, Allah! Ya, Allah! Allahu akbar!*" And next came shrill voices calling over the waters in bad Greek, "Make ready for your guests, Christians. Trick out your prettiest daughters!"

The walls, however, for long endured in silence. Wiseacres whispered to the timorous, "The currents make an attack on the Marmora side impossible. No danger now. It's the other fronts we have to dread." Nevertheless, there were many anxious glances towards the towers nearest the straits. The Roman pennons were drifting idly. Not a soldier seemed in sight. The defenders of Constantinople were apparently blind and deaf with the defiant foe at their very thresholds. At last murmuring arose among the watching citizens. "The Lion? Where is the Lion?" muttered one group to another; and there was even the derisive query, "But *is* he a Lion? Where to-day are his fangs?"

Emboldened by the immunity, at length one Saracen galley swept her long banks nearer the battlements, to the very shadow of the twin towers guarding the entrance to the Julian Haven. A noble trireme,^[54] her hundred and seventy oars leaped in disciplined rhythm. The turbans and kaftans of her officers, half covering their gilded armour, flashed colour from her stern. Venturing to the edge of arrow-range, she advanced arrogantly, and a tall warrior leaped upon her bulwark. His white turban gleamed with gems: "A great emir, an Omiad prince," whispered many.

"God is one!" rang his defiance in Greek. "He begetteth not and is not begotten. He hath no son or companion. Deceive not yourselves. Issa was only a prophet; lo! now his mission is void. Mohammed hath superseded him. Look on the True Believers' might. Your Carpenter will not save you. What does He now?"

Suddenly from the crest of the nearest tower thundered a great voice—Basil's. The admiral stood forth alone, erect against the sky-line. His curved sword waved brightly above his head. By sea and land all looked on him.

"What does the Carpenter now?" he trumpeted. "I will tell you. *He is making a coffin.*"

The sailor's long blade sank. At the signal with a rattle and crash an apparently solid piece of the parapet beside him collapsed inward. A second rattle: An enormous wooden arm, like the black limb of some unloosed Titan, was seen swinging over counterweight and pivot. Far away could be heard the hurtle and rush of a great stone flying squarely towards the trireme.

The missile crashed with bloody ruin into the closely-packed oar-bank, even while the helmsmen vainly strove on their steering paddles. A second swinging arm, a second stone and even better aimed. It smote down the knot of officers upon the poop. There sounded the rending of solid timbers and white splinters flew out as under a woodman's axe. A third catapult: The missile drove through the solid gunwales, crushing in the side like an eggshell. The trireme reeled in a kind of agony. Her oars trailed in confusion as the rowers rushed frantically from the benches. A moment more and she was seen lurching in her death flurry.

A consort had dashed forward to succour her, but the swinging arms had been instantly twisted back. A dozen other catapults suddenly upreared themselves in action. A stone struck the boarding bridge hung between the masts of the second galley and dashed it to fragments. She swerved ignominiously, leaving the first victim to her fate, while the whole Moslem fleet made desperate efforts to get beyond range of the terrible engines and were soon under full power flying back to the Isles of the Princes.

The walls quaked with the salvos of cheering, as Roman boats shot out from the Julian Haven to rescue the struggling Moslems as the low waves closed over a noble hull. When had been counterstrokes more dramatic? When catapults with such unearthly power and range? Having contributed nothing to the success, but feeling now very brave, the multitude was quite ready to cry, "Slay the enemies of God!" when Basil's pinnacles brought the half-drowned prisoners ashore; but the admiral's men beat back the gesticulating monks and screaming women. "Softly, good people," enjoined a master-pilot, "dead captives answer no questions. These fellows may be worth to us their weight in gold."

But all baser emotions were easily drowned in the general rapture which seized the thousands at this first success won under their very eyes. "The Panagia is with us! St. Theodore is with us! Did you not see the claws of our Lion?" Thus friend to friend and neighbour to neighbour. And as the Saracen ships were seen slinking away to some anchorage down the Marmora, the vast tiers of humanity along the seawall began chanting together a thunderous doxology:

"Glory to the Father, and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost,
As it is now, and ever shall be, unto the Ages of Ages! Amen."

So the populace returned to their homes to take fickle courage, as if the crowding peril were over, and to boast complacently upon "Our marvellous victory," while Basil still stood on the seawall, scanning the retreating hulls and

saying to Fergal, “They are many, many; but they become one less. Your father-in-law’s catapult was not vain. They’ll shun our Marmora ramparts now as they should the devil. We’ve put only a drop in the bucket to-day, but it’s the drops that make the Bosphorus.”

* * * * *

Basil and Fergal later found Leo in Kasia’s apartments at the summit of the Daphne. The Emperor had already witnessed from afar the success of the new catapult. When the admiral entered, Leo ran to him with delighted laughter and seized the sailor’s powerful hands in his own quite as mighty.

“*Euge!* They’ve learned their first lesson, I warrant,” cried the Isaurian. “It’ll hearten our people—that’s the main thing. I thank you, Basil. Nought was ever concealed better. How is the great chain across the Golden Horn?”

“Lysis reports it is firmly stretched under his own orders. We have taken some good prisoners. Shall I examine them?”

“Yes, but no tortures. They are brave men. And you, Fergal, how do Kallinikos and Leander prosper with their work?”

“Some of their ingredients are hard to prepare; nevertheless, they make progress. They’ll have enough in ten days,” returned the young Spatharios.

“Good again, but Michael had better double his prayers that the Hagarines are dilatory in trying to force the Bosphorus. We must spare nothing to make them cautious. As for the city, take my dutiful wish to the Patriarch that the ‘Sleepless Monks’ of St. John, who chant in relays day and night, remove from their convent to Hagia Sophia and there maintain their office. It will help to steady the women.”

Leo’s eye was alight, his step resilient. Grave of wont to his subordinates, in this hour of absolute crisis his manner became one of easy comradeship. He seemed even gay. His words were the words of a man who has anticipated all things and is the master of his fate. When Basil and Fergal bowed themselves out of his presence, the admiral delightedly turned to the Celt. “What a leader to have at once for Basileus and for friend. Who cries ‘fail!’ when he’s commander?”

But with the door once shut behind them, Leo swung himself towards Kasia, who had been watching her mighty son with gaze at once admiring and puzzled. He laughed again, but not with the laugh of recklessness.

“This is the day, mother mine: the day for which I have lived and moved and had my being since that day when I became Protector. God has us all—Moslemah, the Kalif, Basil, I—all the rest of two vast empires—spread out upon His own great gaming board. Whither will He move each one of us next? One thing at least men can say of your Lion. Not for little things has he tried to live. Not for little things is he now prepared to die.”

“Don’t speak of dying,” commanded Kasia, crossing herself a little superstitiously. “It’s a very bad omen. Basil has won a great success.”

“Just enough to make the emirs hesitate, and to put our own populace in good heart. That’s all I counted on. The sparrows of course must twitter upon their ivy when the thunderbolts are soon to follow. Moslemah must be suffered to prepare his bolt until——” A faint rustle sounded from the end of the long chamber. “What’s that girl doing yonder?”

Kasia smiled contentedly. “That’s my new treasure, Saloma—the first decent wench I’ve had in this accursed palace. Reminds me of the old days.”

Leo shot upon Saloma a glance which seemed to that startled damsel to penetrate to her back lacings. With a single gesture he sent her trembling out of the apartment. “If joy she gives you, O my mother, then joy she gives to me, but remember, *philotata*”—he laid a cautioning touch on Kasia’s shoulder—“the Sacred Palace isn’t our dear Mesembrian farm. We aren’t obeyed here because we’re loved but because we’re feared. The walls have ears and the pavements eyes. Paul the Eunuch seems fangless now, yet always beware of snakes. Some day——”

The door was swung open by Peter. The Chief of the Protectors clanged across the floor in his full armour, and saluted.

“Sacred Clemency, smoke is rising from the outside villages. Great clouds of dust are seen along all the roads as of advancing thousands. Turkoman cavalry are exchanging arrows with our outposts.”

Leo clapped on a plain steel helmet. “It’s time for them. Take all the guard to the Palace of Anastasius at Blachernai. I will go with you.”

“An assault—so soon?” Kasia’s withered lips quivered slightly.

“No, mother mine, grievous partings can wait awhile”—and, heedless of the gazing officer, the Emperor bent his martial bulk and kissed her: “To-night at worst it’s only an embassy they will probably send me. But I must go to show the Hagarines the face of a Cæsar.” ...

... Leo was right. Just as the summer shadows grew long, a little tambour of horsemen rode down the Selymbrian Way to the outworks before the land walls. The riders were tall warriors in costly panoply and of haughty mien. Their jet-black steeds were fierce stallions from the deserts. However, they carried their lance heads inverted, and when the Roman sentries came in sight their trumpeter blew a shrill parley. A Roman trumpet answered immediately, and a Christian officer in jangling mail advanced from the palisades and saluted ceremoniously. “Your mission?” he demanded in clear Arabic. The Moslems were amazed to hear a red-headed spatharios speak with an accent worthy of the kalif’s divan, but their leader announced, “I am the *Kaid* Sukaina. I bear a message from the Emir of Emirs to your Emperor.”

Fergal saluted again. “Your coming is expected. My august master the Basileus is at the fort at Blachernai. He commands me to conduct you to him.”

Sukaina glanced about him. “And my escort, where can they wait me?”

“They all go with you,” rejoined Fergal with haughty generosity. “The orders are not to blindfold them. Let each man gaze with both eyes.”

The doors in the timber outworks were flung wide. The Kaid and his troop passed inside the palisades, next clattered over an enormous drawbridge. Under their feet at a giddy depth was swirling the water from a dozen aqueducts as the great moat was flooding.

Before them, and involuntarily striking awe into their very marrow uplifted the double wall of Theodosius II: lines upon lines of gigantic towers and ramparts as far as the eye might reach—dark, brown or grey under the evening light, here covered with greenery, here grim and bare, everywhere defiant and adamant: the outer wall one-and-thirty feet in height and thirteen in breadth, the inner wall six-and-thirty and thirteen. Seventy-eight flanking towers upreared above the outer barrier, one hundred and sixteen, loftier and stronger than the first, above the inner. Beside each of the seven public gates and the seven military gates rose mightier towers still. Clear across the four miles from the Golden Gate to the heights of Blachernai upon the Golden Horn ran the imperial bulwark; and Fergal, riding at Sukaina’s side, saw the dark eyes of the Saracen nigh starting from his head, and noted the admiring and half-affrighted glances shot from Moslem to Moslem in the embassy. It was as if to that self-confident, plunder-lusting band a voice had spoken from above: “To this barrier have come Goth, Hun and Avar in insolence and might, despising ‘effeminate’ New Rome; but one and all they have turned back discomfited. And are ye better and braver men than they? Hither, O Invader, shalt thou come and no farther, and here shall thy proud waves be stayed.”

Fergal led them in thoughtful silence along the broad paved road betwixt the outer and inner walls. Everywhere above the Kaid’s head were moving spearpoints and helmets. Loud rose the clatter and bustle of thousands at martial toil. They halted often to give way to squadrons of cavalry or heavy phalanxes of pikemen. Dimly now against the twilight skies could be seen the gaunt arms of mighty casting engines, such as had dashed the trireme to her doom.

“You have come far, my *Seyd*,” spoke Fergal to the chief ambassador, “to behold Constantinople. Let nothing escape you. Bring a full report to your High Emir.”

“Wallah!” cried the Saracen, overwhelmed at last, “is your Emperor such that he fears not to reveal his full power to his foes?”

“The Lord of Constantinople need conceal nothing from man or God. Remember also that he is called the Lion.”

Three-quarters of the compass of the land wall thus had been traversed when under torchlights the envoys and their

guides clanked up the steep way to Blachernai, the northern citadel overlooking the Golden Horn. Here in what had once been a summer palace of Anastasius I and what was now a stark castle, Leo was waiting his expected guests. The envoys had heard much of the silken grandeur of the imperial court. They were prepared for a hall of state and for long-robed magnificoes surpassing the splendours of Damascus; but Fergal ushered them now into a long gallery with red cressets flaring over walls of bare stone, and barer pavements. The place was packed with armed men, and betwixt two lines of spears the messengers were led to a low dais where on a crude chair sat a figure in plain black armour with unadorned steel helmet. Only his purple leggings told his rank, although above the chair as a kind of baldachin hung a great oblong of black damask blazoned in the centre with a golden eagle, its pinions outspread. At the right of the seat stood the High Strategos Artavasdos, at the left Basil, both with drawn swords and silvered armour. Behind the chair, impassive as northern rock, stood twenty gigantic Frankish mercenaries, the blond braids of their long hair mingling with the gold on their shields, while they leaned on the sledge-like *franziskas*, their native battle-axes.

The Saracens advanced boldly to the foot of the dais, brave men exchanging glances with the brave. Then Sukaina and his companions gravely bowed their turbans low and stood with folded arms awaiting the imperial behest.

“You are welcome, Seyids,” spoke Leo mildly in good Arabic. “You were expected. My service on the Cilician Marches has taught me your tongue. In other days how gladly we would exchange the pledges of friendship, but I know your master enjoins haste. Make known your mission.”

The Kaid sought a supporting glance from his two chief associates; then drew from his bosom a scroll. “Great Lord of Rome,” he began in very fair Greek, “your pride and valour are known to us. What answer you may make is already recorded on the scrolls of the all-seeing Allah; nevertheless, inasmuch as Mohammed the Apostle (on whom be peace) undertook no war against Syria and Persia until he had first summoned the rulers thereof to confess El Islam, or, failing that, to submit themselves to the Faithful, we now are come to transmit to you this message from the seal and hand of the Kalif himself.”

“Read forth,” commanded the monarch, “and let no man presume to interrupt the Kaid’s speech, however arrogant his words.”

Sukaina shook out the scroll, and tossed his head boldly:

“Solyman, Lieutenant of the Lieutenant of Allah, Sovereign from the Sea of the West to the River of India, the Shadow of the Most High, the Dispenser of Thrones and of Destruction, to Leo calling himself Emperor of the Romans, his slave:

“Deliver unto me the city of Constantinople, too long withheld from the servants of El Islam. Make wide its gates before my vice-regent, the Emir of Emirs Moslemah. Then shall my benignity grant unto your people clemency, the enjoyment of their families, and of a half of their wealth, and, should they persist in their error, the offices of their Christian religion. And for you, O Leo, I promise a garden of delights, riches, a robe of honour, and a place exalted among the greatest of my emirs.”

The reader paused, and Leo smiled enigmatically. “I am overwhelmed,” he responded, “by the Kalif’s generosity beyond all expectations. But if we accept not his proffer?”

Sukaina let his voice rise:

“But, if confident in your Issa, whom ye miscall God, but who was merely a prophet and who died not upon the Cross as ye pretend, ye harden your hearts against this my magnanimity and resist my servants, think not to cry for compassion again. Verily, as Allah is Deity alone and hath stretched out the heavens like a tent and the earth like a tent cord, for all your men of war is reserved foul death. And this shall be the fate of your city: Your old men and women we will take to die toiling in bondage in a far country; your youths we will make our eunuchs, your maidens our concubines. Your silver, your gold, your dwellings we will make a spoil for the Faithful. Your churches will we make mosques and your monasteries dunghills. Boast not in your pride. From the days of the Prophet have we not gone forth conquering for ever? And wherein are ye better than all the kings from Yezedgerd the Persian to Roderick the Goth who set themselves against the hosts of El Islam and lo! the Gehenna fires have closed over them?”

As the Kaid closed, despite the Emperor's injunction, there was a terrible murmuring all down the closely-packed hall. Spears tossed wildly, and the Frankish giants lifted high their axes, but Leo quieted them all with a gesture and his voice was even mild:

"*Seyd Sukaina*, you are a gallant officer. No light thing you know you dared when you came to read that scroll to a Roman Basileus' face. In a happier day I would study to be your friend. At present when you depart I command that a dalmatic of crimson silk be given you, and a hundred solidi be distributed among your followers." The Saracen bowed himself to the pavement. "And now"—Leo rose in black might and dashed his long scabbard upon the flagging—"take back this answer to your commander: A Roman Emperor makes no unworthy threats. You have seen our walls. Come and storm them. You know where lie our ships. Come and take them. When near the Lion's den beware his sudden leap. And, answering the blasphemies against our holy religion, hearken with both ears. May God cut me off from Salvation and Christ Jesus deny His pity if I receive again envoy from your emir save as he would plead for safe retreat; and he who comes for other purpose I swear to set his head above the Golden Gate. Think not that because our God spoke 'Peace,' and your false prophet cried 'War,' we Christians know not how to fight. You have come from far to wage your Djihad. Make sharp your blades, recite your Koran, cry loud to Allah—you will need his mercies."

And so the embassy was gone, with only an iron discipline keeping the Protectors' swords from hewing the insulters in pieces. But Leo smiled approvingly once more when Fergal later came in with his report after escorting Sukaina out through the Fountain Gate.

"Sacred Clemency, they never ceased marvelling until I quitted them. They believe we possess countless numbers, and I heard them muttering, 'Beware a sortie before we have fortified our camp.'"

"That will give time," quoth the Emperor; "time for Kallinikos, and two weeks of his work are now worth more than all the revenues of all the themes."

Then with a chosen few, ardent young officers whom he had inspired with his own high courage and who at one word would have died for him, he ascended the dizzy summit of the Tower of Baktagion by the Gate of St. Romanos, the key to the defence. Far below over the night-clasped Thracian plain spread out numberless strange lights, campfires answering the calmer glitter of the stars. Out of the darkness rose the discordant sounds of drums, flutes, trumpets and timbrels, the chanting of outlandish battle-songs, the clash of armour, the jingling of chains, the snorting of buffaloes, camels and horses, the shrill "Ahu! Ahu!" of savage Tartars, the loud accents of ulemahs exhorting the true believers, the deep shouts of "Allah" in response—all confounded in one terrible and warlike noise.

Priest was not by the Emperor, nor crucifix, but Fergal standing near saw Leo raise his hands unaffectedly against the night and pray aloud: "O Lord, the enemies are come at last. On my hand, my tongue, my brain rests under Thee the life and death of all this Thy Christian empire and city. The power of the foe is vast, and all the devils in Hell rage to befriend them. Send down Thine angel, Lord, as when Sennacherib encompassed Jerusalem of old, or quickly take away my life that I may not see the pure and holy mastered by the impious and vile."

CHAPTER XXVII

THE EMPEROR SPEAKS FOR THE MAN

THE destruction of the trireme and the bold front before the embassy fulfilled their purpose: Caution possessed the emirs.

Moslemah's myriads were put at work beyond farthest catapult-shot from the walls preparing a vast stockaded camp surrounded by a ditch and strengthened by castles of huge uncemented stones. His fleet also moved prudently, waiting for the army to be ready to cooperate. It was not until the first of September that its rear squadrons were seen trailing up the Marmora and anchoring with the others near the beaches of Magnaura, two miles beyond the Golden Gate.

Meantime gust after gust of hope or despondency swept across the city. At one moment the folk were ready to rush forth to Moslemah's camp, trusting in the Panagia's aid to storm it with their empty hands. The next the whole capital was shaken with rumours that the gates had been betrayed and the yellow Tartars were coursing down the Mesē. For the young men there was abundant outlet in the trainbands now being continually drilled into something like a presentable militia, while every artificer found employment for his skill at the Arsenal or the Navy Yard. There remained, however, hundreds of thousands of older men and women, and on this impressionable multitude the prophets of evil wrought all too readily.

The great army of monks, ascetics and anchorites had not forgotten their discomfiture in the hall of the Patriarch. The offence of Kallinikos had faded, but they now traded out their grudge against Leo by circulating every kind of insidious whisper. At the Neorian wharf by the Navy Yard stood a colossal brazen ox, supposed to bellow at every impending calamity. The adjacent monks of St. Didymos now swore that their sleep was destroyed three successive night by unearthly lowings. More disastrous still was the assertion that to a venerated recluse had appeared a vision of St. Gabriel, who assured him that human might would avail nothing against the Infidel, and that the Hagarines were destined to penetrate into the city clear to the Forum of Theodosius, when legions of angels would fling them back in confusion without mortal aid.^[55] All military precautions were therefore sheer presumption, and distrust of Heaven.

Inevitably, Marinos was in his element. Never before had he held greater crowds of unemployed hucksters, raw lads and silly women groaning and fascinated beneath his pillar.

"Lo, now is come the day of God's wrath," he would shout over the hundreds, "the day of mourning for the bridegroom and the bride, the day of desolation for each house of prayer. Verily, the Lord our God is a jealous God, remembering our iniquities unto the third and fourth generation. Think ye yourselves righteous? Remember, then, your fathers' and your grandfathers' vile sins. Behold, He hath covered the daughter of Zion with the cloud of His anger. He hath cast down the beauty of Israel. He hath burned against Judah as with a flaming fire. Cease, then, your vain strivings with sword and spear. Are not the Hagarines like the Babylonians to the Jews of old, ministers of the Heavenly fury? Cast away, therefore, your shields and bows! Cry unto the mountains 'Fall on us!' and unto the waters 'Cover us!'"

After such harangues a kind of desperate madness would possess the people. Some men shut themselves in their houses, giving themselves over to riotous and sensual feasting. Others lay prostrate day and night in the churches, where in one monotonous chant from the thousands rose the incessant "*Kyrie eleison! Christe eleison!*"

The Emperor endured all this for long, knowing well the danger of tampering with the superstitions of the populace and their ghostly leaders; but at length when the more intelligent churchmen were becoming alarmed at the growing spirit of pessimism, suddenly all the hegumens were ordered to report at the Patriarch's palace. They were received not by his Beatitude, but, to their great astonishment, by Basil clothed in full armour and flanked significantly by a forty of grimly panoplied marines.

"Holy Fathers," demanded the admiral abruptly, before they could recover from their bewilderment, "the august Basileus commands me to ask you all a question: Do any of you or your monks desire to turn Moslem?"

"The Blessed Trinity forbid," came the horrified murmur.

"Who then among you claims that the Panagia or angels have favoured him with visions revealing that the human sword is useless against Infidels? Let him speak now without modesty."

An awkward silence followed. Basil's tone did not encourage claims to the heavenly honour. Presently the hegumen of St. Diomedes ventured, "It is so claimed by Marinos, the pillar-saint."

"And do you agree with him?"

More silence, and then some earnest denials.

"Give heed, then, Holy Fathers," pursued the admiral, "and tell this to all your monks: Learned prelates have warned the Emperor 'Take heed against visions which come not from God but from the devil.' If the Hagarines are to be repelled from spoiling your convents it will be by every Christian doing his part. Your pious brethren's bodies are strong. In this time of siege you will not, I fear, live on manna, nor be fed by ravens. Claim any of you to be wiser than St. Paul?"

"God forbid," again all the black hats and veils shook in chorus.

"Hear, then, his saying, even if expounded by an unlearned sailor: 'If any will not work neither shall he eat.' Tomorrow you shall lead all your monks out to the walls to assist with the palisades and the gabions. If any have scruples against this, there are the hospitals and the public bakeries. For those that refuse stubbornly there must be the holy joys of absolute fasting, and for those who circulate lying stories there shall be the swift anguish as well as perchance the later glories of martyrdom. Depart."

The black hats went out, all bobbing in consternation together, but the threats had sunk home and there was a spirit of obedience in every convent when the news spread of the deed that immediately followed. Basil led his men straight down to the waterfront where Marinos was lashing himself into no ordinary fury. The marines, long at feud with the city monks, brushed aside the frantic crowd of listeners and without hesitation a tall Islander laid his axe to the foot of the wooden pillar. "Chop," commanded the admiral.

The anchorite's scream rose to heaven: "Now is the cup of iniquity made full. Now is the hand of the sinful Uzza put forth against the holy ark. Rain down Thy lightnings, O Lord. Send down Thy fire as upon the sinful captains and their fifties at the call of Elijah the Prophet!"

"Chop!" reiterated the undaunted officer. Hundreds averted their faces in horror at the proposed sacrilege. The chips flew wide. The pillar shivered. The heavens continued serene. No anathemas from above were heard, no thunders, no consuming lightning bolts. Yet again rang the axe. Marinos' voice rose to frenzy: "Impious of the impious! Infidels and worse than Infidels! Your lot is with Herod, Pilate and Judas for ever!" But at the fourth blow, right in the sight of the shivering multitude, Marinos descended the spikes set in the sides of the pillar, with a most unsaintly haste, and fled towards the adjoining church, the dust and fleas snapping from his filthy sheepskin. Men blinked in amazement, while women crossed themselves; but Basil and his company seemed none the worse.

"*Euge!*" cried the admiral with ferocious smile. "There'll be fewer murky visions and fewer screech-owls to-night in Constantinople."

In a twinkling the mood of the mob changed. "We were deceived. He's no saint. Perhaps in pay of the Hagarines to scare us. Impostor! Croaker! Madman!" Seconding such yells, certain even threatened to invade the church, chase out the anchorite and dip him in the harbour.

This fury, however, ended in mere noise. Marinos presently disappeared; it was reported into some monastery whose officers agreed to be responsible for his conduct. Not without satisfaction did Leo greet Basil at the Daphne that evening. The hegumens had promised as a body to put their monks at useful labour, and to discipline all prophets of calamity. "And that," spoke the Emperor, "is all we can desire to-day; though when the good God takes the Saracens off our hands I'll deal with these pious busybodies at leisure."^[56] Then he listened to many other reports: from the landwalls and seawalls, from Galata and Chrysopolis. Last of all, Fergal entered the presence of his master, and one glance at the Celt caused Leo to send all others from the chamber.

The spatharios was only scantily clad. His forehead was pale, his limbs blue, his breath still panting. When he strove to salute, his feet tottered and with his own hands the Emperor forced him into a chair.

"Swimming again?" demanded the Isaurian significantly. "And not a few strokes, I warrant. It takes a long stretch to

wind a dolphin like you.”

“Yes, *despotes*, I have been swimming. Late to-day I felt an itching in my bones. ‘Go out and skirt around the Hagarine ships,’ something said. So I entered the water at the Kyklobion, the fort protecting the Golden Gate.”

“Wise you were not to ask my permission. I’d have withheld it, not desiring to lose you. But continue.”

“I clung to a bit of driftwood and covered it with seaweed to help hide me. Thus I made fair progress. I worked close to the Saracen fleet. The ships are strung out by Magnaura and far to southward. All the armada has at last arrived from Egypt and Phœnicia. They have got out their battle tackling and taken aboard many soldiers from the army. I could see them adjusting their boarding bridges and casting engines. At a venture I risked swimming close to their portholes and heard the chatter of the seamen. Once I was hailed but my good reply in Arabic got me off.”

“And you found?” thrust in the monarch with straining interest.

“The orders were being transmitted: To-morrow they will go up the Straits.”

“Ha!” ejaculated Leo softly. “And what else?”

“The transports will follow the battle fleet. They will come with at least two hundred biremes and triremes. Well, the swim back was in the dark and safer, but the current hindered. At last I made the Kyklobion and got a horse. And that is all, *despotes*.”

“You have done well,” were the Emperor’s only thanks. Then he clapped his hands to bring back the attendants. They saw him rising and strapping his belt tighter. “Give God the praise! There will be hotter work to-morrow than hewing down a pillar-saint. All this of course must be told to Basil. And now I’ll ride to Kallinikos.” ...

... Around the house at the Mangana torches were gleaming and from within came the shimmer of lamps and the noise of much human bustle. The Emperor’s small escort answered the challenge of a centurion of the Protectors. Leo leaped from his mount and summoned the officer:

“Your guard has been ceaseless. You know its importance?”

“Yes, Sacred Clemency.”

“Have other interlopers been seen?”

“An Epirote girl seemed hanging around yesterday. She’s at the Prætorium now, and the quæstor will deal with her.”

“To-morrow will reveal the faithfulness of your watch. Now take me inside.”

Leander as well as Kallinikos met the Emperor. The once trig and dapper engineer was as coal-black now, even as the savant. The eyes of both were heavy for lack of sleep, but they presented themselves eagerly.

“How many now?” demanded Leo with a wave that forbade salute or salaam.

“Fifty cases. By morning fifty-five,” returned Leander, not without pride.

“Enough. We will take twenty-five ships. That’s two cases apiece. The five last cases will serve as reserve. Keep all your men busy. You are letting them work each only on a single substance, and are preparing the final compound yourselves?”

“The Basileus speaks truth,” replied Leander.

“Does he assist you properly?” said Leo, smiling and turning to the begrimed philosopher.

“I’ve had better pupils in Homer,” confessed Kallinikos candidly, “and Sophocles and Euripides; but touching the domain of Euclid, Eratosthenes and Archimedes, though his theoretical knowledge is not so great, in the more practical matters if I could only teach him Egyptian hieratic and demotic——”

“Ah, venerable friend,” cried the Emperor laughing, “if in times like these I could only withdraw myself into such inner castles of the soul what refuge for happiness! We’re not of his world, Leander! Yet we must play our own game as

the Blessed Saints ordain it. But now tell me——” And technical questions and technical answers held the three in tense discussion until far into the night.

At last Leo pressed his last query, gave his last command, and the two master-chemists went back to their toil. The Emperor passed from their workrooms through the aula of the house. Outside under the torches horses stamped and staff officers were waiting, but Leo moved slowly, looked about him and not in vain. Behind a curtain leading to a side chamber he caught a glint of light and sensed that someone was watching. “*Kyria!*” he spoke; and drew the damask aside. He came face to face with Anthusa.

She wore a long blue peplon without embroidery or ornament. She was unveiled and her hair now hung half way to her shoulders, caught back by two golden grasshoppers. He knew her cheeks were pale, but her eyes excited and very bright.

“*My Basileus,*” she said; and before he could prevent her she had fallen upon her knees, seized one of the mailed lappets of his cuirass and kissed it. Then she rose slowly and stood facing him a long instant, with Leo pitifully conscious that he knew not what to reply. Anthusa spoke the first:

“I have overheard the officers. The Saracen ships are about to come out. To-morrow there will be battle?” Leo nodded. The other passionately seized his hand. “But you need not go into it. One arm will count for little, and Basil can do all that you might and more. Your life is precious to—I mean to all Constantinople.”

Leo’s form straightened: “The Kalif may sit in his palace; the Basileus leads forth to war!”

Anthusa knelt again before him, yet this time she lifted her eyes boldly: “Who am I, a frail and useless woman, to question the man to whom God has given the keeping of this mighty city and empire. But I grow presumptuous, so bear with me for asking this: Why must you fight to-morrow? The walls are very strong. Let the Moslems bruise their fists on them in vain.”

“No one, dear *kyria*”—Leo’s hands were very gentle while he lifted her—“has better right in all the world to ask such a thing than you; not Basil; not all the Patricians. I will tell you what we strive desperately to keep from being bruted in the Augustæum. I trust indeed to hold the walls, but the walls may well crumble speedily the moment this vast city grows hungry. There are a million mouths in Constantinople. With all our care there is not wheat enough to feed us through six months—and Moslemah will stay all of those and I fear me more. With the Bosphorus sealed you can reckon off our doom. With the Bosphorus open the Euxine grain ships can fight our battles better than sword or spear. The Kalif’s admirals are not fools. To-morrow they will try to close the Bosphorus.”

Anthusa stood now with drooping head. “I am a very stupid girl,” she said, biting her white lips. “I know nothing of war. I thank your condescension. You must fight.”

But Leo did not release her hand. “*Kyria Anthusa,*” he resumed, his own colour mounting, “do you remember my words to you at Sophia’s wedding: ‘My private hopes, desires, and vengeance all must tarry; my hours all belong to the Empire?’ ”

“I remember,” spoke Anthusa.

“Hear, then, my words again. Always now I am constrained to speak as the Emperor. On the eve of this great ordeal suffer therefore Leo the Emperor to speak for Leo the Man.” He knew his own colour was mounting, but he pressed forward. “Long ago I matched my boyish strength against the great ram at St. Theodore and did you some slight service. To-morrow I go out to battle with God’s help for all the Roman Empire, for every spirit pure and good in all great Constantinople. I am now a man and you a woman grown. We know the fates of war and do not blink at them. If I am spared and we prevail in this siege, what may follow for you and for me in after-years let the Most High keep now as His great secret. But I cannot go to the ordeal save as I tell you this: When I grapple the Moslem ships, your name stands first; if I fall by the Moslem sword, your name fades last within my heart. Pray for us all, but pray most earnestly for your own warrior, for my need of your prayers surpasses all your need of my poor valour.”

Anthusa’s lithe form swayed a little under the flowing peplon. She seemed in turn seeking for speech, but no sound crossed her moving lips. Then suddenly he bent, seized both her hands and kissed them. When he released his grasp she laid her white fingers on his bowed helmet. “*My Basileus,*” at last she said again.

Leo uprose in his strength. "Yes," he answered with deep voice, "now it must be 'Basileus' and ever 'Basileus' until the shadow of the Saracen passes." He stood erect and saluted her as a soldier might his general, then turned with resounding strides towards the door. "The Navy Yard with speed!" she heard him order, and with his whole troop canter off into the darkness.



CHAPTER XXVIII

THE MIRACLE OF FIRE

SEPTEMBER the third. Anthusa had not slept that night, neither had any man or woman in Constantinople. Like all the rest she was up at grey dawn. The wind was coming in mild puffs from the southward. The last stars were fading from a cloudless sky. "The Hagarines will try it to-day," so said every mortal in the great city one to another.

It was not to the Marmora walls this time that the myriads streamed. As many as were permitted pushed through the gates of the Palace Compound and mounted the eastern walls. Others clambered the lofty domes and scaled the giddy columns of the fora. Every wharf on the Golden Horn commanding view out into the Bosphorus was black with heads. More thousands piled upon roofs of the porticoes by the harbour, or peered from the ascending tiers of houses in Galata and Pera. Across the Straits one could see the masses of humanity crowding the fortified shores of Chrysopolis. Women with little children clutching their gowns, bright-faced girls, elders on staves, priests in black robes, senators in stiff dalmatics—the distinctions of rank were nearly lost; all were confused and thrusting together.

Anthusa's own impulse was to go to the Church of the Saviour, very near the Arsenal, and join in the intercessions there ceaselessly arising, but her father strangely enough had developed a marked professional interest in the results of his handiwork. He desired to see the battle. Fergal also was at hand (sorely against his will, for the ordeal in the water had left him too exhausted for martial action) and Sophia and Leander. These, therefore, took the philosopher and Anthusa to the Tower of Eugenios by the Promontory of St. Demetrios at the apex of the Bosphorus and the Golden Horn. Stairways, ladders and balconies they toilingly conquered; then all Constantinople and its waterways seemed swimming at their feet....

... The sun rose upon another day of gold and glory. The light from the waters dazzled. Below the Tower the Golden Horn spread out to westward like a wide blue river, its upper end crowded with peaceful shipping moved thither for safety. Directly below Anthusa, so that she might almost have dropped a pebble upon it, stretched the great chain, closing the harbour, buoyed upon hulks and pontoons clear across to a second tower on Galata.

Immediately behind the chain, in a long serried line—their beaks all pointing towards the Bosphorus, their hulls gleaming with fresh black paint, their bulwarks flashing with the burnished shields hung their length—swung the Roman dromonds. Upon their decks the crews seemed swarming like crawling ants. Out from the shores like water spiders were shooting the caiques and barges bringing out the last draughts of marines and supplies. Close to the Tower of Eugenios was moored the tallest "Pamphylian," a dromond of superior size. Her gunwales were striped with purple. Anthusa knew that this was the flagship, the *St. Michael*, and that she would bear the Basileus.

At length, as the folk gazed, one wise head was laid to another and fingers pointed. Twenty-five of the largest dromonds were moored apart and nearest the great chain. In addition to the usual upperworks, catapults and massive cranes for the swinging boarding-bridges, near the prow of each vessel rose a new structure, a stout tower rearing nearly twenty feet above the decks. These erections were faced with rawhides, and hides also could be seen covering all the more-exposed portions of the bows. Sailors were busy wetting them down with water. Retired seadogs on the quays looked at one another with pessimistic waggings of the head. "These towers? What possible use? What new-fangled folly of that upstart admiral?"

