THEODORA

CLARA UNDERHILL

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THE COURTESAN OF CONSTANTINOPLE

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By
CLARA UNDERHILL

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THEODORA

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To

GRACE MORSE

In Grateful Appreciation of
Her Loyalty and Foresight

FOREWORD

THIS, the first book in English to have the great Theodora as its central figure, should be read, not as a biography, nor as a novel, but rather as a segment of reconstructed history. With the exception of one or two instances of transposed chronology, the facts of Theodora's life, as found in documents dating from her times, have been followed faithfully. The gaps in history have been filled in, free hand, as it were, but with a strict regard for the probable truth.

It has been the aim in writing this book to present Theodora not dryly, as a Queen long dead, whose influence on her own and succeeding times was inestimable, but as a breathing living person, whose career was unbelievably colorful and whose personality was set off against the background of the most exotic and luxurious court the world has known.

C. U.

NEW YORK CITY,
DECEMBER 25th, 1931.

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CHAPTER I

THE HIPPODROME—MIRROR OF AN EMPIRE

THE WIND blew in from the Sea of Marmora and gently puffed at the great purple canopy that swayed and dipped over the Imperial Loge. Men with brooms wandered up and down the tiers of seats and below them four sweating slaves sprinkled artificially colored dust —purple, lead blue, and yellow—along the arena. Two swarthy individuals opened and shut the huge iron gate leading into the ring, oiling the hinges, making sure the locks were secure. The Hippodrome of Constantinople was being prepared for a race, and the silk canopy advertised the fact to the citizens of the City Guarded by God.

The word ran like fire up and down the streets. Goldsmiths stopped their hammering; fish merchants wiped the scales from their hands; silk dyers stirred their vats more slowly; money changers tugged at their long black beards and spoke of bets. A race at the Hippodrome was the most important event in life.

Long before dawn of the following day queues of thousands of people milled about the five great entrances. By eight o'clock every seat was filled and forty thousand spectators waited in breathless eagerness for the entrance of the Emperor, the Golden King of Kings. The bronze doors beneath the Kathisma, or Imperial Loge, were flung open, and the Imperial Choir burst into the Royal Anthem. Forty thousand voices took up the hallelujah chorus, one side of the great oval bowl answering the other. The Basileus, the Anointed of Christ, appeared before his people, robed in purple and gold, wearing his diadem of pearls and precious stones, carrying in his hand the sphere of gold, the apple of the world. A silence fell upon the multitude as he raised his right hand and blessed them with the sign of the cross.

"Hail, O God-loving and God-loved Emperor!" sang the choir.

Now every one turned expectant eyes toward the starter at the north end of the great wall which ran down the middle of the Hippodrome. As the Emperor tossed a small wooden cylinder from the Loge, this burly official dipped his white flag, and from beneath the Kathisma, four light chariots, drawn by four frantic horses each, crashed into the arena and started their thundering flight around the wall. A great cry burst from forty thousand throats, drowning out the drumbeat of the hoofs. The Emperor bent far out of the Loge, his eyes fastened on the straining drivers. The citizens of the most glamorous and mad city in the civilized world leaned forward tensely, while each forgot in the twinkling of an eye that anything existed but the plunging chariots below.

There was, in this enraptured audience, as strange an assortment of humanity as the sun had looked upon, for in the sixth century after Christ, Constantinople, the capital of the Eastern Roman Empire, had become the melting pot of the Old World. Attracted by her glitter and luxury, her cool gardens by the sea, and steaming markets by the quays, there swarmed to this fantastic metropolis all the learned minds, the artistic talent, vice and riffraff of the East and

West. So it was that in the Hippodrome, common meeting ground of the Empire, turbaned merchants from Babylon rubbed shoulders with hook-nosed, almond-eyed Asiatics. Shaved Bulgarians, broad-shouldered and girded with iron chains about the middle, jostled haughty barbarian chieftains, who in turn crowded open-mouthed pilgrims from small Greek islands, come to see their first chariot race.

Elderly gentlemen, whose snow white tunics edged with purple were held pompously over respectable paunches, sat in close proximity to swaggering, black-browed dandies, perfumed and boisterous, whose fashionable full sleeves fluttered as they applauded the outcome of the race. Matronly ladies who looked as if they had just left the vegetables for dinner simmering on the hearth, shrieked "Well done!" or "Foully turned, Son of Satan!" as loudly as the fishwives from the wharves, and cast envious eyes upon a group of court ladies shimmering in silks, who sat half-concealed in a screened gallery near the Kathisma.

A group of tonsured monks wrangled among themselves and turned to glare as three women passed, whose cosmetic adornment suggested that

they were at the races in the interests of their profession.

"A curse upon them!" said one of the monks. "It is those same three we saw in Alexandria. How did they get here?"

"You forget, Brother," replied one of his companions, "they say that every Hun and every whore longs to visit Constantinople once before death comes."

It was true that every struggling farmer and artisan in the provinces dreamed of some day visiting the capital. The tales told of Constantinople's wonders by returning travelers, the gossip of the court of Eastern Rome filtering even to the boundaries of the Empire, made the city out to be a heaven on earth, beautiful beyond all imagining, wicked beyond all hope of salvation. No wonder that half-civilized Gauls and Huns, scratching stony hillsides as far away as France and Spain, longed to tread the narrow streets of the Queen City and sample her delights.

If the stories they heard were true, Byzantium offered all sorts of intoxicating pleasures to her visitors. A man, if he were hungry after knowledge, could elbow his way through the groups of arguing savants under the arches of the Royal

Gate and listen to interminable discourse on religion and medicine. If it were luxuries he wanted, he could saunter down the principal avenue, the Mese, and visit all the gorgeous awninged shops, and if he had money enough, he could buy silks to take home—heavy weaves of blue and green and red with yellow huntsmen chasing game across their lustrous surfaces. He could buy jewelry—earrings, amulets, and bracelets of pure beaten gold, inlaid in intricate enamel patterns, edged with pearls and beautifully light. Or, if there were no gold pieces in the money pouch, there were still lovely things to smell—the booths of the perfume merchants near the entrance to the Palace exuded a tantalizing fragrance of musk and sandalwood; the stalls of honey and cheese and olive oil set up on street corners sent forth a sweet odor of the countryside upon the dusty street; the strong, briny smell of the fish markets made many an island visitor homesick, and the spice bazaars near the gate of Perama titivated many a provincial nostril with the scent of cloves and aloes. The *chalcopratia* where the Byzantines worked brass, the bobbling strings of camels laden with bales of raw silk from Persia, the *copraria* where an army of half-naked, nimble-fingered carpenters planed away at oars

for the Imperial Navy, the lamp sellers' shops twinkling with the light of a thousand burning wicks in broad daylight—there were so many things to admire and wonder at! And if a man should tire of the bustle of the streets, there were small inviting doorways opening into cool court-yards where he could recline at a little semi-circular table and regale himself with figs and salted fish and fresh, green vegetables and sweet, palate-tickling wines from Cyprus.

And if, having drunk deeply and dallied with the delights of the Byzantine cuisine, he had another sort of pleasure in mind, there was no lack of opportunity for indulging. There were any number of balconied houses, standing many of them in the shadow of a church, from which came sounds of harps and flutes, and gay feminine laughter. Within, black-eyed girls with fair white skins and disturbingly transparent draperies, could make a man forget the thousand dusty leagues of travel and hardships endured to reach this "city of gold and pearls, reflected in an azure sea."

But there was another side to the picture of this citadel of sensual pleasures. No tales of the carnal joys of the Queen City, the beauty of her setting on the Bosphorus, and the magnificence

of her parks and marble palaces, would be complete without mention of the hundreds of churches and monasteries which flourished and grew rich in a city where it was necessary to legislate against pederasty and where public castrations were so commonplace a punishment for that crime that tradesmen hardly bothered to leave their shops for a sight of a mutilated malefactor bleeding to death. The blood of Christ was warmer, to the average citizen, than that which ran in his neighbor's veins, and his interest in religion far more vital than his concern for human life or public morals.

From the Emperor down to the little boys who swept out the camel markets, every Byzantine was ready to argue on the most abstruse questions of dogma. The bakers dealt out loaves of bread accompanied with a neat discourse on the anathematization of the dead. The rubbers in the great public baths thwacked their clients and spoke of the incorruptibility of the body of the Lord. The very money changers on the Mese, wringing the last copper from gullible Illyrian peasants, harangued feelingly upon the beauties of Christian charity and ended by asking whether it was not so that the Father was greater than the Son. The churches were constantly open, and

were used not only as a place in which to worship, but as sanctuary, and more than one offending citizen was snatched, howling, from an altar to satisfy the anger of his enemies. "In Byzantium," said the wise men, "the devil winks at Christ."