Presently Anthusa knew also that there was a murmur and a suppressed shouting coming along the southern walls of the palace point. Men were leaning towards the Marmora. "The Saracens have set forth," went flying from mouth to mouth. But her own gaze continued straight downward. Upon the level quay at her feet came dashing a troop of horsemen. She saw a figure leap down from his tall charger. Leo had put off his sombre mail. Christian and Moslem should know when an emperor went forth to war. His cuirass, shield and red-plumed helm gleamed with the gilded steel. His sword was drawn, and the new light flashed upon its brightness. She saw the knot of high army officers standing about him, doubtless awaiting the last orders for the guarding of the city. She saw him evidently pluck off a ring and hand it to Artavasdos the High Strategos, presumptive successor if he came not back.

The soldiers saluted solemnly and stepped away. A greater group of navarchs and master-pilots came forward—sinewy, hawk-visaged sons of the Archipelago who had sniffed the brine since babyhood. They were all in their blue and crimson jackets, with golden baldrics whence swung long crooked sabres. Next Anthusa saw the Patriarch in jewelled vestments upraise his hand and crucifix in the greater benedictions over them as all bent kneeling. Then the

officers rose, and intently faced their Basileus as he gave them his final word. Whilst he spoke under the gaze of thousands, the hush ever grew along walls, quays and shipping. His great voice waxing stronger mounted at length even to the crest of the Tower. Anthusa knew that he was speaking of native land and city, of ancestral graves, of church, of holy faith, of all things else which honest men hold dear, and his last summons swelled like a clarion to all the hosts around:

“Go, then, to your ships; and I give you the words of that stout warrior Judas Maccabæus, ere he led his men to battle facing odds sorer than do we: ‘With the God of Heaven it is all one to deliver with a great multitude or a small company. For the victory standeth not in the multitude of a host, but strength cometh from Heaven. They come against us with much pride and iniquity to destroy us, and our wives and our children, and to spoil us. But we fight for our lives and our laws, therefore the Lord himself will overthrow them before our face; and as for you—*be ye not afraid of them!*’ ”

In deathlike silence the Emperor went on board his barge, which shot from the quay. All the barges of his officers followed. A great purple flag, sprinkled with white crosses, rose on the mainmast of the *St. Michael*. Without drum or whistle one of her oar-banks moved. She stroked noiselessly out to the middle of the great chain, her twenty-four ready consorts in line behind her. There like dogs on leash they crouched upon the water motionless, giving no further sign, their beaks all pointing towards Asia.

The southern wind had fallen. When Leo went aboard the flagship it was a flat calm. The flags and pennons trailed their lengths heavily. But just as a faint din from the hostile armada crept around the palace point, down from the north rushed a sturdy breeze. Long ripples appeared on the Bosphorus. Soon the caiques were tossing on the wavelets and the flags all whipping fiercely. The emirs would have to force their fleet into the teeth of a fairly stiff Euxine gale, doubling all their oarsmen’s toil. Old sailors upon the quays exchanged grins of satisfaction: “The Hagarines did not know how quickly the Bosphorus winds could shift. The Saints grant us first advantage.”

Then, just as the breeze sung clearly around the Tower of Eugenios, Anthusa and everyone near her leaned together from the fragile railings, reëchoing the awestruck “Ah!” which was passing along the walls. The Moslem navy was before them.

It was a sight for men and for angels. The mouth of the Bosphorus was now covered with enormous ships. Large squadrons were swinging off to the Asiatic coast to seize the Haven of Eutropios below Chalcedon, but the rest headed straight northward up the Bosphorus. At the van sailed long, slim single-bankers, cutting the sea in white furrows, but after these, in more stately array, moved at least a hundred ponderous dromonds, slower, heavier than the Roman craft, but ready to defy rams and grappling engines by their timbered sides and lofty bulks. Above the rowers, upon prows, midships and stern, the long files of boarders surged, shouted and shook their scimitars. The noise of hundreds of trumpets, kettle-drums, atabals and tomtoms, hideous and barbaric, mingled with the yells of the soldiers and mariners.

“*Ya, Allah! Ya, Allah! Allahu akbar!*” They screamed their defiance with insulting gestures and hootings towards the crowded masses upon the walls. On the prow of the chief emir’s galley, moving arrogantly in plain sight, but beyond farthest catapult range, the agonizing Christians beheld the seamen uplifting a large bronze crucifix, plunder from some church, and right before the outraged eyes of the onlookers, the turbaned crew were seen casting filth upon the holy image and smiting its body and face.

“*Ya, Allah! Ya, Allah! Allahu akbar!*”

Anthusa strove to cover her face, and compel her ears to ignore the horrid din, but some uncanny power forced her to gaze and listen. The Saracen ships, retarded by the unexpected gale and heavily laden with the soldiers they intended to land above the city, advanced with majestic deliberation. The light craft were at length abreast of Galata, but the greater ships were only fairly athwart the mouth of the Golden Horn. All this time the Christian galleys lay as mighty things sleeping, till another long tremor, half cheer, half groan, undulated along the walls. Under the eyes of the myriads, silently, slowly, with wide ripples spreading out upon the water, and, moving as by an unseen force, the booms across the harbour were swinging aside. A section of the great chain was slowly opening.

A new pennon, blood-red, broke out from the foremast of the *St. Michael* just below the golden eagle. From her poop a single piercing trumpet sounded through all the barbaric din. Her triple oar-banks poised once, then leaped into life together. The spray shot high from her bronze-shod cutwater. At her left flew the *Blessed Trinity*, on her right the proud *St. Andrew*, the saint rejoicing in war. *The Holy Resurrection* sprang forward in her wake, the *St. James* and twenty

good dromonds more. No trumpets after the first, no shouting, but above the clamour of the Hagarines sounded the grinding of four thousand Roman oars leaping like mad upon their thole-pins.

And now, from the walls, men and women gazed, transfixed. Some knelt and prayed wildly. Some stretched out frantic hands. Then from a reserve galley behind the chain deep voices took up the great Trisagion. Soon all the walls, quays and shipping were flinging it heavenward together:

“Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal,
Have mercy upon us!”

But clamour indescribable was rising from the Saracen ships. To leave their trailing flanks exposed to the Roman beaks was perilous. The unexpected north wind and their own daring had brought them too near the walls. Despite superior numbers, their prows began swerving towards the Asiatic shore. The vanward ships, caught in the swift current just beyond Galata, and fearful of losing touch with their heavier consorts, swung back upon the battle fleet. There was delay, then confusion. In an instant three of the largest galleys had fouled. Their seamen, scampering among the tangle of booms and derricks like brown cats, strove frantically to cut them asunder. Other ships bore down to stop the Roman onset. Straight into their press, like an arrow from the string, flew the *St. Michael*, with her four-and-twenty tossing the spray behind.

The pitiless morning light beat over the ships and waters. All the tracery of yards and tackling stood out before the watchers. A Saracen galley, free from her companions, at length shot out from the Moslem line to meet the Roman flagship. For an instant the two seemed striking prow to prow, but at the last moment the Christian swerved. The yell of derision from the Saracen carried even to the shore: “The Romans are women! They dare not grapple or strike! *Allahu akbar!*”

Then, just as ship rushed past ship, oars barely clearing, the forward tower of the *St. Michael* was seen alive with men. Round missiles they seemed hurling both upon the Moslems’ decks and (marvel of marvels) into the waves about her bow. But, after an instant, lo! out of the waters—smoke, and out of the smoke livid sheets of fire, bright and terrible, even against the sunlight. Then, while a wondering silence held alike walls and ships, as from an archangel’s lightning bolts, over Moslem bulwarks and outworks, cabins, masts, rigging, in resistless ruin, leaped the flame, until the tall galley faded behind a reeking smoke bank out of which came screams of mortal agony.

The *St. Michael* stayed not. Into the press of colliding ships she charged and all her consorts with her. Soon over the Bosphorus settled blue smoke which even the piping northern breeze only lifted fitfully. At intervals the gazing thousands caught glimpses of ships locked yardarm to yardarm; of boarders, swords in teeth, clambering hither and thither or flung into the waves. They heard the splintering crash as some beak struck home and drove in a whole ship’s side. They heard the incessant snapping of oars. The devilish yells of combat, the frenzied calling to Allah or the Panagia came as the ceaseless thunders of an angry ocean. And thus for moments like to hours.

Twice and three times Anthusa turned away her face, praying passionately, “I cannot endure more; give me but power to tear myself hence!” Yet still they were fighting, fighting, and some power ever commanded her, “Look!” and look she must again. The first time the smoke so covered the whole mass of ships, she saw nothing but a few masts rising above the murk and fire. The second time the wind had shifted the haze enough so that Roman and Saracen dromonds were seen mixed in utter confusion, without means to determine which was vanquished and which victor. The third time—at the beginning the smoke was impenetrable again, but as she stared the breeze beat back the foul vapour, and out of the tangle shot a gleam—the red pennon blew in shreds, but the sun lit fairly upon the golden eagle. “*St. Michael!*” cried all the walls in ecstasy. Then drifting away from the battling ships lurched a galley—unmistakably a Saracen. Her crew had mastered the fire upon her stern, but all her prow was blazing. A deep gash seemed torn across her side. Under the eyes of a myriad witnesses she bowed her tall sides over into the deep, spilling her people from her decks like pebbles as she capsized—and the crisping waters covered them.

Again the encompassing smoke closed down, though often pierced by enormous leaps of flame, but now singly, now by twos and threes, dromonds under full oarage dashed out of it. Hagarines. When they were not in a blaze their yards and boarding bridges were charred. Their tacklings hung in eft-locks. Their rowers tore at their blades in the frenzy of panic. “Allah! Allah!” was still their yell, but now it was a piteous cry to save. The north wind speedily bore them down among the Isles of the Princes. Out of the murk there likewise drifted smoking spars, and bits of wreckage laden with

clinging wretches.

Ship followed ship, and as some sped past the palace point those who knew Arabic heard their crews screaming: "Jinns! Enchantment! Iblis' work! Gehenna fires!" like men distraught. There were still a second hundred of Saracen war galleys, not numbering the transports, working up from the Marmora, but as the survivors came down on them with their sight of horror, suddenly the prows of the rearward armada turned. The emirs dared not lead up the second half of the Kalif's fleet to apparent destruction....

... Little by little the sun pierced through the tangle of hulks and spars. Shattered and rent, charred and begrimed were all. The noise of combat, the shrieks of the dying—were they to be endless? Then amid the crash and tumult came a sudden silence, known in battles, when out from the maze of ships pealed a thunderous cheer—the cheer of men who had been into the jaws of hell and had braved the Prince of Terrors; strong, glad rang the Roman battle cry, "*Iesous Christos nika!* Jesus Christ is victor!"

Anthusa again, as in a dream, saw the *St. Michael* stroking back to the great chain. Her mainmast was gone. Half her oars were shivered. Her bulwarks were black and all her bravery departed, save the huge eagle which still lifted itself in red gold over the wreck-strewn sea. Most of her consorts were following her, none in better state, several barely floating. Out into the Golden Horn now, however, sped the reserve dromonds and the barges. Soon they were towing in fifteen Moslem hulls whose scorched crews had cast their scimitars into the sea and howled their "Mercy!" Twenty other Hagarine galleys had vanished in the Bosphorus. Half of the remaining Saracen craft which escaped were so burned they could not fight for many a day.

So Fergal, so Leander and the others at hand were telling Kallinikos, who stood, with vacant eye, combing his beard with nervous fingers, overwhelmed by the fearful demonstration of his handiwork. But Anthusa cared for none of these things. Her gaze was wholly upon the *St. Michael*, and if she were white and silent, sailors and soldiers upon the quays were trumpeting her question for her: "The Basileus—what of him?" Then quays, walls, towers shook with the loudest cheer of all when a tall figure stood out alone upon the poop of the flagship. The gilded armour was blackened, the scarlet plume was gone, but there was no mistaking. "Ten thousand years to Leo Augustus! Ten thousand years to Leo the Isaurian, saviour of Constantinople! *Leo, tu vincas!*" went up the salvo together.

As the flagship neared the Navy Yard quay, some of the clergy of Hagia Sophia upon the quay began rejoicing versicles:

"God is with us, know ye nations and be confounded!"

And the myriads swelled in reply:

"For God is with us!"
"Give ear to the ends of the earth."
"For God is with us!"
"The Father of the Age to come."
"For God is with us!"

And then all lifted the great hallelujah with one voice:

"Glory be unto Thee, O our God; glory be unto Thee!"

... From her eyrie Anthusa watched the Emperor disembark. Blackened and battered as was his panoply, he still walked erect, taking the plaudits of officers and people with almost disdainful calm. The multitudes streamed down from the walls, laughing and rejoicing hysterically. The wiser endeavoured, indeed, to say, "The Saracens are still here. Their fleet is still formidable. Moslemah's host remains at the gates." No such considerations could quench the raptures of the great services of thanksgiving in all the churches that night.

When evening fell, with pretended secrecy the entire length of the great chain was withdrawn from before the Golden Horn. The Roman fleet with all the reserve galleys again pointed its prows outward. The Saracen emirs soon got wind thereof. In terror of a new and completely ruinous attack they made haste to draw up their ships upon the shores of the remotest Isles of the Princes or in their old havens by Moslemah's camp. They never knew that of Kallinikos' fire there

were left only five cases.

That same night a messenger came for Anthusa. It was Peter in the plainest of liveries. "The little *kyrios*," he remarked, "is well. He bids me bring you this." And Anthusa took a tablet scratched with bold and hasty uncials.

"The kyria Anthusa Maria from her cousin from Thrace:

"Know, most gracious lady, that all through to-day the Panagia was with me. If I have merited her favour it was through the prayers of one I dare not name. The debt to your father is not to be measured by solidi or rubies. It is one the Roman Empire and its Basileus can never hope to repay; but perchance when the present stress is ended something will be possible. I think the Hagarines have had enough by sea for the present, and they will next test us by land. Pray for your warrior without ceasing. Farewell."

So at length slept Moslem host and Christian city, but in the dreams of all men, some terrified, some joyous, sounded this first roar of the Lion.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE GATE OF ST. ROMANOS

THE defeat of the Saracen fleet thrilled Constantinople. There was optimism ("Too much," said old soldiers) that all was well. The confounded monks, silenced in their croakings, began now to circulate stories that no mortal agency had rained fire and brimstone upon the Moslem galleys. A venerated anchorite even asserted upon an oath by the True Cross that he had seen the warrior saints Demetrios and Andrew galloping upon their chargers in the clouds above the Hagarine dromonds and scattering down destruction as once had the Lord upon Sodom and Gomorrah. Others in more general terms praised "the miracle by the Panagia."

In secular circles, however, there was more willingness to credit a strictly human agency. The sailors who had used the "Maritime Fire," suddenly entrusted to them under strict instructions, declared it was a very matter-of-fact compound, although no man could guess its elements. At every civilian or military concourse there was one ceaseless, vehement question, "Who is he? Who is the inventor of this agent of terror and deliverance?" Had Kallinikos declared himself he would have been beatified almost as a saint, but the inner circle at the Palace kept wise silence, and the sage himself (ignorant of all the frantic curiosity) continued calmly at his labours with Leander.

Ten days of informal armistice followed the Saracen defeat. The invaders' ships still rode in brave array in the Marmora, but the heavier galleys were protected by floating booms, the lighter were moored so close to the shore they could be dragged up instantly. Everybody knew that by sea the Moslem attack had been blasted, and that the emirs could hardly make their men approach the fatal mouth of the Bosphorus. If Constantinople were to be taken the task had surely fallen to Moslemah's land army.

After the victory by sea, if Leo had called to the city trainbands to sally forth they would have followed him in all self-confidence, but day by day the Basileus ascended the land towers, counted the enormous sweep of the tents of the Moslem laager and the number of its banners, and rode back to the palace without giving those orders for which the ardent young centurions prayed. "He did not intend," he said bluntly, "to present the emirs with a victory. He had waited for the Moslem ships to come to the Bosphorus. He would wait now for the Moslem host to come to Constantinople."

On the day, however, that Leander cheerfully reported, "Again fifty cases are ready," the Emperor gave an unwonted command to Artavasdos:

"I understand we took three thousand prisoners in the sea fight?"

"That is the case, Sacred Clemency."

"Cull from these captives the five hundred most worthless. Strangle them as mercifully as possible, but then set their bodies on stakes along the land walls as if impaled with great cruelty. If copies of the Koran have been taken, see that they are defaced and defiled by our outposts in the face of all the enemy."

The next day the howlings and fury in the Moslem camp increased twentyfold. The ulemahs and dervishes stormed frantically for action. Had the Faithful gathered from the ends of the earth, from the Atlas and the Oxus, from the Red Sea and the Indus, only to be confounded by Iblis' enchantments before that city which was the last bulwark against the universal triumph of El Islam? As for the fire of the Romans, was it not manifestly a weapon for the sea but not for the land? Galleys it might consume, but not armies. Allah had merely permitted His people to be tested in their piety ere vouchsafing final success. Should the True Believers range victorious from Seville to Samarkand and then shrink back like women at the burning of a few ships?

"Verily (shouted the preachers) saith not the Prophet, 'The Gehenna fires will be hotter for you, O ye timid!'"

So the wide camp raged, and if some of the older sheiks and emirs looked on the walls of Theodosius and shook their great turbans, saying that deliberate preparations were needful, they were overborne. Speedily the tidings leaked into the city, "The Hagarines are hewing down the forests. They are building ladders and portable bridges for the moats. They are preparing movable siege towers. They are taking their catapults and dart-hurlers from the ships!" And Leo heard these tidings not exultantly, but with that silent smile which was better to his devoted staff than any high boasts of victory.

Quiet there was not in Constantinople the night of October first. Unlike the day of the sea fight, the populace now were sternly bidden to stay within doors, except for the great gangs of artificers forging arrow and lance heads, or shaping spear butts at the Arsenal. Even the churches were half deserted. But down all the streets leading to the walls, with clangour of steel, went all the infantry bands and mounted turmæ of the garrison until Anthusa gave up counting the rumbling army wagons tearing away from the Mangana.

Just before sunset the heralds had blown their trumpets in all the fora. "Romans! The Hagarines are preparing to storm the land walls at dawn. Their rage is great, but all is made ready to meet them. Remain calmly in your homes, trusting in the Holy Trinity and praying for the Christian army. These are the words of your Basileus." Leo had also sent word to the house of Kallinikos that he would visit the sage again, but at the last moment came a messenger saying the Emperor was needed at the fort at Blachernai, and that Artavasdos could transmit Leander's latest opinions as to the best use of the fire. In the packet was a slip of papyrus closely sealed and inscribed, "For the very noble Kyria Anthusa," and its recipient read this within:

"Your cousin from Thrace at dawn must go to battle. All that he has said before, he repeats again. All that it is possible for man to do has been done and he is full of hope. Nevertheless, pray without ceasing. Farewell."

So Anthusa spent the ensuing day, as did nearly every woman in all Constantinople, partly on her knees, partly in striving by desperate attention to homely details to take her mind from the hideous and incessant rumblings to westward, that low, growling thunder drifting from the distant walls which told how the myriads were at grips....

... Long before dawn the Moslem host had been awake. From the land towers the waiting Romans heard the clamour and trappings of thousands on thousands. Those who had fought in the Anatolian wars could picture to their comrades the scenes in Moslemah's encampments—the serried companies from every southern and eastern clime, swart Moors, yellow Turkomans, brown Arabs; white teeth and aquiline noses; chests that, if struck, would resound like a huge brass, oily, stony and full of wrinkles; arms flung about wildly and often tattooed with red and blue, or with foliated designs and texts from the Koran. Some of the battalions from Syria and Persia were swelled with warriors worthy of chivalrous steel, tall, handsome men of the conquering races of Islam, splendid with inlaid armour, damascened scimitars, and silken turbans and surcoats. Their discipline was stern, their movements deliberate. But beside them were arrayed the hosts of the grossest Orient—sinister faces, long tresses of tangled hair, half-naked bodies, uncouth ornaments, and spreading about them the fetid odour of caged wild beasts.

The Moslem host expressed its impatience by an incessant pounding upon its shields with scabbards and spear staves, so that even behind the Roman walls verbal orders could scarce be transmitted. Many contingents had worked themselves into a raging delirium by the draught of hashish or the fumes of bhang. Before them were floating visions of the revelry indescribably sensual, awaiting the True Believers alike, whether they conquered or perished. Desperados from the Sahara, Hedjaz or the Chorasmian wilds boasted loudly the number of Christian nuns they would have in their clutches ere nightfall. Ulemahs ran incessantly up and down the ranks calling out the felicities of martyrdom:

"Verily saith the Prophet, 'When ye encounter the Misbelievers strike off their heads until ye have made a great slaughter among them. Allah commandeth you to fight his battles!' Would ye shun the beds of torment and the fire that burneth for ever? Haste then to the battle for El Islam! Is not our living and our dying predestinate? By one twinkling of an eye can ye postpone your end, as it may be eternally written? Up then; win for yourselves the silver, the gold, the gems, the slaves, the delicious palaces of the Misbelievers; yea, and all their fair women. Or if it is fated that ye fall, ye shall sit down to-night in the Garden of Delights, beneath the shade of the palms and the pomegranate trees, where the happy martyrs (their sins cancelled for ever) shall espouse the stainless ones, the dark-eyed houris." ...

... Two hours before daylight Leo rode to the Golden Gate, accompanied not merely by the Protectors, but by four strong bands of his own Anatolians, mailed lancers who had followed him through all his wars on the Cilician Marches, and who would ride through raging devils at his least behest. From the camp of Moslemah the din was now spreading deafeningly the entire length of the land walls, but a centurion rode up with a report: "The Spatharios Fergal informs the Basileus that he has made a small sortie and taken certain prisoners. The main strength of the Hagarines is directed against the Gate of St. Romanos. There they are wheeling up their towers. The spatharios also learned that they have elephants which will be used in forcing the timber outworks."

Leo received the report composedly and in the dusk rode deliberately along the broad military way between the walls.

All the garrison were in their places. Here and there centurions were kneeling while the priests took their confessions en masse, the men smiting their breasts in unison as they received absolution. At the Tower of Baktagion, the Emperor was saluted by the gigantic Karlmann, count of the Frankish mercenaries.

“My young kerls’ hands itch on their axes,” announced the blond Northerner. “They are jealous of the glory won by the seamen; I can scarce restrain them.”

“There’s a Bulgarian proverb, I’ve heard,” answered the monarch, grimly smiling, “‘Endure, O horse, till the time of green grass.’ They need not wait for their chance for renown much longer.”

A concentrated yell from the outposts drowned this colloquy. In the east was now a long bar of pale golden light, making walls, timber-works and men stand forth in grey tracery. The rock foundations of the fortresses shook with the tramlings of tens of thousands of feet outside and the rasping of the wheels of ponderous war engines. Dimly, as out of a fog, the whole Moslem host stood revealed—helmets, turbans, tossing plumes receding far into the distance. Rising above the hosts like armoured bastions loomed twenty elephants—they and their mahouts covered with bright mail. The beasts were dragging forward three siege towers—ungainly masses of trestlework, lumbering on clumsy wheels, and faced with iron or hides, and lifted to the level of the curtain walls. Presently now were beheld the long companies of ladder men, some tugging forward the catapults, while others staggered ahead dragging the bridges ready to fling across the moat.

Moslemah’s numbers spread themselves along every section of the land wall, but Fergal’s tidings had not failed; the elephants, siege towers and main array were directed near the centre of the defences, to the Gate of St. Romanos, where, through a deep ravine, the little river Lykos entered the city. Here, perforce, the moat was narrow and shallow, and here the ground without the walls almost matched the height of the ramparts themselves. Near St. Romanos, if anywhere, was the Achilles’ heel of Constantinople.

Turkomans, Indians, Persians, Syrians, Egyptians, Moors, as well as the sons of the Prophet’s own Arabia—all were come for that crowning battle which was to give to their creed and kalif the lordship of the world. Their lines shook and swayed like a cornfield under the wind. Every *kaid* boasted his gaudy banner, every subordinate *nakib*^[57] his bright-forked banderole. Deep in the masses of the centre, safe beyond farthest missile but in the full view of the fight, was a litter borne high by eight giant negroes. Its canopy was white, its woodwork crusted with gold and ivory. Herein sat the great Omiad, the Emir of Emirs Moslemah; beside him trooped a battalion of ferocious dervishes covered with lion and panther skins, and over them floated a huge green standard, the flag of the Prophet himself, “The Ensign of Ensigns,” the prime talisman of Islam.

Forward came the hosts, their numbers ever more apparent with the strengthening light. Before the walls and beyond the moat ran a stout timber-crowned earthwork, no trifling barrier to surmount ere the Saracens could come to the defences proper. Companies of the city trainbands held this advance fortification. These militia had been boastful enough when Leo offered them such a post of glory, but the veterans lining the walls above noted that the recruits were becoming silent and nervous as the Moslem host drew near. “Facing Moslemah isn’t cheering on the Blues and Greens in the Hippodrome,” quoth a scar-visaged engineer to Fergal, who had rejoined the Emperor, as the former shifted the tilt of his catapult bars. “It’ll be a pretty boxing match ere midday.”

The advancing hosts came on with tossing tumult until just beyond the range of the most powerful Christian engines. Then the whole vast array halted. The kaids and nakibs were seen going down the lines, striking with the flats of their sabres any whose ill-discipline offended. Suddenly the voices of hundreds of ulemahs were heard intoning together stanzas from the Koran and exhortations against the Infidel. At the name “Mohammed” the thousands upon thousands bowed their crested heads to their knees as one man. At the name “Allah” as simultaneously they fell on their faces and kissed the ground. Then for an instant they stood in ranks extending as far almost as eye could reach, muscles taut, eyes aflame, scimitars unsheathed. The green standard by the Emir of Emirs’ litter was seen to dip thrice, followed by a shout from all the leaders, the shout that had pealed at the Yermuk, at Nehavend, at Xeres, at fifty battles more which had given to El Islam half the kingdoms of the earth:

“VICTORY OR PARADISE IS BEFORE YOU! IBLIS AND HELL FIRE ARE BEHIND YOU!
CHARGE!”

From the walls the whole plain below seemed springing to the attack. The young sun flashed on brandished blades

innumerable. The ramparts shook with the trampling. “*Allahu akbar!*” answered the hosts as one man, all rushing onward.

The walls had been silent till this moment. Now the battlements became terribly alive. Great catapults and tormenta hurled heavy arrows and rocks upon the closely packed assailants. It was impossible to miss the mark. Lives were snuffed out by every missile, but the rushing feet merely trampled over the fallen and hastened forward. Soon the nearest ranks were close enough for common archery. The city trainbands plied the attackers from every loophole in their timber bulwarks. The heads of the columns melted like ice before sun, but like a rapid glacier ever pressed the throngs behind. “Allah! Allah! Allah!” their cry went up in monotonous thunder.

The first battalions, composed of the least reliable Moors and Turkomans, artfully put to the front by the emirs, piled a fearful mound of human forms before the palisades, then recoiled at length upon the masses behind. The militia holding the breastworks rose in delight, shouting to one another, “St. Andrew is with us! St. Demetrios is with us! And the Panagia! Victory!” But the old warriors around the Emperor upon the Tower of Baktagion only pulled down their casques and tightened their baldrics. “This was the invitation to the feast; here comes the banquet!”

Again the green banner of the Prophet dipped. Forward now, with bray of trumpet and din of kettle-drum, rushed serried lines of white-turbaned dervishes, the devotees of El Islam. “The black-eyed girls are beckoning us! They shake out their handkerchiefs of green silk and their caps with precious stones. They beckon and call out, ‘Come hither quickly, for we love ye!’ On, brother martyrs, now to win Paradise!”

Thus dervish to dervish, and as they charged ten of the elephants, detached from the towers, also lumbered forward. The Roman bolts and arrows took again a fearful toll from all the attackers. One of the great beasts trumpeted hideously and fell, but the others, well guarded by their panoplies, crashed onward against the wooden barriers, bearing them down by sheer weight. The trainbands stood to the onslaught like men, but the dervishes swarmed through the breaches torn in the palisades, and flew with their blades at the defenders. From the walls above the Romans now feared to shoot lest they strike down friend with foe. There was hot sword play, but the militia, unnerved by the terrors of the onset and deeming themselves deserted by the walls, broke at last. Some fled headlong into the moat, there to drown or escape as fortune aided; most ran to right and left, protected by those parts of the bulwark the dervishes had not stormed, and found their way over the drawbridges into the gates.

“*Allahu akbar!*” rang the exultant yell once again. The whole Moslem host in great waves surged forward. The remaining elephants, aided by countless hands, forced ahead the three siege towers. Although the engines on the battlements had resumed full action and beat down pitilessly with their missiles, who amongst the attackers counted the dead? The moat still spread its waters (crimson already) before the assailants, but thousands were now casting in rubbish of all kinds, yes, and helpless forms still gasping. At one or two shallow points the Moslems could almost reach the foot of the walls. Towards other spots they hurried the movable bridges. “Ladders!” everywhere they were shouting, and many shook their reeking fists towards the walls above: “One hour more, Christians, and all your churches are mosques!”

The ladders, however, were flung down the instant they were erected and all their human freight crashed under them. The Roman engines continued to discharge ceaselessly upon the ranks advancing from the rear, but the three towers resisted the blows of the heaviest catapults. On their black crests could be seen swarming great knots of warriors, picked sword hands who had claimed this peculiar glory of winning martyrdom or of being the first to storm the bulwark of Christendom. Behind each tower pressed strong companies of spirits equally desperate, ready to fly up the ladders set in the rear of the tall trestlework the instant it had been forced sufficiently close to the walls. The defenders could see the cunningly arranged flying bridges placed on the crest of the great fabrics, adjusted to span the moat at even height with the parapets.

Over the blood-soaked earth, over the shattered palisades, elephants and men struggling together and by sheer strength mastering a thousand obstacles, the towers drew nearer. One hundred feet more and they would be throwing their sword hands upon the curtain wall just north of St. Romanos itself. And all the while the Emperor stood watching silently, motionless save for his ever-moving eyes. His staff looked at him eagerly, only their inbred discipline curbing impatience. Leo had not uttered three orders since the attack began. Still he gave no sign. Eighty feet, sixty, fifty—out in the raging host below the green standard of the Prophet dipped again, signal for the columns to close in to support the towers and for the laddermen to renew their efforts.

As the green standard dipped all his staff started with sheer horror. Leo had leaped upon the open parapet. None could mistake him. A purple chlamys floated from his shoulders. Around him whirred a dozen Moslem arrows. To him they were as snowflakes in the gale. The Emperor's hands made a trumpet, and he sent the Roman war cry now here, now there, far over the walls and the assailing hosts:

"Jesus Christ is victor!" Simultaneously engineers at his side flung round missiles down into the moat. Smoke rose, then a burst of fire shot up as a lurid signal. A thunderous cheer answered from all the walls and impatient array behind. The next instant, with a clang, the drawbridge before St. Romanos fell. Out of the wide portal, their *franziskas* dancing above their lofty heads, poured a grim wedge of Frankish mercenaries, a seven-foot giant leading their apex. *"Out! Out!"* they called in Northern gutturals, as with sledge-hammer blows they fell on the dervishes, every axe-stroke crushing a helmet or lopping a limb.

Before the unexpected shock the Saracens gave way. They recoiled farther when behind the Franks poured forth, in bristling pike hedges, century after century of the regular infantry, shield to shield in the close Roman array that had carried well the eagles on a thousand stricken fields. Axe to scimitar and spear to pike, they strove for long moments under the walls. Soon one of the siege towers was in danger. The front ranks of the Hagarines, for all their frantic valour, began recoiling upon the rear. The green standard tossed again, at last desperately: the signal for the *kaids* in all the reserve divisions to bring up their unwearied men. New thousands came rushing to the front with a fearful gladness: *"Allahu akbar! Now to win paradise!"* Syrian called again to Persian and Persian to Arab. But next the Moslem war-cries were changed to unearthly howling. *"The fire! Iblis' fire! The jinns are against us! Save, Allah, save!"*

All along the line of the abandoned stockade, out of the very ground, seemed leaping the flames. Starting far off to right and left, over a stretch of many furlongs, the fires raced towards a common centre directly before the Gate of St. Romanos. The attackers tore off their helmets to cast water from the moat: the shivered piling only blazed with fiercer heat. At the same instant other catapults and dart-hurlers, more powerful than before, began shooting missiles from the walls. The converging flames cut off the Saracens around the siege towers and nearest the moat from their comrades beyond. Now, through the smoke, the Emir of Emirs could be seen standing erect in his litter. He was gesticulating, pleading frantically with his rear divisions to brave the flames and succour their comrades under the walls. Numbers gallantly rushed forward, but were caught by other numbers, terrified, scorched and desperate, running back. Not many could cross that fire wall and live.

Presently an elephant, beyond all control by his mahout, tore from his shackles and raged back into the press, trampling a long path of destruction. The head of the Frankish column had hewed its way to the foot of the nearest siege tower. Once the Christians gained its unprotected rear, a long red flame was soon springing up its top-lofty ladders and trestlework. The men caught upon its summit dropped like shrivelling worms, but the Saracens threw away their lives recklessly to save the other two towers. Twice they flung back the Roman onset, when from north and south along the solid way betwixt the moat and palisades came the trampling of the imperial cuirassiers, pouring from the numerous military gates.

The Protectors led the charge; the Anatolian lancers-of-the-line thundered behind them. On their tall steeds, protected horse and man by complete panoply, the Hagarine arrows clattered from them harmlessly. They speared the dervishes like boars, and sent their own horses up to the very limits of the fire. Near their head raced a purple banner tipped with a golden eagle. All the hosts knew who rode beside it. The Moslems cried out in despair: *"Allah is against us! Our repulse is fated! The Lion! Deliver from the Lion!"*

The flames caught the second siege tower, then licked up the third. The last of the elephants, with a trumpeting shriek, tore through the fire wall and into Saracen ranks wavering behind. The movable bridges and ladders had long since gone the way of the towers. In desperation, the last of the original attackers who had crossed the outworks ran back through the fire, and a few escaped to tell the tale. The blaze, still furious, prohibited effective pursuit by the victors, but now again from battlements, gates and all the Christian host rose the exultation, *"The Hagarines retreat! The green standard flies! Jesus Christ is victor!"* while other leathern voices caught up, *"Ten thousand years to our Basileus! Ten thousand years to our Lion!"*

Missiles were still flying alike from walls and foe, but sitting upon his horse just below the Gate of St. Romanos, his staff congratulating about him, Leo lowered his shield, loosened his cuirass and threw back his casque to wipe the heavy sweat from his brow. *"They have their lesson, comrades,"* he was saying, with his wonted smile, when an arrow whistled downward from the parapet. It smote the Basileus in the neck at the joining of the gorget and body armour, and

he reeled back into the arms of Artavasdos. Fergal, at his other side, glanced instinctively upward. Through a loophole in the battlement he believed he saw two peering faces—instantly withdrawn. Was he mistaken? Was the countenance of one the unforgettable face of Hormisdas? A centurion instantly flew inside the gate and up to the battlement. The section of wall around was entirely vacant. Nothing could be discovered. In the confusion and huzzahing following the victory any kind of accident was possible.

None save immediate members of the staff saw the catastrophe. The Moslems, all unconscious, were hastening in demoralization to their camp, blessing Allah that the Romans were attempting no great counter-thrust. They had lost all their siege apparatus, all their elephants and over ten thousand of their bravest. Worst of all, they had lost utterly their confidence in the possibility of storming the Walls of Theodosius. Defeated completely by sea, they were now defeated as sorely by land. A far from any friendly base the host of the High Emir was pinned fast. It could not even retreat with fair credit....

... Constantinople again gave itself over to rejoicing that night; once more the rapturous thanksgivings in Hagia Sophia; once more the ecstasies over the Miracle of the Fire, praise for its unknown inventor and for the prescient leadership and the valour of the Lion. But even while the heralds called out the glad tidings of victory in all the fora, down side streets rumbled a closely covered army wagon escorted by a little knot of sorely distressed officers. They had drawn out the arrow. The wound itself was not deadly, yet an inspection of the missile instantly told a story. The point had been smeared with some substance, presumably poison, whereof clear traces adhered to the wooden shaft. Probably all but a little of the venom had been dashed away by the thick quilting the Emperor had worn under his cuirass, but enough had struck home to make the warrior already pallid and fainting.