With such widespread and genuine religious interest prevailing among passionate and sensitive natures, and with plenty of time to devote to religious discussion between sunrise and the cool of the evening, naturally there were fearful dissensions between the various kinds of Christians in the City Guarded by God, and Constantinople became a prolific spawning bed for mushroom sects. There were Monophysites, who believed that there was but one nature in Christ, as opposed to Polyphysites, who maintained that there was a human as well as a divine nature in Christ, our God—two factions that later became highly important politically. There were various kinds of ascetics who showed marvelous ingenuity in thinking up ways to make themselves uncomfortable for the greater glory of God. Some went into the wilderness and lived on grass and herbs, shunning all human beings until they became like wild beasts. Others subdued all their passions so completely that they prided them-

selves upon being able, according to one Evagrius, "to possess dominion over nature and neither by sight, touch nor even embracing a female to relapse, it being their desire to be men among men and women among women." And then there were the wives of middle-class and aristocratic Byzantines, who, not having enough to occupy their minds in bringing up their children, foreswore a natural life and shunned their relatives, preferring to devote their days to meditating on religious matters, and their nights to sleeping on uncomfortable straw pallets. For unmarried princesses, disappointed maidens, and other ladies to whom life in general had become unsatisfactory, the Church was the ideal refuge and welcomed them with open arms to such an extent that a large section of Constantinople female society was to be found in nunneries.

But it was not by sipping the goblet of carnal joys or quaffing deeply of the wine of religious devotion alone, that one might taste the true flavor of Byzantium.

The pulse of the Empire did not beat in the crowded streets and houses of pleasure, nor in the teeming monasteries, nor even in the breath-taking magnificence of the Sacred Palace and the overwhelming splendor of St. Sophia, that great

monument to Christ. The very core of all that made up life in Constantinople was contained in the vast U-shaped amphitheater of marble, built by Constantine the Great, and dedicated to the noble Roman sport of chariot racing.

There is nothing in our modern world with which to compare the Hippodrome of Constantinople. We have no institution, no sport, no form of religion, no kind of politics affording such an example of all-absorbing interest. The Hippodrome was the forum of Byzance and within these marble walls the most vital questions of politics were decided, Emperors elected and dethroned, revolutions started, and heart's blood of the Empire spilled.

"God may take St. Sophia," said the people on the streets, "and let the Emperor have his Palace; the Hippodrome is ours."

It rose, a great white oval beside the Palace, four hundred yards long, a hundred yards wide, twice the size of the Roman Colosseum, with forty tiers of seats topped by a great promenade overlooking the sea. Its niches and galleries had been adorned by despoiling Emperors with the finest collections of classical art in the ancient world, while above the Imperial Loge stood the four rampant bronze horses brought from Chios,

which to-day stare down upon the tourists who read their guide books in front of St. Mark's in Venice.

Down the middle of the arena ran the *spina* or dividing wall, which served to keep the chariots from cutting over, and which had to be circled seven times for a perfect race. At each end of this partition stood the obelisks, one of bronze, pillaged from the banks of the Nile, and one of granite, which still mark the spot where once Byzantine charioteers fought to get the inside turn in their careening two-wheeled cars. Between the two obelisks the modern visitor to Constantinople will see a curious twisted bronze column which once had three serpent heads spouting water. The Serpentine Column has a history older than Byzantium itself, for it was brought by Constantine from Delphi, where for eight centuries it had stood in the temple of Apollo.

On a level with the top of the *spina* was the Imperial Loge, which occupied the entire north end of the oval, and which, wisely enough, was inaccessible from the Hippodrome itself. Emperors for whom Byzantine tongues grew too sharp or Byzantine blood ran too hot, could flee to safety from the amphitheater along a fortified

passage way, for the Kathisma connected directly with the Palace. It contained the throne room, robing and retiring rooms, a reception salon, a restaurant and a chapel. Here the Emperor stood when he made his first appearance before his subjects, newly crowned. From the Kathisma he introduced his bride when newly married. From the Kathisma he gave the signals which were to swing the races to one faction or the other.

Originally, the chariot races in Rome, upon which those of Constantinople were patterned, were run by drivers wearing four different colors —red, white, blue and green. For centuries, however, the Reds and Whites had been relatively unimportant, and by the time chariot racing was in full swing in Byzantium, there were only two great Hippodrome factions, the Blues and the Greens. It was not long before the Emperor began to take sides, and with the Imperial favor in the balance, adherence to one or the other of the parties soon took on a political tint. From a mere tinge, in Rome, this political significance deepened until it became in Constantinople the saturating principle of public life.

It is impossible to catch in these phlegmatic days the frenzy with which the emotional Byzantines espoused the cause of each faction. A burn-

ing urge to take sides was something every Byzantine drank in with his mother's milk. In religion, in politics, in commerce, there was no such thing as apathy or neutrality, and when it came to a question of Blue or Green, the Byzantines flung themselves on one side or the other with a passionate partiality.

One was a Blue. Good. One wore the Blue band across his mantle, and sat in the section of seats reserved for the Blues in the Hippodrome. One hated the Greens, with a fine fanatical hatred, and showed one's feelings by publicly denouncing them for cheating, thieving, low-born scoundrels. In the sixth century the Blues burgeoned so openly under the Emperor's favor, that they went so far as to do a little dagger plunging into unsavory Greens, and unpopular adversaries all too often disappeared. The Greens, a red-hot minority, but politically impotent, had to content themselves with verbal insults, in the Hippodrome, and sly retaliations of a bloody nature in dark alleys—an all too feeble avengement, for races were handed to the Blues with scandalous regularity and, as time went on, comments in the Green tiers grew scathingly inimical to the King of Kings and Three Times Holy Emperor of Byzantium.

That, however, is jumping ahead some thirty years. On the day when the wind blew in so gently from the sea, and the morning sun shone down in a friendly Ægian way on the grasping traders and craning sightseers, the honest senators and high-born ladies, the ragged holy men and painted wantons in Constantinople's Hippodrome, the Greens took out their venom in the safe medium of blustering talk, in spite of the fact that the fourth race had been run and four times the Blues had won.

"By Christ," exclaimed a young man with a green band across his mantle, "there will be murder to-night!"

His companion yawned.

"There may be for all I care. Let them bring on the mimes."

A trumpet blared and a company of female dancers came mincing into the arena, their faces hidden by masks, their bodies revealed by some sheer colored silken stuff, which fell away from their thighs as they bent and swayed.

A sigh of satisfaction rippled through the audience. This was to be the famous Brydalika, a modernized version of the old Greek temple rites, and as spectacular a sex orgy as anyone could hope to witness. The young bloods nudged each

other as the women writhed and gestured. The drums beat faster and faster and the flutes whined seductively. The dancers paired off two by two, and finally each couple, to the accompaniment of a refrain chanted by an invisible chorus, sank upon the ground. It was all most stimulating and edifying, particularly to any Byzantine virgins who happened to be lurking in the audience.

The *pièce de résistance* of the Hippodrome entertainment for the day, however, was a large, yellow, one-eyed dog, with the peculiarly malevolent and uncanine faculty of reading minds. Byzantine audiences were delighted with him. When he classified the coins of the reign as expertly as any numismatologist, they held their breaths with awe. When he returned rings tossed at random from the tiers, to the proper owners, they gasped in astonishment; when he designated the most generous, the most vicious, and the most avaricious persons in the audience, the public rocked with glee; but when he slyly pointed out the most indiscreet ladies among the spectators, the vast amphitheater roared its approval and bit its thumbs for ecstasy.

The dog, after having caused several matrons to burst into tears, and as many husbands to

squirm under the sympathetic glances of wits and gossips in the neighboring seats, was led away, and a company of mimes came upon the stage, depicting in pantomime the bridal night of Bacchus and Ariadne, with plenty of provocative detail.

The Byzantine public, to whom this was an old story, showed signs of boredom, and the people in the topmost tiers were already beginning to think of food and ask one another if the Emperor meant to be generous that day and give salt fish and bread to his subjects for their midday meal, when suddenly the doors of the Kathisma opened again.

"Mother of God," said the audience, "what have we here?"

CHAPTER II

ENTER THE PEARL OF THE HIPPODROME

OUT of the entrance to the arena there straggled a strange procession, indeed. Three small girls, the eldest of whom might have been nine or thereabouts, came faltering into the ring, dressed in flowing white tunics like Vestal Virgins, their dark curly heads bound about with laurel wreaths. Hand in hand they advanced into the middle of the amphitheater, and then with self-conscious little smiles sat down in the sand in front of the Green tiers.