“On your lives conceal this,” had been his last orders as they bent over him. “Take me—to my mother.”

To Kasia then they brought him, driving into the palace grounds by a private gate, while Artavasdos and Basil put on brave countenances, and assured the cheering folk in the Augustæum that “His Sacred Clemency is naturally weary to-night because of his valiant endeavours. You will excuse him from your rejoicings.” So the city continued its celebration, all men saying to one another, “Well, what think the Hagarines of this the second roar of our Lion?”



CHAPTER XXX

IN THE CAMP OF MOSLEMAH

WHEN Placidia broke the news to Kasia of her son's plight, the latter merely remarked, "I was prepared for worse than this, praised be the Panagia!" and insisted upon cross-examining the physicians in person. The ablest of the university faculty of medicine were already at the palace, sworn to secrecy upon their lives, and full of wise saws from Hippokrates, Galen and Marcellus, but they were able to tell the Empress-Mother little more than an army leech had discovered already, that the wound was not extremely deep, and that Leo was partially throwing off the immediate effects of the poison. If the wound did not fester, if the patient's strength did not fail too sorely, he had a reasonable chance, if not—"But," concluded the oldest doctor, shaking his long beard, "your son has the body as well as the soul of the lion. Perhaps he can fight the poison as well as he has fought Moslemah."

The moment Leo was within the palace Kasia assumed complete control. The scurrying menials saw something of her mighty son's own puissance in the cool old peasant woman as she issued her efficient orders. The imperial close was a large place, but neither the highest chambers of the Chalke nor the Daphne could be absolutely exempt from the bustle of officialdom and of martial preparations. "Take him to the Bukoleon palace," she commanded. Here, quite detached from the great complex of imperial buildings, a stately two-storied mansion looked out upon the Marmora. The structure had been used by kinsmen of former emperors, when state policy required that they should be lodged within the greater palace but not directly in the regular mansion of the reigning sovran. The halls and chambers, nevertheless, were of quiet magnificence, and the upper windows commanded a water panorama more than usually sweeping. Kasia selected the loftiest and most secluded chambers, then she summoned Michael:

"If the lad's to recover (and he's a good lad, and it's proper he should recover) it'll be thanks to decent nursing. The men can fight Hagarines, but it takes women to fight wounds and fever. These mincing palace hussies are enough to spoil his last chance. Go, then, to Kallinikos' Pera relatives and tell them to take that old fool in charge and keep him well fed and comfortable. Next go to Sophia and Anthusa and tell them they're wanted at the Bukoleon."

Michael departed with the speed worthy of his errand. When Anthusa received the command and knew its cause, she grew very white, but she made her dispositions with great calmness. Soon she and her sister were installed with Kasia in the sickroom. As far as possible they were quite isolated. Only Placidia freely came and went. The girl Saloma and Peter (whose loyal distress was pathetic) attended to their meaner wants. Even in the palace few understood why the Empress-Mother had so suddenly changed her chambers. It was supposed that the old lady, whose moods had already become a standard subject for jesting in the "Sacred Butteries," had found the Daphne too noisy and formal, and was determined to intern herself in the Bukoleon, to the great relief of the pompous Silentiaries and Vestiaries who even in days of siege strove hard to maintain the full etiquette of the "God-guarded Cubicle."

The Emperor was no longer seen upon the walls and in the streets. After the second victory, however, his prestige was so high that at first the populace accepted any excuse for his disappearance: "He was at the remote fort of Blachernai." "He was across the Bosphorus, expecting an assault on Chrysopolis." "He was shut up in the palace experimenting with some new and still more marvellous catapult."

The Saracens held sullenly to their camp. Some of their ships still rode off the Isles of the Princes, and at intervals a squadron of swift sailers would head northward towards the Bosphorus, but the *St. Michael* had but to show her golden eagle beside the great chain and all their prows would swing abruptly southward. By land and sea the fear of the "Maritime Fire" possessed the Hagarines. Prisoners said that Moslemah had proclaimed a reward of fifty thousand gold dinars to the man exposing its full secret. The money was still with the camp treasurer.

To offset the Emperor's absence Basil and Artavasdos showed themselves everywhere, on the plazas, along the porticoes, upon the sea and land walls, and among the ships. Many things were enjoined "by the personal command of the Basileus"; many proclamations issued in his familiar direct language. The city militia had become less boastful and more teachable following the great assault. They were becoming so well drilled that veterans no longer laughed at them.

One bright autumn day all Constantinople rejoiced to see the Bosphorus white with ships. The harbour chain was drawn aside. The ready dromonds swung out to guard the channel to Chalcedon while a great grain fleet from Sinope and Trapezos swept into the Golden Horn, but the Moslem armada dared not stir. After that the bread ration in the city was increased and croakers ceased to groan about "starving in the winter."

Thus everywhere, save in the Bukoleon, the blessed saints seemed smiling on the Romans, but within its halls of marble, onyx, porphyry and mosaic Kasia and the sisters fought what was for long a more doubtful battle than any in the Bosphorus or before St. Romanos. For days Leo hung between life and death. Twice the architherapist pointedly suggested that the Patriarch be invited to keep himself close at hand.

“It’s the last sacrament, you mean,” angrily retorted the Empress-Mother after the second hint. “Not yet, my learned *kyrios*. If the lad’s to go, Pope Michael, who loved him, shall give him the oil and wafer, and never that glozing Germanos who bends double to him only because he must. But know this about my Leo: the Hagarines may have bridged his moat, but his walls are not stormed yet!” ...

... At times in his fever Leo’s mind wandered far. Sometimes he was riding with his old comrades to the relief of Iconium, sometimes pleading with Leander and Kallinikos to hasten the manufacture of the fire, sometimes in the naval battle was calling his marines to fling off the grappling irons of a blazing Moslem dromond. He seemed never to recognize Anthusa, but of her he talked incessantly. He was devising with Fergal excuses to visit the House of Peace. He was on the barge flying to Therapia with that message which was never delivered. He was at the palace the coronation night after he had seen Anthusa the day of the procession. Then he would swear blasphemous oaths at the fate which granted to Fergal happiness, and denied to him his.

After his worst ravings Kasia would command Anthusa, “Sing, girl!” and the latter, with red cheeks, pale lips, but with a voice no bulbul could outvie, would quiet him with some of the old tragic choruses—some great threnos from Sophocles or a triumphal pæan from Pindar celebrating the victory of the pure and good. Or when these failed she could more surely calm him by some Christian hymn, such as that of the Patriarch Anatolios on “Christ Stilling the Tempest”:

“Fierce was the wild billow,
Dark was the night,
Oars laboured heavily,
Foam glimmered white,
Trembled the mariners,
Peril was nigh:
Then spake the God of God, ‘*Peace, it is I.*’ ”

“Ridge of the mountain wave—
Lower thy crest,
Wail of Euroclydon—
Be thou at rest;
Peril there none can be,
Sorrow must fly
Where saith the Light of Light, ‘*Peace, it is I.*’ ”

“Jesus deliverer,
Come Thou to me,
Sooth Thou my voyaging on
Life’s troubled sea.
Then when the storm of death
Roars sweeping by,
Whisper, O Truth of Truth, ‘*Peace, it is I.*’ ”

... “Anthusa, how will this all end?” spoke Sophia one day, when Leo lay uneasily sleeping. “He is now Emperor. When he marries he must consult state interest. What can he be to you? He will not dishonour you, and you will never dishonour yourself. How can this all end?”

“I do not know,” Anthusa answered, holding down her head to hide her burning cheeks. “I only know that his life hangs by a thread, and that I can only see ahead from hour to hour. If God spoke to me, ‘He will recover if only you will pledge never to see him more,’ I would reply, ‘So be it, Lord,’ and try to keep my promise gladly.”

“Alas, my little sister!” cried Sophia tenderly, seizing both her hands. “You know that I will always love you.”

Every day Basil and a few other faithful sharers in the fell secret visited the Bukoleon. The anxiety of the tough seaman for his long-time comrade was pathetic. Hungrily he sought each crumb of comfort. When the physicians talked their blind jargon of fluxes and humours, his great mustaches worked impatiently. Then in relief he would turn to the sisters.

“You are the sole anchors for the dromond off a very rocky shore,” he would adjure them. “Do your best, women, do your best. The fate of a million Christians hangs on your faithfulness and skill.”

So day slipped into day, and Leo ceased his tossing and raving. Then at last the architherapist permitted himself one afternoon to call Kasia aside. His face beamed with professional satisfaction. “Sacred Majesty,” he announced, “the precepts to Hippokrates, aided, perhaps I must grant, by skillful nursing and by the prayers to the Panagia, seem to have prevailed. Your august son has thrown off the poison. The inflammation of his wound recedes, but his strength is nigh spent. He must be kept quiet and entirely unburdened by public cares, or all our joy is changed to mourning.”

* * * * *

On the day after Leo began unmistakably to amend there was a council of the emirs in the pavilion of Moslemah.

The great tent of the High Emir had been pitched inside the Saracen circumvallation near the Church of St. Mary, about half a mile from the Gate of the Fountain. Here in summertime there had been a luxurious park, well stocked with tame deer and much frequented by the Emperors when they desired a cool outing amid groves, springs and verdure within easy reach of the city. Now, however, in addition to the desolating presence of war, the leaves were falling or hung withered and sear on their branches. Winter was shutting in with premature severity. From the Euxine descended chilling blasts. The unaccustomed Orientals huddled about their camp fires and shivered as they drew closer their abayahs and kaftans. Already most of their camels were dead and grievous was the plight of the horses. The prospect for the Hagarines was therefore becoming very cheerless. Stark and grim before them rose the Walls of Theodosius with all the nine score towers, while daily the Christian outposts taunted the besiegers: “Are you warm, Moslems? Fear not. The fires of hell shall soon be hot enough for all of you, O pack of Infidels.”

The plight of the invading host was made worse by grievous news. Already it was being told how inside the city there was abundance of fuel and provisions. The best Saracen admiral was dead as a result of exposure and chagrin at the great naval defeat, and his ships, in mortal fear of the fire, still clung closely around their havens. It was reported, indeed, that a new land army was forcing its way across Anatolia to coöperate with Moslemah from the Bithynian shore and that another powerful fleet would arrive in the spring from Egypt. Spring, however, seemed far away. Nevertheless, in the chilly tents and cabins in the Moslem laager the ulemahs still exhorted the Faithful not to lose confidence in victory:

“Saith not the excellent Book, ‘As for the Misbelievers, their wealth and their children shall avail them nothing before Allah! Declare, therefore, unto them, ye shall be worsted and in hell shall ye be gathered together?’” Then scabbards and hilts would clash and all the thousands raise their fierce “*Ya, Allah!*” All this enabled the rank and file to endure, but the emirs were not men to hug illusions. It was a despondent conclave that gathered at the summons of the Emir of Emirs.

Conscious that he had been the soul of the expedition and that on him would fall the main onus if the siege failed, Moslemah made a brave attempt to affect optimism.

“In this great work for El Islam,” he announced from the head of the divan when the salaams and compliments had passed, “we must verily expect Allah to test His people. What are our reverses, what our sufferings compared with the woes which were fated for the Apostle himself (on whom be peace) to endure? Was he not stoned from Mecca? Did not the impious Koraichites pursue to take away his life? Later, at the battle of Ohud, did not the Misbelievers prevail, and as for Mohammed himself, was not his cheek wounded and a tooth driven out? What said he then to the misdoubting, ‘Be not cast down, neither be ye grieved—for victory will yet come. If ye are wounded, verily your foe is wounded also. These battles we make to alternate among men that Allah may single out the real Believers.’”

“Excellent are the words of the Emir of Emirs,” answered Mokanna, a sub-general, wrapping himself more warmly in a sable-lined kaftan. “More than holy examples, however, are needed to unlock St. Romanos. I doubt if the Romans have suffered severely. Had we attacked the day when Leo was crowned he would have had scarcely enough trained men to

have held his long walls. Now every day the spears multiply upon the ramparts. The spies tell us that the city folk are becoming ever better drilled. We look any hour for a dangerous sortie.”

“Would to Allah it might come!” exclaimed a brown-visaged kaid. “My poor Syrians would grow warm again fighting. Their pious confidence has frozen within them.”

“Allah forbid we should have to face that accursed fire again,” rejoined Mokanna gloomily. “Unless we master its secret never will we enter Constantinople save as captives.”

“My officers forget that they are Moslems,” interposed Moslemah imperiously; “that they must answer at the Great Day if we turn back dishonoured from the djihad; that they must answer earlier to the Shadow of Allah himself.”

“Perhaps we fear that second judgment most,” cast out Mokanna impiously. His superior was about to bid him with passion, “Be silent,” when the *aarif*^[58] at the door of the pavilion came forward with profound salaams.

“Will the Emir of Emirs condescend? The agent expected from the city is at hand and brings a certain Christian with him.”

The brow of Moslemah cleared. “Valorous emirs and kaid,” he declared, “know that I have had trusty friends of El Islam within the walls. Most opportunely at this moment they are come out to us. Their information may aid to shape our counsels.”

Two figures, heavily cloaked, were led somewhat awkwardly forward and prostrated themselves at the high commander’s dais. The first soon threw back his mantle enough to be recognized (by a few present, at least) as the slave dealer Hormisdas. The second continued, even after he rose, to keep his face muffled. Moslemah bent forward affably:

“The worthy Hormisdas, O Chieftains of the Faithful, is a tried agent of El Islam, the more valuable because his life is spent so much among the Disciples of Issa. With him I conferred most profitably when he was last in Damascus. Since then, good fellow”—he turned to the newcomer—“you have sent us many reports we have found trustworthy and useful. I praise your zeal. I would I could also praise your success in one great matter which has set all our projects on the razor-edge of calamity.”

Hormisdas’ broad sleeves flew about in gestures of vehement deprecation: “Oh, but permit your slave speech! I know what is on the Emir of Emirs’ tongue—the secret of the fire. It is true we have not been able to master it. Nevertheless know, O Lieutenant of the Lieutenant of the Most High, that our watchers about the palace, yes, and about the very Emperor himself, have not failed to tell us ‘Something strange is afoot.’ On strong suspicion we set spies around the sage Kallinikos, by the vulgar called a magician. Alas, for our endeavours! The imperial treasury is not so well guarded as the Mangana where he operates. Three of the Kalif’s devoted slaves have been taken. Already they are numbered among the happy martyrs. But after the hanging of the last, not all the gold we can offer will stimulate the zeal of others. We get nought but empty tales. What is fated is fated.”

“It is fated we should suffer foul defeat both by sea and land,” spoke a sub-emir. “Bethink you, most exalted Emir of Emirs, is this fellow really to be trusted?”

“I trusted?” cried Hormisdas, with half a scream. “Do you question that I am not at heart as true a Moslem as ever bowed in the great mosque in Damascus and said the ‘Fattah’?”

“I like you not,” returned the candid officer. “Persian you claim to be born, Christian you are inside the city—and Christian, I swear, you’ll be to-morrow, if so blows the wind of advantage.”

“This to me?” groaned the emissary. “Protection, great Lord,” and in supplication he cast himself at the foot of the dais. Moslemah shrugged his shoulders and bit his lip.

“We are not here,” he declared, “to question this man on personal matters. Enough that I believe that now he speaks the truth. Let us proceed. Have you, O Hormisdas, done nothing more since the two battles, to learn the composition of the fire?”

“At great risks certain sailors were corrupted. They supplied us with a few ounces left in the bottom of an exhausted case on one of the dromonds. I think that the substance presently found its way into your exalted Lordship’s possession.”

“It did,” confessed the general, “but our most learned engineers with the army and fleet made nothing of it. Whilst testing its qualities water was unluckily spilled thereon. Instantly it burst into flames, almost destroying the tent they were in. The stuff was utterly consumed.”

“It is Allah’s will,” rejoined Hormisdas resignedly, “but let these valorous lords know that the magic spells of Solomon the Ancient can unlock their secrets sooner than can we those of the workroom of Kallinikos—if, indeed, he be the magician. Associated with him now are several younger men whom, I say it with grief, it is impossible to corrupt, and they in turn are closely guarded. It were profitless, also, to consider removing Kallinikos from this world. His secret is apparently shared by enough for its perpetuation, by too few for its betrayal.”

“A helpful emissary from the city you are,” darted Mokanna sarcastically. “Has Leo commanded you to come out thus and encourage us?”

“Has Leo?” reëchoed Hormisdas, with a glance of triumphant subtlety. “O mighty Lords, it is on account of a matter concerning this Leo that the least of your slaves is before you this hour!”

“Declare your meaning,” commanded several.

“O valorous Lords of El Islam, what are your reports from your outposts? Have you of late seen Leo the Emperor upon the walls, upon sorties, or otherwise showing himself as in the first part of the siege? You have not? Then hear with all your ears and let your hearts leap for joy.” Hormisdas smiled with all the pleasures of a dramatic pause. “Leo the Emperor was stricken by an arrow at the end of the great battle before St. Romanos.”

“*Allahu akbar!*” cried several officers, half leaping from their cushions.

“For days his life has hung by a thread. Even now, although they profess to expect his recovery, he still lies weak almost unto death. Meantime, strange rumours are beginning to course the city. Now, if ere long it were fairly whispered, ‘The Emperor is dead’——”

An excited commotion among all the chieftains again stopped him. Wiry hands were catching their hilts, dark eyes shone fierce and bright, but the kaid Sukaina scowled menacingly:

“Tell me this, slave vendor—who shot that arrow? Came it from our ranks or the Emperor’s rear?”

Hormisdas’ smile was like a round moon:

“The least of your slaves can conceal nothing. My skill in archery is nought, but I made use of another good servant of the Kalif within Constantinople—the shipmaster Satyros, not unversed with the bow. In the heat of the battle I introduced him to an unoccupied spot on the wall by St. Romanos. We bided our time and Allah favoured us with having the Emperor remove his caique directly below our loophole. Satyros shot—not in vain. If the wound had been deeper, then my poison on the arrow——”

“Dog!” cried several high officers together, flinging the coarsest of Eastern epithets, but the slave dealer stood unmoved.

“Grieved am I,” he replied, in buttery accents, “if my zeal in the Kalif’s service is misprized. Unfortunately, however, the Emperor lived. What now is actually the case is best learned from my friend here, the reverend Deacon Evagrius, a Christian still, alas! but for all that a devoted slave of your Lordships.”

“Away with these filthy curs!” declared Sukaina, rising in disgust. “I have seen the Lion face to face. As a Lion let us meet him. We will not sully our good Damascus swords——”

“Peace,” commanded Moslemah. “Allah forbid that I should have prompted this thing. We know, I trust, how to meet brave foes. But the use against us of the fire shows too well that queasy stomachs will never help to take Constantinople. What Hormisdas has done, he has done—not we. And he it is who must answer for the same to the Angel of Destiny. As for us, if Leo, our arch-foe, lies thus stricken it were treason to the Kalif and to El Islam were we not to take full advantage of our knowledge. Let this Evagrius, therefore, say on.”

The ex-deacon threw back his cloak and gazed about him most uncomfortably upon the unfamiliar company. Several kuids were fumbling with their daggers, but he gained courage as he heard his own voice. He spoke in Greek, which

tongue, however, was understood tolerably by most of the officers.

“Understand, O Serenities and Sublimities, that some time ago I was permitted to introduce a certain damsel, one Saloma, into the personal service of the Empress-Mother, who, rumour may have told you, is a very rustical woman, vulgar and ill at ease with the regular palace menials. So I had hoped to learn many things through her not unuseful to my beloved friend Hormisdas. I will not conceal from your Lordships that our holy Christian religion is still dear to me” (“Very dear!” muttered Sukaina, still toying with his dagger) “and only with reluctance did I consent to assist the cause of the Kalif, but unhappy necessity has made it apparent that the Panagia will not be too grievously offended.”

“Spare us these wanderings,” commanded Moslemah tartly. “Tell us plainly this: why have these great tidings not come to us the sooner? Precious time has slipped. Leo is recovering. Take care not to lie, else you are buried up to your chin, and left to perish slowly.”

“It is all true, true, exalted Emir of Emirs,” interposed Hormisdas zealously. “Your slaves were not certain that Leo had been wounded severely. His officers took great pains to conceal everything. As for all of ourselves, prompt flight and hiding became instantly needful. For long we could learn nothing.”

“Proceed,” brusquely enjoined Moslemah, nodding his great turban.

“Our hopes,” resumed Evagrios, “first revived when, venturing abroad, we found the citizens gossiping as they stood in line around the public bakeries for their rations, ‘Where is the Emperor?’ or ‘For days who has seen him?’ Then we found the same questioning creeping among the soldiers and in the fleet. Presently it was whispered, ‘Something has happened. Something is now concealed.’ The whisperings are becoming louder. Ere long they will be spoken out freely.”

“This is a weighty matter.” Moslemah bent forward intently. The lesser generals all clutched again at their beards.

“The excellent Hormisdas and I, however, feared some trickery. The Emperor is called the Lion, but sometimes, as we know with cost, he should be called the Fox. Vainly we strove for a safe word with that maid Saloma, but the accursed Empress-Mother was vigilant. None of her women could even twitter through a window. They were all imprisoned. Only to-day, thanks be unto St. Gabriel!—Ahem! I beg pardon of your Moslem Serenities—her watch was a trifle abated. I met Saloma briefly. She told your servant that the Emperor had been at death’s door, but that they said now in his sickroom, ‘He will live.’ However, for many days he must lie quietly, exempt from every care, hearing nothing of the siege, and till he can show himself again his condition will still be concealed from the army and people.”

The “Ha!” of Moslemah was reëchoed by all the divan. The Emir of Emirs fastened his eyes sternly upon the emissaries. “You have told us something that may give us Constantinople. Again, nevertheless, you are warned, do not play with us. We know you glozing Greeks too well. There’s an old Arabian saying, ‘Beware that your tongue doth not cut off your neck.’ If, however, you speak truly, when we master the city take each of you from the first spoil a thousand purses. Would to Allah we had known all this the day after he was stricken! Now the Emperor recovers apace.”

“But there is time, great Lord, there is time!” protested Hormisdas, in confident delight. “The story, ‘The Emperor is dead,’ can be made to buzz around as from a beehive. Officer can be made to distrust officer. The confidence in Leo has been the very heart and soul of the defence. Withdraw that confidence and distrust, consternation and confusion are everywhere. Give us seven days. Evagrios and I can bestir ourselves. Your camp treasurer should not stint us. This work will be safe and we can easily buy the proper men. The Frankish mercenaries, a great prop to the garrison, are very gullible barbarians. Seven days from to-day draw all your best forces quietly in the evening to the worst guarded gate. The officer in charge will be suddenly told, ‘The death of Leo is confirmed. Basil and Artavasdos already are fighting for control of the throne.’ While all is dismay, and when, no doubt, part of the troops are marching from the walls to the palace”—Hormisdas bowed low to the tough warriors of the divan and put his hand on his breast—“I leave it to these most valorous kaid and emirs to do the rest.”

“By the lightnings of Allah!” burst from several. “Fear not that.” ...

... When after many more questions and agreements the slave dealer and the ex-deacon were quietly withdrawn, to be smuggled into the city by a roundabout route through a postern in Pera, there was a contemptuous hissing after them: “*Ousht! Ousht!*”—as if driving away foul dogs, and many a lip curled angrily. Nevertheless, Moslemah and the upper emirs were agreed. Sorely as it hurt the Omiad pride to win Constantinople by such agency, how dared they cast away

this chance to gain complete victory for El Islam?

During the next days the ulemahs exhorted their chilled comrades, "O True Believers, bear up yet a little longer!" and picked divisions were quietly told off and trained for sudden movements with scaling ladders. The Christians noted renewed activity beyond the fortifications, but there were no signs of any fresh building of siege-towers or similar engines, and the Walls of Theodosius still rose as defiant as ever.



CHAPTER XXXI

THE ROAR OF THE LION

WHEN the fever left Leo he lay for long too weak for conversation or active interest in mortal affairs. Pitiful it was to see his great frame and mighty limbs, before which captains had trembled, helpless upon the pillows, while only his questioning eyes, following now one now another of his nurses, told that again he was renewing those contacts with the world which he had almost loosed altogether.

Anthusa, perforce, had often to be near him, although she remitted to Kasia and Sophia every care possible. Kasia indeed, whose ideas of social conventions still savoured much of the Mesembrian farm, would at length have thrust upon her all the main responsibilities of the sickroom. "Your hair is growing, girl," the old woman would repeat complacently; "your hair is growing." But Anthusa firmly resisted every attempt to leave her alone with the invalid. The manner in which Leo followed her with his gaze was most disquieting, although he seemed exceedingly shy and embarrassed at all personal ministrations. Anthusa, however, could not refuse to obey Kasia's command to "sing to him," and sing she did every evening, to soothe him to sleep, although never with pagan lyrics. And when the patient was resting quietly she would steal away from the Bukoleon to the convenient church within the palace compound, the Chapel of the Theotokos, founded by the devout Empress Placidia.

Here was kept a famous portrait of the Virgin, alleged to have come from the brush of St. Luke himself, and here, too, in a golden reliquary the swaddling clothes of the Christ child. Anthusa of wont set little store by holy ikons and relics, but there was now a vague comfort in kneeling before the altar bearing the precious casket, and surmounted by the black, stiff, gem-encrusted picture of a rigidly smiling woman. The very awkwardness and unreality of the portrait lifted Anthusa away from her own sore problems, and relief likewise came from the constant droning chant of the blind monks attached to the chapel, who never ceased their petitions for the repose of the fallen Christian warriors.

Anthusa well knew that if Leo's attention to her had been imprudent to the point of coarse gossip, when he was a mere strategos, it could take a far harsher accent now. That Leo loved her, and as a normal mortal would have offered her honourable marriage was a fact she cherished proudly in her heart. But that in late months, weighed down by the fearful responsibilities of the siege, he had not thought out the real hopelessness of their position she had grievous cause to dread.

He was Emperor. He belonged to his fifteen millions of subjects. He was obligated to found an unassailable dynasty and give repose to the sorely distracted provinces. How could he fitly marry any save the daughter of one of the great patrician houses? True, emperors had indeed lifted meanly-dowered brides to the purple. Theodosius II had wedded Eudokia, the daughter of a poor rhetorician of Athens. Justinian I had married the notorious Theodora, a variety actress. But the first marriage had ended in anguish and separation. Around the second still clung filthy scandal. Both bridegrooms had been crown-princes before becoming monarchs. Their position was well assured. They could defy the pointing fingers. All these facts would come home to Leo when the Saracens had been flung back; and that cool intellect which had exalted him among the mighty could teach where his public duty lay. Had he not said it himself, "My hours all belong to the Empire?" Could this thralldom to the purple ever relax its hold?

Caught by such thoughts, Anthusa would cast herself before the gleaming ikon. "O Christ-Bearer Ever-Blessed," she would pray, "teach me to rejoice in my mercies: that as man to woman he has truly loved me. Teach me to rejoice in that consciousness which a life of an hundred years can never take away. Teach me to rejoice that thou and thy Holy Son have this time spared his life, that he may accomplish Heaven's great purpose in peace and in war. And to myself grant calmness and resignation, wisdom and strength, that I may never dishonour myself and never by word or deed suffer him to swerve from the things that become a Basileus of the Romans."

After that she could return to the Bukoleon somewhat comforted, and resume with Kasia and Sophia the duties of the sickroom...

... While Anthusa was concerned with these things, quite other troubles preëmpted the head of her ever-active brother-in-law. Evil rumours at last were abounding in the city. The cessation of normal life left thousands with overmuch idle time. The throngs under the long porticoes and in all the fora were never more talkative and gesticulatory. "Where was the Emperor?" The report he was at Blachernai was disproved when a part of the local garrison was given a brief leave in the city. Nobody there had seen him. Like testimony denied that he had crossed to Asia. Once or twice a group of

worthless fellows deliberately gathered before the great gates of the Chalke. "Show us the Basileus!" had been their yell. It had been needful for the Protectors to charge them.

The mutterings of the civilian multitudes were fairly harmless. It was otherwise with those rising from the army. Personal loyalty to Leo had been the amalgam that had held many unfraternal contingents together. If he had disappeared, who then was Emperor? Artavasdos was highest strategos, but he was an "Armeniac"; and would Leo's "Anatolians" ever acclaim him? Would the fleet fight for any save Basil? Other strategoi, loyal enough to Leo, and privately informed of his disaster, were hinting they ought to visit the Bukoleon and see his condition for themselves. "Was he really recovering? Was the architherapist telling lies?" And behind these suggestions it was easy to imagine the eager thought: "If the throne *does* fall vacant, I've as sound claims as any."

The stories were traceable to no one source, yet the Emperor's circle sensed some sinister purpose behind them, and Fergal angrily repeated the Syrian proverb, "When one dog barks falsehood, ten thousand spread it like truth." All Constantinople seemed floating with rumours.

On the fifth day after Leo began to mend, the Celt held an anxious consultation at the Bukoleon with Basil, Artavasdos and Kasia. Count Karlmann, the Frank, had been asking pointed questions. His men were not Romans, he said; they had only sworn personal allegiance to Leo himself. Where was their war-chief? Were they being told lies about him? Was there even treason at the palace? The Frankish mercenaries would not fight for another lord unless cleared of their oath to the Lion. What had become of him?

Basil made the proposal of a straightforward sailor. Let the heralds call in the Augustæum: "The Basileus was sorely wounded. Now he is recovering. Wait. All is well." But Artavasdos had objections. Once it was publicly admitted that Leo had been stricken, if he could not show himself immediately the rumour would intensify: "He is really dead. They are preparing us for the news"; and next, "Who is plotting to wear the purple leggings?" It were best, therefore, to tell a few more bold lies, to ignore resolutely all mutterings, and to wait seven days longer. Leo would have then recovered at least enough to meet all the higher officers and all would be well. Artavasdos' urgings prevailed, especially because the Saracens seemed absolutely quiet. They seemed indeed so discouraged in their blockade that there was danger of a lax watch on the part of the garrison.

Leo speedily became able to take an excited interest in all that had befallen. Vainly did the therapists enjoin, "Quiet!" "No talking of the siege!" Basil and Fergal were often at his bedside and told him at last all the news that was good. But they could never persuade him that the city was really secure and the Infidels held at bay. His restless mind was ever imagining evils and formulating orders. Sometimes he would rise on his bed defiant of prohibitions only to sink back in hateful weakness. "He won't obey me any more," confessed Kasia; "sure sign that he's getting better—praised be the Holy Trinity!" Then, when nought else availed, she would turn to Anthusa, "You command him, girl." And the Basileus of the Romans would lie meekly as a lamb at the mild request of the daughter of Kallinikos.

Thus another day passed, and another. Leo had been suffered to sit up propped upon the pillows. To-morrow, he insisted, he would have all the strategoi before him and learn if Basil and Fergal were concealing the truth. The chief physician at this shook a sagacious head: "Once mixed in public business, Sacred Clemency, nothing can restrain you. Wait another week, as you love your city and people."

"Take him away, the traitor!" cried Leo with rage genuine enough to make the leech tremble. "Moslemah has bribed him!"

Nevertheless, the afternoon passed quietly. It was a grey, cold day in the early winter, and the sickroom was warmed with charcoal braziers. In the sequestered Bukoleon scarcely a sign told that Constantinople was a besieged city. Fergal had been in earlier to report "All is well," and Artavasdos to suggest the wisdom of transferring more troops from Blachernai to Chalcedon. The shadows of the early evening were advancing. By a tall gilded candelabrum Anthusa sat reading in clear, rich voice from Arrian's Campaigns of Alexander. Soothed by the music of her tones and perhaps ignoring the stirring narrative, Leo seemed sunk in grateful reveries. In a remoter corner of the wide room Kasia sat with her faithful gossip Placidia, the latter aiding to disentangle a huge skein of the indispensable wool. In another niche the girl Saloma squatted mute and motionless, but watching all silently with keen eyes. From the palace area below presently sounded the furious galloping of several horsemen, followed by much running and shouting of orderlies. Such events had become common, and Anthusa continued reading while Leo rested calmly upon his pillows. Then bounding steps reëchoed upon the stairs, and Peter's voice was upraised outside the door: "It is impossible even for you. The

command is positive the Little Kyrios is not to be disturbed again to-night.”

“This is for life or death,” Basil was ordering with unwonted harshness. “Give way, sirrah! The Emperor must know.”

The admiral entered, followed by Fergal. Both were out of breath. Basil had lost his helmet and a new red scar ran clear across his forehead. There was more blood on his gauntlets. Placidia ran affrighted towards her husband.

“You’ve been in battle! Yet all has seemed quiet. Praise the Panagia you’re safe. But why here?”

The admiral literally ran to the bedside without greeting or salute.

“There’s no other way. The Emperor must show himself. The Frankish mercenaries have mutinied. They won’t heed my protests. A hellish story flies along the walls like fire: ‘Leo is dead. The strategoi are struggling together at the palace.’ Treason’s afoot. Detachments are deserting the battlements. The Saracens are attacking the northern gates. A few towers are theirs already.”

“Already? And I—here?” Leo had risen like a ghost and flung aside the bed-clothes. With lightning motions he was casting around himself the first garments available.

“Boy! You will kill yourself!” screamed Kasia, seizing his arms. With power once more resistless he thrust her by.

“Only to the Augustæum,” pleaded Anthusa, knowing well the futility of any greater objection.

“I go where a Basileus is needed,” shot back the monarch, striding past Peter and down the stairways. The women looked to see him fall. He seemed to totter at first, but apparently gathered steadiness as he went onward. Pale as the grave, but erect and terrible, he descended among the group of subalterns anxiously discussing Basil’s fell news.

“Horse! Armour! All the guard!” Leo’s orders sent a dozen running; but Fergal stood close at his side. The Celt did not remonstrate but at every turn saved his master when possible. Leo had to be lifted upon his horse but once mounted he rode firmly. Already the palace compound was a scene of furious activity. Reserve centurions were mounting the seawall to guard against naval attack. Another courier had arrived—two arrows in his target:

“They are fighting on the ramparts at Blachernai. The Franks have quitted the walls. They are marching down the Adrianople Way vowing they will take the palace. The moirach Makrobios is stopping the Saracens with what men will still obey him.” ...

... Arrayed as became an Emperor, Leo rode into the imperial plaza before the Chalke. The Protectors had already mounted in hot haste, though sore confounded by the tidings; but at sight of the imperial figure their cheers shook the golden tiles above their heads. “The Basileus! All is well!”

“Comrades,” announced Leo, “you see that I am not dead. Teach now the Hagarines it’s perilous to beard the lion.”

“The Lion! Again the Lion! Ten thousand years——”

The cheering was caught up by other troops as they flew across one forum after another. From all the barracks and outposts poured in the now rejoicing soldiery. The report that the Saracens were on the walls had already brought up Artavasdos from the War Department. With a swelling host the Emperor raced down the Adrianople Way. Close by the Church of the Apostles he met a long grim column of Franks on their furious march towards the palace, at their head the towering figure of Karlmann.

Leo rode bareheaded to meet him. “This way, axemen!” was his call. “The Saracens are at Blachernai, not by the Bosphorus.”

A torch flashed over the Emperor’s face. Like delighted bears the mighty Northerners surged around him.

“Hoch! Hoch! It’s our Lion!” They almost plucked him from his horse. “Lies, all lies, the busybodies told us. Back, brothers; knock the brown devils into the moat!”

By the great Cistern of Aspar, however, came new messengers of calamity. The Saracens were storming the inner walls. Among the despairing defenders some malign spirit was now spreading the rumour that the Moslem fleet had

forced the great chain by the harbour. As Leo advanced, torches became needless, for the sky was lurid with the burning siege-works. One could hear the continuous thunder of deadly combat, and now the “*Allahu akbar!*” shouted in triumph to the darkening heavens; now the despairing “*Kyrie eleison!*” as of men nigh spent. When the Emperor approached the walls the pace of his steed slackened. Around him gathered his staff. Ticklish as was the situation, every eye shone confidence as he gave orders with his wonted precision. There was not time to arrange any surprise with the new fire. Hand to hand they must eject the Hagarines. Behind them, stirred by his magic impulse, all Constantinople seemed marching towards the walls, while cavalry bands raced ahead to reënforce the sorely-tried Makrobios.