A sudden silence fell upon the audience, and a man's voice was heard quite distinctly, "Vestal Virgins—bah! They're daughters of that Acacius, the Bearkeeper, who was removed from the world not long ago. Their mother wants the job for her second husband."

The little girls grinned uncertainly, and the middle one held up her hands in a melodramatic gesture of appeal.

"Fools!" sneered the Greens. "This is no place for children. Take them away."

The Blues took up a chorus. "Breaking promises as usual!" they derided. "The Greens can't even provide for the widows of their servants. Bring the children over here. We'll take care of them."

"They're good-for-nothings," yelled the infuriated Greens. They come of a bad stock. Their mother is a circus prostitute. Their father was a common fellow. Take them away!"

The little girls, frightened by the tumult, began to think better of their situation and to beat a trembling retreat. The oldest and the youngest wept with shame and fear, but the little girl who had raised her arms in appeal—a pale child with great dark eyes—shook with anger, and dancing up and down in rage, cursed her erstwhile patrons in a manner anything but childish. The Greens who heard her held their sides with laughter, thereby furnishing any moralists who ponder on the tale with another example of that irritating adage about "he who laughs last, laughs best." Certainly their mirth was ill timed, and had far better been choked in their throats if it killed them, for rarely has so sweet an opportunity for revenge been given anyone as the gods put into

the hands of that pale-faced child—the little Theodora—Pearl of the Hippodrome that was to be, actress extraordinary, harlot, wit, reigning beauty of her day, Queen and co-ruler of an Empire.

There have been attempts, in view of her later exalted position; to furbish up her family history and give her at least a senatorial ancestry, but the facts appear to be that the mother who thrust her children into the arena at the Hippodrome to excite the sympathy of the audience, came from the island of Cyprus, of very humble stock, and herself was no better than she should have been. When her first husband, the worthy but thoroughly mediocre Acacius, died, she immediately took steps to keep his stipend in the family for husband number two, and had the matter all arranged with the dancing master of the Greens, who had the privilege of doling out such minor positions. Unfortunately, somebody with more money than the second husband smoothed the dancing master's palm, and the job of Bear-keeper to the Greens slipped out from under the fingers of Theodora's ambitious mother.

Thanks to the perversity of human nature, the Blues, delighted of an opportunity to spite their hereditary enemies, snatched up Theodora's step-

father and made him warden of their own beasts, so that the family was able to continue in circus life, and the designing mother could carry out her plan of putting the girls on the stage and giving them the proper start in life.

The proper start, it is to be feared, to a life of vice and degradation; for the theater in later Roman and Byzantine times had sunk to abysmal depths, and anyone connected with it was considered to be on the lowest rung of the social ladder. The heroic tragedies of Sophocles were as dead in Constantinople as *Gammer Gurton's Needle* on Broadway, and the racy comedies of Plautus and Terence sounded to Byzantine ears as faded as *She Stoops to Conquer* and the *School for Scandal* do to ours. What sixth-century audiences wanted was some new way of dressing up the sexual vagaries of decadent gods and goddesses; some fresh stimulus for minds already surfeited with obscene allusions to, and filthy parodies of, the sex act. It is obvious that the sheltered daughters of the Byzantine first families could not go in for that sort of thing; nor was the stage the proper place for young women of less illustrious social standing but just as unimpeachable morals. The theater was left to prostitutes and perverts, morons, cheap pan-

derers to the more reprehensible human instincts; men and women who had no opportunity for bettering their stations in life, and who were content to live, generation after generation in the tawdry, debasing milieu into which they had been born.

Since Theodora's mother was of this class, and this was the only kind of existence she knew, it was natural that the three daughters of Acacius should be doomed to tread the boards.

Comito, the oldest girl, was introduced to Byzantine society at the age of fourteen, in a way which left no doubt as to her future career. There are no accounts of her performances on the stage, and apparently she soon found that life was pleasanter in the profession twin to that of an actress. She began to go to parties in the homes of wealthy Byzantines as an entertainer, and after the bowls of rose water had been passed about by slaves as a signal that the guests might settle down to a little post-prandial enjoyment of a seductive nature, being a courtesan, she could dance for them and play the harp.

These courtesans of Byzantium were modeled on the Greek. They were trained to dance and sing and play musical instruments, since most of them were recruited from the stage; to converse

charmingly and make themselves generally agreeable. If they chose to go further and charm the guests in another more intimate manner, they were encouraged to do so, but prostitution was not always demanded of them. There is hardly any doubt that the black-haired young Comito lost her virtue early, however, for she is spoken of as one of the leading hetairæ of her day.

If early historians are to be believed, these hetairæ were brilliant, educated women of some refinement, who, to quote a delightful euphemism "threw over the commerce of the senses, the veil of illusion." They learned the art of loving and pleasing as well as music, philosophy, and rhetoric, and were very much in demand as entertainers and pleasing embellishments to functions given by the rich. The Byzantine woman of good family was too narrow in her interests to be considered the intellectual equal of her husband, who not unreasonably preferred listening to apt comments on local events from a courtesan, to discussing the price of Thracian butter with the wife of his bosom and the mother of his children.

Comito, as a starring member of the profession, had many opportunities to get about and mingle with some of the more cultured minds of

Constantinople. Freed by her profession from any social constraint, she appeared frequently in public gatherings, taking with her on these little forays her next younger sister, the wan little girl who had surprised the Greens with the fire of her vocabulary.

Theodora made an excellent maid. She trotted about behind Comito, carried the bench upon which her sister sat when it pleased her to join a group of citizens in an inn; dressed her for the performance when she went on the stage; kept importunate suitors at a distance; and helped arrange many a rendezvous with gentlemen whose pocketbooks were sufficiently heavy.

At the age of ten, Theodora knew more than most middle-aged matrons have managed to accumulate in the way of worldly knowledge. She was sharp, she was clever, and quick with her tongue. Her great black eyes, with the eyebrows almost meeting over her long straight nose; her pale face, and slender body gave promise of exceeding beauty, and more than one of Sister Comito's callers gazed with obvious favor upon the youthful lady's maid, and pinching her thin little arm, promised to look her up again in a year or two.

"Haire!" said the young blades of Constanti-

nople as they greeted each other in the baths. "Have you seen that young sister of the courtesan Comito? By the Body and Wounds of Christ, but she is fair to look upon! In another twelve months she will be ripe for the plucking." And they wagered as to which of them should be the one to deflower her.

As they hung about the entrance to the theater waiting for their masters, and Theodora loitered just inside the door, with Comito's cloak over her arm, the slaves and servants of these same Byzantine rakes also found occasion to flirt with the little girl whose tongue was sharp as vinegar and whose eyes flashed fire. Their brand of conversation was not calculated to help preserve the illusions of a ten-year-old, and their behavior, if we can believe Procopius, was nothing short of bestial. This historian says that they employed unnatural violence toward the child.

One cannot, however, believe whole-heartedly in Procopius, for he developed into the most astounding hypocrite in literature. Paid by the State to chronicle the history of the Empire, he turned out an excellent account of the Persian and African wars under Justinian the Great, as well as the most fulsome and flowery description of that Emperor's architectural program. Melli-

fluous adjectives fairly dripped from his stylus, and no words in Greek or Latin could sufficiently express his admiration for his Royal patron or the beauty and magnanimity of his Queen. A remarkable piece of dissimulation, for while his fingers traced the most breath-taking eulogies, his heart was fairly bursting with bitterness, because, it is suspected, undue pressure was put upon him from Royal sources to make him change his religion. In order that none of his stored-up venom might seep into his published writings, and result in swift dismissal or the splash of a corpse in the Bosphorus, he poured it all out in a book which he called the "Secret History," with instructions that it should not be made public until after the Emperor's death. If the "Persian Wars" and "Justinian's Buildings" erred a trifle on the side of sugar-sweet exaggeration, the "Secret History" is surely the most virulent, malicious, and unbalanced diatribe that ever blackened the character of a deceased employer.

So when Procopius says that the little Theodora indulged in unnatural vice with the slaves of play-going young men-about-town, his word may well be doubted. His accusation that she was disgracefully employed in a brothel before

the age of puberty is more probable. It fits in with her character that she should know all about sex at an age when well-bred little girls still talk of storks and cabbage leaves. There was a hardness, an implacability about her that could only have been learned young and assimilated to the detriment of any lingering touches of tenderness and feminine sweetness.

What Theodora actually did between the ages of twelve and fourteen, Procopius does not say in so many words, but a shrewd guess would be that any elderly Byzantine gentleman with lustful proclivities, who happened to visit a certain lupanar, or house of ill fame, during those two years, might have been shown in by a spindly child with murky black eyes, who could surmise at one lightning glance whether he wished to see a blonde or a brunette.

The better class lupanars, into which Comito's standing as one of the foremost hetairæ of her time would have given Theodora *entrée,* were not unpleasant places in which to while away the days and nights. They were built around a patio, and had balconies upon which the vivacious feminine inmates sat, crowned with flowers, retailing gossip, exchanging the latest love charms, and listening to the plash of running water from the

courtyard fountain while they waited for their clientele. Opening off the balcony there were small private rooms, almost like cells, furnished with couches, and charmingly if suggestively frescoed with mythological scenes. It is more than likely that, besides greeting customers, it was part of the young Theodora's duties to set these rooms in order, and to help the ladies of the establishment with their toilettes, for they were far too superior to think of dressing or undressing themselves, and always needed help in arranging their jewels and touching up their complexions.

Naturally, she added to her fund of information in the lupanar, and stored up a vast and lasting contempt for the *genus homo*. The prattle of the courtesans left no doubt in her mind that every man could be cajoled into doing a woman's bidding, and that, properly managed, no man could remain obdurate in the matter of trinkets and fine tunics, coin of the realm, and golden sandals for pleasure-bent small feet.

After a period of this enlightening apprenticeship, her mother and sister put their heads together and agreed that Theodora was old enough to go on the stage.

"Yes," said the mother, "it is high time that

she should. But a doubt comes into my mind that she will be able to pantomime and act. I should have had her better trained."

"Mmmm," mused Comito, "I really think you should have had the child taught music. She will never be invited to the kind of banquets where I am in demand. She cannot even dance."

"I know," said her mother in a helpless, middle-aged way, "but with three daughters, one cannot do as much for each as one would like."

"Unfortunate," sighed Comito, gathering her tunic about her, "I shall do what I can, but the stage is so overcrowded that I fear even my influence cannot procure her much besides a small part in low comedy."

As it turned out, the adolescent Theodora could very well leave harp and flute playing to other less talented members of her profession, for she herself blossomed out as the queen of low comedy. She was so funny that tears ran down the cheeks of the jaded Byzantines when she did her act. In mimicry there was nobody like her, and it is only unfortunate that there have been no pictures salvaged of the young Theodora in the act of stopping a Byzantine custard pie, for that is the kind of thing in which she excelled. When the audience got tired of

these rough-and-tumble antics, she could make them guffaw by raising her skirts and tickling their viler sensibilities with pertinent remarks. Within a year after her début, she had become the rage in Constantinople, and earned the title of the Pearl of the Hippodrome. In the same arena where she had sat in the sand eight years before, she now appeared to thunders of applause, and cries of *"Haire,* O Theodora! Here comes the Pearl—she is our favorite and our delight!"

The self-possessed, audacious child, sagacious and canny beyond her years, had grown into a beautiful, abandoned, but still calculating young woman, whose extraordinary grace and keen intelligence put her head and shoulders above the rest of her sisters in the trade.

The audiences were tired of the old pantomimes and dances. She thought up new ones, and dispensed with the need for new costume effects by appearing as nearly nude upon the stage as the law allowed. Theater-goers appeared more and more to favor burlesques of old Greek myths done in a spicy and lascivious fashion. For instance, she put on a parody of *Leda and the Swan*—with a goose playing the part of the swan, picking not kisses from the lips, "but

grains from the calyx of this passion flower" (Procopius). In *Pyramus and Thisbe* her antics as a love-sick maiden swooning with desire for her beloved and separated from him by a wall, appealed tremendously to Byzantine minds, always alert for none too furtive bits of obscenity.

Both on the stage and in her activities as a courtesan, Theodora made it a point to outstrip all competitors, in originality of conception and daring of execution. Her colleagues prided themselves on being able to entertain, in a suitable and enticing manner, the young men who came to them. She refused to admit that she could be defeated on "the field of pleasure," and at one time went picnicking with ten young men or more, putting herself out not only to please them but to keep their thirty servants happy and contented.

She was clever and adaptable, and she brought to her profession a flaming energy, refreshing even to the sophisticated Byzantines, which made her an exhilarating addition to many convivial social functions, where her boldness transcended anything she could indulge in publicly. The more experienced *bon vivants* of her time swore to a man that she was without an equal.

"I declare," said sister Comito, already over-

shadowed, "but Theodora is a greater success than we had dared to hope for."

"She is, in truth," replied her mother. "But she is carrying this flaunting wantonness of hers a bit too far. If I can believe what I hear, she is none too popular with the other actresses in the company, and several unpleasant stories have come to my ears about her behavior at the banquet Hasan the Persian gave last week. She must settle down now and think about marrying somebody at the Hippodrome. This sort of thing cannot go on forever. The girl is too free with her favors. There will be need for a husband to support her in another few years."

"Mother," said Comito, with emphasis, "Theodora will never marry an actor and settle down. She is too brimming over with ambition and far too temperamental."

Theodora's reputation was, in fact, rapidly becoming unsavory. She was already widely known in the town, and respectable citizens, passing her in the Forum, withdrew in haste, less the hems of their chaste mantles be polluted by her touch. She became notorious as a bird of ill omen and any upright theologian hurrying home in the small hours of the dawn from some long drawn-out religious discussion, felt that a shadow fell

across the coming day for him, if he met her on his way.

It was obviously time to change the scene of operations, and the Pearl of the Hippodrome was casting about her for other settings to adorn, when, by a most fortunate chance, she was invited to a banquet given in honor of the newly appointed governor of the province of Pentapolis in Africa—a stoutish Tyrian gentleman named Hecebolus.

Theodora, realizing what was at stake, planned her arrival carefully after all the other guests were already reclining upon their banquet couches. Her simple tunic of palest beige brought out the creamy pallor of her skin, and her gold embroidered overdress with little sleeves cleverly outlined her slender figure in a way which any honest woman would have considered shocking, but which could not fail to catch a masculine eye. She wore no jewels—the single scarlet flower behind her ear and her scarlet sandals set off her unusual beauty more deftly than rubies. Quietly she stood in the doorway surveying the riotous guests, and nodding briefly to the host, slid upon the couch beside Hecebolus. That worthy was engaged in decapitating fresh asparagus stalks at an alarming rate, and paused only to wipe his

chin when she laid her cool little hand upon his arm and in a low voice congratulated him upon his appointment.

The offshoot of a noble family raised a goblet to drink to her and leered suggestively. "You're getting more than you deserve, Hecebolus," he hiccoughed across the table.

"I *am* a lucky man," replied Hecebolus thickly. "The God-crowned Emperor has made me governor of a province, and a flower-crowned maiden makes me the recipient of her attentions. I drink to Theodora!"

A dozen Ethiopian slaves removed the dishes and passed silver bowls of snow-cooled persimmons and melons. Several of the guests pushed them away and laid their heads upon the table. Two of Byzantium's better known citizens began to quarrel, drowning out the music of the harps and flutes in a crescendo of petulant rage. The host raised his eyebrows at Theodora, and slipping from Hecebolus' side, she stepped on to the banquet table and began to mimic each guest in turn. The fat waddle of the most flourishing jeweler, the swift shoulder shrug of the Jewish money changer, the pompous stride of the Senator present, the queer way Peter the Syrian scratched his loins when he was deep in thought,

each in turn was forced to laugh, albeit feebly, at the caricature she made of him. Stopping in front of Hecebolus, she raised her tunic, and turning so that he alone could see her limbs through the diaphanous undergarment, she arched her back provocatively, and, stepping down, with one lewd gesture aroused that worthy from the semi-drunken stupor into which he had fallen.

"This hetaira is beautiful," he said to himself. "I find her more gay and witty than most, and her impudence is refreshing." He thought of the long days aboard ship and the longer months to come in a backwoods province remote from the gayety of the capital, and made a rash offer.

"How would it be," he asked her, "if you were to accompany me to my new post? We might find plenty of pleasant ways to pass the time together."

"Sir," replied Theodora, leaning toward him and gazing coquettishly into his eyes, "it would be amusing to take the journey and I know I should prove an entertaining traveling companion. The only question in my mind is—how would *you* please *me?*"

Hecebolus laughed.

"By Christ's Blood," he exclaimed, "but this

lady is impertinent! No courtesan can say that time spent with Hecebolus is wasted."

Next morning, in a more sober and reflective mood, Hecebolus may have repented of his invitation, but it was too late. Theodora was already making preparations to leave behind her the widow of Acacius the Bearkeeper, the sniffing Comito, and the multi-hued sands of the Hippodrome arena. When the flagship of the Byzantine fleet raised her flame-colored sails and stood out to sea bound for Africa, with his Excellency, the Governor of Pentapolis, aboard, Theodora stood beside him on the raised afterdeck, watching the white marble towers of Constantinople merge into the purple distance.