Suddenly the Saracens found resistance stiffening. The Christians began shouting: “Tarry, Infidels! The Lion comes. He’s hungry!” The kaid who led the storming parties sent frantic appeals back towards the camp beseeching Moslemah to hasten up his full numbers. Acting on covert messages from within the city they had directed their unwarned attack upon the heights of Blachernai, close to the Golden Horn, where the rocky hill-slopes had forbidden the excavation of a moat, but where the very nature of the ground had rendered an assault nigh impossible. The sudden desertion of the Franks had enabled them to surmount the outer walls with their ladders. They had seized six towers on the lower fortifications and soon a long stretch of the adjacent curtain wall had been swarming with bronzed skins and crooked scimitars. The defenders had been making a last desperate stand to cover the all-important Gate of the Shoemakers when the first reënforcements arrived.

Leo lost not an instant in costly endeavours to drive the foe from the ramparts. The three military gates south of Blachernai swung wide. The theme-cavalry and infantry, stiffened by the better part of the civic militia, poured out beyond the walls like raging bees. From band to band the Emperor rode with personal appeal to every man to play the warrior, being answered with cheers which shook the now inky vault on high. Out into the night they charged, their movements guided by the unearthly glare from the walls, and spear to spear sustained the battle, although, raging to avenge former defeats, Persians and Arabs bore themselves as became the strength of El Islam. The first rush of the cuirassiers they turned; but Leo called confidently to his own tried lancers: “Now, Anatolians!”—and the Moslem standards went down under the Roman charge.

The emirs, sore bested, hastened up more men; but in the dense darkness of their rear division lost touch with division, orders went adrift, confusion became worse confounded. From the slopes by Blachernai, under the lurid light from the walls, groups of Hagarines could be seen running back towards their laager. “Allah! Allah!” rang their wail. “Who has deceived us? The Lion lives—more terrible than ever.”

Heedless of the pleadings of his staff, Leo put himself on a mound above the outworks where a great bale-fire of burning palisades made his purple mantle and the eagle banner beside him visible far above the press. To the besiegers it was as when Achilles shouted in his fury from the Greek trenches before Troy and all the Trojans shrank amazed:

“Then were the souls of all of them dismayed,
And fain their horses were to turn them back—
For blanching anguish smote them sore—
The men of Troy and all their proud allies.”

The battle ended when, after the frantic entreaties of Karlmann, Leo suffered his Franks to charge. “Have at the dog-brothers,” pealed their guttural yell. “Here are the fangs of the Lion!”

The Frankish column cleft the last Saracen divisions still struggling before Blachernai as a steel wedge rends the oak. Back into the plain fled all who escaped the red path cut by the axes. Severed from friends, and with the Romans victorious upon the ground below, the van of the attackers now found itself isolated upon the ramparts. Here for long the struggle continued from tower to tower. The Emperor had ordered that quarter should be given, but a devil’s fury was possessing the themesmen, and the Franks were all in a blind Northern rage. At last the soldiery were enough under control to listen to their commanders. “Your lives against prompt surrender!” called the heralds; and the last despairing Hagarines cast their scimitars into the moat.

The attempt on Blachernai had cost Moslemah five thousand men, the pick of the kalif’s host. It had been won by the Christians without invoking the magical aid of the Fire and after the Moslems had gained great initial successes. The morale of the Saracen host was now forced lower than ever, and a gloomy apathy possessed all their huge encampment, as they settled down to bitter battle with a grim and relentless foe, the Thracian winter....

... Leo had gone through the entire contest issuing his orders with an absolute lucidity and readiness. Fergal had kept ever beside him, whether on horseback or on foot. Once or twice the Emperor's voice had faltered. Towards the end of the struggle it became unnaturally shrill. Vainly had the Celt entreated him to spare himself. Better one might have pleaded with the rock-girded towers. When the last resistance collapsed, Leo rode to the Gate of the Shoemakers to receive the surrender of certain Moslem officers who had besought the privilege of yielding to him in person. He was sitting upon his horse awaiting them, under the black shadow of the towers amid the red torchlight, when Fergal heard him mutter, "I've lasted till we flung them out"; then hastily, "All's safe"—and he reeled very suddenly like a block of wood, his aide barely catching him as he toppled down upon the blood-spattered pavement.

There was no attempt this time to conceal his plight. The tidings, "The Basileus has fainted!" flew instantly along the walls and silenced all the cheering. The first officers who flew to his side groaned aloud, "He is dead!" When they stripped off armour and surcoat, his face shone bloodless beneath the lanterns, but his heart seemed fluttering. The men of iron standing by, who had just been snuffing out Hagarine lives like moths, wiped gory hands across their moistened eyes. Uncouth, vehement were the vows they raised to the Panagia, to St. Theodore, to all the holy of Heaven, nay, to all the fiends, if they would give back his life. Desperate attempts to revive Leo meeting with only partial success, the strategoi ordered that he be taken forthwith on a horse litter back to the palace.

The news, good and bad, had run before. All down the Adrianople Way, across the Forum of Theodosius and then along the Mesē, stood the folk by thousands. They had waited with frantic anxiety for news of the battle; now with bared heads they watched the long line of torches moving beside the litter. There was complete silence, except as men and women knelt in the streets pouring out loud prayers for their monarch. Thus they brought him again to the Chalke, where the portals were lit by hundreds of flambeaux and the cohorts of palace menials stood waiting for their stricken lord.

The reception of a victorious Basileus demanded a certain etiquette, whether he returned to triumph or to die. When the horse litter came through the state entrance, a pompous group of Counts, Logothetes, and Consulars kneeled ceremoniously, then swept forward in a magnificent hedge of stiff dalmatics, as a kind of supernumerary guard around the honest soldiers who would not surrender their charge. In this manner they crossed the torch-lit palace close and under the shadow of the domes, the marbles and the gleaming mosaics until approaching the entrance to the Bukoleon. Then, all unwarned, down its steps and into the sight of the hundreds, thrusting aside the astonished magnificoes, ran a young woman. The coif had fallen from her head; they saw her short hair flying and her countenance as pallid as the monarch's. Heedless of glances of horror, heedless of official hands thrust forth to stay, she cast herself upon the litter.

"Leo, Leo," she cried, seeking his face, "I am only of flesh and blood. I cannot endure longer. Speak! Ah, woe, they have slain you!"

The archtherapist, advancing behind her, strove with gentle authority to put her away. "You are beside yourself, girl. Go back to the Empress-Mother. This is no place for such a scene."

The woman gestured wildly. "He is *my* soldier," she cried; "that is all that I know."

She recoiled, however, from the litter enough to suffer the physician to make a hasty examination.

"Give praise to the Trinity," he announced after a tense hush. "By a miracle the Basileus' wound has not reopened, although he swooned from weakness. Heart and breath seem slowly returning. Take him to his rooms in the Bukoleon and let supplication be offered in all the churches."

Fergal and Basil carried Leo gently from the litter, and the doors of the residence closed abruptly in the faces of the assembled notables. The young woman had disappeared in the confusion, when the word had spread that the Emperor would live. The noble lords looked wonderingly one to another.

"Who is she? Comely enough!" was the general question.

"I think I know," sagaciously spoke Count Maurice Dukas, who had joined the group. "His Sacred Clemency is not so much of a monk as is often reported. She's a certain Anthusa, the daughter of that preposterous driveller, Kallinikos the philosopher—the Emperor's 'friend,' of course."

"All is explained," rejoined several, with cunning elevation of the eyebrows.

* * * * *

The next day Kasia sent Peter to the lodgings of Kallinikos beseeching almost frantically that Anthusa return to the palace. Leo, ran the message, was safe, but days again must elapse ere he could sit or even converse with Basil. Who could keep him quiet? Who read to him? Who sing? The faithful fellow brought back a blank refusal.

“Tell your august mistress,” ran the answer, “I will obey her in every other least command, but for the safety of my soul not in this. During the hours of waiting while the Emperor was upon the walls I was driven mad. I forgot all things save that he was in mortal danger. What has happened in my folly has brought me back to myself. Leo is Basileus. I am the daughter of Kallinikos the lecturer. I will die in the service of your master and mistress if needs be, but I cannot suffer them longer to conceal from me that God has fixed a great gulf between us. I can no longer have any ‘Cousins from Thrace.’”

The day following, Anthusa offered her services to the nuns of the Pankrator, the second great hospital, to nurse the many wounded. Her knowledge and orderly skill soon made her one of the most-valued members of the staff. From time to time Fergal told her how Leo convalesced, but never on any pretext would she approach the palace.

CHAPTER XXXII

HOW CYRUS REDEEMED HIS SOUL

Now the story of the siege of Constantinople and of all that Leo did—is it not written in the chronicles of the monks Nikephoros and Theophanes? For time would fail here to tell of all the combats by sea and land around the imperial city in those fateful twelve months after the coming of Moslemah.

Grievous was the discouragement of the Saracens after their second repulse from the walls; grievous the ensuing hardships in the crude huts of their laager as the winter blasts from Scythia whistled down across the storm-tossed Euxine. Supplies dwindled and forage failed. The Moslem raiders soon swept the Thracian country bare for miles about, yet could provide only a starving ration for the High Emir's unwieldy host. Repeatedly the Saracen leaders debated whether it were not Allah's will that they should raise the siege. They were deterred from this by the effective knowledge that a winter retreat before the victorious enemy would probably involve the loss of the entire expedition, and by comforting promises from Damascus of overwhelming reinforcements by spring.

Through an unwontedly severe winter, therefore, the Sons of the South endured great hardship while for an hundred days the solid earth was hidden by snow. Men and beasts alike perished miserably. The besiegers gritted their teeth and tightened their belts desperately when told that within the city there was warmth, safety, and sufficiently abundant rations to maintain the public courage. "The Lion is over his wound," taunted the Roman sentries from their outposts. "Take courage, Hagarines; you will hear again his roarings!"

When the first winds of the early springtime blew, came the tidings that at Damascus Solyman the Sensual had met his end while organizing the new expedition to succour Moslemah. In his stead reigned his kinsman, Omar II, a worthier Omiad, who strained the resources of his empire to hasten the relief forces. Once more (report had it) the dockyards of Phœnicia and of Egypt rang with the shipbuilders' hammers; once more the ulemahs from Kairowan to Bokhara extolled the djihad, enlisting the sword hands of the Faithful. The milder weather infused a new courage and activity among the Saracens already before Constantinople. The Kalifate had staked its prestige upon the siege. To suspend the undertaking would be to confess defeat and shake the grasp of the Omiads upon all the East. The crisis of the attack, therefore, was near at hand.

The same genial winds brought Leo again upon the battlements. He was thinner and paler than before. He gave decent heed to the remonstrances of Kasia and Fergal, "Spare your strength." Once during a skirmish before the walls he exposed himself to some long flights of arrows. With loyal violence several centurions immediately thrust him from danger. "I've heard in church," remarked one champion of many scars, "how King David's men once held him back from the Philistines lest some rashness quench the light of Israel. The Basileus had better trust to others to kill mere rats and mice."

After that Leo took fewer chances, but nothing escaped his ken. All winter long the city trainbands had been under rigorous discipline. The forum idlers of a year ago were passionately desirous now of high adventure. Certain divisions demanded noisily on the parade-ground, "When are we led out against Moslemah?" But there was obedient silence when the Emperor rebuked them, "That thing is mine to command, and yours to await."

Kallinikos had returned to his own dwelling. The manufacture of the new Fire had been competently and secretly continued by Leander and certain trusty assistants, but the sage, no longer indispensable, longed for his old books and surroundings in the House of Peace. There he was able to play at such matters as devising a new and more elaborate code of fire signals on the basis of the ancient scheme of King Seleukos, or to counsel Leander as to a project for discharging the fire through brazen tubes instead of in the form of hand-grenades.

The change was a great satisfaction to Anthusa. Little had been altered at the House of Peace, and their quiet region was untouched by the noisy marchings of the garrison. Dorkon the street dog still held to his loyal sentry duty by the door. The shrubs and plants bloomed green, bright and fragrant in the courtyard and window boxes. The two great cats still glided about sleepily. The warming weather also brought back the birds wherein Anthusa ever delighted. No threat of Saracens halted their northward-faring armies; all Constantinople became alive with them. Swallows nested over doors and arches, pigeons in huge swarms formed garlands of grey and white along cornices and cupolas, turtle-doves cooed in the cypresses behind the dwelling, halcyons flew in long files from the south, storks took up their solemn watch upon the pinnacles above Anthusa's head, and sparrows sought the crumbs from her hand. War still ringed

Constantinople about, but around the house of Kallinikos all was innocence and quiet.

Anthusa found another great relief at the Hospital of the Pankrator. By casting herself into the sufferings of others, by soothing the dying, by discovering hope for the living, by finding that no new burden ever made one too many, she won a peace never to be discovered by long vigil before the altars of Hagia Sophia. Yet at night sometimes, when from the lofty balcony of Kallinikos' house the vast city seemed spreading out beneath her, when under the moonlight and above the dark masses of groves and gardens, the white domes and pinnacles of the greater buildings shone like the handiwork of giants wrought in snow, her eye irresistibly would drift towards that lordliest group by the Bosphorus—the golden-tiled roofs of the Daphne and Chalke, of the Golden Hall, and a little beyond to the Bukoleon—then Anthusa would say in her heart, “Doubtless *he* is there,” and picture Leo, once more hale and self-contained, perchance now in homely converse with Kasia. Whereat, rejecting all luxury of tears, she would hasten back on any pretext to the Pankrator, to relieve some tired nun of her vigil....

... Presently Anthusa with all the rest of the city knew that another great hour of stress was at hand. Thrusting clear across Asia Minor, and traversing all Bithynia, appeared a mighty Moslem army under the Emir Merdesan. The Saracens ignored the strong fortifications of Nicomedia and Nicaea, but pressed on close to the Bosphorus. Their cavalry ravaged the undefended villages beyond Chalcedon, and the city folk now gazed forth anxiously upon the smoke of desolation rising across in Asia, just as earlier they had gazed upon the ruin wrought in Thrace. A few days after the advent of Merdesan another and greater tremor passed through the capital. Once again the thousands mounted the seawalls to gaze at the Marmora. Two more powerful fleets had come to join the remnants of the earlier armada: four hundred tall ships from Egypt under the Emir Sofian, three hundred and sixty from North Africa under the Emir Yezid.

Rumour soon told how the newcomers were arrogantly disdainful of the warnings given by the earlier assailants of the terrors of the Christians' Fire: “They would show those backward sons of Islam the way to close the Straits!” And seemingly the Roman admirals were petrified by the suddenness and overwhelming character of the Moslem reënfacement. One fine spring morning, taking advantage of the current which aided them to glide safely along the eastern shore, and keeping a safe distance from the city, the Egyptian armament actually plied its proud way up the Bosphorus and anchored opposite Therapia, the while African ships hugged the Bithynian coast near Kartalimen.

Vainly did the scowling citizens watch for the removal of the great chain and the flanking attack of the imperial dromonds. These rode peacefully at anchor within the Golden Horn. That night for the first time in the siege the Saracens could claim to have blockaded Constantinople on every side: from Thrace, Asia, the Bosphorus, the Marmora. Only the implicit confidence in the Emperor kept the city from panic.

Anthusa spent the day amid her own troubles. Sophia was in distress: Fergal had disappeared upon some capital errand of such secrecy that he had refused all information thereof to his wife, and only after his departure Sophia had discovered that he had again dyed his hair and resumed his old Syrian disguise. It taxed all Anthusa's powers through an anxious night to keep her sister from surrender to hideous imaginings concerning his fate if taken by the emirs. Just at dawn, however, came a messenger from Basil to comfort Sophia. Had she been upon the harbour after sundown, it was now told her, she might have seen the great chain slipped open just enough to permit the exit of a swift *galaias*, a slim scouting galley pulling with muffled oars. The watchers upon the walls had seen it disappear in the gloom northward from Galata, and just before daybreak there had been a low returning whistle near the boom. The craft had glided inside, and in the fading darkness, Fergal, disguised no more, could have been seen to leap upon the quay at the Navy Yard, then mount and gallop to the palace.

* * * * *

All the day following the advance of the new Moslem armament, informal armistice reigned along the waterfront of Constantinople. There were no musterings of the garrison. The Emperor visited the various landwalls as if merely to satisfy himself that there was no danger of a sudden onset from Moslemah's laager. In the Golden Horn, however, along the wharves west of the ferry, where movements of the shipping would be well concealed from Moslem observation, idle wisecracks noted that all the reserve dromonds were lying ready. The *St. Michael* and her stoutest consorts rode again near the great chain, but the bulk of the Roman armada was out of sight. As the soft evening stole over walls and harbours, there was again a continuous tramping in the streets as of many thousands: draughts of spare rowers for the galleys. Nothing, however, broke the sunset calm. The day closed as peacefully as if Sofian's and Yezid's fleets had

been pleasure barges or corn-ships.

The sentries had just changed for the last watch preceding midnight, when the hoofs of a few horses clicked through the palace gate nearest the Point of St. Demetrios. Leo was in full armour. He had just taken an unwontedly careful leave of his mother, whom he had assigned to Michael's protection. The priest and not the Patriarch (undisturbed in his palace) had given the Emperor his blessing. Leo rode quietly out upon the quay, where Basil, Fergal and a small staff were already awaiting him, grouped around a single torch.

"The ships are ready?" he asked the admiral.

"To the last thole-pin," returned the eager sailor.

"Very well, then; to the *St. Michael*."

The barge carried them quietly beside the flagship, which stretched out a long prone hull, a monster sleeping upon the placid deep. By a faint lantern the Emperor clambered the ship's side. On their benches, silent save for whisperings, sat all the rowers. The officers and marines on the poop suffered the monarch to reach the deck without cheer or salute. Leo took his station in the extreme stern, beside the helms of the great steering paddles. The night was moonless and partly clouded. Very dimly as the eye ranged westward over the vague contour of the Golden Horn could be seen ghostly shapes gliding nearer—dromond after dromond stroking out under a few oars from the inner harbour. The *St. Michael* had slipped her cable until her prow nigh scraped against the floats of the great chain. Through all her people reigned a silence truly oppressive. Fergal at his master's side cupped his hands to his eyes and strained eagerly out into the night.

"They are due at midnight," at length he fidgeted.

"Midnight is not yet here," announced Leo collectedly; "if the delay is too long we must strike without them. This is the time when we must throw dice with Fate."

Long moments followed, while officers and men cursed inwardly, while the Celt tore anxiously at his black-dyed poll, while even the Emperor's great fingers drummed nervously upon the taffrail. Then a falcon-eyed Eubœan lookout pointed into the dark, and muttered to his mate; and their "See!" passed in hoarse whisper along the flagship. Rising, falling, the watchers caught the glint of white oars moving along the Bosphorus. Several small craft were gliding past the guard-towers of Galata. Now they approached the northern terminus of the great chain. Now having found it, they were edging along its outer length as if seeking the centre where rode the *St. Michael*. The tension aboard the flagship increased. A marine dropped a boarding axe. Its clatter sounded across the calm water like thunder. Basil with a spear butt smote the blunderer into the scuppers as relief to his own feelings. The other dromonds were pressing closer from within, but all attention was upon the nearing strangers. Presently these "sandal boats," ship's pinnaces, were abreast of the *St. Michael* and halted as if in doubt of their proper motions. Instantly three red lanterns gleamed from the poop of the flagship. The answer was a resounding cheer in Coptic and mongrel Greek across the sleeping waters:

"Life to the Christian Basileus! Ten thousand years to Leo, our Emperor!"

"Curses on their noise," swore Basil, under breath; "these shouts may spoil everything!" But at his muttered order forty hands began tugging on the cable controlling the great chain. Its floats drifted apart. Immediately the foremost pinnacle was alongside. Fergal darted forward as strange seamen clambered the ship's ladder of the *St. Michael*, and let a little knot of strangers back upon the poop. The lanterns were suffered to flash over them, revealing the brown features and gaudy sashes of Egyptians. "Show us the Emperor!" demanded their leader; then, seeing the purple mantle, he fell on his knees before Leo.

"O most dread Basileus," he protested, "I am that Cyrus whereof Fergal has spoken, and whom in the Emirs' fleet at sore peril he has just visited. My friends and I are Christians. Tyrannous folly has made the Kalif impress us Copts for his service. Now we seek vengeance for the oppression of our country and redemption, if such may be, for our souls. For have we not all forsworn our God and apostatized? Henceforth we are yours."

"Understand, O Cyrus," spoke the Emperor, "that God has now vouchsafed singular opportunity to atone for your error. Fergal reports you are pledged to show us where ride the fleets of Sofian. Guide us well, and all the clergy of Constantinople shall beseech Heaven for your pardon. Guide us treacherously and I swear no mortal torments shall lack before the devils pluck your souls."

“We swear; we swear. May God cut us off from His last mercies.”

“Keep your oaths till later,” interposed Basil dryly. “Time’s pressing. Get part of your friends near the helmsmen, Fergal, and send the others to the lesser flagships. Slip the anchor quietly. Man all the banks without clamour. Now, rowing master, give the stroke as silently as you can. *Eu!* Not bad. We’re off and the Panagia grant our wives that we see Constantinople again at morn and not the New Jerusalem.”

Like flitting ghosts the Roman dromonds glided out into the night-bound Bosphorus: not five-and-twenty now, but a far statelier fleet, all the ships which the imperial city could build and man after a year of desperate preparation. A faint lantern on the stern of the *St. Michael* was the only guide as she led the way. They moved up the narrowing straits, past the dim capes of the Michaelion, Chelai and the Hermaion, then just beyond the latter promontory, where Europe and Asia seemed reaching out in the dark their fingers to touch one another, the watchers on the flagship’s prow saw a hull resting on the steel-black waters. “A guard-ship!” passed the whisper from stem to stern. Soon they heard her oars rattle and her head swing about in alarm. Dimly across the violet ripples came her hail in Arabic:

“In the name of Allah, who are ye?”

Cyrus was standing in the Roman prow. His Coptic accent was irreproachable. “A squadron from the African fleet below, to strengthen you. Your admiral’s position is dangerous.”

“If friends, give then the hailing signal. Be quick.”

“*Ayesha, Mother of the Faithful.*”

“Blessed be Allah! We feared a Christian trick. Those dogs are shrewd. The current runs strong here.”

“But stronger on the Asian coast. Tarry, for we’re soon alongside. Our emir would ask something of your captain.”

Basil was running along the gangways, muttering deeply and striking each laggard rower with the flat of his blade:

“Bend to it, rascals! Break your blades! Give way!”

The *St. Michael* answered with a leap. In a twinkling she was alongside the befooled Egyptian. An instant later and her grappling irons clattered upon the Saracen’s decks and her marines were pouring across the swinging bridges upon the smaller and weaker foe. It was dark and silent work. No fire—to alarm the fleet above. The yells of the terrified Moslems were soon drowned by the suddenness of the overwhelming attack. The other Roman dromonds went racing by at full oarage.

Completing her conquest, neither long nor desperate, and leaving a rearward galley to bring in captives and prize, the *St. Michael* presently resumed her way. The fleet had passed the promontory by Limen Phidalias. Before it extended the widest reaches of the Bosphorus, from Therapia over to the mountainous Bed of Heracles looming up darkly from Asia. Leo had joined Cyrus and Fergal at the prow, and the deserter pointed across the dim shimmer northward. Under the shelter of the bay beyond Therapia a long line of hulls spread out against the shore line. Possessed by his evil genius, and contemptuous of the foe through his first immunity, Sofian had anchored his fleet in a reach of the Bosphorus where the swift current made effective flight northward high impossible, while the southern exit was in firm possession of the enemy!

Even in the darkness Fergal knew his master’s eyes were gleaming like live coals. When had the Panagia vouchsafed a greater mercy? “The signal,” called Leo in reverberating voice. Instantly the mainmast of the *St. Michael* blazed forth with a clear white beacon. Simultaneously a rejoicing shout thundered from all the Christian ships. Their long hulls shot through the water as each rower strove upon his benches. The Hagarines had been caught strung out at anchor along the western shore. Scattered campfires told that some of the crews had even landed at the Great Valley to bivouac luxuriously under its oaks and plane-trees. It was one of those instants when the inconceivable folly of a commander can sway the life issues of empires. The dullest Roman knew that the Almighty had delivered the Hagarines into their hands.

Long ere they could reach the shores, however, a barbaric howling was rising from the Egyptian ships and all along the beaches. Lights tossed and went racing towards the ships. Frantic hundreds could be imagined tugging galleys down from the sands and thrusting them into deep water. As the attackers neared they knew that under the darkness the whole bay north of Therapia was a seething confusion—seamen, marines, transports, pinnaces, dromonds—chaos possessing

everything.

Leo stood again imperturbable, like some dread wind god smiling at the elements uncaged at his behest; but Basil uttered a great and terrible laugh:

“The sword of the Lord and of Gideon!” rang his call. “Ho, my merry men: blow your trumpets and break your pitchers!”

For answer, now from the prow of the *St. Michael* flared forth an iron basket set with the Fire. Like a young sun suddenly hung on earth, it glared red, lurid, devastating. The bay, ships and mountains flashed out of the darkness. Every little ripple of the Bosphorus gave back a gleam like blood. Other beacons, equally fierce, shot up from the following galleys. To the Saracens they seemed like onrushing angels of Death—like the dread Azraïl and his fellows who execute the dooms of Allah.

Once alarmed, the Egyptian captains did what brave men might: The readier ships charged out gallantly to meet the Romans and give time for their backward consorts; but they found no chance for valorous ramming and grappling. A Saracen approached a Roman dromond. The Moslem was yet a full ship’s length off when on the prow of the Christian under the glaring light was seen the levelling of a strange bronze tube. From the tube issued a dense puff of smoke, and then upon the Egyptian decks, farther than any hand-flung missile could carry, lo! a devouring ball of the deadly Fire. A second, a third—and even as in the earlier sea fight, upper works, cabins, spars, rigging, were covered with the racing flames.

Guided by the Egyptian deserters the Roman leaders made for the Moslem flagships with uncanny precision.

“God is with us! God is with us! The sword of the Lord and of Gideon!” the Christian seamen raised their battleshout, plying their new “fire-siphons.” And they fell on the Hagarines.^[59] ...

... Hours before dawn Constantinople was shaken by a great alarm. Men and women rushed up upon the housetops. To the north the skies were glowing with the brightness of burning Sodom. From up the Bosphorus came the hideous din of ships by hundreds, of men by tens of thousands locked in pitiless battle. Even along the quiet ways by the House of Peace where Anthusa stood on her balcony, rushed terrified boys crying that the Basileus had fallen and the Hagarines had forced the city. On their heels ran other groups as witlessly rejoicing because Moslemah had raised the siege. Next at every cross-street blew the trumpets to rouse the civic trainbands and send every available man to the walls. The wailing of the women and children, terrified yet again, even after long months of siege, rose from hundreds of balconies and windows.

Then, even as panic-stricken groups began rushing towards the neighbouring Church of St. Theodore to cast themselves before the altar, a great wave of shouting went passing from street to street. It gathered volume from every dome, parapet and housetop covered with the agonized onlookers. At last from her own home balcony, as she gazed towards the Bosphorus and Marmora, Anthusa herself could see the lurid apparition. Out behind the black bulk of the palace buildings and the Cathedral, into plain and awful view came a ship—her tottering masts were traced against the sky with fire: her hull was a seething volcano. Life within long since must have shrivelled away. Where were her people, God knew. Another after her; another, and yet a fourth; then two more locked in such deadly embrace they were going up in brands together. And down the waterways and over the awakened city spread the haze of smoke and the keen odour of a mighty burning.

Romans? Saracens? From her distance Anthusa only realized that the folk on the seawalls would groan and not shout so recklessly if they thought the Christian fleet had lost. More blazing hulls, until the daughter of Kallinikos was fain to turn away her head and cease from counting—to say a prayer for the souls who, whether calling on Christ or Allah, were voyaging into Eternity. At her side, rubbing his bewildered hands and peering seaward was now that most peaceful of men, her father, on whose hands leaped the tame sparrows, whose every act and word was gentle—and under the dome of whose calm forehead had worked that intelligence which had made these mortal fires possible. He was stupefied by the spectacle.

“This is fearful, child, fearful,” he was muttering wonderingly. “And I—I have prepared the Fire! In my peaceful study it was I also who gave Leander the idea for the new fire-tubes. I have destroyed more men than Sardanapalus. I cannot comprehend it. Yet the hideous thing was needful. I could not give you and Sophia over to the Hagarines.” He broke off,

nigh weeping. “Woe unto the world because of offences, but woe unto the man by whom the offence cometh!”

“Amen!” answered him Anthusa from her soul.

When the grey light at last broke over the hills of Chrysopolis, burning ships were still drifting down the Bosphorus. But with the dawn the streets reëchoed with the marching infantry. The main strength of the garrison was pressing towards the wharves, and presently the glancing waves towards Asia were alive not with dromonds but with barges and ever more barges, going forth loaded with brave men, and destined (Anthusa knew too well) to be pulling back full soon with their ghastly freight of wounded.

She dared not leave her father in an hour like this, although the impulse to rush forth and for sheer relief of spirit to course the streets alone was almost overmastering; but Ephraim went, coming back after a trying interval with a fund of comforting rumours: “A great sea fight had been won by Therapia, and now Artavasdos at Leo’s behest was moving all his numbers over to Asia to have it out with Emir Merdesan.”

All that livelong day, therefore, the city stared and strained towards Chrysopolis. There on the green slopes betwixt the sea and Mt. Damatrys rose the dust and haze of ferocious battle above the lush groves and gardens. Even across the waves some imagined they could hear the charge of horsemen, the trampling of the phalanxes. Kallinikos, however, at length grew calmer, and suffered himself to be led back to his crucibles; and Anthusa, knowing that the wards of the Pankrator would be filled to overflowing, ventured to quit him and to find a blessed relief in her ministries.

But just as the sun sank low and sloped all the shadows of column and pinnacle eastward, a shouting of jubilation, as of hundreds of thousands relieving their hearts together, went running from the Point of St. Demetrios and over all the hectic city. It penetrated even the wards of the Pankrator, and Anthusa could bear no more. Resigning her post to a nun, she followed a great tumult into the square by the Church of the Apostles. Senators, tapsters, porters’ wives, great merchants’ wives—all fell on their knees on the dusty pavement when the imperial heralds blew long for silence, then trumpeted their message:

“Romans: Give God the praise!”

“The fleet from Egypt is destroyed. The fleet from Africa is defeated and crippled. In Asia the host of the Emir Merdesan is utterly routed. Only the armament and camp of Moslemah still oppose us. Your Emperor is well. Get you in gratitude to the churches, thank God and take courage. These are the words of Leo the Basileus.”

“Your Emperor is well!” Those were really the only words which Anthusa heard. Desperately she cried in her heart, as she knelt in the Church of the Apostles through a long litany of thanksgiving. “I rejoice only for the great victory; and for Leo I rejoice only as do the others—because our Basileus is safe and victorious.” She knew that her very thoughts were lies.

When she returned to the Pankrator to watch by a stricken sailor, a messenger awaited her. He was Peter himself, covered with dust, having come straight from Asia, and as usual clad in the plainest of liveries.

“This,” he announced simply, “is from the Little Kyrios”; and he put in her hands a tablet covered with hasty and awkward writing. Anthusa’s forehead glowed as she looked on the lines:

“Flavius Leo to the gracious kyria, Anthusa Maria:

“In this hour for one brief moment I steal time which should belong to the Christian Empire. If it will please you, let me say that the Panagia and the prayers of my guardian saints have carried me again scatheless by land and sea, when death struck down many better men than I.

“My mother did you great wrong when she summoned you to serve as nurse at the Bukoleon, in a manner which you could not well refuse. I also see now many things, which, in my selfish warrior pride, I should have understood long since. Take, then, my promise: I shall not cross your path again, unless it be at a time when, whether you call me Basileus or the least of your servants, you can feel no blush. *Farewell.*”

After Anthusa had questioned Peter about many things touching the battle and his master, she went back to the long

wards of the hospital.



CHAPTER XXXIII

EVAGRIOS CHOOSES HIS ROAD

THIS double defeat blasted the last hopes in many of the invaders of taking Constantinople. Not merely had the Fire seemed a miracle of Allah, sent for their special destruction, but in the land battle by Chrysopolis their horse and foot had been annihilated in equal fight by the Roman themesmen. Moslemah's host had crowded the beaches by the Marmora and howled with anguish when the blazing Egyptian galleys had drifted past or a few skiffs slipped over later from Bithynia with the tale of Merdesan's ruin. Already there were many voices inside the great Saracen laager: "Our defeat is destined; we have done enough for El Islam; retreat while retreat still is possible."

Nevertheless, out of stubbornness or from some hidden hopes, the Emir of Emirs still hung on grimly. Provisions were straitening among the Moslems. Deserters to the city told ghastly stories of roots, leaf-pulp and even carrion being served as rations. Pestilence walked among the closely-packed huts. For all that the great Omiad host still made a defiant show before the walls. Some said that Moslemah counted on assistance from the army that had been sent away into Thrace to meet the Bulgarian allies of the Emperor; some that he still hoped against hope for another great reënforcement from Syria. A few select spirits about his pavilion suggested to their despairing comrades that the commander had not dismissed expectations of "events inside the city," decidedly to his advantage. All agreed in any case that if the siege were raised the blow to the prestige of the Omiad house would be terrible through all the Moslem Orient. From day to day, therefore, Moslemah remained.

As for Leo inside the walls, the Emperor was known to be reorganizing his regular divisions after the serious but not crippling losses of the battle in Asia; repairing his dromonds; and, above all, pressing the drilling of the citizen trainbands. A new move by the Basileus was steadily expected, but it came not. Such now, however, was the public trust in his prescience that his inactivity was accepted without a murmur.

* * * * *

On the western edge of the closely-packed quarters of the capital stretched the pleasant region of green lanes, garden walls and even of small villas extending away to the Walls of Theodosius. Here were the compounds of the great monasteries and many of the enormous reservoirs which assured Constantinople an abundant water supply even should the besiegers cut the aqueducts. During the investment there had been a constant coming and going of the garrison through this outlying district, and the uproar of the great assaults had of course affrighted its dwellers; nevertheless, the distances within the fortifications were so vast that during most of the time life in these suburbs had been placid and almost normal.

In a quiet little house near the Cistern of St. Mokios, Evagrios and Nikosia had found a congenial refuge. The wholesale influx of refugees at the beginning of the siege made their appearance in the precinct quite accountable. They and their Persian friend, Hormisdas—so Nikosia told the neighbours—were from Selymbria, and if at times many strangers seemed going to their house, it was natural enough that fellow-unfortunates should flock together.

Nevertheless, a time of keen anxiety afflicted these good folk just after the second repulse of the Saracens following the false rumours of Leo's death. A decarch of the watch had called and asked Evagrios many pointed questions. Did he know anything as to how the treasonable tattle about the Emperor's state originated? By whom spread? Was his party really from Selymbria? Only the firmest and smoothest front by Evagrios and his "spiritual sister" fended off disaster. As it was, the police, although not quite satisfied, dropped the search. But Evagrios put in many unhappy weeks. He could not even scheme to escape outside the gates to the Infidel. After the great defeat of Moslemah upon the walls, the ex-deacon with reason feared that no better welcome would await him in the High Emir's camp than the bowstring, or perhaps the actual stake for impalement.

During the winter and spring, as the invader's prospects waned, Evagrios spent long hours ruminating upon the past and future. The Panagia was getting the better of the Prophet, and the deposed churchman was disposed to curse Hormisdas vigorously when that astute Oriental visited him, and to tell him that from the very hour the two had met for the traffic of slaves by that wharf on the Golden Horn, misfortunes had heaped upon himself and Nikosia—loss of fortune, pursuit by the law, exile, and now an excellent chance of being sawn asunder as a traitor. Nikosia was in an even darker mood. She was now convinced that all their misfortunes were the direct result of impiety. Desperately she

would kiss the holy relics. She also procured a part of a miniature copy of the Gospel of St. Luke and hung it around her neck as an amulet, the same as worn by infants. When Evagrius began to bewail their plight too loudly, she would protest that for her part she was so stricken in conscience that she intended to retire speedily to a nunnery.

Nikosia's piety was further excited by the proximity of no less a personage than Marinos. The dethroned pillar-saint had taken refuge at the small convent of St. Antiochos, whereof the garden wall abutted the lane hard by the entrance to Evagrius' house. Prudential reasons led the brethren to forbid him to denounce the Emperor or to predict the triumph of the Hagarines; but to his heart's content Marinos was suffered to mount a scaffolding behind the convent wall and fulminate into the street concerning the general fate of the wicked. Women, street urchins and soldiers off duty listened in droves, and often went away smitten in conscience and in mortal terror of hell fire, while his strident voice sometimes penetrated to Nikosia even in her peristylum:

“Though thou wash thee with nitre and take thee much soap, yet is thine iniquity marked before me, saith the Lord our God. Think not, wretched people, by tardy repentance now to escape the meed of your transgressions. For have ye not one and all sinned the unpardonable sin, even that against the Holy Ghost? Dream not by prayers, genuflections, fasts, almsgiving to escape. The hour for all such is passed. Unto you is spoken the terrible voice, ‘Depart from me, ye accursed, into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels!’ ”

Had it been practicable Nikosia would have removed their residence simply to be afar from this hideous monitor, but as it was she was sent daily into paroxysms of fear. Her companion affected to make light of the noisy anchorite, but even he was becoming cowed. The trend of martial events had awakened his physical terrors and had even stimulated that poor thing, his conscience. If the siege ended with a great Moslem defeat he was presumably a ruined man with a price on his head. The Emperor was most certainly his foe, even if the plot with Moslemah never came to light. Thus, at times, when Nikosia became unusually pious, Evagrius also would dwell on the idea of retiring to Mt. Athos and astonishing the world with his self-mortifications. One afternoon he grew unusually boastful:

“I will surpass the fame of St. Anthony the Greater. I will lie on a bed of nailpoints, eat only thrice a week a handful of lentils; reject sleep for seven full days and nights; wash myself never. Then will I have visions of angels and enjoy the glory of the heavenly light. My renown will spread through Christendom. Pilgrims will come from Italy and Armenia to bow themselves before me. I shall cast stones at them to prevent their idolatry. They will gather up the pebbles to take them away as the most precious relics. When at last I die, my wasted skeleton will be plucked to pieces by my disciples to be distributed in the most distant cities. The least of my finger bones will be set in golden caskets, causing the churches that boast the possession thereof to become the centres for innumerable pious travellers——”

“Glorious prospect,” spoke Nikosia, not too conscience-torn for sarcasm, “but when will your lentil diet begin?”

“Don't mock at God, woman,” said Evagrius severely. “I'm not what I was. I feel now that the devil's been reaching out for my very soul. This life is but for an instant. Eternity lasts through the æons. If only now the Saracens had seemed likely to prevail——”

“They may still prevail,” interposed his companion.

“I fear not.” The ex-deacon shook a gloomy head. “Moslemah will raise the siege as soon as he can do so with a little better credit.”

“Perhaps it's for the best,” remarked Nikosia in solemn tones, clasping her hands. “After all, are we not Christians? It's only natural, of course, that we should sin. I'm sure St. Peter did that; and we're not impious enough to claim to be any better than a holy apostle. And then it's still more natural that we should repent. If the Hagarines had triumphed what would have become of our souls? I can't believe that noisy Marinos to be right, and that all forgiveness is past, and I'm sure I'm constantly feeling a greater vocation for the convent.”

“Doubtless its austerities will do you good,” observed Evagrius, shrewdly eyeing her rouge and false hair.

This conversation was interrupted, however, by the entrance with soft tread of Neokles, who, for a variety of reasons, had resumed his place as cook and major domo to his old master. The menial's redolent face seemed excited.

“*Kyrios, kyria*—Petronax is here, and with him Hormisdas.”

Evagrius bristled. “That sly fellow has led me by the nose often enough, and as for Hormisdas, he's no longer a dog of

my quarter.”^[60]

“Nevertheless, I think the *kyrios* will see them.”

“And why that, sirrah?”

“Because Saloma is with them.”

“Saloma?” Nikosia, in her turn, started very angrily. “I thought that wretch was at the palace, and at the palace let her stay. Little enough of helpful tidings she has sent us.”

Evagrius rose, nevertheless, with his most unctuous smile. “Calm yourself, *philotata*; don’t give way to prejudices. If Petronax and Hormisdas have in good deed brought Saloma here it’s for strong reasons. Bring them in, Neokles.”

Nikosia settled herself stiffly upon her armchair, and barely gave the trio a sign of greeting as they entered. Petronax seemed less spruce and dapper than formerly; cares manifestly had been preying upon him, but Hormisdas glided about with his wonted oily ease. As for Saloma, although her cheeks had lost something of their rustic bloom, her costume of rich dark stuff, the gold chain about her neck, and the second gold chain binding back her veil told that certain fates had been kind to her.

“It’s a pleasure to see you so prosperous in these black days, my good girl,” announced Evagrius, “and what is it that brings a great *despoina* like the Empress-Mother’s tire-woman to her humble friends? Does the old woman—I mean her Sacred Majesty—continue to be kind to you?”

“Very kind.” Saloma looked about her uneasily under Nikosia’s cold scrutiny.

“*Eu!* What, then, can I do for my friends?” pursued the ex-deacon, looking at his visitors.

“Most reverend father,” said Hormisdas, one hand gliding over the other, “is it true that you and your honoured spiritual sister here”—with an eye upon Nikosia—“have been considering seriously forsaking the cares of this world and taking refuge, each of you, in a convent?”

Evagrius bowed deliberately. “So our holy purpose has spread among our acquaintance? Yes, it is almost settled. Nikosia and I have become conscious of our sins. Who among us frail mortals should not? The moments of repentance grow short. The repulse of the Infidels seems a clear sign that the mercy of Heaven is not yet closed. If ever our thoughts wandered from perfect loyalty to our most holy faith, nevertheless, I trust that there is time——” He sighed and pressed a fat hand upon his bosom.

“That’s very unfortunate. Then you won’t be interested,” darted Petronax, with complete abruptness. “The devils take your scruples! We need your help sorely. All can yet be achieved——”

“*All?*” Evagrius’ hands fell at his side while Nikosia uprose in astonishment.

“Yes,” pursued the myrmidon, with emphatic gestures. “But there’s no time to lose. You know we’ve trusted in Saloma. It’s no fault of hers that the old hag, her mistress, has been too sharp for anything to leak out save that one message about the Emperor’s wound.”

“Much good did *that* do us!” bemoaned the ex-deacon.

“No matter. Things are laxer at the palace now that the Saracens seem repulsed. To-day, Kasia gave her tire-woman an afternoon holiday. Whom should Saloma seek but us? She’s got great news. Tell it out, Saloma.”

The girl’s eyes shone very bright.

“I know a woman who possesses the secret of the fire.”

“Mother of God!” swore Evagrius, changing colour, but added: “Why, she’s your mistress, of course. We can’t get her.”

“Not so; this is a woman outside the palace. Perhaps she can be dealt with.”

“Name her quickly,” cried the ex-deacon, his hands clenching and unclenching. “Don’t play with us, wench.”

“Most unreasonably she distrusts us,” protested Hormisdas. “We could get none of the essential details out of her.”

Evagrius chuckled. “Quite likely, my friend, or you’d never have come here to share any pickings with us. Well, Saloma?”

The latter looked fixedly at Nikosia. “She won’t like what I have to say.”

“Nonsense, my maid,” objected Evagrius. “Haven’t we just said we were both about to renounce the world and its vanities?”

“Speak for yourself as to that,” interposed Nikosia tartly; then she turned with hauteur upon Saloma: “Don’t give yourself airs, my fine Lady Magnificence from the palace. Remember, you carried my gown and slippers before we let you go to the Empress-Mother. Did her Sacred Majesty do you the honour to whip you with her own girdle?”

Saloma tilted back her head. “The Empress-Mother’s a good and kindly woman. Only for one reason”—she gazed at Evagrius—“can I do her and her son this great wrong.”

“You’ve only done ourselves great wrong so far,” warned Petronax. “Dare not to play with us. The softest cats have claws. You’ve put yourself in our power.”

“Come, no threats!” commanded Evagrius, with a deprecating wave. “I’ll take Saloma aside. She’ll talk to me and to no one else.”

The ex-deacon walked with her to an adjacent room, where, to the great vexation of the others, her communications were too whispered for any eavesdroppers. Nikosia, therefore, perforce plied Petronax with questions as to his patron the Master of the Palace. The man of affairs painted a pathetic picture:

“Alas for his Sublimity! He’s all but banished from the councils of state. Crude military men everywhere, and vile rumours that even while the siege lasts the Emperor is having the records overhauled. As if personages so exalted as my patron Paul, and his friends the Logothete Niketas and the Arch-Secretary Theokistos, should be expected after such singular public services to have to account for every last obol. Such is the ingratitude of princes! If you could but witness the Christian grace with which his Sublimity endures all this neglect and uncertainty!”

“He may well shudder,” remarked Nikosia with irony, “for out of ten fine mansions he is like to lose nine; out of five hundred servitors to keep only fifty. After the siege is raised no doubt he’s banished—to a marble villa at Therapia.”

“But the siege is *not* raised, and if we can only learn the secret of the fire——” threw out Petronax vehemently.

“*Ei!*” asserted Nikosia. “I thought that you and your exalted masters drew the line at actually helping the Hagarines?”

“Gracious *despoina*,” declared Petronax, with a salaam, “the feeblest animals will turn at bay. Rather than have his Sublimity ruined, rather than—let it be said—see myself deprived of his august patronage, he—we—have reluctantly brought ourselves——But here comes Evagrius, and perhaps I exult too soon.”

The interlocutor entered alone. “Saloma has told me her story,” he reported with satisfaction, “and it is one very probable. Fools were we all not to think of the facts before. That Kasia was a cautious old farm wife, but for once she blabbed too freely something her son told her, and in Saloma’s hearing. We can get all the secrets of the fire.”

“Blessed Evangelists!” rejoiced Hormisdas, his hands waving like fans. “But from whom? How? Bring the girl back.”

Evagrius’ smile was of infinite subtlety. “No, beloved friends; let us understand each other. Saloma talks to me and takes orders from me alone. I’ve left her in charge of Neokles, with a hint to him to keep her from overhearing us now, because—it’s best to confess it—a very unfortunate scruple has entered into her case, and I’ve promised to respect the same. We must humour her carefully until—well, until all has gone prosperously. You see, she fondly imagines still that we desire this secret solely for the purpose of subverting the present Emperor and substituting another more to Paul’s liking. Towards Leo she has no ill-will. She even tried to get me to pledge the personal safety of himself and his mother.”

“Oh, simplicity!” marvelled Petronax. “Who’d have imagined it?”

“Then here’s the upshot,” concluded Evagrius. “I’m pledged that nothing she reveals will be used to the advantage of the Hagarines.”

“You have sworn this?” demanded Hormisdas, with alarm and incredulity.

“The old poets say something about Heaven laughing at lovers’ promises. If she’s not my love, right certainly I’m hers. What else d’you imagine gave me my power over her? And perhaps I had to promise a few other things very horrid to Nikosia. I can keep them as well—or as ill——”

“Time lacks for chaffing,” warned Petronax. “Let’s understand clearly. Saloma named to you a woman who knows about the fire?” Evagrius nodded. “And one we can get in our power?”

“I swear that we can do this within three days—yes, and make her talk promptly. I will engage this.”

“Praised be the Panagia!” cried Hormisdas, his eyes rolling heavenward. “Now we can get out word to the High Emir on no account to break camp. If the ingredients for the fire are not too difficult to find and to compound, in a few weeks what can’t fail to happen!”

“Hark, you, friend!” cautioned Petronax. “Be careful what you promise the Hagarines. Remember, my Sublime Patron and his associates are Romans and Christians. We’re not to betray our city and holy religion for ten keratia. The price must make us all rich. There’s much to be considered.”

Hormisdas glanced slyly towards Evagrius and Nikosia. “For example,” he returned, “we must consider the desire of our most Reverend Deacon and his beloved Spiritual Sister to become monk and nun.”

The laughter of the whole party made the bronze statuettes in the peristyle shake.

“I think I’ll turn dervish rather!” roared Evagrius, smiting the slave dealer on the shoulder....

... For two hours and more four heads, sinful and subtle, were laid close together. An infinite number of schemes were proposed, and all but one rejected. The details of this last and acceptable scheme were presently adjusted with an astuteness worthy of Odysseus weaving mischief for Troy. It was agreed that three days were needed for arrangements. Plato and Kannebos were again in their old haunts in the Pharnar district, having escaped the draft for rowers. They had not proved wholly reliable in the past, but the Emir’s dinars would be generous enough to make them devoted this time, and their aid with that of Satyros seemed indispensable.

Resounding oaths of mutual fidelity were exchanged between the four ere they separated, oaths which, by their very vehemence, proved their probable necessity. Petronax especially took upon himself the ticklish duty of conveying immediately to the palace the message that Saloma had been taken suddenly ill while visiting relatives. He could be trusted to make the story plausible and acceptable to the Empress-Mother. At length, when the shadows were darkening down the lanes, Hormisdas and Petronax glided separately away, each swollen with hopes and thoughts of gainful business. Nikosia heard the garden gate close after them, then turned at once upon Evagrius:

“I know the woman Saloma’s named; you needn’t tell me—the old wizard’s daughter, that Anthusa.”

“What a diviner you are!” replied the other, smiling. “Yes, *philotata*, it seems that she carries in her head all her father’s formulas. Why didn’t we discover it months earlier! So much could have been done——”

“Yet I fear that girl,” pursued Nikosia. “I would it were somebody else. Every time she crosses our path it breeds bad luck. And Saloma? Didn’t she make you renew that promise to marry her?”

“Yes, my little sparrow, she did. In fact, she was unreasonably importunate, raged and vowed that she knew I was not the best of men, but that there was no means of controlling one’s heart, besides, that she was an honest girl before she entered our service. I’ve confessed that slight indiscretion of mine, and long ago regretted it.”

Nikosia struck her hands together in sheer disgust. “If there are sacks and stones she’ll sink in the Marmora ere I’m a month older. Was ever a Spiritual Sister so disgraced by a servant in her own house! I abhor the thought of her.”

“Don’t be absurd,” replied her companion, “it’s only three days, and then we’re for ever through needing her. Meantime, it can’t be helped.”

“Meantime, she and the wizard’s jade of a brat can ruin us. That of all the women in Constantinople we must pin everything upon those two!”

“Rest assured,” answered Evagrios calmly, “Anthusa at least won’t have much choice as to her music.”

Nikosia shook her head. “You’re mistaken. Somehow I feel that angel-faced vixen has made a bargain with the saints. Who but they could have brought her back from the Isle of Cedars?”

The ex-deacon was attempting some reply when strident and shrill the voice of Marinus the fanatic suddenly penetrated even into the dwelling:

“Woe unto those who devise mischief, whose hearts are full of lies and subtlety. Verily your counsels shall be brought to nought. Your iniquities shall recoil on your own heads. Who shall save you now from the land where the worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched? O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath which is to come!”

The woman shuddered, crossed herself and began kissing her gospel amulet. “They say the man’s inspired,” she protested. “Oh, what a warning! After all, you can’t deny we’re betraying our holy religion to the Hagarines and are no better than Judas. Let’s have pity on our souls and refrain!”

“Marinos is mad,” sneered Evagrios. “Don’t be weak enough to let him scare you. It’s too late to draw back. Petronax and Hormisdas are off, and I’ve no belief in silly omens.” ...

Nevertheless, both he and Nikosia thereafter spent three very uncomfortable as well as very busy days.

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE BATHS OF XEUXIPPOS

THE third evening after the reunion at Evagrius' house, Anthusa left the home of Kallinikos to go to the hospital of the Pankrator. After her return from the Isle of Cedars and for months afterward, by Leo's command, her movements had been inconspicuously watched and guarded. But as the siege had worn on, competent men had been needed for stiffer things, and the watch had been relaxed, at least so far as the secret of her magic-working father had not been concerned. Anthusa in any case had become accustomed, in daytime, to make the short journey to the Pankrator unattended, and, like many a woman in Constantinople in those days of stress, she was not deterred by the approach of dusk. She informed her father that she would not return until dawn. This had often happened since she had begun her service at the hospital.

At the Pankrator, she relieved the nun on duty in her ward. No new cases had come in, and the regular patients were resting easily. Anthusa composed herself, therefore, for an uneventful vigil. The streets without became quite dark and a pale rush lantern was throwing its gleam over the line of pallets when the monk physician on night duty appeared and quietly beckoned to her.

A boy in the palace livery was waiting with a message. Anthusa recognized him as Lobel, a Slavic lad sometimes employed in very menial capacities around the chambers of the Empress-Mother at Bukoleon. He produced with signs of anxiety a tablet duly sealed and waited impatiently while she read:

"Plotinos, physician at the Hospital of Samson, to the noble kyria, Anthusa Maria, greeting:

"The soldier Muchlo the Slav, whom you nursed back to health, has been brought to us grievously wounded in a skirmish. He can scarcely live through the night. He declares it will console him much, in view of your former kindness to him, if you will hasten to the Samson and receive his last message. The bearer of this tablet is his brother Lobel, and with him go two attendants from the Samson, whom you may trust to conduct you safely. Knowing the Christian compassion of your heart I have not hesitated to send this request, despite the hour. Muchlo's time is very short."

"Will not the gracious *kyria* hasten?" pleaded Lobel, tightening his girdle, while tears seemed springing to his eyes.

"I am grieved for Muchlo, a fine young soldier, I remember well," returned Anthusa, "but I never heard he was your brother, Lobel."

"Ah, but the gracious *kyria* has forgotten. We were sons of the same father and mother. But I failed to tell you that the tire-woman Saloma, who was visiting the sick at the Samson in her gracious mistress' behalf, assured me you would surely come with speed. Alas, my poor brother! We were orphans."

Anthusa summoned one of the younger sisters to take over the ward, but the monk physician raised difficulties: "The sick can spare you, praised be St. Luke, but the streets are very dark. It's a long way from the Pankrator to the Samson."

Lobel, however, was ready with his answer: "By the Kyrios Plotinos' orders we have brought a mule. Her Ladyship can travel with perfect safety."

The monk looked on the boy with keen scrutiny. "Nevertheless, it is late," he pursued. "Let me see the letter. It seems to be the seal of Plotinos, who's a good friend of mine. I grant he would not send thus unless the case seemed very meritorious. And you, *kyria*, are sure you recognize this lad?"

"Perfectly," responded Anthusa, "and Muchlo was a gallant soldier whom I tenderly pitied. I cannot possibly refuse such a last request."

Anthusa drew her peplon about her, anxious to set forth. The friendly monk followed her to the portal of the Pankrator, and there, on the black pavement, stood two men in long cloaks, one with a torch and the other holding the bridle of a mule.

"All appears to be in order," assented her guardian. "The Blessed Trinity prosper your errand of mercy."

The bar of light from the hospital doorway closed behind him. Anthusa mounted the mule and her escort started

immediately. They were a taciturn trio and could give little information as to how Muchlo met his misfortune. “It had been while chasing down Hagarine fugitives in Asia; the *kyria* could learn all about it at the Samson.”

The way traversed was familiar enough to Anthusa under the deep shadows, although her guides took her down somewhat sequestered avenues, apparently as the shortest route to the Samson. It was once more a pleasant night in the springtime. From the many gardens blooming even in the heart of Constantinople there came the heavy odour of rose, jasmine and lily. Overhead hung the narrow crescent of a moon. The great dark city stretched its vast distance in every direction silently and peacefully. Hardly would imagination permit the thought that outside the walls still lay the huge Saracen entrenchment. From the Mesē, however, which ran its majestic length south of them, came a low, incessant trampling and rumbling.

“They are sending many thousands again to the walls,” thought Anthusa, painfully versed now in military matters. “Is it an assault or a sortie?” Then for a long time her mind dwelt on quite another soldier than the unfortunate Muchlo. Presently one of her escort cursed and laid about him with his stick: “Off! Off! That cur is still following us.”

A dog yelped and fell back to a safe distance in the darkness. Anthusa suddenly remembered that her faithful protégé Dorkon, who very frequently accompanied her to the door of the Pankrator, was now doubtless following her thence to the Samson. It was useless to bid him to depart, and as she looked back, now and then she caught his lean form loping athwart the bars of moonlight which fell between the street crossings.

Almost in silence they proceeded most of their two and more miles of the journey. The imperial Record Office, the Forum of the Breadmakers, the parade ground by the War Department, and many familiar landmarks more were passed without deviation. Before them, the moonbeams flashing a pale silver from its tiled domes, loomed at intervals the enormous bulk of Hagia Sophia. Anthusa knew that to reach the Hospital of Samson they should now turn to the left—northward. Somewhat to her bewilderment, her escort began verging by black alleys towards the right as if seeking the Augustæum. Alarm might have seized her at once had she not realized that Lobel at least was an ignorant Slav, who doubtless was somewhat lost in the mazes of Constantinople except in broad daylight. Nevertheless, she remonstrated. The trio kept on. She expostulated again. They merely pressed down a narrow lane leading between the great Basilica of Justice and the Cathedral itself. Aroused at last, she gave an angry tug upon the bridle of the mule, and would have cried aloud, when from the shadow of the lofty pillars of the Courts of Justice, all deserted now by advocate or litigant, emerged two figures, and Anthusa heard voices.

“She is here?” spoke one.

“Here, Excellency,” rejoined one of her guides.

“Your thanks are waiting at once—and something better. And you, my pretty song thrush, you can trill and warble later, but for the nonce—keep quiet!”

Anthusa could not scream for aid. Almost with the first words, a cloak had been thrown over her head; an instant later resistless hands had pinioned her tightly. The voice had been the voice of Hormisdas.

* * * * *

The Baths of Xeuxippos was among the prime wonders of the city. Perhaps those of Titus and Caracalla at Rome had once boasted equally lofty domes, crusted with coloured marbles, equally luxurious “halls of heat” and “halls of cold,” enormous swimming tanks, ball courts and sumptuous lounging apartments; but the thermæ by the Tiber were already a ruin and a memory, while the great baths at Constantinople still rose to the southeast of the Augustæum in gilded magnificence.

In the days of Justinian I the Baths of Xeuxippos had been burned down only to be rebuilt in even greater splendour. Its habitués now boasted that in a city of statues, it surpassed every other structure in the wealth of its art treasures of bronze and marble. The likenesses of practically every famous poet, philosopher or statesman of Greece or Latium looked down from the gallery of its central dome, upon the thousands of pleasure-seekers rejoicing in the great pool under the spray of a dozen fountains. In the days before the siege, from sunrise to sunset, the Baths had been possibly the most frequented structure in the city, and the last conceivable spot for privy interviews.

Since the siege began, however, the Baths had been opened only at limited intervals. Persons who sought them not for cleanliness but for idle revelry had been ordered away. Fuel had lacked for heating the great tanks of hot water. At first dusk all the vast apartments had been cleared, and soon, barring a very few custodians, the pigeons under the lower eaves and the storks upon the upper pinnacles, the colossal fabric stood inert and lifeless—the most empty thing apparently in all beleaguered Constantinople.

The main portal of the Baths presented its bronze-wrought valves upon the Augustæum. These were now firmly barred, but on the southern side nearest the Marmora, a second, smaller entrance was reached by a sequestered portico. Here an acute observer might have seen a faint light gleam forth as the door was swayed just enough at long intervals to admit a visitor. The spot, however, was quite away from the rounds of the guard. The Baths commanded no military coign of vantage. No munitions were stored therein. The garrison was conveniently barracked at a distance. A furlong away, indeed, on the southern seawall, sentries might be heard faintly exchanging their “All’s well.” No possible guardians seemed nearer.

Inside this entrance, one might pass to an apartment of almost extravagant elegance, dimly lighted at that hour by a few lamps skillfully disposed in niches in the gilded fretting of the ceiling. The mosaics, illustrating the story of the Argonauts, extended the entire circuit of the large room, in a faintly glittering sequence. Across the floors were treasures out of Persia, far-spreading rugs whereon the sandaled foot sank noiselessly. In the apse across the apartment rose a bronze statue of Homer, very ancient and reputed a true portrait of the blind bard of Chios. The other statues and busts appearing everywhere were of scarcely lesser fame. Among them, and before them, were scattered, with irregular grouping, couches often covered with tapestries of pure silk in rainbow colours spread over deep, luxurious cushions. This, in fine, was the “Reposing Room of the Patricians,” where the noble and mighty of New Rome were wont to sprawl, doze or gossip after the vigorous pleasures of the swimming pool.

The door to this august chamber was kept that night by none other than the shipmaster Satyros, assisted by Plato. They had short sabres in hand, and scrutinized every face sharply. Already they had admitted about a dozen, when a guarded rap made them unbar again. Two persons threw back the hoods around their faces.

“Petronax,” began Satyros, “and—ah! your Sublimity—the Master of the Palace honours us in person. With the forehead, mighty *despotes*, with the forehead!”

“Keep your service till we’re more inside,” ordered the squeaky voice of Paul. The eunuch entered the Reposing Room and, with a sigh of relief, flung off his coarse cloak and began readjusting the rich dalmatic beneath it. His flat, fishy eyes set in his puffed face glanced about keenly.

“All seems safe enough,” he remarked to Petronax. “Lucky you thought of having our little consistory here at the Baths. Strangers entering any of our palaces might have been spied upon by the Isaurian’s hawks, but who of them will think to hover here? Even if a few people are noted gliding in, they’ll be set down as attendants come for night work, while the actual staff——”

“A few solidi, Sublimity, have sent them all upon a holiday. Rest assured the Baths are now as void of life as a tomb, saving for ourselves.”

“*Eu! Eu!*” returned Paul, with satisfaction, rubbing his hands; then he turned towards the company. “And are my noble friends all gathered, and our newer friends from outside the walls?”

A small group had risen from their couches and congéed respectfully to the arch-conspirator. Paul approached them with easy affability: “A good evening to you, my dear Niketas, and to you, Arch-Secretary Theokistos. How long it is since we poor persecuted victims have dared to meet openly and freely! And do I see the most exalted Count Isoës of the Opsikian Theme, and his Magnificence Anthrax, the Commissioner of Fortifications? We are few here, but quite sufficient. This gathering is wisely kept to the very sinews of our undertaking. And I bring you good news. If our plans prosper we can count on the Patrician Sisinnios, now envoy to the Bulgarians, to swing those barbarians to our side. And who are these other valorous gentlemen?”

At a gesture from Niketas two dark-skinned, sharp-visaged men salaamed low before the eunuch. They wore plain Roman dalmatics and cloth skull caps, but they had been manifestly more at ease with abayah and turban. The hilts of crooked scimitars peered from their girdles.

“I present to your Sublimity,” announced Niketas, “the very noble Emir Babek and his valorous companion, the Kaid Muazzim. They come directly from the Emir of Emirs himself, and possess full powers to ratify all compacts in his name.”

The eunuch received their obeisance with smiling condescension: “Be seated, all of you. I rejoice to meet these high-born and gallant lords. Let us not delay weighty interests by idle courtesies. Do these Saracen Excellencies speak Greek?”

“We do, great Seyid,” rejoined Babek, with another salaam.

“That is well,” pursued Paul, placing himself, as by natural right, on the central couch. “Now I think that we are all prepared, that is, if Evagrios is ready to bring before us the prisoner taken earlier in the night.”

Petronax glided from the room, then reappeared in an instant:

“Evagrios assures me that everything is waiting when desired. Of course your Magnificences understand he took the prisoner with surpassing ease.”

The eunuch’s smile became effulgent. He turned towards his associates with somewhat didactic tones: “Of course you are aware, noble and valorous friends, that we of the inner palace circle only submitted to the usurpation of the Isaurian adventurer because the military situation compelled us to cringe before an all-powerful soldier. Since, however, this same upstart Leo, forgetful of all bonds of gratitude to us who have lifted him from the very dust, appears about to scrutinize our official acts with a view to our actual disgrace and ruin, we have felt it needful to enter into such happy agreements with the Kalif and his most noble emirs as shall rid us of personal anxieties and secure for both Roman and Saracen the inestimable blessings of peace.”

The lip of Babek curled slightly, but he made answer: “I am commanded by the Emir of Emirs to treat generously with you, if, indeed, you have power to treat. Let there be no concealment. Our attack is at a stand. We are like to retire shattered and discomfited. Nevertheless, all could be redeemed if the Faithful knew but how to imitate and to master the terrible fire.”

“If that is your desire, O excellent Hagarines,” returned Paul, “we can give you vast comfort. You are aware that the secret of the fire has been closely guarded. Private information, indeed, at our command, and hidden from the gossip of Constantinople, has turned our eyes towards a certain wizard, one Kallinikos. But his workrooms, too, have been closely guarded and all efforts to penetrate the same have failed. Nevertheless, it has pleased all-disposing Heaven that the probable inventor of this compound should have a confidant to whom he entrusted all his formulas—his daughter. That daughter is now in our power—in the next apartment.”

“How know you this?” demanded the elder Saracen, never taking his arrow-keen eyes from the eunuch’s puffy face.

“The wench, it appears, has a sister often in the Empress-Mother’s company. Very lately, in the hearing of the tire-woman Saloma, a most worthy damsel in our devoted employ, this sister boasted, ‘Anthusa’—that’s the jade’s name; I’m right, Petronax?—‘helps my father so often she knows all his secrets. I think she knows the formula for making the fire better than any of the Emperor’s engineers’—and more talk to that effect.”

“Your Sublimity accurately recounts the very conversation,” reënforced Petronax. “Saloma herself is at hand to confirm all. What we know of the habits of this Anthusa and the wizard, her father, makes the report very plausible. Kallinikos is notoriously dependent in all things upon his younger daughter, and she carries a devilish knowledge and cleverness under a pretty face.”

Babek’s sharply trimmed beard worked emphatically: “Now, as Allah hath spread out the tent of the firmament, give us the secret of the fire, and give us the substance that will quench its fury, and we will master Constantinople despite the walls built by the Jinns and all the roarings of your Lion!”

“Gently, exalted Emir,” warned Niketas, with a deprecating hand. “Are we not Christians? How can we deliver lightly over to Hagarines this God-guarded city?”

“Verily!” cried Muazzim, the younger envoy. “You have a strange brand of piety. But I understand. Yet before we discuss further terms and treaty let us sift out this story. For Moslemah himself bids us say this, ‘If you cannot get the

secret of the fire, all your counsels are but as summer wind.' ”

“The kaid’s words are wise,” remarked Theokistos uneasily. “If the girl will speak to the point we are saved men, if otherwise—the fiends all help us!”

“I think,” observed Paul blandly, “there’ll be little difficulty with this young woman. A proper mingling of threats, firmness and cajolery—you remember who she is—then harsher measures, which I deprecate, if she’s unreasonable. Therefore, since this is so vital a matter, let her be examined before us all.” He clapped his hands. Evagrios appeared at an inner door. “We are ready,” declared the eunuch. “Bring in the prisoner.” ...

... Anthusa was guarded by no less an escort than Kannebos, Hormisdas, Nikosia and Saloma, as well as by the ex-deacon. They had taken the wrap from her face, but Kannebos walked behind, clutching her wrists with an iron grip. Ample time had elapsed for the captive to realize her situation, especially as her custodians had been talkative. Her face was waxen. The short curls hung about her neck in disorder. Nikosia bore vials of restoratives in case she should faint, but she kept her poise. As she was brought before the more exalted conspirators the Spiritual Sister purred softly in Anthusa’s ear: “Now answer promptly all you’re asked, my sleek kitten, and no evading. Do only that and not one pinch will hurt you.”

Kannebos conducted his prisoner directly before the couch of Paul, dropped his clutch on her hands, and made himself a very awkward obeisance; whereupon the eunuch surveyed the girl deliberately from head to foot, muttered aside to Theokistos, “She’ll give no trouble,” and blandly began his examination:

“My unfortunate young *kyria*, you understand, no doubt, that in times of general calamity innocent persons must occasionally suffer inconvenience for great public ends. You are, of course, Anthusa, daughter of Kallinikos, indifferently called the Wizard and the Philosopher.”

Anthusa pressed her hands behind her back and her lips closed. “I affirm or deny nothing,” at last she vouchsafed; “you are not a lawful judge.”

“It profits not to deny your identity. Several of these good people here know you well.”

Anthusa continued silent.

“We have good reason to think that your father invented the Maritime Fire and that you know all his methods and formulas.”

Still silence from the prisoner. Paul’s cheeks flushed, and his voice became a little more shrill: “We demand that you forthwith tell truly what are the ingredients he used, the methods of compounding the same, also—for infallibly he must have found it—the means for quenching the fire.”

Anthusa’s eyes had been searching from face to face in the tense, relentless circle, apparently seeking one intercessor. Suddenly her eyes blazed fury and her arm darted out towards the Saracens.

“Hagarines!” she screamed. “Treason!”

“And if they are, *kyria*,” rejoined the eunuch calmly, not sorry to make her speak on any terms, “leave the matter of their presence to your betters. Answer my questions and avoid sore misery for yourself.”

But the prisoner’s whole frame seemed kindling with fury. “I know you, Master of the Palace, plunderer of the people, false patron once of the Lion. But you, and you, and you”—at her accusing finger all the other patricians blanched and quailed—“are you Romans? Are you Christians? Will you bring your souls to Judas fires by admitting the Infidel within the gates?”

Niketas and the others exchanged highly uncomfortable glances.

“It’s through public necessity,” excused the Logothete hastily; “negotiations with Moslemah cannot be avoided. No treason is planned——”

He was interrupted by Muazzim, who spat angrily upon the carpet. “*Wallah!*” he cried. “Do not lie to the girl, when nought’s to be gained. If I served the Kalif as you do the Basileus I should writhe on the stake of impalement.”

“O dear Lord Jesus Christ,” rose the voice of Anthusa, “wast Thou crucified for sinful men only that men should requite Thy passion like this! Treason to the Basileus! Treason to Holy Faith! Who of you tremble at God’s great judgment?”

Her protests were this instant drowned by a piercing scream from Saloma, who had stood transfixed since entering the room, staring at the two Moslems: “Mother of God! You have all deceived me. Evagrios swore there was to be no pact with the Infidel. What have I done?” In a paroxysm of anguish she flung herself on her knees before Evagrios.

“Silence, girl,” cried the latter, red and angry, “I meant for the best. Your childish scruples could not be respected. You take my oath too seriously.”

“And that other oath,” raged Saloma, oblivious of time and place, “the oath to do me right, was that writ in water, too?” She gazed on his sullen and denying face, then, as the horrid truth dawned over her, she turned, with a shriek, holding out her hands to the prisoner: “Oh, *kyria* Anthusa, I am lost, damned forever. They have tricked me out of my maiden honesty, and now out of my soul. We are in the power of devils.”

“Away with this wanton!” ordered Paul, in fury. “She has served her part and can be tossed aside! Why is she longer here? Out with her, Kannebos, and guard her!” The powerful sailor instantly dragged Saloma forth, still screaming and struggling. “Now, you other woman,” pursued Paul, “you see how little succour you’ll get. Speak promptly or take the worst.”

Anthusa’s gust of passion had apparently passed. Again she stood rigid and silent. The eunuch waved his fat fists before her with increasing violence: “Don’t think, you pink and white jade, that we’re here for a water party. We know you possess these secrets, for you dare not deny the knowledge. Quick about it, then, or feel something hideous on your soft, fine flesh.”

The prisoner continued to look about in vain quest for some more potent advocate than Saloma, but her lips parted not.

Paul rose at length and motioned to Hormisdas. “This is intolerable; who is this slip of a girl to brave us? Show her we’re not to be trifled with.”