This voyage, begun with such bravado, did not turn out quite as she had expected. Hecebolus appeared to find the deck of the narrow pitching galley less to his liking than the firm stone pavements of the Imperial City, and showed a diminishing eagerness for dalliance and brilliant repartee. For most of the four weeks of the journey, he sat huddled under the awning on the poop from dawn till darkness, watching his traveling companion jealously. A touch of *mal de mer* he might have, but none the less she should have no opportunity of exchanging glances with

the captain of the oarsmen, nor be allowed to cast too long a look at the brawny back upon the rowing bench.

So Theodora was all the more unprepared for the unceremonious manner in which she was hustled off to the women's quarter in the Palace upon her arrival in Pentapolis (now the Benghazi district of Libya). Hecebolus, once more upon dry land, bloomed forth in the full glory of his gubernatorial importance, and to her disappointment and dismay made no bones about thrusting his fair supercargo completely in the background, while he himself, under a suddenly accumulated pressure of work, immediately turned his entire attention to matters of State.

The African adventure was becoming less and less alluring. Theodora's position in the household was too insecure to allow her to take any active part in the management of affairs, and time hung heavy on her hands.

It must be admitted that she took to sharing Hecebolus' hospitality with any personable young man who offered himself as a substitute for her busy lover, and that her charity in this respect was truly indecently indiscriminate. Perhaps she felt that, now she was away from home and out in the world, it would be profligate to neglect the

opportunity of learning all she could about foreign customs. More likely her previous training, and at this time unrestrained impulses, got the better of her, and with a fine disregard for gratitude, she made shift to stave off boredom in the only way she knew.

Hecebolus' visits to her apartments became chillingly infrequent and more and more stormy, for his slaves had furtively hinted that the lady they served with such bad grace had far too free and easy a disposition for their master's good. He taxed her with her bad behavior; she retorted with accusations of neglect. But it was not until one blowy, rainy night in March that matters finally came to a climax.

The Governor was sitting in his audience room. The lamp-wicks flickered low in their little oil urns, and the wind pushed pettishly at the tapestry across the doorway.

"Go," Hecebolus commanded his slave Zeno, "go find me Theodora. I have a mind to be amused."

The Governor was in an amiable mood. He had that day annexed a rich estate for the Royal Treasury and served his Emperor well. He was in so amiable a mood that he was ready to forgive Theodora her little affair with the Greek,

and that other slight peccadillo of hers in connection with Anthamius of Alexandria, although the thought that she had brought the man to her apartments in the Palace itself still hurt his dignity. Well—she was a clever strumpet——

His thoughts were interrupted by the return of Zeno.

"Master," said the slave. "Theodora is not alone."

"Not alone?" queried Hecebolus. "How? What do you mean? Who is with her?"

"Master," answered Zeno with a dry tongue, "as I went in, I caught a glimpse of young Simeon, vanishing behind the folds of the curtain leading to her sleeping chambers."

Hecebolus swallowed hard.

"Go bring her to me, and tell the Captain of the Palace Guard to slit that Simeon's nose for him."

Theodora followed the slave into the room, smoothing her black hair as she came.

"You wished to see me?" she said, with more than a touch of insolence in her manner.

"I could hardly say that," answered Hecebolus. "If I were to tell the truth, I should say that I wish to see no more of you. I have put up with your vile tempers and your flagrant behavior as

long as I can. You are positively besmirching my character as Governor. I should advise you to return to Constantinople, for certainly you are no longer welcome here."

"Oh?" said Theodora. "And if I do not find it convenient to go?"

Hecebolus' fat red cheeks began to take on a purple hue.

"You will most certainly find it convenient to leave this palace, and to-night!" he shouted. "I have had enough of your brothel impudence."

"Oh?" said Theodora again, even more quietly.

"Yes, oh and oh, and *oh!* Zeno, pack her belongings together and rid me of this harlot."

"You are a misbegotten son of the devil," said Theodora, managing somehow to convey the impression that she was dismissing him, "and you shall live long in my memory for this, O Hecebolus, Governor of the Five Cities."

The slave Zeno took her by the arm and led her from the presence of his incoherent master. Hustling her down the steps of the palace, he threw a bundle of her clothes after her. The huge iron doors swung shut with a harsh and definite *clang*.

Theodora stood alone in Africa.

CHAPTER III

"WICKED ALEXANDRIA"

"MOTHER of Apollo!" said a lean, pock-marked citizen of Antioch, "but there goes a beautiful woman. Who is she?"

"That?" remarked his companion. "Oh, that is a certain hetaira from Constantinople—Theodora by name. Do you wish her?"

The Syrian wiped the beer from his lips. "Do I wish her? Where in all of Egypt have I seen such another? Of course I wish her."

"Then it can be done," answered his host. "She is cheap enough these days. They say in Constantinople she led the town by the ears, but she has fallen on somewhat evil days since."

"Ah, so," said the pock-marked one. "Then you think it safe for me to lie with her?"

"Safe enough," retorted the other, "but unpleasant. Since the Governor of Pentapolis threw her out of his palace, and left her to make her way to Alexandria alone, her temper has been soured I hear, and her ways with men not

quite so free and pleasing as they were in the city where she is at home. She never gives something for nothing, that one. The Guild of Hetairæ will be calling her to account shortly, for damaging their reputation," and he laughed as he emptied his mug.

"Come," said the Alexandrian, as they left the tavern, "we might as well pass the afternoon at the theater. Since you come from Asia, where they do these things less well, it might amuse you to go. It's not what it once was, true—this theater of Dionysus, but since those accursed Byzantines have been in Egypt, nothing is as it was—everything has altered for the worse."

The Syrian, Herodes, whose business in Alexandria had been well discharged, and in whose money-bags clinked twenty solidi of bright Egyptian gold, quite willing to be amused and delighted with an opportunity to see the sights under the guidance of so experienced a cosmópolite, suffered himself to be led along Alexandria's colonnaded streets, through the great bazaar at the intersection of the two principal avenues, where the Dionysian theater stood, near the ancient Gate of the Sun.

It was a leisurely, garden fête sort of crowd, dressed in white, which streamed through the en-

trances, and settled itself upon the tiers, a gay and witty crowd, which called out greetings and joked, care-free and festive, with nothing of the intensity of an audience in Constantinople, for here there was no thought of politics, or favorites, and no life-and-death partisanship to heat the passions of a mob to the boiling point. These people had gathered together to be amused, and nothing weightier hung in the balance than a sizzling witticism not quite polite but always funny. For the Alexandrines were noted for the sharpness of their tongues and the painful pricking of their jests. They were not easily overawed, these nimble-witted vulgarians whose favorite epithet for the most ponderous of their philosophers was "Old Iron Ass," and the theater was an excellent place in which to display their particular brand of biting and malevolent humor.

"You'll have another chance to see your Byzantine beauty here," remarked the Alexandrine to Herodes. "They have engaged her to put on one of her famous burlesques for to-day's performance. But I doubt if she meets with favor. We of Alexandria have no stomach for pantomime. Give us a singer or a good flautist —there's something that people will go mad

over. But these outworn mimics—and threadbare mythical obscenities—personally I find them boring to the last degree."

The Syrian, unwilling to admit that any performance in the theater was enthralling to him, and to disclose his lack of sophistication, said nothing, but leaned forward, his hands on his knees, and waited eagerly for the entrance of the notorious actress.

It was unfortunate that Theodora had of necessity to choose the theater in Alexandria for her début, for not only the growing distaste of her audience for anything but music, but the very social structure of the place weighed heavily against her. Alexandria, once a lofty center of learning and possessor of the most magnificent library in the ancient world (finally used as fuel to heat water in the public baths) had lost her glory and prestige, and in the sixth century was noted merely as a rich commercial metropolis, where there raged a crass disregard for anything but money.

Her citizens bent their energies toward exporting enormous quantities of papyrus, manufactured from the plant which grew in such profusion in the swamps round about, weaving linen, blowing glass, carving ivory, and beating gold;

they left the appreciation of histrionic and literary endeavors to others, and satisfied their esthetic instincts by writing scurrilous limericks on walls by night, and staging rousing drinking parties in the many beer and wine shops, to say nothing of hair-raising carousals in the pleasure boats which plied the neighboring canals.