The slave dealer, with a smile and a salaam, produced a bag of sacking out of which he poured a number of metallic implements upon the carpets, and from the pile selected a pair of manacles of peculiar shape. With the assistance of Petronax, he bared the prisoner’s arms and snapped on the fetters above the elbows, Anthusa submitting in dumb patience, although a deep colour was now mounting to her cheeks. When the devices were adjusted Hormisdas bowed again to his superior. “This is the simplest method, your Sublimity. These are the famous ‘Gloves of Cappadocia.’ By turning these handles the clasps contract most ingeniously, causing a prodigious amount of pain without seriously marring the skin. I’ve found them an excellent tamer for stubborn slave girls.”

“You see where your willfulness leads,” admonished Paul. “The fault is yours, young woman; you determine your own fate.”

“I assure the prisoner,” asserted Theokistos uneasily, “we do this only as a last resort. If she will only be reasonable _____”

Anthusa’s lips opened: “This is the method for making the fire,” she spoke hurriedly. “Take equal parts of bees-wax, tallow, bitumen and oakum——”

“Ha!” broke from the delighted company, and Theokistos made haste to produce a writing tablet.

“You do well, *kyria*,” said the eunuch in smoother tones. “Now explain clearly the methods of compounding. How is the blaze produced by contact with water? What is the means of extinguishing?”

“One moment, your Sublimity,” interposed Petronax. “This girl has keen wits, but she makes a great profession of piety. Here is a crucifix”—he drew one from his bosom—“let us hold this to her lips and then she shall swear by her hopes of salvation that she is not beguiling us.”

All the returned colour left the prisoner’s cheeks instantly. She stood like the alabaster of the winged-sandaled Hermes at her side.

“Wisely said,” darted Niketas. “I think she’s deceiving. Well, mistress, kiss the crucifix and swear to your tale by your hopes of Heaven.”

Anthusa’s voice, shrill, but with a tremulous sweetness, seemed soaring away into the fretted vaulting: “Blessed Lord Jesus, forgive that for an instant of mortal weakness I spoke falsehood. Give strength even as Thou gavest to Thy saints of old to suffer in Thy name. Teach these, Thy new betrayers, that Christian woman can still, for the Faith, endure all tortures, and for the Faith can die. Let no treason-aiding word cross my teeth. Then receive me unto Thyself. Amen.”

“This pious mockery is intolerable,” stormed Paul, his veins swelling darkly. “We’ll have her pray a different prayer in an instant.”

The Emir Babek rose, his features fairly torn with disgust. “I praise Allah, Christians, this is none of my work. Had we known that such were your doings the Kaid and I would have tarried in the camp. I can order a man to be sawn asunder, but no camel driver’s woman could suffer this at our hands—much less a second Maryam the Blessed.”

“I crave no interference,” ordered the eunuch testily. “The formula is necessary and the girl is obdurate. Proceed, Hormisdas.”

Hormisdas pressed upon the spring around the fetters.

CHAPTER XXXV

THE DOGS BEFRIEND SALOMA

KANNEBOS had dragged away Saloma, raging and almost raving. She was helpless as an infant in the clutches of the powerful seaman. He bore her into a small chamber in the rear of the Reposing Room, reserved for the menials of the high-born bathers, while the latter rested or chattered. This done, he slammed the door, leaving the twain alone together. Vainly she entreated, screamed, then beat wildly with her fists. For the moment she might as wisely have pleaded with the pillars of green malachite.

“We’re lost, betrayed!” she moaned incessantly. “Constantinople’s betrayed. Those men are Hagarines. It’s for them Evagrios wanted the secret of the fire. All this awful crime is on my head!”

“Calm yourself, woman,” rejoined Kannebos hoarsely. “What’s commanded’s commanded and I obey orders. Screaming’s no good. The Baths are utterly deserted. Nobody will heed you.”

In sheer exhaustion, Saloma succumbed upon a stool. A single weak lamp shone around the room. For a brief interval the wretched girl sank into unlovely meditations. Across the months now, and years, the sense of her disgrace had preyed upon her to the point of obsession. For Evagrios once she had indeed possessed that unreasoning infatuation which had long rendered her blind to his manifest sins, and had made her endure the taunts and tyranny of Nikosia. The glamour, however, had been gradually stripped from the ex-deacon’s life. Affection in any noble sense had become dead, but never had died the passionate belief that the words of the marriage service with the man who had stolen her maiden honesty would enable her again to face her rustic kinsfolk, and to kneel before the holy ikons without inviting divine wrath. Hoping against hope that at last Evagrios would render her the great atonement, she had reluctantly played the spy upon Kasia.

The months at the Bukoleon had not made her soul more easy. Kasia had been indeed anything but a dignified imperial mistress. She could chide her menials like a huckster’s wife. Once she had flogged Saloma with her own slipper. Her raiment, table and all other service had been of absurd simplicity, even with allowance for the siege. But the tire-woman had inevitably fallen under the spell of Kasia’s dry humour, true piety, common sense and withal her very deep and genuine kindness.

Almost daily, too, Saloma had served that Emperor who calmly, inscrutably and unerringly was holding the Hagarine myriads at bay. She had seen enough of Leo to learn that there was little of real divinity hedged about the private moments of a Basileus, but she had quite enough wit to recognize an indomitable and an exceedingly manly man. As the months had passed, more and more she had disliked her part in the palace. Twice she had been almost moved to make a full confession to the ever-approachable Kasia. Not wholly because of the close guard had she failed to send out any of the military secrets following that report of the wounding of Leo which she had betrayed early in her sojourn. Then unexpectedly came the utterly indiscreet conversation between Sophia and Kasia revealing that Anthusa possessed the formula of the fire, followed immediately by an opportunity to leave the palace. The temptation to use this information to buy her soul’s contentment from Evagrios had been overwhelming, though Saloma’s conscience had pricked her sorely—but she succumbed.

In this moment of intense anguish, from the mental eyes of the wretched woman had fallen the scales. How possibly could the secret of the fire have been valuable save when passed on to the Hagarines for the ruin of Constantinople? How could any merely internal plot against Leo prosper save with the help of the enemy without the gates? If Evagrios could befool her as to this awful thing, bringing upon him and his all the torments of the seventh hell, what slightest hope that he would go through even the jargon of a marriage with her, when Nikosia and all his own convenience and ambition would absolutely oppose? Transported by her fearful thoughts, Saloma beat her head in desperation and began again her frenzy.

“Quiet, girl,” ordered Kannebos, forcing her back upon her stool. “One would imagine you, not that other poor thing, was being tortured. Holy wounds! But she seems very quiet. I expected her to shriek out long before now. I’ll open the door a bit. Probably she’s confessed.”

A low moan, one wrung from the flesh while the spirit was still unconquered, penetrated from the outer room. The voice of Hormisdas, very harsh, sounded clearly:

“Better speak, you fool! Do you want the screws again? There’ll be worse things later—this is just the beginning.”

In the silence which followed Saloma could feel her own heart throbbing in its prison. She thought that the breath even of Kannebos came quicker. There was a clicking noise as of metal tightening, another moan, lower than before, then more of oppressive silence. The voice of Babek in bad Greek interrupted it:

“As Allah liveth, all this gets to nothing! Halt for a little and let us consult together.”

“Take the prisoner aside,” commanded Paul, and a noise indicated that Hormisdas and Petronax were conveying Anthusa to a second antechamber. Whether she had fainted or could walk Saloma could not tell. The next to speak was apparently Niketas:

“The fiends devour you, Evagrius, for making everything hinge on this sorceress. Why wasn’t the confession wrung out of her ere we were called together and everything put at stake? I swear she was muttering her father’s spells and felt no more pain than do I when I sit on these cushions.”

“They gave her the uttermost tension of the gloves, your Magnificence,” excused the myrmidon. “I could see she suffered extreme pain. Who could have imagined such obstinacy!”

“There are such women,” interposed Count Isoës. “They’re squealing things usually, and come promptly to terms; but when really obdurate, it’s like tormenting granite. I had to rack a girl at Pergamum back in old Justinian’s day. We disjointed her limb by limb, and she died with never a word. I’m fearful this woman’s her sister.”

“If she dies, how do we get the secret of the fire?” gloomily asked Theokistos.

“We’ve not put the brazier of coals to her yet,” announced Paul. “No one can bear that.”

“In her present state,” remarked Anthrax, “the moment the fire touches her she’ll swoon and may never come to. That’s the last resort.”

Hormisdas apparently had glided back over the carpets. “May it please your Magnificences,” he suggested, “let us wait a little. I know this tribe. They are all strung up for an instant, then their courage relaxes and the terrors of a renewed torture come home to them. This girl will be in a wiser mood within half an hour.”

“What must be must,” assented Paul unwillingly. “Well, noble emir and valorous kaid, we cannot doubt that the formula will be forthcoming despite this small delay. Let us proceed to our treaty. In return for the secret of the Maritime Fire and other material assistance when you renew the attack upon the city, what terms does your commander offer us?”

Kannebos’ astonishment had made him open the door still wider.

Saloma could see Babek producing a scroll covered closely with writing: “The matter is simple, Lords of the Christians. The themes of Asia go, of course, to the Shadow of Allah. Touching Constantinople, the gold, silver, silken raiment, gems and all the slaves belong to the victorious army of El Islam. The personal liberty of the free citizens we condescend to respect, and, of course, the entire estates of your most noble selves and your nearer friends. As for the ex-Basileus Anastasius II, whom we hear you propose to restore, we deign to permit that he reign at Thessalonica, nor will we demand greater dominions in Europe at present than the theme of Thrace.”

“Blessed Trinity!” swore Anthrax, arising in astonishment. “Do you demand that Constantinople be made Moslem for ever? I understood you merely expected now the portable spoil and then would retire.”

The emir took no pains to conceal his scorn: “Do you imagine, Seyid, that our sword hands have come from the four corners of the East, and have earned Paradise by tens of thousands, merely for the sake of a few dinars per man of spoil, and a few girls for the Damascus harems? Not so! We have come to make this city the bulwark of the Faith for ever. Your worship, indeed, we will tolerate; some few churches will probably be spared——”

Anthrax rose, his face white and twitching. “Noble friends,” spoke he hurriedly, “despite my hatred for the Isaurian, I have long misdoubted this whole scheme. You have told me lies. I will not betray you, but suffer me to withdraw.”

“It cannot be,” commanded Paul hastily. “Plato, Satyros, all of you fellows not now with the wizard’s girl or Saloma, bar the door to the Lord Commissioner. No one can desert the plot now.” Anthrax resumed his seat, angry and miserable,

while the eunuch resumed: "Before adjusting public matters let us understand certain personal items. I mean the gratifications which the Kalif will give those who have devotedly served him."

"Wallah!" swore Babek in his colleague's ear. "They say the betrayer of Issa sold his master for thirty pieces of silver; these, his later disciples, will drive a little harder bargain."

Saloma and Kannebos had, alike, listened speechless and hideously enchanted. When the emir disclosed the destined fate of Constantinople the groan from the girl had been more desperate than any from Anthusa. Despite her own misery, she now saw that the sailor's face was pale and working horribly.

"Are you a Christian, fellow?" she adjured. "Do you kneel in church? Do you fast in Lent? Do you kiss the ikon of the Panagia? Do you dread hell? Can't you realize what they are doing?"

Kannebos shook his puzzled head. "I like it not," he announced, "but, again, I've sworn to keep faith to Petronax and Evagrius and obey all orders. I broke my oath about that Anthusa and where I took her. Bad luck's come of it, though. I told it to a priest. If she were a holy nun on the Isle of Cedars she'd not be under torture now."

"Torture, man?" reëchoed Saloma, ever more beside herself. "Do you think St. Gabriel will punish Paul and Hormisdas alone for this and spare the rest of us a full share in the burning? O Blessed Mother!—but how dare I pray to her? We are all damned through Eternity!"

"I can't believe they will sell the city," growled the sailor, rubbing his crown to reassemble very scattered wits. "The thing's too deep for me. I'm faithful to my paymasters. They gave twenty solidi. Hist, the eunuch's speaking again."

"I see, very exalted Emir," resumed Paul, "that we must recede in our objections to the Kalif's holding Constantinople. For that same reason our personal recompense must be sufficient. It is agreed that I am to be made the vizier over the Christians and their affairs, not merely here, but through the entire Empire of your master?"

"And Theokistos and I," thrust in Niketas, "are to receive each a hundred thousand dinars, and Isoës and, to quiet his scruples, the most excellent Anthrax——"

Kannebos' hands fell in dismay. At last his dense skull had been penetrated. He clapped his hand upon his sword. "Wounds of Christ!" he swore. "This is too much. Twenty solidi won't salve such villainy. I'll break in on them."

"Don't be a sheep," ordered Saloma, hope surging suddenly within her. "You are one against many: Hormisdas, Plato, Satyros, Evagrius, and Lobel's men. The two Hagarines are great warriors. See——" She pointed to a second door in the rear of their chamber, probably leading towards the exterior of the Baths. "Let us run, call for help, break up this villainy!"

Kannebos, nevertheless, thrust out a detaining hand. "The devils are confounding my brain. I don't know what to do. After all, I took their money and swore to be faithful. It's their crime, not mine."

"They've sworn to be faithful to the Emperor and are taking the Hagarines' money. Do you think the Saints will forgive your refusal to block their infamy? Woe! What's that——"

Hormisdas was speaking again in the outer room: "Your Magnificences, I hope the prisoner is getting into a softer frame of mind. She has naturally reflected upon her condition. After a little we can question her again."

"That is well," observed Niketas, "but now to return to the question of the Patriarchate, of course under the Kalif's gracious patronage."

"The Patriarchate, I understand, was reserved for me," interposed Evagrius, with his blandest accents.

"For you, spawn of the Shaytans?" thundered Babek. "Whose head deserves to be picked by the crows? Do not insult my great master by suggesting such an infliction even upon Misbelievers."

"This unfrocked clerk is presumptuous," ordered Paul with asperity. "No such thing was promised. A little money suffices. Now, Hormisdas, have in your prisoner. Do your best with her or we are befooled indeed." ...

... Saloma heard no more. Kannebos had dropped her arm and stood transfixed, a miserable picture of hesitation,

helplessness and sheer imbecility. The woman shot down a long, dark passage. Fortunately, in other days, she had often attended Nikosia to the Baths and had a tolerable idea of the arrangements of their galleries. The great structure had several exits, and Paul's myrmidons had been too few to guard those which seemed securely locked from within. After frantic groping Saloma's hands encountered what seemed an outer door. Bolted—but with some fumbling she found the handles of the heavy brazen bars. By exerting all her frenzied strength they yielded. A push—almost too great for her—then the ponderous bronze-faced portal swung outward, barely enough to let her slim body glide through. Whether Kannebos was hesitating still, pursuing her, or assailing the conspirators she recked not. The girl knew only that she was free.

The midnight air smote Saloma. Overhead twinkled cold stars. The great plaza of the Augustæum opened dimly before her. The pinnacles and columns of the mighty edifices rose all around like mute sentinels. Directly across the wide area the colossal statue of Justinian I reared its pride against the long reach of the walls of the Hippodrome. To her left were the elaborate porticoes of the Senate House. Suddenly it came over Saloma how desperate even yet was her mission. Not a mortal seemed in sight. The distant seawalls appeared deserted. The noblest square of the imperial city was at that hour as the city of the dead, its great piles looking down as impassively as Egyptian pyramids.

Saloma, even in her frenzy, had preserved wits enough to pause an instant and consider her situation. Directly behind the Baths and the Senate House rose, indeed, the fortified wall of the palace compound, but she knew of no gate therein nearer than the Chalke, a quarter of a mile thence. She must raise the alarm, tell her story in a manner to convince doubters of its truth, and get help to Anthusa. The torturing had already recommenced. She was sure of what would happen: Anthusa would endure all, even the worst, and die under the grip of Hormisdas. And God would require the blood of His saint at Saloma's hands!

The situation overwhelmed her. There seemed but one way—to run, and run she did, full speed, across the Augustæum in the direction of Hagia Sophia. No human sight or sound; no human beings apparently nearer than the fiends in the Resting Room of the Patricians, but in sheer desperation Saloma screamed loudly, wildly. Her voice was echoed mockingly along the vast marble porticoes lining the plaza. The echoes doubled her terror, but did not strike her dumb. She screamed again and again with still keener fright, when directly at her heels sounded the yelp of a dog, a dog distressed, forsaken and taking up her cry. Shrill, piercing was his call, and repeated many times, his whole canine soul going into his voice.—Dorkon, who had followed to the baths, so afterwards they told her.—When half a dozen times he had howled, lo! now from under the shadows of the Hippodrome, now from under the tall structure of the Golden Milestone, now from the colonnades of the Senate House, rose other yelpings as the sleeping cohorts of the scavengers awoke. Like a pebble's splash, rippling across a pool, the howlings spread wider and wider. Now the dogs by Hagia Sophia lifted their voices, now their brethren by the Marmora replied.

The unearthly clamour terrified Saloma more than ever, but on she ran—screaming shrilly and with the shadow of Dorkon, wild with excitement, racing beside her. She was well across the Augustæum and near its junction with the Mesē, when suddenly she knew a few lanterns were flashing over a group of men advancing in clattering armour. They were part of a force, no doubt, moving from the palace to the Forum of Constantino, when the clamour of the dogs had induced a squad to swerve in the direction of the uproar. In the darkness, the band saw first the flying Dorkon, then, like a fleeting ghost out of the gloom, sped a young woman, garments streaming, hair dishevelled. Following the frantic dog, and knowing little what she did, Saloma ran straight into the arms of an astonished marine who almost dropped his spear as she collided with him.

“Treason! Rescue! Help! Murder!”—and all the time, half-drowning Saloma's cries, the dogs made every portico resound. Then more mailed feet came stamping from the area before the Cathedral.

“A madwoman!” reported the bedeviled marine to his hastening decarch. “She's bewitched every dog in Constantinople. Unhand me, vixen—I'm not a Hagarine.” The last word sent Saloma into wilder prayers and adjurations than ever: “Spies! Treason! The great Baths!” still came from her in one torrent. The decarch was a very young subaltern, but he lacked not steady nerves and prompt intelligence.

“Something's happened,” he called to his group of staring men. “Their Excellencies are just leaving the Chalke. Run, Kebes, and bring them hither!” And a moment later Basil and Fergal, on their way from the palace to the Polyandrian gate, on some midnight mission, were reining their horses as a lantern was held to the face of the stranger, who never ceased her noisy protests.

“Saloma, the Empress-Mother’s tire-woman, as I’m a sinner!” swore the amazed Celt. “Clean crazy. One of you men lead her back to the Bukoleon.”

But the light had also touched the features of the spatharios. Saloma seized his hand and clung to it as one drowning clings to a spar.

“O Lord Fergal, hearken! hearken! How can I say it all at once? The *kyria* Anthusa is being tortured in the great Baths. Evagrius, Hormisdas, Paul the eunuch, many more,—and two Hagarines are with them. They seek to wring out of her the secret of the fire. They will kill her!”

“Cross of Our Lord,” vowed Basil in his turn, “you rave.”

“All true. Torment, murder and treason. Constantinople is lost. They will torture the secret out of her, or more likely she will die in their hands.”

“I’ve seen this girl often with Kasia,” observed Fergal more coolly. “She doesn’t rave.”

Basil bounded from his horse to the pavement. “Where is this?” he demanded.

“In the Reposing Room of the Patricians. I’ve just escaped. They were beginning to torture her for the second time.”

“Nikanor,” ordered Basil, with the precision of high command, “this must be looked to. Take your fifty, surround the Baths of Xeuxippos, every door. Be swift and silent. Your life if a soul escapes. And you, Zonoras, with your men, follow me.”

Fergal likewise had leaped from his steed. Basil turned to the now faint and fluttering Saloma. “Guide us, girl,” he commanded. When she hesitated the mighty sailor, scorning assistance, seized her bodily, flung her over his left shoulder, and, with hardly cumbered steps, strode fiercely across the Augustæum, his boarding cutlass flashing in the starlight. As he marched he questioned, nor was Saloma too distraught to answer coherently. Dimly they saw Nikanor’s force ranging itself around the various portals, but a new fear fastened itself upon Saloma:

“When you attack they will kill Anthusa!”

“The more speed, then,” tossed back the sailor, setting her down at last. “Was this the door by which you escaped? Yes? Then if they’ve not flown already the devil’s betrayed them into our hands—it’s still unbarred. I know the inside of the Baths, praised be St. Theodore. Now, Fergal, beside me, and all the rest of you, off sandals and follow like cats.”

The bronze valves were swung wider. Basil and Fergal entered abreast, the marines, with panther tread, behind. The passages of the Baths opened in cavernous blackness before them, but Basil possessed the true sailor’s gift of seeing in the dark. Speedily he caught the bare glint of light from the anteroom whence Saloma had fled. Under the heavy vaulting and behind those massive walls every external sound was smothered. The howls of ten thousand street dogs could never have penetrated inside. Satyros, Plato and Lobel’s comrades may have guarded the southern door, but there was no second watcher in the inner passage presumably held by Kannebos. As the attackers drew nearer they saw the form of the latter, standing, limp and miserable, upon the threshold of the greater chamber, spellbound by the gruesome scene before him, and still unable to decide, in his daze, whether to join Saloma in raising the alarm or to warn his employers that she had fled.

Brattling as glass sounded out the voice of Paul: “Now, vixen, for the last time. Give truly the formula for your father’s fire or the hot coals of this brazier press on your white skin. You make us desperate. We stick at nothing.”

“Lord Jesus, receive my spirit,” came back in scarce audible whisper.

“Begin, Hormisdas,” ordered the eunuch, “by all the fiends, what——”

Plato, nearest the outer door, had sprung back into the room, his teeth chattering: “Soldiers—the Augustæum’s full of them; they are surrounding the Baths!”

Paul rose, with a scream of terror and rage: “Quick, you fools, destroy the evidence! Kill the girl! Hide her body! Hide these Saracens!”

Evagrios had half drawn a long knife when from the Admiral's great throat thundered a trumpet of judgment:

"In the Emperor's name——" With a single sweep of his cutlass he sent the brazier flying perilously, while his left hand descended upon Evagrios as a hawk would seize a sparrow. Pandemonium reigned in the chamber. The emir was the first to recover enough to whip out his crooked weapon and bound on his attackers. The loaded mace swung by Fergal dashed the scimitar from his grasp. The first noise of scuffling sent the column of marines into the apartment with a resistless rush. Satyros and Plato and Lobel's trio had time to unbar the entrance and flee outside, but the instant clash of weapons told that the exit was guarded. The onset had been so sudden, the odds so overwhelming, that the eunuch and his other companions were pinioned before time for a second outcry and struggle.

One instant Anthusa stood motionless as the pilasters; her face was already the colour of a corpse. Then burst from her lips a scream of mortal agony, too long held at bay, and she collapsed upon the floor. The torturing fetters were still upon her arms. The admiral dropped his weapon, and, with fury doubling even his wonted strength, by two wrenches snapped the metal bands and cast the hateful things away as he might snakes.

"Traitors! Kill! Hew in pieces!" stormed the marines, driven wild by the sight of the two Saracens and waving their blades, but Basil, with voice that made the vaulting ring, bade them to stand and hold their prisoners. In the lull, the writhing eunuch made a despairing effort:

"Alas, what misunderstanding! The admiral did not know that I was privately commissioned by the Emperor to interrogate this unhappy girl. The whole affair is most easily explained."

"By Allah the One, half-man," cried Muazzim, held by two marines, "can you not pass to your account without more lies? Cry now to your saints as we to the Compassionate. Die bravely if you must live foully!"

"Save your breath, Sublimity," added Fergal, with a mock obeisance to the eunuch. "I have seen these noble Hagarines at Damascus. The Emir Babek and the Kaid Muazzim were familiar riders upon the polo field. They do not deny——Well, Nikanor?"

The centurion, sprinkled with blood, entered from the plaza and saluted. "Of the men that rushed forth two would not yield. We had to kill them. They are identified——Satyros and Plato, all too well known around the Golden Horn. Their comrades dropped their swords and are our prisoners."

Basil carried the motionless Anthusa very gently to a couch just vacated by no less a personage than Paul. "Your Magnificences," spoke he, addressing the blenching magnates, "the case is plain: torture of an honourable lady, concealed presence of Moslem officers, armed resistance to lawful authority. The rest can wait. Zonoras"—the lieutenant stood before him—"get you at full speed to the Basileus. Let nothing stop you. Probably he's now taking horse, but drag him from bed if need be. Tell him Paul the Eunuch and a dozen traitors more are held at the Baths of Xeuxippos, taken while torturing *kyria* Anthusa. That will fetch him out of heaven or hell. Tell him to bring his mother and my Placidia, there's women's work ahead; and bring the architherapist—if his skill is not too late."

As the messenger sped away, Babek turned to the men who grasped him. "Permit me," he begged, then edged nearer to Paul and spat in the cowering eunuch's face. "I extol the Most High," cried the Emir, "even on the verge of death, that El Islam has not had to suffer the shame of purchasing Constantinople from such as you!"

CHAPTER XXXVI

THE TRIUMPH OF THE LION

AFTER a time, long to captors and captives, but short in reality, Leo entered the Reposing Room of the Patricians. Zonoras had found him just as he was leaving the Daphne to ride to the walls.

The Basileus was in cuirass and helmet, the purple chlamys floated around him, in his hands swung a drawn sword. Behind him clanged a strong force of the Protectors, while the giant bulk of Karlmann the Frank cast a guardian shadow over his master's shoulder. The apartment became full of men in steel, tossing their weapons.

Leo's countenance was darker than the night and he seemed straining against the rein set upon his anger. Before his strides, staff officers, marines and prisoners parted to left and right, but Basil came to meet him and saluted.

"Where is *she*?" was the Emperor's sole demand.

The admiral threw back the curtain to an inner chamber. They had placed Anthusa upon a more retired couch. Saloma had recovered wits enough to loosen her dress, and was sobbing hysterically over her, now beating her own breast, now calling down upon herself imprecations. Leo swept her aside with one stroke as he might a puppy, and gazed upon Anthusa's motionless face.

"Does she live?" he demanded, turning to the almost tearful Fergal standing beside Saloma.

"God knoweth," responded the Celt, crossing himself, "they were about to put her to the fire when we broke in."

The Emperor dropped on one knee, lifted the limp arm of Anthusa and carried it to his lips. On the smooth skin by the elbows were red rings deeply planted—the marks of the Gloves of Cappadocia. When Leo rose the iron hearts of Basil and Fergal stood still within them. They beheld a terrible thing: the cheeks of the iron Basileus of the Romans were wet with tears. Then his form straightened, with firm authority he turned to Saloma, forced the miserable girl to cease wailing, and by swift questioning drew from her all she knew of the deeds of that night. When he had finished there were more people in the chamber—Kasia, Placidia and certain of their women, likewise the architherapist, still sleepy and bewildered at this untimely summons.

"*Makaira! Makaira!* Open your eyes and make my old heart glad!" cried Kasia, bending desperately over Anthusa. "What have they done to you?"

With his own hands Leo forced his mother away, while the physician made his examination.

"Does she live?" pressed once again the Emperor.

"Say rather, Sacred Clemency," replied the leech, "she is not dead."

Leo held up the ring upon his finger—the emerald was worth a logothete's ransom; then he touched his sword hilt. "The price of life and the price of death," he spoke significantly; "you understand?"

"I can but do as God gives me power," returned the physician, not without trembling.

"God helps those who strive beyond strength. My mother will assist you. Now let me hence, or by every saint and demon I shall turn mad."

Again the Emperor knelt and kissed the motionless hand. He seemed averting his head that he might not gain new view of the unresponding face. Then back to the outer room he went, where still waited the guards and prisoners. At his fell presence most of the captives burst into howls of agony. Life, life, they besought, even on the most loathsome terms. Loudest of all were the frantic pleadings of Paul. Niketas and Theokistos were hardly less abject. Anthrax and Isoës preserved a shade better of self-control. The Emperor turned his back on them in shrugging contempt and faced the two Moslems. The hands of the emir and kaid were bound behind them, but they bowed themselves before the Basileus.

"We are men of the sword," spoke Babek, "and to the sword we submit without whimpering. Permit us to salute the warrior who, had he served El Islam, would have surpassed the deeds of Khalid, the scimitar of Allah."

Leo returned the salute as from one of his officers. “And I accept the homage of brave men,” he made answer, “whom a soldier’s duty bids me dispatch to God’s judgment bar. As spies, nevertheless, you came and as spies you die. Korippos”—to a spatharios—“take out these Saracens. Strike off their heads, then give their bodies honourable burial.”

The twain walked out with silent dignity. The mouthy agony of the other prisoners increased. Paul’s cries ended in sheer foaming. The Emperor smiled on them the smile of Polyphemos selecting his victims, then beckoned to a second adjutant: “Ignatios, these noble lords fear death too soon. They have much to say. You have skill as an examiner. Get the truth out of them, one by one.” He pointed with awful significance towards the heap of torturing implements still lying on the floor. “*The means are ready provided.*”

The humbler conspirators, Hormisdas, Evagrios, Petronax, Nikosia and Lobel’s band, were huddled in a group apart from the captured magnates. All were groaning, quite beside themselves, and animal terror had destroyed Hormisdas’ wits; he began to curse aloud:

“The devils blast that white-faced trull who by her silence ruined us!”

The Emperor, livid with over-goaded passion, took one bound towards the slave dealer and dashed out his teeth with a single blow of a mailed fist. “Away with this carrion!” rang his command. “We know their story. Prick out their eyes and cut their tongues out!” The soldiers leaped upon their victims as wolves upon their prey...

... Presently Leo controlled himself enough to receive another staff officer who entered, saluted and proffered a tablet. The Emperor gave it one glance, then uttered a laugh fearful in its intensity. His eyes glittered as those of a man inspired.

“From Artavasdos on the walls,” he announced to his aides. “Our concentrations have been completed. Presuming upon their friends within the city, the emirs have disposed their forces carelessly. God is with us this night. The sacrifice of the purest saint still left on earth has risen to His throne. The time for patience is past. The time to strike is come. At morn let the Hagarines feel the tooth and the claw of the Lion!”

“*Euge!*” echoed all the delighted officers together.

“Out with the themesmen, the mercenaries, the city bands; out with every man or lad who can swing steel! To your posts, all of you! Let the God of Battles go before!”

* * * * *

That morn the imperial city shook herself in her might as became the long-time Mother of Empire. From the seven public gates, from the seven military gates, from the Golden Horn to the Marmora, forth poured the Roman chivalry. Horsemen and foot were there, cuirassiers and phalangites, Armeniacs and Anatolians, Frankish and Slavic mercenaries, high-born Protectors, humbly-born trainbands, these last tyros no longer but hardened into veterans in the gruelling school of war. Their long battle line was in array outside the gates ere the outposts of Moslemah ran to the High Emir’s tent with the dread tidings. The first Roman onslaught brushed aside the guard lines of the Saracens like flax. Then the great Moslem laager sprang to life. The myriads that had toiled through the weary siege, chilled and starved, rejoiced with wild shouts at the chance of an open battle. “*Allahu akbar!* At grips with the Roman dogs at last!” And all the scimitars shone bright...

... Just before the trumpets called for the decisive conflict, Leo summoned before him Artavasdos, the chief strategos. The Emperor took from his breast his golden medal and hung it over the neck of the general.

“To-day I am not myself,” spoke the Isaurian, “my thoughts are in the city. I cannot resolve clearly. All that forethought can do has been done, but now I am only the first of your volunteers. You are in command.” And so the wondering officer gave the signal to begin the charge.

Sword against scimitar, the thousands met all through that morning of terrors, and noon brought no repose, but only deadlier combat. Thrice and four times the rush of the dervishes bore back the Roman attack, and carried the Green Standard of the Prophet deep into the Christian array, but ever the Roman flood returned and ever from the city gates poured forth new squadrons, new centuries. And here, there, everywhere, now by Blachernai, now by St. Romanos, now by the seaside, went the purple banner with the golden eagle tossing over the press of war, while Christians cheered and Hagarines groaned, “The Lion—see—the Lion!”

Never in his youthful days in the guard had Leo exposed himself more recklessly. Vainly did his officers plead with him, "Stay, Basileus! Your life is precious!" Always he cast the answer back at them, "Victory is certain. I only know that if the news I dread comes from the city I care not to live. Let me forget myself in the battle."

Leo sent his horse against the Syrians and Arabs as though death were a thing impossible, as though his sole joy was

"In the brilliance of battle, the bloom and the beauty of spears."

But the Protectors thundered in a moving wall behind, and Karlmann on his left and Fergal on his right, with shield and sword, fended unnumbered blows and arrows. Yet the Emperor's own blade cleft through the way, and where he led all, the fight blazed with sevenfold fire. Michael leading the heavenly hosts against the rebel angels—were ever his strokes more mighty?

And just as the sun began to wane came the last girding of armour, the last bracing for the onset. Slowly, furlong by furlong, the Roman strategoi had forced the heart of the battle southward, until, close by the Marmora, Moslemah closed his ranks as he saw his peril. Betwixt the great fortified laager and the long array of Saracen ships drawn up on the shelving beaches to avoid the fire lay a broad mile of open country joined to the encampment only by a weak palisade; and across that mile so vital to the Moslems, host locked with host in the final wrestle. In the city, long used as it was to war, women hushed their children in panic, or crowded again to the churches, as louder than ever before, from the south and west, rose the thunder of incessant combat. In the strife itself, what warrior could see beyond a few comrades or a few foes in the welter? Lance to lance, hand to hand they strove, calling on God Triune or Allah the One; or went down in the trampling press with thoughts of devilish hate mingled with dreams of the saints' or the houris' paradise.

Then when unwounded men were dropping fast because flesh and blood could do no more, and the Moslem line still held, the Isaurian called to his own cuirassiers, the Anatolian themesmen to whom he was as a god, "Fail me not!" And the purple banner led all the raging lancers.

The end. Under the battering shock Asian courage snapped. The Saracen hosts, as before a great gust from the sea, seemed flying towards their laager, the Green Standard showing swiftly the way. "Our defeat is fated. Allah has decreed against us. Save, O Compassionate, save from the Lion!" This from the Hagarines, while over the shivered palisades, midway betwixt camp and ships, blew the imperial banner, its purple in shreds and these half changed to scarlet. Then from the panting themesmen, from the hosts behind, from all the watching towers went up a shout of ecstasy. It echoed from the walls back into the tensely waiting city. Five miles it passed down the Mesē and the Adrianople Way along fora and colonnades, over domes and arches to the uttermost palace point, whence exultant voices tossed it across the Golden Horn to straining Galata: the Roman war-cry, "Jesus Christ is victor!"

... That night, while the Roman host bivouacked upon the battlefield preparatory to seizing and burning the helpless Saracen ships the next morning, a trumpet blew for parley from the emirs' encampment. A Christian trumpet answered, and they brought to Artavasdos an embassy headed by the stout Kaid Sukaina. But when the high-strategos knew their errand he smiled sternly and said, "The Basileus cannot depute this to me," and bade his officers take the envoys to Leo.

They found the Emperor seated upon an arrow chest beneath two torches held by Protectors in battered armour. His own face was streaked with red, and around his left arm was a bandage. He was very pale, but there was that flash in his eyes which made the Saracens tremble. Abjectly they prostrated themselves and waited on their knees until the conqueror addressed them, moving stiffly his bloodied lips: "O Sukaina and your companions, you know the fate I promised the next envoys from your master save as they came to crave my mercy."

"Warrior of Warriors," spoke the kaid, "to whom Allah hath given might and victory denied to His faithful, Moslemah the Omiad sends us, saying, 'We cannot battle against destiny. The Most High refuses to decree the fall of Constantinople. Suffer us to return to our own land.'"

"But if I refuse—and your ships are in my power——"

"True, Victor over the Victorious. You have our ships. But you do not possess, as yet, our camp. Deny us terms worthy of brave men and we will sell our lives full dear. Many Romans must pay the price ere you can storm our barriers and make our remnant slaves."

"And if spared?"

“O Lion, we read the ordinances of Allah. Permit our return to Syria. We will take oath to you, for ourselves and our children, never again shall a Saracen host cross the Hellespont or Bosphorus to array itself against Constantinople.”