The pagan aristocracy of the city—descendants of those Greeks who had come with Alexander the Great, its founder, nearly a thousand years before, preserved a society more rigid in its exclusions and more difficult of entrance for a stranger, than any upstart Four Hundred, by the simple expedient of making it virtually impossible to become a citizen of their little autonomy except by birth in a family already citizens. The outsiders, namely, the native Egyptians, on whose soil this alien culture had been planted, embraced Christianity fervently, tilled the fields, were sold into slavery or fled to monasteries, getting along as best they could, while Syrians, Jews, Arabs, Illyrians, Romans, and all the other polyglot peoples of the Mediterranean, attracted by the opportunities of the busy markets, worked at their trades, and tried to avoid the watchful eye of the Imperial and purse-squeezing tax collectors. There was only one subject on which this

excessively diverse population was whole-heartedly in accord, and that was a hatred for the Byzantines who looked upon the rich provinces of Egypt and Africa solely as a gigantic granary existing for the one purpose of feeding the entire Empire. Famine, drought, pestilence, and warfare were no excuse—each September, the "Happy Transport," laden with good Egyptian wheat, must set sail for Constantinople, and woe betide the unhappy mariner who lost so much as one bag overboard. Truly, success in the city so carefully guarded by God on the Bosphorus was a poor recommendation to the inhabitants of the city called Queen of the Nile.

Therefore, it was exactly as the Alexandrine said. *Leda and the Swan,* provocative as only Theodora knew how to make it, aroused the audience to sarcastic comments and catcalls. Cries of "Let us have music—bring on the singer from Thebes!" cut short her act. In the snobbish Greek section of the audience several groups of elegant young men in white chitons, with wreaths of flowers bound about their heads, patently turned their backs and began casting dice, while from the upper galleries, where the poorer Egyptians sat, several voices called down: "She wriggles like a worm. Bid her crawl off!"

Herodes slipped from his seat and went to the actors' entrance to meet her.

"May I accompany you?" he asked, as she came out.

Theodora looked at him. "Why not?" she answered shortly. "I cannot afford to be too proud."

The Syrian let the insult pass, and walked beside her.

"I am told you are newly come from Pentapolis," he said.

"Ah," said Theodora, "so that story has already buzzed in the ears of every pock-marked provincial who has a copper to spend drinking at the bars, and listening to the gossip of the town. What else do they say?"

Herodes, taken aback by the bitterness with which she spoke, and attracted more than ever by the black eyes which burned disdainfully under the extraordinarily heavy brows, thought it was time to change the subject.

"It is nothing," he offered, "just as you say—idle gossip. Would it amuse you to go to a weaver I know of, and help me select a bolt of fine Alexandrian linen for my mother, who will expect a fitting gift from her son when he returns from his long voyage?"

Theodora, scenting a possible length of linen for her own use, walked by his side with that peculiar easy, graceful stride which made her seem taller than she really was, and listened while he talked. He told her of the business he had just done, and the Egyptian child he would very much have liked to purchase, whose parents had been forced to sell her to pay off a debt, and of the pleasure boats he had seen on the canals, and how it was in his mind to hire one, and entertain all those who had been host to him in Alexandria, on a cruise to Lake Mareotis, where there was to be had a rich and ruby wine, which, if reports were true, made the senses swim in foaming puddles of delight.

The Syrian thought to himself what a triumph it would be to have such a beautiful hetaira for the entertainment of his guests, and, having bought the linen, and commanded Maiaandra, the weaver, to cut off a piece of crocus-yellow for the sharp-eyed Theodora, said to his companion:

"And how would you like it, Theodora, if I asked you to help me amuse my guests on such a pleasure trip?"

"Well enough," she answered evenly. For the infatuated fool at her side she cared nothing, but her heavy heart lifted a little at the prospect of

once more mingling with rich, and perhaps influential men.

At the age of seventeen, this daughter of two Cyprian circus folk had arrived at a state of emotionless and dispassionate cynicism, which she held up to life as one holds a fine mirror to the light, in order to see things as they really are. Cast out by Hecebolus, with a dreadful journey by camel caravan and on foot to Alexandria behind her, shorn of her pride, and content for the last months to pick up a living as she could in the city where the Byzantines were hated—hissed off the stage after a long struggle to obtain this one engagement, she was passing through a clear-minded session of self-evaluation. It became apparent to her that grace and charm and youthful impudence were not enough, and that if she were to gratify this curious ambition which made her impatient to rule men with something other than beauty, it was idle to spend the fast-scurrying months in receiving such as came to her in her shabby small tenement room in Rakotis, the poorer section of town, or even in miming and acting at the various insignificant houses to which she was infrequently invited. She saw that she must get to people of influence, and, guarding against an impulsive action of adven-

ture and love of change, such as had made her lay her hand a shade too lovingly on the arm of the asparagus-guzzling Hecebolus, must plan each step in the future carefully, calculatingly—never taking her eyes from the goal which she was setting for herself.

"By God's Mother," she swore, "but I will show these Egyptian yokels yet. Once let me get back to Constantinople and it will go more roughly with these men who laugh at me and pass me by!"

If this fawning Syrian, so anxious to please her, so proud to be seen with a beautiful woman of the town, had so much as lifted his eyes to the Pearl of Constantine's Hippodrome, she would have called to him to take his blemished carcass elsewhere; but Theodora of Alexandria accepted the prospect of his gay pleasure cruise upon a canal gondola with an inward cry of "At last!"

Herodes, to show the Alexandrines that a man from Antioch was not totally devoid of feeling for pleasures of the gayer sort, spared nothing to make his fête succeed from the most flamboyant point of view.

Flute and zither players sat in the bow of the silk-draped pleasure boat, and made oddly inter-

valed music, while the guests reclined on the cushioned benches. The moon rose, as they glided between gardens of date palms and grapes, skirting the lawns of sumptuous country estates which stretched silvery gray in the dim light, to the very edges of the water.

A slender girl among the musicians stood up to sing a plaintive love song, and as she finished her water-blue *himation* or over-dress, slid off one shoulder. A wiry little Roman money-lender drew her down beside him and the rest of the company laughed.

"Caius begins the evening early," they said.

Servants passed wine among the guests, and Herodes, shouting importantly, feeling his dignity as host, told the musicians to play faster. Two couples sprang up to dance, writhing in the warm evening air.

"Come, let us see the moonlight on your bosom," said one of the men to the girl he held, and without more ado, unfastened the buckle which held her chiton.

"Honorable guests," called Herodes.

He was greeted with laughter.

"These provincials," giggled a young Greek, as he caught a little brown zither player by the ankle and, spilling her instrument from her lap,

pulled her none too gently toward him, flat on her back, her sandaled feet kicking in the air.

"Honorable guests," began Herodes again. "I have arranged something special for your pleasure this evening." And he motioned behind the curtain in the stern.

Theodora stepped out, clad lightly in a pair of wings, with an arrow in her hand, and flung herself into a parody of *"Cupid and Psyche."* The young Greek raised his face from the breast of the little zither player.

"I call upon the Golden Zeus to look!" he tittered. "But the Syrian has got that Theodora who made a mistake in going to Pentapolis. Where did you pick her up, Herodes?" he called. "Lying in the arms of some countryman of yours in a Rakotis brothel?"

The other guests watched her in amusement.

"She's not bad," said one. "But all this pantomime is a waste of time—eh, Herodes?"

"Oh, no, let her go on—let her finish," said another. "I saw her once in the Hippodrome in Constantinople two years ago, and she's improved since then. We'll try and see if she's improved in other ways, too—how about it, Herodes?" and they all laughed a little thickly. The red and ruby wine of Mareotis was circulating freely.

Theodora, bitter and aloof, resting after her endeavors, sat watching the flushed and talkative men, each now with a woman in his arms; she tried to single out which of most importance in the city was there, and asked Herodes if there were any freeborn citizens of Alexandria present but the young Greek, who lay by this time tumbled in a heap on the floor, fast asleep with an arm thrown across the little zither player, a golden sandal, its tiny sole stamped with a suggestive love charm, clasped tightly in his hand.

"None," Herodes answered her question. "But why do you ask? It is not to interest yourself in Alexandrines that I invited you—but to interest yourself in me. Besides, all men are alike in this condition, and none has a mind now for anything but pleasure. Row more slowly!" he ordered the oarsmen.

Many other boats, ablaze with torches, passed them and from those whose occupants were not too drunk or sleeping, there came vulgar greetings and an exchange of pointed pleasantries. They had long ago reached Mareotis and turned back.

The moon was setting and a shivery mist rose from the water. Reclining couples wrapped themselves more tightly in one cloak. Herodes

himself, too sodden to order the progress of the boat, roused himself at last and peered from behind the curtain at the stern.

"Come," he shook the sleeping Theodora. "I think we are almost home again."

Theodora propped herself on an elbow and looked about her. In the early unflattering light of dawn, men and women lay sprawled along the decks, partly dressed, sleeping with open mouths and flushed faces. The one influential citizen of Alexandria, the young Greek, snored a little, and in his dreams ran a thick tongue over his lips.

It was small comfort that Herodes came to her every night for the next week and paid her generously. Theodora knew that Alexandria held nothing for her, and longed to leave Egypt more eagerly than she had ever wanted to quit the city on the Bosphorus.

She broached the subject of accompanying Herodes back to Antioch and returned his look of astonishment with a tightening of the lips and curling nostrils. A mistress in Alexandria was one thing—but Antioch!

"Oh, well," she said lightly. "I thought that perhaps we might enjoy the journey together, and that you might please me as a traveling companion."

Herodes twisted his pock-marked face into a grin.

"Yes," he answered, "but suppose you should not please me?" And he left her, salving his half-ashamed memory of the fire she had kindled in him, when he first saw her, with an extra piece of silver.

She was quick enough to grasp the reason. When a woman cares nothing for a man, and treats him so, he is driven to pursue her, until the tide of feeling turns. Once it does, and he feels that she is striving to keep his interest up, then he can afford to be careless of her, and feeling sure of her, can in a swift hour dismiss the thoughts of her which filled his mind.

And with the passing of each day, the silver he left her grew less and less. Too, there was something else. With every morning that the sun rose, she felt that it was harder to drag herself about, and knew with horror that Herodes had left something behind him beside the paltry pile of coins. The arts and wiles and sophisticated precautions with which Procopius credits her in Constantinople, had somehow failed her in Alexandria. In spite of the urge to be gone from Egypt and a deep dissatisfaction

with life gnawing at her, she found herself fettered yet more tightly.

In the unbelievably crowded tenement in which she rented a small box-like room with one tiny window, and a mat on the floor, there was no comfort to be found. Better to stand in the market place and watch the passersby, than crouch in that dark little hole, listening to the noisy squabbles of the twenty-seven other families under the same roof.

When she had drawn her water from the pump in the courtyard, and made her meal of the bread, salt and water which was the usual diet of the common people, the Theodora who had once worn silk, and let loose her gusts of temper in a Governor's Palace, during these days often crept to the booth of an old flower woman who had rooms in the same house as hers, just to catch a whiff of perfume from the narcissi and roses which were sold in such profusion and to refresh her weary eyes with the bright blue of the corn flowers and the brazen, ruddy glow of the poppies, which the old woman twined into wreaths.

There was no use looking for an opportunity to earn an extra piece of silver. The beautiful woman who had passed the beer shop where

Herodes the Syrian sat drinking, had lost her haughty carriage, and the creamy whiteness of her skin. Dressed in a coarse chiton, of neutral-colored linen, she squatted on a little stool beside old Philoxena and watched her sprinkle her blooms or listened wearily to the tap-tap of the goldbeater's hammer who pounded out fine amulets and earrings in his little shop across the way.

In her despair, she began to talk a little with the old flower vender, and gradually let fall the causes of her misery.

"Do you know what I should do, were I in your place?" asked Philoxena. "I should go to a convent and ask the Christians for help and shelter. Many of my people are Christians, and they tell me that in such a monastery as Metanoia, for instance, they will take in all who enter, and put them to such tasks about the place, that they may earn their food. Besides, the Patriarch is there just now, as I have heard, and he is a man with a kind heart."

Theodora listened. "I will go to him," she decided swiftly. "He is not overfriendly with that one in Pentapolis, as I remember, and may look upon my case with more favor because of that."

She set out on foot at once. The wrinkled old

gatekeeper at the monastery saw her coming—a small figure, drooped and weary. She approached him almost timidly.

"May I speak with your Patriarch?" she asked.

"Enter, *adelphi*," he said kindly, "and I will see what can be done, when you have told me your name, and why you come."

He led her through the postern set in the great crenellated wall, into a courtyard, and bade her wait under a fig tree until he should have learned the Patriarch's pleasure.

From one corner of the three-storied, galleried buildings came a procession of monks on their way to chapel.

"In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, our God and our Saviour, and of our Help, the Mother of God, and Eternal Virgin Mary, and of the Holy John the Evangelist and Baptist, and of John the Theologian and Evangelist, and of the whole Choir of Saints and Martyrs Crowned," they sang.

For the first time in her life, the irreligious and despairing Theodora made a gesture as if to fold her hands in prayer.

After the choir came another group of monks, these apparently going to the spring planting, for they carried bags of seeds and hoes. Behind them

came two scribes, with whitened wood tablets under their arms, on their way to take dictation from the Abbot. After them again, appeared some younger brethren—strapping, brown-skinned men, who looked as though they had had a hard time choosing between the Church or a robbers' camp—the only alternatives left to the Egyptian fellahin in those evil days. They were going to help load the monastery's fleet of ships with corn to be used as seed for some less fortunate community who had none left with which to plant. She watched them as they went, ceaselessly busy about the duties of this communal establishment. It was a disturbing thing to sit within eye- and earshot of a hundred men, and have not one look at her, or one so much as ask his neighbor: "Who is that beautiful woman under the fig tree?"

"It is true," thought Theodora to herself. "I am already touched with poverty and ugly."

The gatekeeper returned, bidding her follow him to the Patriarch—that Timothy who has come down in history as a good fighter for the Monophysite cause. He looked at Theodora, and stroked his beard.

"So," said Timothy, "you wish me to help you to Antioch to the father of your child. I will not

deny, my daughter, that one reason why I shall fulfill your wish is because I wish to rid the streets of Alexandria of such as you. Let this teach you what a useless life is yours, and when you get to Antioch, see if you cannot bring that Herodes to marry you. Christ go with you, daughter."

"I thank you, God-loved, and God-loving," Theodora answered him meekly. "And may I ask of you, what kind of Christians it is you call yourselves?"

The Patriarch looked at her in amazement.

"We, and all Egyptians, are the true Christians. We believe that there is but one nature—one indivisible nature in Christ our Lord, and for that men call us Monophysites."

"I shall remember that," said Theodora. "If ever I am asked what kind of Christian is the best, I shall say, 'Those who believe in the one nature of Christ our Lord.' Now I say farewell to Alexandria, and that not with regret but with rejoicing."

In going from Egypt to Antioch in those times, a traveler had of necessity to pass through the age-old cities of Gaza, of Cæsarea, of Tyre, which still manufactured its magnificent purple and scarlet dyes, of Siden, and Laodicea. But

Theodora had no heart to dally in any of these places. Her one desire was to get to Antioch, to make Herodes pay for the burden which she carried, and pay richly.

It was her plan to go to him at once, and make him provide for her until his child was born, leaving it in the care of his mother who had received such a fine bolt of Alexandrian linen, and who presumably might not be overjoyed at this other unexpected gift from Egypt, but who would not cast out her own flesh and blood. Obviously enough it would be folly to go back to Constantinople, the very picture of a humbled Magdalene with a child in her arms, and supposedly, repentance in her heart. If it were done at all, she must return proudly, sure of her purpose, armed with the Syrian's money, ready to begin a career, the first act of which would be to marry and to marry well.

"Where," she asked the first person she met in the market place at Antioch, "where can I find one whose face is marred, and who goes by the name of Herodes?"

"Herodes?" He called to his neighbor, "Theon, is not that Herodes whose face was marred, the one who went out of this world some few days ago? With a fever? I passed his house this morn-

ing, and it seemed the women were still wailing in the court."

"He is the man," answered the devout Theon, "and may the Eternal Mother of God watch over his soul!"

"Dead?" asked Theodora with a numbness in her limbs. "That Herodes is dead?"

She turned away in sick confusion. This was no time to present herself to the mother who had little use for sapphire-colored linen now. She must wait—but in the meantime? "The days wherein she had played the harlot in the land of Egypt" were over. Only one galling remedy suggested itself to her. Some actress might need a tiring woman, some actress who could not afford to rent a slave.

It turned out that there was in Antioch a certain elderly actress called Macedonia, who had been in the Hippodrome during the time when many a good citizen of Constantinople had poked his neighbor in the ribs and whispered, "Now you'll see something," as Theodora came out upon the stage. This Macedonia, perhaps out of pity for her plight, and perhaps because it would be something to boast about in all the second-rate theaters of Asia Minor, took her for a maid, and so she passed the months until she bore a son.

Straightway she took him to the mother of Herodes and there she left him, perhaps showing no nice maternal instinct but not unreasonably willing to be rid of the burden of a posthumous and illegitimate child.

"Well," laughed Macedonia, as she returned, "and what did the mother-in-law have to say?"

"Nothing," said Theodora. "I merely took the child and left him in a basket outside the gates. It was written in the basket that he was the son of Herodes and Theodora, and that was that. The woman cannot deny that the child is her grandson, for he has his father's ill-favored face, and gangliness."

"Hmmm," said Macedonia, "and now what?"

"Now, I must get back to Constantinople," answered Theodora, "and try if any of those gorging Byzantines will still remember me. Some must be left whose memories are not short."