The Roman aides and generals had been crowding into the torchlight. Their hands were closed around their hilts. The hot lust for battle still burned within them. Had their leader ordered war to the end they would have shouted with savage joy, and the hearts of many grew glad as Leo sat silent but with his countenance seemingly ever more pitiless; then suddenly he leaped from his seat and reached wildly as might a man suddenly distraught. Through the circle of generals and cringing envoys broke a messenger, breathless with his speed. He made for Leo as an arrow for its mark, saluted not, but cast at the Emperor four words: “God has spared her.” It was Peter.

Leo bowed his face from view. He seemed groping for words, then at last spoke with extreme effort: “Gallant sirs, grant me speech apart with my servant.” And, to the astonishment of Christian and Moslem alike, he moved backwards, his arm cast over Peter’s broad shoulder, into the darkness of a camp pavilion just erected. For a long time master and servitor were there, communing in low tone. When Leo reappeared Peter had vanished, but the Basileus swung forward with his old poise and pride, although the lines of his face had softened. Immediately he spoke to Sukaina, but no longer with words like steel:

“Brave Kaid, take this, our answer, to your Emir of Emirs: You came from the ends of the earth with all your pitiless myriads to work our destruction, and mercy you cannot claim. Not the softening of your hearts, but the swords of the Romans, made strong by that Trinity whom you blaspheme, make you pray for peace to-day. But our God has now shown to all of us Christian people incomparable mercy. To me, Leo, unworthy sinner, He has this hour sent tidings of a great and special mercy. Therefore, I will make a pact with Moslemah. Let him give hostages of his noblest, surrender his spoils and captives, and return to his own land. For details let him treat with Artavasdos.”

Sukaina bowed his great turban to the ground. “May the Omnipotent stretch far your years for these words of life. Know, O Sovran of the Romans, that it shall be said in Damascus and Aleppo, in Mecca and Medina, in Kairowan and Samarkand, ‘We were under the paw of the Lion, but the Lion showed magnanimity surpassing all his valour!’ ”

... The Emperor tented that night upon the battlefield, and the next morning Moslemah sent proper hostages of good faith. The ships were to bear part of the defeated host to Cyzicus, whence they were to retreat by rapid marches to Cilicia. The rest were to embark upon the ships themselves for Syria. All heart had gone out of the Hagarines; broken and beaten men, they were glad to turn homeward, blessed merely with life and freedom.

After the truce was sealed Leo sat on his war horse with all the Protectors around him, and received the emirs and kaidas as one by one they came, salaaming to the earth, profuse with flowery compliments and congratulating themselves that they had suffered defeat only by a second two-horned Alexander. But Moslemah the Omiad, overwhelmed with mortification, came not, and to him Leo sent a dalmatic of honour with other gifts to assuage his sorely wounded pride. Then, at last, when Artavasdos reported that the first of the quaking Saracens were already going aboard their ships, the sovran turned to his staff:

“The day’s work’s done, comrades. To St. Romanos——”

But the strategoi seized the bridle of his good horse: “Not St. Romanos—the Golden Gate! The Golden Gate!” all shouted together.

Into the Portal of Triumph they led him, and through the central entrance beneath the colossal Nike—the gate opened for none save a monarch, and for him only on his coronation day or when he returned in glory from his wars. With one voice, all the iron-throated hosts acclaimed him; then, once within the inviolate bulwarks, down the four-mile length of the Mesē, far ahead like the dark ripple of a new wave across the summer sea, went running a shout that echoed away in the distance: “*The Basileus! The Basileus!*”

All Constantinople was there: the people by tens, by hundreds of thousands. All the vast porticoes and the roofs thereof were black, the housetops, the soaring arches and even the crests of the columns. The noise rose ever louder to heaven.

He had saved them, their Emperor; saved them despite luxury, avarice and corruption in the palace, despite treason among the mighty, despite twenty years of demoralization and anarchy in the army. From the onslaught of the greatest military power ever launched on Europe from the enkindled East, he had saved his subjects’ wealth and roof-trees,

manly virtue and womanly honour; saved their sons from being made eunuchs, their daughters concubines, their churches mosques. Flawless had been the defence: unparalleled in history.

Vainly for a little soldiers and citizens strove to sustain the decorous Latin of the court acclamations:

“Leo tu vincas! Cæsar et Imperator—invictus, felix, semper Augustus!”

The chanting was ended by a great surge of ecstasy: “The Emperor, *our* Emperor!” “Sacred Majesty” was cast to the four winds. The folk only knew that a valiant brother man, forgetful of weariness or danger, had delivered them from inconceivable peril. They plucked him from his horse. Shoulder-high, upon a litter of lances, they bore him along the roaring Mesē, senators and porters, smiths’ wives and patricians’ wives, holy monks and heathen Bulgars, all shouting, rejoicing, embracing together. When had been such a scene in Constantinople?

From all the gardens of the lordly mansions they stripped rose, anemone, lily and countless blossoms more to rain over the conqueror and his mighty men that marched behind. Every helmet, every spear point had its fragrant chain. Little girls, old women with streaming hair fought with one another to kiss the hem of the hero’s mantle, nay, to kiss the dust across which his litter had passed. The Forum of Arcadius, of Theodosius, of Constantine, each more exultant than the one before, and then the Augustæum opened its imperial breadth, the pavements packed with people, while the huzzaing made the gilded domes of Hagia Sophia quake. So they had him into the Chalke. Then the multitudes dissolved for celebration such as men remembered not before in New Rome.

Leo’s loyal captors released him at the entrance to the Bukoleon. The efforts of battle had told visibly upon his strength, and the attendants ran forward to proffer service. All the high civil officials were waiting in duteous array, but the Emperor ignored them. “Not now!” he enjoined, then, two steps at a time, he mounted the lofty stairs of the residence, brushed past the kneeling menials and rushed into his mother’s chambers.

Kasia ran to meet him, her arms flung wide.

“Well?” and his voice trembled as he kissed her.

“We have both fought,” cried the little woman, between sobs and laughter. “You by the Marmora, I in the Bukoleon. Perhaps I fought the harder. We have both conquered. I sent off Peter as soon as I dared. She will live.”

The great form of the soldier shook. He kissed Kasia again. “O best of mothers,” very tenderly he said at length, “much have you done for me, but never so much as now. I cannot speak out all my thoughts.”

“I understand the heart of my son,” she answered gently. “Anthusa opened her eyes just as the physicians were despairing. The shock of the torture has been unspeakable. She may not be herself for months. Just now she is sleeping. Would you see her?”

Leo shook his head. “We have already, in our peasant simplicity, done her a great wrong. You do not comprehend the filthiness of jealous tongues in matters of the great. Send her back to Kallinikos as soon as she can be safely moved. Do not suffer her to know that I saw her at the Baths that night, or concerned myself greatly about her. For a long space still I belong solely to the Empire. I must be to her nothing, unless I can be to her all things.”

Then, after a little, he controlled and refreshed himself sufficiently to go down to the waiting magnificoes. A centurion reported, “We did to the lesser conspirators as you commanded. Petronax died on our hands. The rest are tongueless and sightless.”

“They have suffered sufficiently,” rejoined the monarch, “now have all that survive hanged forthwith by the Galata ferry.”

The Spatharios Ignatios also reported: “The captured patricians have each been put roundly to the torture. They accused one another and named various other dignitaries as well-wishers of their plot. The names of those implicated are on these tablets.”

Leo took the packet without opening. “You also did well,” he commended. “To-morrow morning let the heralds summon the people to the great curve of the Hippodrome. There let Paul the Eunuch, Theokistos and Niketas be publicly beheaded. Let Isoës and Anthrax lose their noses and ears, and next be tonsured as monks under perpetual close penance

at Sinope.”

Whereupon the Emperor’s eye fell on the pompous line of civil ministers and patricians waiting with servile congratulation. The capture of Paul and his confederates was common news. There were pale and anxious faces among the magnificoes, for the nature of Ignatios’ tablets was more than guessed. But the monarch met each and every dignitary with a friendly smile.

“Sublimities, Magnificences and Serenities,” he spoke affably, “this is a day for rejoicing in God’s great mercy, a day for the burial of old suspicions and hates. If despairing traitors have perhaps named certain loyal subjects as their friends, by the Panagia I swear they lied. See!” He tore the tablets in pieces and trampled them on the pavement. Never was the hem of the Emperor’s mantle kissed with greater fervour and homage than by twenty pairs of noble lips that day.

After a little Leo ascended again to his mother’s upper chambers, his sanctuary. The closing doors shut out splendour and ceremonial. All was homely, orderly and still. Peter divested him of robe and cuirass and began making ready his bath. Kasia, with her own hands, was preparing a simple meal of the country dishes he loved the best. An intense sense of weariness came over him. The events of the last few days became blurred. He could not realize that he was at the end of present striving.

As he waited for the others, he leaned heavily upon the parapet of the windows, and from the lofty height gazed again towards the wooded hills beyond Chrysopolis. Once more the sea was sprinkled with ships, the Saracen armada bearing away the remnants of the host of Moslemah. Gone, gone for centuries, was that great Moslem peril which had shadowed and controlled his life since the meeting with Barses and Chioba. The prophecy was fulfilled: he had saved Constantinople, he had saved the Roman Empire. Through all the stress God had not suffered his voice, his mind, his heart to fail. An inspired messenger within his soul told him that a great victory for civilization and righteousness had been won which would reverberate down the long halls of time.

But he could not take it in. His brain refused to make the adjustment. Only one thing in the world seemed really to matter now: Anthusa was sleeping peacefully.

Close under the shadow of the Bukoleon, ignorant of her imperial onlooker, a Roman dromond rode now in peace. Her sailors were all kneeling upon the deck, while from a portable altar set by the foremast great clouds of incense were curling upward. A priest beside the altar was leading a deep chant of thanksgiving, such as was rising that moment from all the thousand churches of Constantinople:

“Oh, sing unto the Lord a new song, for he hath done marvellous things.
With His own right hand and His holy arm He hath gotten Him the victory.
The Lord hath made known His salvation; His righteousness hath He openly showed in the sight
of the heathen.
He hath remembered His mercy and truth towards the House of Israel.
All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God...
... Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace, good will to men.
We praise Thee, we bless Thee, we worship Thee, we glorify Thee because of Thy great glory!”

Leo cast himself upon his knees, intent upon the worship of the sailors. “Lord,” at length he prayed aloud passionately, “depart from me, for I am a sinful man.”

CHAPTER XXXVII

THE GREAT CHRISTMAS

THE Saracens departed in haste. Their land host was ferried over to Cyzicus for the long, hard march across Asia Minor. Famine and pestilence smote them as they hurried to escape the unfriendly natives. Only thirty thousand hungry, demoralized men, with Moslemah himself, at last found refuge in Tarsus. Yet their state was blessed beside that of their comrades with the fleet. "The Emperor"—said the Christians—"had given them truce, but not the Panagia." In the Hellespont a great tempest fell on the retreating Armada. Thunders and lightnings surpassed the terror of the Maritime Fire. Then in the open Ægean a second and mightier hurricane smote them. All up and down the rocky Cyclades were strewn their wrecks, and the Islanders grew rich upon the spoils the blessed Saints washed up from the subsiding waves. Only five crazy, barely floating barks out of all the enormous fleet at last made Syria with the tale of disaster.

From the Atlantic to the Indus the tale of the great defeat spread through El Islam. Allah had manifestly spoken—Constantinople must stand inviolate. Seven hundred years and more were to pass ere a Moslem army should besiege New Rome again.

* * * * *

Three weeks after the retreat of the Saracens a solemn imperial consistory was held in the Daphne. All the patricians, civil ministers and strategoi prostrated themselves before the Basileus sitting in state. Then the new Master of the Palace, the venerable and good Daniel, speaking for the whole official body, presented a general petition: "Would the monarch condescend to assume the title of 'The Second Scipio,' having saved the New Rome from a deadlier foe than had been Hannibal to the Old?" The ruler received the request graciously, but informed the noble lords that the glories of Scipio had long departed, and he was quite content to be known unto history as "Leo the Isaurian."

Whereupon, Daniel, in no wise rebuffed, made a second loyal request: "Would the Basileus gladden the hearts of his subjects by giving to the Romans a Basilissa, some proper damsel chosen from among the great patrician houses of Constantinople, and thereby afford hopes of founding an enduring dynasty?" To this Leo replied that he appreciated the good will behind the petition, but that the great task of repairing the havoc of war lay heavy upon him; "nevertheless, within one year, and perhaps sooner, he would take to himself a bride from among the daughters of the highest nobility; but since the matter concerned his own person he must study his own manner and time." Whereupon all the magnates broke into suitable acclamations, praising the imperial goodness, and after the consistory dispersed, many fathers of eligible daughters received provisional congratulations, but most of all did Count Maurice Dukas.

The summer and autumn following were months of feverish activity for the Basileus. Indefatigable in war, now he seemed equally tireless in the works of peace. All the intelligence of the Empire was mobilized to restore the ruin wrought by misrule and invasion: commerce was fostered, industry revived, institutions of learning reopened, taxes were lightened, and yet the treasury income increased. Edict followed edict lopping off some inveterate abuse, some absurd survival. A convocation of jurists was ordered to prepare the "Ecloga," a scientific recodification of the vast Roman law. The disbanded soldiery were busied with great public works. The Marmora was covered with barges bringing the marble of Cyzicus and Proconnesus for new porticoes and basilicas. The provincial towns from Sicily to Armenia found their needs studied and necessities relieved. Many and wise were the imperial helpers, but Leo seemed to inspire everything, to direct everything. Leisure for himself he never stole. In the public fêtes of rejoicing he participated barely enough to humour the populace. Basil, as became a familiar companion, once remonstrated:

"You ease the burdens upon toiling slaves, but never those upon yourself."

"*Ei!* comrade," cried the ruler, with a clap upon the shoulder. "Have I not often said that the straitest prisoner in the world is the wearer of the purple? But hark you—tell it not to my present drill masters the logothetes, but their recruit is resolved presently to mutiny. One day I'll please the whims of Leo the Isaurian, and not the commands of Roman Empire. My mutiny is set for Christmas."

* * * * *

While the Emperor and the high officials toiled in their cabinets, the healing saints slowly performed their mercies for Anthusa. The bodily mischief wrought by Hormisdas had passed in a week, but the daughter of Kallinikos long remained in a state of nervous anguish and hysteria that made sister and father question, "Is she mentally clouded for ever?" Then, little by little, the impress of the night of torture faded. The return of peace, the resumption of free innocent life by all about her, the boat rides on the sparkling Bosphorus, a long sojourn at the dear Therapia villa, not too despoiled by the Hagarines, the chance to pick up all the old interests—these did more for Anthusa than the cordials of the architherapist.

Just as the summer ended a new gladness aided her yet more. To Fergal and Sophia was given a son, a little red-headed image of his Celtic father, and in the happiness of his parents Anthusa found her own. She ceased to waken and scream lest she were again in the Baths of Xeuxippos.

Sophia, when strength returned, was often with Kasia at the Bukoleon, but Anthusa went not, nor did Kasia—although asking kindly as to her welfare—send for her. Anthusa knew that after her rescue by Basil and Fergal, the Empress-Mother had done her uttermost for her recovery, but that, of course, was mere humanity. As for Leo, he seemed receding from her life. "He belonged to the Empire." Anthusa said this to herself again and again. Once or twice she beheld him riding in state in the great processions. The hero worship accorded him by all Constantinople was dear to her. He was, of course, a supremely great man raised up by God to save and then to restore the Empire. She would be happiest—so she said in her heart—if she thought on him as little as possible.

They had done their best to keep from Anthusa Leo's public promise "to take a bride from the highest nobility." Of course she had presently heard of it, but received the tidings—Sophia thanked the Trinity—very calmly. "After all, it was only the Emperor's duty to found a dynasty just as it was to win a battle, and of course it was his duty to wed only a patrician's daughter. It was simply as might have been expected."

Sophia and Fergal now lived on the Mesē in the confiscated palace of the late Logothete Niketas, but Anthusa still cared for her father at the House of Peace. Saloma, heartbroken and utterly penitent, was her personal waiting woman and devoted slave. Kannebos, spared from the fate of his fellow miscreants by the special intervention of Michael, had been shipped off to toil on the bench of a dromond. Neokles, fortunately for himself not at the Baths but arrested later, had been tonsured to end his days as a most unresigned monk in a stiff convent at Pityusa. All the hideous things which had risen to afflict Anthusa were passing out of her life, even as the great siege itself was receding fast into memory.

Nevertheless, life could never be the same. Her father was now aging fast. The stimulus from his war inventions was departing. He could not resume his lectures at the reopened University. The formal intimation from the Emperor that his uttermost requisitions upon the treasury would be promptly honoured had been deliberately ignored. "He had enough to eat," he asserted, "and only wanted a few more books." Therefore, he seemed very content to spend laborious hours compiling his "Myriobiblion." But Anthusa knew that his eye was growing dim. He made small errors in the text, which it was her joy to correct without his knowledge.

As for his younger daughter herself she had calmly and cheerfully formed her resolution. She had loved Leo, but not in this world could her love be crowned with happiness. No other love for a worthy man seemed possible. Yet life was hers, and God had shown her another line of noble duty. When the spring came, if without great cruelty she could leave her father, she would go back to the Isle of Cedars.

Kallinikos had despised the Emperor's proffers, and only a most limited circle had guessed that he was the much belauded and mysterious inventor of the fire. But Anthusa felt that, without shame, she might ask Kasia to secure her a fund ample for transforming the island of self-torturing nuns into a sane and comforting refuge for unfortunate women. There on the Isle of Cedars the fallen girls now confined in St. Gastria, and the hundreds of other miserable creatures of the great city, could lead lives of industry, usefulness and true penance of the heart. And Anthusa tried to picture herself growing into the grey and contented Hegumena of a true convent, "A School for the Lord's Service," and finding her joyous reward in the knowledge she had brought hope and peace to many. Surely this was the best. When once she was far from Constantinople, its turmoil, its incessant bruising of old wounds, she would find rest for her soul.

Thus the autumn glided into the winter of 718, and they approached the week of Christmas...

... There came a stretch of days, not unknown in Constantinople, when the winds and waters forgot it was December. The intensely cold winter preceding was not unnaturally followed by one of unusual mildness. The greenery still rustled in the more protected gardens. The piercing blasts from the Euxine were stilled. Soft and balmy blew the kind old

“Notos” wind across the gentle Ægean from Africa. The Marmora, the Bosphorus, stretched out in dimpling blue. The populace thronged upon their favourite water parties. The harbour, the straits, the smooth reaches by the Isles of the Princes were covered with the gay caiques, and the magnates’ statelier barges.

As the holy festival drew nigh, ever more joyously it dawned on the citizens that this was a Christmas surpassing all others. For half a generation, tyranny, civil wars, and the shadow of impending Saracen attack had blighted them. Now, by one great deliverance, the peril had vanished. The sky of the Empire unveiled as bright a future as the azure above the Golden Horn. All the normal, peaceful hopes and joys of life could return to millions. “God and our Basileus have done this!” Roman spoke to Roman.

Never were the goldsmiths’ and silk mercers’ shops along the Street of Lamps, the perfumers’ odorous stalls before the Chalke, the jewellers’ shops by the Theodosian Forum more crowded by spendthrift throngs; never rang the forges or plied the looms in the great industrial quarters by the havens more steadily; never had more cargo ships crowded the wharves and the seaway, resuming long interrupted commerce. In the Hippodrome, the Blue and Green jockeys raced their fours madly before the shouting myriads. In all the variety theatres packed benches howled at the sallies of the farceurs, the daring of the acrobats, the squeaky dialogue of the string puppets. Even the most austere convents stocked their kitchens. Even the harshest ascetics confessed that there approached a day of gladness. As the multitudes in the siege had agonized together, so now they rejoiced together. Such a Christmas-tide had never been in Constantinople.

December 24th was bright and beautiful as its predecessor. The government offices were closed, and civilians and soldiers crowded the streets. Fergal returned home from the palace the gayest of the gay. He said the Emperor had given a special feast to his young subalterns, and mixed and jested with them like a young centurion, and promised them a holiday long to be remembered; particularly he had bidden them not to forget the great service at Hagia Sophia that night, and the palace fêtes the next morning.

In exuberant spirits, the spatharios arranged with certain fellow officers to join in a water party up the Golden Horn. A merry, innocent excursion it was, with young wives, servants and babies, in a long barge pulled by a lustily singing crew from the Navy Yard. Anthusa and her father had been bidden, and the sage had unwillingly capitulated to Sophia’s entreaties. As for Anthusa, the wavelets, sky and sunshine were a sovran cordial for inward discontents. She forgot herself, conversed animatedly, sent out her silver voice when they all joined in the rowing song, and quite stole the heart of brave young Protostrator Theoboulos, who spent an enraptured hour beside her.

The barge first took them to the headlands beyond Blachernai. They climbed the heights^[61] overlooking the site of the deserted Saracen camp. At their feet the Golden Horn curved away to the eastward—cypress-shaded heights, towering edifices, wharves, masts, the dome-crowned palace point and the shimmering Bosphorus beyond, a lovely confusion of green, grey and cerulean arched with pellucid light. The gaunt Walls of Theodosius were covered now with picnickers and merrymakers. Little children were clambering the heaps of rubbish, already mercifully grass-grown, hunting for Hagarine blades and arrow heads. Fergal, with officious gestures, traced the bounds of Moslemah’s laager, and Kallinikos, proud of his Latin, was fain to hawk out Vergil’s lines on the rejoicings of the Trojans when they deemed that the Greeks had fled:

“What joy once more to go out into the Dorian camp ground,
View the deserted plain and gaze on the beaches, forsaken:
Here the Dolopian band, there savage Achilles had tented,
Here they had moored their fleet, and yonder had marshalled for battle.”

After a little the barge was resumed and swept them up to the end of the Golden Horn past a few marshy islands, until the Sweet Waters of Europe opened to view. Here, where two little rivers glided into the great arm of the harbour, they landed upon the greensward.

Half the respectabilities of Constantinople seemed there already. Caiques were constantly coming and going; on land every imaginable painted and gilded vehicle was laden with worthy citizens; songs, flutes, and dulcimers mingled in a melodious noise; children ran in and out the vast park of pines, plane trees and sycamores. No one stood on rank and Fergal and his company sat down with the rest. The ample hampers surrendered to keen appetite. Small talk and laughter was unrestrained. Anthusa yielded herself to the irresistible spell of the Sweet Waters, the capital’s great playground. Nun she might be to-morrow, but a healthy young woman she was that day. The hours passed in genuine happiness.

Then, after jest and repartee had begun to slacken, and a certain spatharios had begun to tell over-tediously of a certain Saracen foray, Anthusa's gaze wandered to the next party of picnickers close at her elbow. Two women, evidently of the lesser nobility, were exchanging gossip:

"Didn't you hear that rumour from the palace—it's all around the Augustæum? To-morrow the Basileus will take a bride."

"Blessed St. Barbara, and who's the lucky patricianess?"

"That's what's just driving the city crazy. His Sacred Clemency is being as hidden about it as he was about the Maritime Fire—the inventor of which, by the by, we're all perishing to know. Ah, he's a crafty Lion, our Basileus!"

"I suppose it's that Theophano Dukas who's his choice. A pretty enough girl, when I sat rather close to her in the Hippodrome—that is, if only she knew how to carry her rouge."

"My Euphrasios says he's not so sure. Her father's rich enough to rebuild the palace, but then she's none too young, and needs her paint. Besides, Count Maurice has sackfuls of enemies. It's whispered that he barely slid out of Paul the Eunuch's plot. There are at least three or four girls with as good influence, birth and dowries, and as fair a chance: Euphoria Boilas, the Logothete Libanios' Pulcheria, old Theodotos' eldest girl Constantia—yes, and still others."

Anthusa clapped her hands over her burning ears, but destiny or female curiosity compelled her to hearken again:

"Whichever way he turns, I pity the Emperor. Poor man, he's human after all, even if he *is* Basileus and has saved every soul of us! All the other great patrician houses will become his enemies the minute he marries into one of them. Then I suppose his new Basilissa will take all her fine family airs with her to the Daphne and give him a pretty dance, just like any other uppish bride. And how *will* she ever get on with his queer old mother? But I can hardly live until to-morrow!"

To Anthusa's infinite relief, Fergal at this instant rose and declared they must make their best speed homeward. She rejoiced that nobody commented on her flaming cheeks and her silence. It had come over her suddenly that the greatest sufferer in such an alliance would be Leo himself: that not one of the exalted maidens who sighed for his hand could possibly love him, or could show him other than contemptuous neglect and scorn as being a base-born peasant were he flung from the throne. The demands of state were dooming him to a sodden and hopeless bondage. Her own self-pity was drowned in a great wave of anger. Was this hard necessity the reward which Providence bestowed upon the man who had saved the very life of the capital, Empire and true religion? Only by extreme self-control did she keep from tears.

The row back to the Navy Yard should have been delightful. All the shipping was covered with brilliant flags. Even the squalid warehouses and tenements along the Galata shore looked festive and friendly under the afternoon sun. Among the multifarious barges and caiques, they passed the great yacht bearing the insignia of the house of Boilas. The array of gorgeously appressed attendants upon the poop indicated that the noble Euphoria herself reposed upon the green cushions under the scarlet canopy. To-morrow would all Constantinople be acclaiming the mistress of this pomp and circumstance as the most fortunate woman in the world? Blessed be the Panagia (Anthusa tried to tell herself) who had prepared the refuge of the Isle of Cedars!

The party returned to Fergal's house, and the sisters were alone for a moment together. Sophia embraced and kissed Anthusa.

"You overheard those idle gossips?" asked the elder.

"Of course," said Anthusa. "Why didn't you tell me that story about the Emperor?"

"Alas! little sister; it seems useless to keep you from things which I know give pain. From what the Emperor said to Fergal, and from things his mother hinted also to me when last I saw her, I fear that rumour must be true. You should not go to Hagia Sophia to-night."

"And why not?"

"Lest something be proclaimed hard for you to hear."

Anthusa tossed her head almost defiantly. "I'm not a child to scream at pinpricks. What must be, must. Leo is our God-

sent Basileus. He shall be nothing more to me. I'll go to the cathedral.”

Sophia smiled a melancholy smile, but again Anthusa carried herself bravely....

... As evening advanced, Constantinople gave itself over even more to joy and revelry. The lesser as well as the greater streets blazed with lamps. Music sounded everywhere. In the crossways were jugglers, puppet players, acrobats, and performing apes and bears; while old and young, Greeks and Armenians, Bulgars, Slavs, Islanders and Epirotes danced riotously in all the little squares.

Presently many thousands hastened to the walls or the view-towers. The whole length of the Golden Horn and of the waters far out upon the Bosphorus and the Marmora was lit by the Maritime Fire. Over the palace domes it played, the seawalls, and next with fantastic radiance over the shipping, blue and red, as if enormous will-o'-the-wisps were rising from the eerie darkness of the sea. The tall flagship, the *St. Michael*, peacefully stroked out across the wavelets, her spars and tackling harmlessly traced with light, and with the golden eagle at her masthead gleaming forth like a moving Bethlehem star. Suddenly from the Tower of Eugenios at the harbour mouth, and from the Pharos, the great lighthouse near the Bukoleon, two far-flaming beacons were answered by like cressets all over the city. On the topmost dome of Hagia Sophia blazed forth an enormous cross; another on the Church of the Apostles; another on Hagia Anastasia. The holy feast had begun. The Christ Child was come to earth. Worldly music and dancing ceased. In courtyards, on pavements and in the already thronging churches all Constantinople began bowing, crossing itself, then singing together the Christmas hymn of Anatolios:

“A great and mighty wonder, a full and holy cure!
Virgin bears the Infant, with Virgin-honour pure.
The Word becomes Incarnate, and yet remains on high,
While cherubim sing anthems to shepherds from the sky.
And we, with them triumphant, repeat the hymn again:
‘To God on high be glory, and peace on earth to men!’
And idol forms shall perish, and error shall decay,
And Christ shall wield the sceptre, our Lord and God for aye!”

* * * * *

“Christians to Hagia Sophia!” The shout so familiar, whether on days of festival or calamity, had never rung more exultantly along the streets and porticoes. At the outer narthex the multitude fought for admission with the doorkeepers. Only the socially privileged were permitted to wedge past; many even of these simply jostled as far as the courtyard and could not push through the nine bronze doors into the cathedral proper. Over their heads the two-and-thirty bells in the domes were now sending their peals far over the imperial city. Torches, cressets, and multi-coloured lanterns shot manifold gleams out of the mosaics lining all the walls and out of the marble fountains and the uplifted bronze statues. Only Fergal’s medals as a spatharios won a way for his wife and sister-in-law through the press, and to the foot of the inclined plane which rose to the vast galleries reserved for the women. The central portal, the “Basilican Gate,” surmounted by a huge mosaic design of an open Gospel and a dove with outstretched wings, had been flung open, but a solid platoon of Protectors was guarding it. “The Emperor will come to-night,” spoke worshipper to worshipper.

Anthusa mounted beside Sophia, leaving Fergal below with the closely-packed host of men. They found standing room by a column of purple Phrygian granite and could look forth over the enormous church. Soon the galleries were crowded with at least ten thousand women.

Never did Anthusa enter the cathedral without feeling herself transported a little nearer to Heaven; and that sensation, despite confusion without and searchings within, did not fail now. “O Solomon, I have surpassed thee!” Justinian had boasted of his master-work—and not in vain. Long since had the daughter of Kallinikos heard and forgotten that the great dome soared away one hundred and seventy-nine feet above the central pavement, that the diameter of this dome was one hundred and seven feet, and that around the church upholding the upper fabric and adorning the massive piers were one hundred and seven columns of every rare marble from Egypt to the Bosphorus. She had learned to trace all the Bible story told with indescribable wealth of mosaics; she knew the majestic four- and six-winged cherubim which seemed to uphold the mighty vault with ruffling wings of blue, metallic green and tawny red. All these objects were familiar and

beloved, as was the enormous mosaic of Christ rising above the vault of the apse, His hands outstretched in perpetual benediction.

Anthusa cast herself upon her knees and tried to let her thoughts soar off into the multitudinous lights now gleaming from every possible point in the vaulting. Over the silver iconostasis the flamboyant altar-screen, was set another vast illuminated cross. Everywhere blazed lofty candelabra, sometimes flashing through screens of rose and blue. Around the heads of the innumerable holy images and jewelled ikons of the saints, ecstatic worshippers already saw playing the fire-tongues of Pentecost.^[62] From the vesting rooms behind drifted bursts of music, harbingers of the greater choirs. For some time Anthusa prayed, trying to give thanks for many things, then rose from her knees with all the rest—the Emperor was entering the cathedral.

Leo walked beside the Patriarch, with ten bishops and all the great officials following. The Basileus wore a dalmatic of plain rich purple; the Patriarch's vestments, veil and mitre were a sheen of gold and incomparable gems. Alone of all laymen the monarch was suffered to take his seat close to the high altar. His throne was of gold; that of the Patriarch facing him was of silver inlaid with mother-of-pearl; that of the bishops of ebony incrustated with silver.

All were seated mid solemn hush. A deep bell tinkled far away behind the iconostasis. The thousands of worshippers fell instantly upon their knees, as the veil (heavy with pearls and gold brocade) which covered the high altar was drawn aside to display the inner tabernacle, again of gold and set with rubies, emeralds and diamonds. New lights sprang out everywhere in the dome and seemed converging upon the altar. It was as if angels were bearing down the glory of Heaven. Then to right and left the inner doors of the vestries parted, and forth marched the full cathedral choir. Three hundred singers moving in slow processional raised the chant sustained by the silver tubes of organs behind the screens. A hundred deaconesses in white array scattered perfumes and flowers upon the pavements about the altar. Cymbals, harps, dulcimers, tambourines and flutes, all joined in the swelling harmony. Had the seraphim that first Christmas night sung fairer?

Passionately Anthusa strove to throw her heart into the solemn liturgy. Was this not a festival of festivals? Had not she with all Constantinople shared in a great salvation? Why would not her gratitude to Heaven rise with the clouds of incense now drifting in fragrant haze around the glistening altar? Why would her too mundane eyes turn not to the mosaic archangels on high but to that purple-robed figure, now kneeling, now sitting opposite to the Patriarch? Should not her heart go out with all the others when with sonorous voice from the ambo a bishop gave a peculiar remembrance of the public deliverance?

“Behold upon the mountains the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace....

“O Judah, keep thy solemn feasts, perform thy vows, for the wicked shall no more pass through thee, he shall be utterly cut off....

“Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins.

“O Zion, that bringest good tidings, get thee up into the high mountain! O Jerusalem, that bringest good tidings, lift up thy voice with strength. Lift it up, be not afraid: say unto the cities of Judah, ‘Behold your God!’ ”

Finished at last was the elaborate mass and liturgy. The Emperor and Patriarch had departed through the Basilican Gate, while the final Gloria was sounding, the churchman upraising his fingers in blessings upon the kneeling worshippers, the monarch moving steadfast and impassive. The choir swept in its great processional back to the vestries. As the incense smoke faded around the high altar, the incomparable pageant of worship seemed ended. The immense audience shook off the awe which had held it, rose to its feet, and the babel of voices long suppressed ascended together, when all were hushed back to silence—a clear, piercing clarion pealed through the church twice and thrice.

On the platform at the base of the preacher's ambo (a spot often permitted to unclerkly orators) stood an imperial herald. His robes of purple and silver were blazoned with the Augustan eagles. Then by a kind of impulse all eyes ascended from him to that spot in the galleries where between two porphyry pillars had hung a crimson veil, hiding the seat of the Empress Consort when such had graced the palace. The veil had been swept aside, disclosing the Basilissa's

lofty throne, vacant indeed, but wrought of ivory and gold and resplendent with almost as many gems as the high altar. The herald uplifted his hand. Through the whole church reigned silence, Anthusa listening to the beating of her own heart.

“A PROCLAMATION IN THE NAME OF FLAVIUS LEO AUGUSTUS!

“*Christians and Romans*: This is a time of thanksgiving and of holy joy.

“Your Emperor, desiring to add yet further to his subjects’ gladness, deigns to give a Basilissa to the Roman Empire.

“Know, therefore, that to-morrow, precisely at noon, in the Golden Hall of the Daphne there will appear before His Sacred Clemency and the exalted magnates and ministers of his court, eight maidens of patrician rank. These very noble damsels have been chosen by particularly deputed imperial commissioners, not merely on account of the loftiness of their birth, but also because of the beauty of their stature and features. They are the Magnificent Patricianesses Euphrosyne Kinnamos, Constantia Rendakes, Antonia Bringas, Pulcheria Skleros, Euphoria Boilas, Theophano Dukas, Gregoria Maniakes and Justina Bryennios.

“The aforesaid noble damsels will present themselves robed in white but without jewels or other ornaments before His Sacred Clemency. In the presence of the most Serene Court the Basileus will condescend to inspect these maidens. The one finding promptest favour in his eyes will receive from him in her hands a golden apple. Forthwith she shall be declared Basilissa of the Romans, shall receive the adoration of all the ministers, magnates and magnificoes, shall be taken to Hagia Sophia and be crowned and consecrated with every solemnity by His Beatitude the Patriarch. After that she shall be shown to the army and the people appearing upon the summit of the Chalke, casting among her subjects with her own hands the sum of five thousand solidi of gold. Finally, she shall be taken to the Church of St. Stephen, the imperial marriage chapel, within the precincts of the Sacred Palace, and there be joined in most holy wedlock to His Sacred Clemency the Basileus.

“The Roman people are invited to-morrow to be the guests of their sovereign, to enter freely the grounds of the Sacred Palace, and to partake of the imperial hospitality.

“*Ten Thousand Years to Flavius Leo Augustus!*”

The gigantic piers of the cathedral quivered with the cheer that rose when the herald ended. Thousands surged out together, everybody laughing, gesticulating, with the women naturally the most excited. As Anthusa regained the outer narthex there was a great crowd edging and salaaming around a gilded car. Theophano Dukas, one sheen of blue silk, white veiling and gold embroidery, was mounting amid a retinue of negro and Syrian servitors and grooms. There was another curious and cringing crowd around the car of Pulcheria Skleros.

“Who would she be? Who to-morrow will sit in that glittering seat in Hagia Sophia, exalted above all other mortal women?”

Leo the Isaurian had imposed many sore trials upon his subjects during the great siege. He had never laid on them one sorer than upon this Christmas night. “To wait till noon to-morrow!” How for half of Constantinople did the thing seem possible?

Fergal and Sophia conducted Anthusa in their modest mule wagon back to the House of Peace. Sophia held Anthusa’s hand long and tenderly ere they parted: “I knew it, little sister; it would have been better if you hadn’t gone to the cathedral.”

Anthusa answered without evasion, looking back at her with dry eyes: “The sooner endured the sooner ended. I have loved a good man who rose to more than common manhood. I know that honourably he loved me. I would not be worthy to bear his name in my heart if I were not proud that he is the most envied man in the world.”

CHAPTER XXXVIII

THE GOLDEN APPLE

CHRISTMAS morning and still the entrancing weather. Citizens greeted in the streets. Old grudges were made up and new friendships sworn. At the great mansions there were general distributions of food and useful garments to the poor. The street dogs were not forgotten: they yelped in huge tawny companies outside the parish churches while the laughing popes and sacristans tossed out large squares of bread. Gifts between friends were everywhere exchanged. Anthusa shed tears over some of the well-meant trifles sent her by troopers she had nursed at the Pankrator. A mandator from the palace had brought to Kallinikos a rare copy of Hesiod in scarlet uncials bound in gilt and purple vellum, and she more than guessed that Leo had left the selection to no deputy. For herself the messenger brought nothing, not even from Kasia. Anthusa was most grateful. The sooner Leo and his mother were to her gracious sovereigns and nothing more, the better for her peace of mind.

As the morning advanced the trampling in the streets increased. All Constantinople seemed headed towards the Augustæum or the palace. The servants said that Hagia Sophia already was packed again with a multitude that would stand until afternoon to behold the coronation of the new Basilissa. Those who could not gain the Cathedral or the courts of the Daphne could range the enormous palace compound, in hopes sooner or later of setting eyes upon the happy choice of the Deliverer of New Rome.

Anthusa went about her morning tasks calmly and cheerfully, and her father (oblivious of the holiday) was soon enmeshed again in his library, with the endless excerpts for the "Myriobiblion." Fergal's station required that both he and Sophia should attend at the palace, and neither had suggested that Anthusa should accompany; however, Ephraim presently came to his mistress with a request:

"The *kyrios* and the little *kyria* are not going out?"

"Why, no, Ephraim! You know my father cares nothing for court pageants."

"Very true, your Graciousness, but the maids and serving boys grow restless. It's not every day a new Basilissa is chosen." He broke off abruptly, intelligent enough to know he had touched a tender subject.

"I understand. Let them all go. Tell them to bring home some of the gold she will scatter. You go also. The holiday belongs to you as much as to the rest."

"But the house, little *kyria*?"

"Saloma will stay. Dorkon will guard the door. There's nobody left to kidnap me now."

She waved him out of her presence. Soon she heard the servants departing amid rejoicing chatter. The street was thinning, the house grew still. Anthusa mounted to her upper balcony and let her gaze wander once again over the city, the harbour and the Marmora. The metropolis and all its incomparable panorama of waters was basking tranquilly in the glittering light, but her eyes would not voyage afar to the Isles of the Princes or to the snowy crest of Asiatic Olympos more distant still. Nearer they lingered, on the palace point, and the white pinnacles and gilded domes of the Daphne. There, there—very soon! Why, when God had given her strength to endure that ordeal in the Baths, had He denied her power to control her own errant fancies?

Angry with herself, Anthusa resought the rooms below. The girl Saloma came to her, fawned at her feet and kissed her hands.

"O saint-like and gracious *kyria*, you who have given me new hope and strength, you who show all the holiness of the Panagia, I think that I understand a little of what you must suffer this day. Surely you are going to the Isle of Cedars very soon—and you will take me with you?"

"Don't talk foolishly, Saloma. This great city is neither for you nor for me. We will be sisters together at the Isle. I hope we can depart in the spring."

Anthusa entered Kallinikos' library. He was painfully transcribing, standing by a tall desk. She sat on a stool watching him for a long time. How silent, now, the house was! All the things of past years seemed fleeting away from her like a

dream, the accident in the harbour, the first visit of Leo, the abduction to the Isle of Cedars, her return thence, the invention of the fire, the great siege, the ordeal in the Baths of Xeuxippos; had she lived through them all, or only read thereof in her father's Herodotos or Prokopios? Her fingers touched her hair. It fell again soft, and, in vanity she confessed it, curly and lustrous, almost to her shoulders, but it had not reached its tether. What of that? In a few months it must be cut short again, for who could pass as a nun and keep her hair? Anthusa felt herself strangely experienced and suddenly grown very old; she was sure she could play the commanding hegumena to a meekly obedient convent. Yes, Saloma was right. The sooner they sought the Isle of Cedars the better.

And yet, as she looked on her father, doubts afflicted her. Ought she to leave him? Could Sophia care for him? If she now felt old, she knew that Kallinikos had become aged. His eye was dim. Now he had lost his place and fumbled pathetically among his manuscripts. She rose to help him just as he dropped the reed pen, and manifestly that morning he could do no more. The hand upon the dial of his new clock told that it lacked barely an hour of noon. Already they were mustering in the Golden Hall. Already the eight candidates were arriving from their paternal palaces. Already their respective fathers were swearing eternal enmity—if their daughters lost—to the destined all-powerful father-in-law of the Basileus. Already the candidates themselves were plotting the humiliation—if they won—of their defeated rivals. And Leo?

Even in the old, familiar library Anthusa's rebel mind pursued her. In desperation, she took Kallinikos' hand:

"You are weary, father mine. The great book can wait. See"—a happy thought struck her—"this is Christmas. Our Pera cousins have sent a great hamper of lovely honey apples. We are all alone here, save only Saloma. You remember how we would eat apples together, when I was a little girl, and before Sophia married, and before—so many things happened? Sit by me on this bench. I have a knife and will peel them."

"I should finish the epitome of Theopompos," protested the sage. "Nevertheless——" And he sat, obedient, watching her with tired, affectionate eyes.

Anthusa peeled, and fed him steadily, eating also herself. The apples assuredly were very good. Up to her side yet again sprang Tobias and Lethe, nosing each other away yet again for the well-loved station in her lap. Kallinikos ate and nodded contentedly. How dependent he was upon her, how learned, how childish, how pathetically willing to be tended! Was she serving God or only her own wounded feelings when she planned for the Isle of Cedars?

Suddenly the two cats leaped up with erected ears. Dorkon, before the door, was barking violently. From the street came the clatter of carriages and many horses. Then Saloma entered, her tones charged with terror:

"Soldiers—Protectors all in blue and in silver armour, *Ai!* Woe! They've come to take me."

Her mistress arose, calmly laying down the apples. "Nonsense! Your pardon was issued long ago."

"Nevertheless, they are knocking at the door."

"What have we to dread? Some mistake, of course, but open to them."

"I see Pope Michael," said Saloma, after a glance through the grille. "He's a holy man. All must be well."

She unbarred. Michael, in robe, hat and veil of unwontedly costly material, entered the little aula, accompanied by a centurion of the Protectors in magnificent panoply. The officer saluted gravely and ceremoniously:

"Do I greet the very noble *kyria* Anthusa Maria?" he asked.

"You do," replied the steadfast yet wholly puzzled girl.

"Is your equally noble father, the Consul of the Philosophers, Kallinikos, within?"

"He is, Sir Centurion."

"Then will both you and he accompany us instantly to the palace?"

"You are not serious. I cannot understand. We have already refused to go with my brother-in-law."

"Let the *kyria* pardon me, our orders are very precise. We must execute them immediately." A decarch, in fact, was

entering the library and leading thence the astonished and gesticulating Kallinikos. Anthusa turned to Michael, who had been attending in silence, but not unsmiling.

“I can add nothing,” observed now the Pope very quizzically, “save to urge you to fear nothing and to obey this officer in all things.”

“But to the palace?” protested Anthusa, with rising inflection. “To the great fête? My father’s coarse gown—my own _____”

“No matter,” replied the Protector, “orders are orders. We must drive very fast. Conduct her, Kratylos.”

Anthusa felt that force, gentle yet irresistible, was compelling her through the door. She knew that Kallinikos, most unwillingly, was following. In the street were two cars, plainly painted and with dark curtains closely drawn, but to each was yoked a magnificent four of horses. She was lifted upon the cushions of one carriage. Presumably her father was in the other. Why were they thus separated? But now the curtains were being tightly clasped and buckled. She heard the guardsmen’s scabbards clatter as they mounted. One whisper from Michael through the coverings: “Courage! Friends are near! All is well!” Then the centurion’s order, “The Chalke—full speed!”

The car shot ahead with bewildering velocity. She knew that the horsemen were clearing the thronging high streets as before a great state courier: “Way! Way, in the Emperor’s name!” Anthusa clung to her seat. The horses were being lashed, the speed grew reckless. She could not think calmly. Twice kidnapped by foes, but what of this? Yet Paul and Evagrius had long ceased from troubling. She caught fleeting glimpses through the curtains: the Forum of Constantine, the Augustæum, and now assuredly the palace. The car slackened a little; here was the Chalke, and she would soon know her fate. But evidently the bronze portals of the outer palace had been swung wide. The horses continued now over the smooth gravel of the imperial compound, then abruptly stopped. The curtains were unfastened, and Anthusa found herself in a vaulted carriage-way she had never seen before, possibly one of the numerous entrances to the enormous Daphne. A “ten” of Frankish giants stood presenting their great axes. An elderly woman, richly dressed, with a face kind and wise, assisted her to alight. Anthusa looked quickly about, but no second car was visible:

“My father?” she questioned.

“He is well,” observed the strange lady with gentle authority. “Fear nothing. Do as commanded. The time is short.”

“Time for what?”

“Do not question, *kyria*; you will soon see.”

Unfavoured by further explanation, the daughter of Kallinikos was led down a narrow marble corridor, then up a system of spiral staircases to some strange apartment far above. Everywhere the standing menials bowed low to her conductress. Suddenly Anthusa found herself in a small chamber of unusual elegance, equipped with silver mirrors, ebony stools and tables, as if for a boudoir. Three young women, modest and prepossessing, bent the knee before them, then they held up robes and furbelows of shimmering white silk and muslin. Anthusa’s guide now spoke again:

“I am Agneia, wife of Daniel, Master of the Palace; these are my own handmaidens. Begin to dress her, Polybia.”

The three girls busied themselves around Anthusa with indescribable deftness. They clothed her all over in silk, here translucent as spider’s gossamer, here one rich sheen of rippling whiteness. On her feet they thrust slippers of pure white leather. Ornaments there were none, but they shook out Anthusa’s hair upon her shoulders and bound it with a single snowy ribbon. When, however, Polybia made to touch her subject’s eyebrows with kohl, Agneia—who had watched with silent approval—interposed quickly: “Such is quite forbidden.”

Anthusa stood all in white, the floating draperies barely revealing the soft curves of her neck and her nervously clasping hands. At last the handmaidens stepped aside. Agneia inspected their work intently; adjusted a fold, drew tighter a ribbon. As she did so the blast of a powerful trumpet rang through the palace. The older woman impulsively put her arm about her charge and kissed her.

“You are a brave maid. Do as commanded. Keep absolute silence. No harm can touch you. Only good is in store.”

Then she led her again from the boudoir, this time by other, loftier corridors, ever deeper into the heart of the Daphne.

At last they entered a spacious chamber lighted by mullioned windows, now open upon the great court beneath. Through the casements rose the hum of many voices—the standing multitudes below waiting the great tidings from within the palace. In the room were already eight other young women, all enveloped in white silk, all moving about awkwardly, all striving, in a most constrained manner, to converse with one another.

“Wait here: it will not be long,” enjoined Agneia, and disappeared in another doorway. Anthusa stood gazing about her in complete bewilderment. The rush of events had stolen her power to think clearly, and, in a kind of waking dream, she heard the other young women talking:

“We may all promise, *philotatai*,” a certain girl was saying in a high, shrill voice—she was Antonia Bringas, Anthusa vaguely imagined—“to reverence and love the lucky victor, but think of our fathers! Mine, at least, cares nothing that I should win beside the dread lest your father, Theophano, or yours, Constantia, should be preferred before him at the palace. And our mothers are every whit as bad. The new Empress will bring seven sets of mortal enemies as her dowry.”

“It’s so with all of us,” rejoined Constantia, “but what will you have? Every old patrician house distils poison against every other old family. The Emperor’s got to marry a patricianess. We alone are eligible. If there were any proper girl whose father was not already hated by the whole nobility of Constantinople, she ought to have the golden apple; that is”—with a defiant shrug—“if *I* don’t get it.”

“I think, *makaira*,” remarked another, possibly Euphoria Boilas, in icy accents, “certain of us take this morning a little too seriously. Of course, on account of our parents, several had to be summoned, but it’s well understood His Clemency’s actual choice will lie between only two or three.”

“Such as you, Euphoria,” darted Gregoria Maniakes, a shrewd, dark-haired girl, “or perhaps our dear, self-effacing Theophano.”

Theophano’s white teeth were opening for a barbed reply when suddenly her eyes dilated: “Mother of God! Who is this? We are eight—and now, behold, nine!”

Eight pairs of excited eyes were riveted upon Anthusa. Gladly would she have suffered the mosaic pavement to open and engulf her. The eight girls all began exclaiming together:

“Who is she? A perfect stranger! All in white like a candidate. There’s too much colour on her cheeks. Rouge! It’s forbidden! Wipe it off!”

“I know her,” remarked Antonia decisively. “Theokista, old Theodore Komnenos’ daughter. But he’s not a full patrician. Of all impertinence——”

“She’s not Theokista,” interrupted Theophano, who had been haughtily surveying the intruder, “she’s a nobody far worse. The Emperor’s been gallant like the run of men. She’s that Anthusa, the old pedant Kallinikos’ girl. Everybody knows she’s been the Emperor’s leman. To thrust herself among us now, to presume upon her sinful access to the palace thus, it’s an insult intolerable! Hark, you wench!” She approached the shrinking Anthusa with a menacing dart. “Get you hence or, by the Panagia, your brazen trumpery is stripped from your back.”

Her threat ended as, with silent tread, the Lady Agneia suddenly reëntered. “Young mistress,” she commanded imperiously, “know that this stranger is here by authority. Beware in this moment of saying or doing anything of which you may repent in dust and ashes all the rest of your life.” And she took her station at Anthusa’s side. The cords in Theophano’s neck swelled, she grew pale, then purple, but she had the supreme wisdom to keep silent.

A second clarion louder than the first pealed through the palace. At a doorway appeared the arch-silentiary, in a magnificent blue dalmatic and waving his gold-tipped staff. “Come!” he commanded, with a sweeping gesture. The eight candidates gathered their silks about them and went out in a fluttering column. Agneia took Anthusa by the hand and led her after. More corridors, almost interminable, they traversed, until a faint odour of perfumed lamps and the deep hum of the whispers from many voices came to them. They were approaching the Golden Hall.

Not for a generation had the Sacred Palace beheld so magnificent a *silentium*. The need of reorganizing the provinces had brought to Constantinople all the governors and sub-governors from Sicily and Southern Italy to the heart of the Caucasus. The vassal kinglets of the Slavs were present, as well as tall Epirote chiefs in their native white kilts, and astonished envoys from the Bulgars, the Tartar Khazars, the Duke of Rialto in Venetia, and even from the mighty Karl, Major Domus of the Franks. To brim up the cup of Roman pride a white-turbaned emir was come from the new Kalif Omar II with a gift of blooded desert steeds to his “Imperial Brother the Basileus” and honeyed suggestions of a pact of eternal amity betwixt the New Rome and Damascus.

When the clarions announced the august ceremonial, through the portals of the Golden Hall trooped the serried files of the great civil officials, the admirals and generals, and all the patricians and senators, each in appropriate dalmatic or armour. The flashing of jewels from silken caps or silvered helmets answered the soft golden lustre from the walls, wherever these last were not covered with the more brilliant mosaics. In the further apse of the hall rose the imperial throne of gilding and ivory, backed by a tapestry of plain purple. At right and left of the great seat were two other thrones of scarcely less magnificence. Above the dais spread an enormous canopy of blue silk hung with heavy golden tassels. The three thrones were flanked by two bronze statues from the master hand of Lysippos, an Apollo with his cither, an Artemis with her arrows. The Protectors, in silver panoply, lined every entrance and stood in solid ranks, sword resting on shoulder, about the steps of the dais, while hierarchy on hierarchy the magnificoes entered and with perfect discipline took their wonted stations.

Closest to the throne appeared the venerable Master of the Palace Daniel, and a little behind stood the heads of the great patrician houses, including the fathers of the candidates. Even in that tense hour they had not forgotten to bow in their stiff dalmatics to one another on meeting, but the gems upon headgear, neck, hands and shoes were less bright than the glances of jealousy and hate. Every one knew that Dukas was praying (and Libanios) every demon and saint that if his own daughter might not conquer, that of his dearest rival might not prevail. From the wide galleries above, which completely encircled the lower hall, came the rustle of fans and silks, the hum of feminine whisperings—all the noblewomen of Constantinople consuming with insatiable curiosity, and infinitely more partisan and distressed than their husbands or fathers. There were glances towards the throne and towards the central portal, but even more went towards a certain light-blue curtain hung between two pillars to the right of the dais. Sometimes this drapery waved slightly; then a suppressed “Ah!” would ripple over the galleries. “The candidates are mustering,” passed the nigh-frenzied whisper.

High noon: all were assembled. After a delay just long enough to convey the sense of imperial deliberation, a blast now of many clarions sounded with resonant sweetness. The great portal was flung wide. Four Frankish guardsmen, sons of Goliath, entered with great solemnity, then the arch-herald, his voice ringing out like the trumpets:

“His Sacred Clemency the Basileus; her Sacred Majesty the Empress-Mother.”

Leo advanced, giving his arm to Kasia. The Emperor’s purple robe was spangled with golden eagles; gold was the great scabbard girded at his side, the heavy chain around his neck, and his ponderous baldric. He wore the helmet-shaped diadem surmounted by a diamond-set cross and with long lappets of pearls falling over either shoulder. His beard had grown to a noble length. His face was stamped with lines of experience, self-discipline and high command. Every soul present confessed to himself, “He is the Lion.”

Kasia had likewise been clad in purple. They had set over her grey hair an open coronet and a long silk veil. No art of her tire-women would give majesty to her round little form and her homely features, and she moved with awkwardness, manifestly scared by the thousands of eyes upon her, but her great son, towering calmly by her side, gave courage. All saw Leo take her by the hand, then bend his head, doubtless with reassuring whispers, and the half-muttered sneers of top-lofty patricians died as they caught the warning gleam in his eyes.

As the twain moved towards the dais, the whole assembly fell on its knees. Leo gravely conducted his mother to the seat on the right, then mounted the central throne. At a sign from the arch-herald all the hierarchies began chanting their formal acclamations:

“Ten thousand years to Leo Augustus!
Ten thousand years to his most venerable parent!
Ten thousand years to the bulwark of the Romans!
Ten thousand years to the saviour of Constantinople!”

Then standing once more, the great array began intoning together:

“O Leo Augustus, have compassion upon your people!
O Leo Augustus, give heed to the prayer of the Romans!
O Leo Augustus, make this day eternally joyful!
O Leo Augustus, give a Basilissa to the Empire!”

The chanting paused. The imperial head was gravely nodded, and a little more tumultuously the hierarchies answered with another resounding “Ten thousand years!”

Next the arch-herald, standing forth, announced a long list of honours and promotions suitable for such a time, and the happy recipients came forward, prostrated themselves before the throne, kissed the hem of the purple and received each a gracious sign from triumphant majesty. Then followed a hush. “Now the bride-choosing,” trembled along the galleries as the Emperor rose from his throne. But Leo turned not to the right, but to the left, where a saffron curtain hung opposite its blue counterpart. His voice rose clear and strong:

“Noble among the Romans, before the act of joy an act of justice!

“This day we celebrate not merely the Nativity of Our Blessed Lord. The bravery of the men, valiant and loyal, who turned back the Saracen, many at the cost of their lives, who can recompense? Nevertheless, except for one great thing vouchsafed by Heaven for our aid, whether we could have flung back the Hagarines, the Most High knoweth, not me. You know what smote the invaders with fiery death. You know also that, from reasons of high policy, we have concealed the name of the inventor of that Maritime Fire which enabled your Emperor to save your daughters from dishonour, your sons from Infidel bondage. How now, at length, shall the Roman Basileus reward the man who has made every subject of the Empire eternally his debtor?”

Many voices rose from the great officials, and presently above them all that of Artavasdos, the High Strategos: “Sacred Clemency, let this man be named full patrician, though he prove an Armenian horse boy. Let his family share his rank. Let him take ten days of tribute from the entire city.”

A salvo of applause and shouting swept over the assembly. Women leaned from the galleries, cheered and shook out bright veils. The patricians themselves seemed loudest in their approval. Leo silenced the whole hall with a gesture.

“So be it, Serenities and Sublimities. But know you that already we have proffered this man wealth. He has disdained it. The proffer of rank will, I fear me, bring him no greater pleasure. Nevertheless, that the Roman Empire and its sovran may not seem to the world ungrateful, let the will of this exalted company be done. Honour this man. Behold Kallinikos, sage and philosopher, inventor of the fire, saviour of Constantinople!”

The saffron curtain parted. Guarded and half supported by Michael stood Kallinikos, in abject bewilderment, facing the glittering company. He had been clothed in a rich, dark robe and a golden chain had been hung about his neck, but if he comprehended half of what was being said and done it was fortunate! His eye wandered pathetically over the mosaics and galleries while Leo’s voice sounded again:

“Very Magnificent Kallinikos, we know that you are privileged to dwell in a noble world of mind wherein such honours as we can bestow are but as inconvenient vanities. Nevertheless, understand that in the name of the Roman Empire we thank you for that power of brain which succoured us in our mortal extremity. Herewith we declare you and all your descendants patricians of New Rome, sharing in every privilege of the most illustrious houses, and whatever you shall desire of material wealth our Count of the Sacred Largesses shall make haste to supply.”

“Ten thousand years to Kallinikos! Ten thousand years to the inventor of the fire!” pealed from hall and galleries, while Maurice Dukas muttered contentedly to a friend: “How lucky! One foot in the grave! He’ll never be our rival for political favour. But to think that such an apparently useless pedant could ever have invented *that!*”

Kallinikos looked about him in absolute helplessness. The Supreme Chamberlain approached, bowed profoundly, and cast over him the white silk dalmatic with purple tabards, the insignia of his new rank. The hall again thundered with applause. Then, to the philosopher’s infinite relief, the saffron curtain was replaced and he was released from the ordeal of curious eyes. Michael later reported that his first words were, “Now take me back to my ‘Myriobliblion.’”

But as the saffron veil returned the arch-herald stepped before the throne: “It has pleased his Sacred Clemency to take a bride according to the wishes of his people and in the manner signified in the proclamation made in Hagia Sophia. When the blue veil is withdrawn the nine candidates—not eight, as by erroneous report—will stand before the Emperor and this exalted assembly. The Emperor will pass before each, and when, according to his august pleasure, he has inspected all the nine, he will proclaim his choice, calling aloud her name and placing in her hands a golden apple. The company will then be permitted to adore the new Sacred Majesty the Basilissa Consort, and she shall be forthwith consecrated and crowned in Hagia Sophia and then married to his Sacred Clemency.”

From the many windows in the great dome of the Golden Hall the sunbeams now poured with full power upon the blue curtain. Once more the clarions. Amid absolute hush the veil was parted. Against a background of dull gold stood the nine candidates, each in shimmering white, their faces seeming whiter than their garments. They were stationed about a foot apart, and were as motionless as the mosaic saints. After a moment the galleries, at least, began to point and whisper: “Euphoria Boilas, yes—and we recognize her, and her, but who is *she*, the third from the end—the girl with the short, thick hair, between Antonia Bringas and Gregoria Maniakes?” ...

... Anthusa had witnessed her father’s promotion as one can witness marvellous things in dreams. She knew that one slight snap within her head would send her senses reeling. A curious feeling of detachment possessed her. She seemed to be standing afar off, looking down upon herself, admiring her own calmness. Life, death, judgment, eternity—all were passing before her. With even amusement she knew that Gregoria, at her right, was trying to suppress a hysterical laugh; that Antonia Bringas was turning so deathly pale she was like to collapse, fainting. Lo, at length the Emperor, in victorious pride, was descending from the central throne. In his hand was a softly gleaming ball—the golden apple. The hall was absolutely still: women leaned from the balconies, their whole souls in their eyes; the Empress-Mother had risen, and was standing on the edge of the dais, in unconcealed excitement, following the motions of her son; far up in the dome, outside the windows, one could even hear the twitter of two contending sparrows.

Now the Emperor was drawing nigh: he was approaching Euphoria Boilas. That haughty patricianess, of wont so bold, held down her head and flushed an intense scarlet. Leo looked at her fully and deliberately, with kindly penetrating eyes, as if seeking not outward charm, but the beauty of the inner spirit. He glanced without ogling, without impertinence, yet every maiden felt her comeliness shrivel under his dispassionate appraising gaze. Anthusa imagined that he would speak to each candidate, would at least draw out the tones of her voice and test her manner of speech. Not so: Leo passed to the next, and then the next without a word. Before Theophano Dukas, his stay was perchance a trifle briefer, the knitting of his brows more severe. Now he was before Antonia Bringas, now before Anthusa herself.

She did not wince, but looked calmly, bravely into his face. His own glance seemed at first as impassive as that vouchsafed the others, then flitted across lips and forehead a sign, humorous, quizzical, rejoicing, as if charged with boyish delight in triumphant mischief. “Tarry an instant, all is well!” she knew he had all but said. Yet now he was gazing fixedly upon Gregoria Maniakes, and now upon the last candidate, Pulcheria Skleros.

Suddenly the Emperor turned towards the Golden Hall. One thought ran instantaneously through the breathless assembly—how was it conceivable that the coldly calculating vanquisher of Moslemah could choose him an Empress after so perfunctory an inspection? Was not the issue foreordained? *Who* was the ninth candidate?

The clarions blew a mighty blast. Still in her dreams, as if hearkening from afar off, Anthusa caught Leo’s voice rising ever louder as became the captain over myriads:

“Magnificoes of the Romans, we have summoned hither eight of these noble maidens because we desired that all their lives they might have the knowledge, ‘If Leo the Basileus had not already chosen as men should choose, according to honest love, by my birth and by my beauty I might well have been his bride.’ But inasmuch as your Sovran cannot honour one of these damsels without seeming to prefer her paternal house above its peers, and inasmuch as already long ere God called us to this great office, He had given us His noblest earthly gift, the love undefiled for a woman beautiful, wise and good, hearken now to our will.

“We have vowed to take a bride from among the daughters of the patricians. That vow we execute. This hour we have exalted to the Patriciate, Kallinikos, inventor of the delivering fire. The honours we have proffered are to him but dross. The honours we thrust upon one of his dearest will form a duty and not a joy. What the new Empress of the Romans has suffered in her own person to save this city and Empire shall soon be published in every village from Armenia to Sicily, while across the years her modesty, piety and womanly virtue, no less than her loveliness, will shed glory upon the

Sacred Palace. Leo, the peasant's son, raised by God and the voice of the people to deliver and restore this Christian Empire, beseeches her to share with him that splendour, which, by the awfulness of its burdens, is too great for any man alone to bear."

Leo turned once more. Yet again pealed the clarions, blowing with ascending power. In Anthusa's hands he was placing the Golden Apple. But she felt nothing, knew nothing save that close now, under its gold and pearls, his strong and loving face, wreathed with rejoicing smiles, was looking into hers. Then he released her hand an instant. Far out into the wide hall went his great voice, as when he had summoned his hosts to war:

"The Grace of Heaven and the Good Fortune of the Roman Empire attend for ever upon the daughter of Kallinikos. *Ten thousand years to Anthusa Maria Augusta, Christ-loving Basilissa of the Romans, the Beauty of the Purple!*"

All the Golden Hall saw her white body sway, and the Emperor catch her in his arms and, unafraid, press his lips to hers, but the plaudits, which made the high dome quake, drowned the words now heard by him alone:

"My Emperor, I am too weak to do that which I should. I am too weak to say you, 'Nay!'"

* * * * *

Anthusa did not faint, but when next she truly knew anything she was in an antechamber of the Golden Hall and Kasia was ecstatically kissing her.

"The boy would have it so." The little woman was laughing wildly. "He said he would not have you until he could put all Constantinople agog, and snip off every magpie's tongue, once and for ever. Oh, but it was hard to keep Fergal from telling Sophia, and harder still to keep quiet myself! Michael and Agneia helped, but Leo planned it all. He's a good lad, if I do say it; and you will be good to him, and never grow ashamed of his strange old mother."

A little later Anthusa had recovered enough to be conducted to the throne at the Emperor's left hand, and first all the patricians and then all the patricianesses from the galleries were permitted to kiss the hem of her white robe before they clothed her with the purple. All knelt very humbly, but when it came Theophano Dukas' turn she cowered and shook with sobs:

"O Sacred Majesty, what have I done? I have treated you like a beast! If I had only known! Forgive! Forgive!"

Whereat the devil for once entered into Anthusa's heart. She answered with condescension supreme: "All past trifles are forgiven, my good damsel. It shall soon be our peculiar care to find you a suitable husband—that is, considering your station." ...

... Then the Patriarch crowned the new Empress in Hagia Sophia as "The Beauty of the Purple," and in the palace Church of St. Stephen she and Leo were made man and wife.

In a thousand books it is written how Leo the Isaurian and Anthusa Maria, with their children after them unto the fourth generation, reigned over the revived Roman Empire with victory, glory and power.

THE END

EXPLANATION OF CERTAIN TERMS OFTEN USED

ARCHIMANDRITE, the head of a group of monasteries or a single very large monastery.

BASILEUS (feminine form, *Basilissa*), regular official title of the Emperors of Greek-speaking Roman Empire.

CAIQUE, modern name for the gondola-like boats used in the Bosphorus.

DESPOTES (feminine form, *despoina*), “master” or “mistress”; used by Greek slaves or as title of servile respect.

HAGIA (masculine form, *Hagios*), “Holy” or “Saint”; as *Hagia Sophia* = “Holy Wisdom,” *Hagia Eirene* = “Holy Peace.”

HEGUMEN (feminine form, *Hegumena*), the ordinary head of a convent or nunnery, corresponding to the abbot or abbess of a Western monastic establishment; of slightly lower rank than archimandrite.

KYRIOS (feminine form, *Kyria*), “gentleman,” “sir,” or “lady,” a regular form of polite address in Christian Constantinople.

KAID, officer in the Saracen army with rank approximately of “colonel.”

LOGOTHETE, imperial secretary of state or other high civil official under the Later Roman Empire.

PANAGIA, literally “All Holy Lady” = the Holy Virgin.

PATRICIAN, the highest order of the Later Roman Nobility, including, besides all the *logothetes*, the heads of the greatest of the aristocratic houses of Constantinople.

PROTOSTRATOR, a Later Roman military officer with substantially the rank of “colonel.”

SENATOR, a general title of nobility held by about all the Later Roman aristocracy who did not enjoy the higher rank of Patrician. There were many other ornamental titles, such as “Consul” which had lost most of their original meaning.

SEYID (feminine form, *Sitt*), Arabic title of extreme respect = “Lord” or “Lady.”

SPATHARIOS, imperial aide-de-camp, a high officer in the Later Roman army, but below the rank of *strategos*.

STRATEGOS, a general of the Later Roman army, usually combining the duties of commanding a *theme* of regular troops with those of acting as civil governor of the district in which those troops were stationed.

THEME, a term meaning alike a province of the Later Roman Empire, e.g. Armenia, Anatolia, or Thrace, and also the body of regular troops stationed therein. The *themesmen* were these troops of the line (especially heavy cavalry), who were heirs to the military traditions and discipline of the old Roman legionaries.

FOOTNOTES:

“All Holy Lady” = The Blessed Virgin.

“*Kyrios*” = gentleman; “*kyria*” = lady; usual forms of courtesy.

“*Basileus*,” official title of the Emperors of Constantinople.

The solidus or bezant was a gold coin worth about \$5.00.

A later age would have called him a “Breton.”

The modern Turkish Scutari.

“Holy Peace.”

“Holy Resurrection.”

Far greater feats than these were authentically recorded of the original pillar-saint, Simeon Stylites.

Now Bebek on the Bosphorus.

The Byzantine name of contempt for the Saracens.

Despotes and *despoina* were terms of abject submission by inferiors.

A *keration* was a silver coin worth about 13 cents.

Practically “Chief of Staff.”

Territorial divisions of the army.

Nearly all the higher Byzantine nobles ranked as “Senators,” the mightiest of these were designated “Patricians.”

Subordinate chamberlain.

Dial clocks were first introduced in Western Europe a little less than a century after the date of this narrative.

This was a bare modicum of the learning sometimes possessed by Byzantine ladies—witness the famous Anna Komnena.

A section of the Mesē, with the best shops, and brilliantly illuminated at night.

Leo’s personal love of letters is attested by the detailed diaries he left of his expedition to the Caucasus, and later of his campaign in Anatolia against the Saracens.

To-day known as Mt. Boulgourlou.

A well-known variety theatre.

Hawkers often were allowed to keep their stalls in the great outer courts and porches of the churches of Constantinople.

Applauding eloquent sermons was very common. Worshippers sat through the preaching, although expected to stand through the liturgies.

The hegumen corresponded with the abbot or prior of Western monasteries. The archimandrites were over groups of monasteries and sometimes over very large single institutions.

Greek was by this time the official language of the Empire, but a great number of half-understood Latin expressions were still used in the courts. The “Novels” were special laws for special cases, as against the older laws in the great imperial “Codes.”

Gladiator contests had been abolished, but not occasional beast fights.

The military district in northwestern Asia Minor.

Now called the “Tower of Galata.”

To-day called Rumili Kavak.

Very near to modern Anadolı Kavak.

To-day called the “Giant’s Mountain.”

Such as abounded and were often employed in Constantinople.

A familiar fact at several places along the Bosphorus.

Commander of a brigade of 2,000 men.

A frequented pleasure resort at the head of the Golden Horn.

About \$100,000.

A rank very nearly like that of “Colonel.”

First chapter of the Koran, the Islamic confession of faith.

Holy men, practically Islamic saints.

Holy war against the foes of Islam.

“Rum” was the Arabic term for the entire Roman Empire, but especially for Anatolia.

A “purse” was money of account worth about \$25.00.

Spain.

The famous second chapter of the Koran.

Minarets were at this time just being introduced into Moslem lands.

Omiad kalifs frequently drank wine, despite Mohammed’s prohibition.

“Pin money” in other ages.

Commanders of small troops of cavalry.

The bed whereon dead monarchs lay in state.

A standard military manual, written about 580 A.D.

The secret of the “Maritime,” or, as it was later called, the “Greek” Fire, has been kept down to the present age. Modern learned conjecture suggests that although sulphur, naphtha, turpentine, etc., were largely used by Kallinikos in his compound, his vital addition was *quicklime*. His antidote was probably some powerful acid, or possibly only a form of vinegar.

The bulk of Byzantine and Saracenic warships at this time were two bankers, but certain of superior model were three bankers.

Such a prophecy was also made during the final Turkish siege in 1453 A.D.

A promise amply fulfilled in the latter part of Leo’s reign.

Practically the same as a centurion.

Subaltern commanding ten men.

The principle of the fire-tubes (“fire-siphons”) used in the destruction of Sofian’s fleet is not wholly clear. Seemingly they were a simple form of cannon, although using an explosive too weak to carry heavy projectiles. Their use in this battle, as well as the incident of the desertion of the Egyptians who betrayed the ruinous position and recklessness of the Saracen armament rests on first-class evidence. The “siphonator” (cannoneer) became a regular petty officer on the Byzantine dromonds.

An expression of extreme contempt in Constantinople.

The modern village of Eyoub.

This was of course before that abolition of holy images, which took place later in Leo’s reign.

[The end of *The Beauty of the Purple* by Willaim Stearns Davis]