"If I were you," advised the old actress, "I should not pluck flowers in any fields where I had trod before. Now, because I see you are really in hard straits, and because I feel sorry to think that your youth and beauty should be wasted, I shall give you a letter to one Justinian—the nephew of the old idiot in the Palace of Constantinople. I did him a favor once, and he'll re-

member me. As I look back on it, he's not your kind—a little pious, and apt to take himself too seriously, but latterly I heard he was brightening up, and, to celebrate his consulship, had staged a roaring battle between twenty lions and thirty leopards in the same arena. He's fairly extravagant, too—which you should not mind, and has not been in Constantinople overmuch, so that yours doubtless will be a new face to him. If by any chance you should ever find favor in his eyes, I need not ask you to think of Macedonia."

"Give me the letter," cried Theodora fiercely. This was her chance. No greasy merchant, no effete son of a decaying noble family, no newly rich provincial, but the nephew of an Emperor! Her imagination was on fire and she could hardly wait to set out on her long journey overland.

She fairly scorched a trail through Asia Minor, Edessa, the ancient Callirhoe, Melitene, Satala, the fabulous Trebizonde, Cotyora, Panopium and Sinoöe, the capital of Paphlagonia, Amstris, Heraclea—all these she passed on her way—and finally Nicodemea, a scant day's journey from her goal.

It would be sweetly touching to believe the uplifting and widely current story of her meeting with the nephew of the Emperor on her re-

turn. The happy ending enthusiasts have it that she took a little cottage in Constantinople far from the haunts of pleasure she had known in earlier years, and there sat before the door with her aged mother, spinning—earning her living by honest toil, doing good to the poor, and generally beloved. The future Emperor, chancing to pass that way one day, fell into conversation with this humble and industrious maiden and upon the same occasion also fell in love.

This romantic legend, however, degenerates into an inept fairy tale beside the picture of the true Theodora, beautiful and grim, making her way with all possible speed to play her last trump; a clever, desperate woman, determined to inch her way inside the Sacred Palace.

CHAPTER IV

THE EMPEROR WHO WAS NEVER YOUNG

JUSTINIAN, nephew of the aged Emperor Justin, sat in his bachelor palace of Hormisdas, and, contrary to prevailing notions of Imperial diet, regaled himself with a plate of mutton broth.

This young man, in his late thirties, was noted for his abstemiousness in the matter of food and drink, his clever appeal to the volatile Byzantines, his ensuing popularity with them, and the skillful way in which he had made himself indispensable to his mother's brother, the ancient Macedonian peasant who occupied the throne of the Eastern Roman Empire. He was also, in spite of his steady elevation to count, *vir illustris,* patrician, consul, commander-in-chief of the garrison of the capital, and *nobilissime,* beginning to be bored. The business of waiting to inherit a kingdom—being, in fact, Emperor in deeds—but not in coronation—was telling on his nerves.

It was not that he went in any fear of seeing

some interloper snatch the rich prize from under his nose, for Justin had already named him Regent. The Empire did not descend from father to son, so that, properly speaking, there was no blood royal. If there were no likely candidate for kingship, the Senate, or the Army, or both, made a choice. More often, a failing Emperor designated his own successor, or if he were carried off before he had a chance to indicate his preference, his wife, the Empress, might do it for him.

The history of the earlier Byzantine rulers presents an intricate study in psychology, for having once made a man Emperor by quite ordinary human means, the citizens of Byzantium said to him in effect, "Now you are God," and endowed him with absolute temporal and spiritual power, to say nothing of divine and supernatural attributes, while unlimited opportunities for garnering in terrestrial wealth were thrown in for good measure.

With both hands firmly grasping such a future beyond the possibility of doubt, Flavius Petrus Sabbatus Justinianus, sipping his broth in his palace, was still not a happy man.

His health was good. His ruddy face, stocky muscular figure, elastic step and quick movements bore evidence of that.

His surroundings were calculated to please the most exacting taste. Perched on the shores of the Sea of Marmora, the palace of Hormisdas offered a stupendous view of the water. Its marble halls and galleries, its high ceilinged sleeping rooms opening on delightful gardens, its exquisite mosaic panels, were all that any man could want in the way of residence.

There could have been no spiritual unrest in his soul, for before him, filling a long roll of papyrus, was a hymn which he had just composed, extolling the divine omnipotence and mercy of Mary, Eternal Virgin; "We glorify Thee, O Mother of Christ, the ends of the earth give glory and all the demons are affrighted at the gift Thou hast bestowed upon mankind. O Mother of the Vanquisher of Death, save our souls, for Thou alone art merciful." He looked over what he had written and was exceedingly pleased.

And no impartial observer could hint at such a thing as lack of feminine society, for in the women's quarters or *Gynæceum* of Hormisdas, several ladies of undoubted charm and *savoir faire* were established to their entire satisfaction and Justinian's occasional satiation. Monogamous by nature, the necessity of proving that he

was a normal and manly Prince led him to indulge in dalliance which he would far rather have turned his back upon contemptuously.

His dissatisfaction was, as nearly as he would admit to himself, caused by the doleful realization that he stood as man, as future Emperor, quite alone. There was no one to help him with decisions, upon whom he could rely as upon himself. And strangely enough, decisions were the hurdles at which this earnest and over-serious fledgeling Emperor balked—this man whom history was to hand the supreme accolade of Great. Qualms swept over him as he issued edicts. Had he done wisely? Was that man Magnus worthy of a consulship? Was it good policy to load recalcitrant barbarians with gifts? Even as he sipped his broth and contemplated the lofty sentiments of the hymn before him, a frown darkened his wide forehead upon which lay the naïve fringe of grizzled curls.

The maroon-colored silk tapestry at the door was suddenly pushed back on its rod of silver and Justinian looked up, his thoughts a thousand miles away from this intrusion.

"I am not at liberty," he began, and stopped.

Before him stood a slender woman, the pallor of her skin accentuated by her huge black eyes,

her scarlet mouth curved in a slight, an almost quizzical smile.

"I greet you, Justinian," she said simply, and came forward to lay upon the kingly table, inlaid with lapis-lazuli, what appeared to be a rather grimy and bedraggled letter.

"There were orders that I was not to be disturbed." Justinian drew his brows together. With his right hand he struck a note upon a little silver gong, but with his left hand he reached for the letter.

As he read it, his sensitive mouth with its childishly full underlip pursed itself together.

"And what, if I may ask"—he looked directly at his visitor—"what did you expect that I should do with an actress? My interest in the theater has given way before the press of business for the State, as Macedonia very well knows. I have nothing to say about the management of the Hippodrome, and even if I had I should hesitate to introduce a stranger from Alexandria. What is it you wish?"

Theodora made an infinitely appealing half movement toward him.

"Companionship, Inheritor of the Purple," she answered, raising her glance to him.

Justinian, galvanized, stared into the depths of

the somber black eyes. He thought of the ladies in the *Gynæceum,* whose demands ranged from necklaces of pearls to summer houses in Bithynia, and tried in vain to remember having heard one of them use that identical word. He hesitated, and then recovered himself.

"As you can see," he said a little pompously, "I have important work on hand, and have at the moment not the leisure to be companioned, even if I had the urge. However, I may feel differently about it to-morrow. Photius!" He called to the servant who had answered his gong. "Show this lady to a sleeping compartment—and let it be as far from the *Gynæceum* as possible," he added tactfully.

He turned to Theodora. "Before you go," he demanded, "tell me how you passed the guardsmen at my gate, who had orders to admit no one."

Theodora smiled. "I came by water, not by land," she said, "and I scrambled up the bank on the far side of the wharf without being hindered by a soul. If I had been questioned, it would have made no difference. I have traveled for endless days and interminable nights to see you, and having made up my mind, I warn you—nothing can stop me."

The dark portieres fell behind her with the words "nothing can stop me" ringing in Justinian's ears. He re-read Macedonia's letter. "An actress lately in great trouble is recommended to your mercy," she wrote. The man who people said had never been young leaned his head in his hands and absently drew a series of irrelevant and flowery scrolls upon the borders of his hymn. An actress, who having once made up her mind, stopped at nothing?

"When," asked Theodora of the eunuch Narses, who waited upon her next morning, "am I bidden to your master?"

"Lady," he answered in his high, squeaky voice, "the Victorious and Happy, nephew of the Emperor, receives Alaric the barbarian chieftain this morning in an audience, and later stands as godfather while the pagan Prince is received into the Christian Church. I doubt——"

"I doubt not," Theodora said shortly. "He certainly will call for me before the sun sets. But in the meantime I have a mind to see how a barbarian is received at court. Take me to the audience chamber."

The Theodora who had slept upon a pallet of ɜw in an Egyptian tenement spoke imperi-

ously, and Narses, wondering at this latest guest of his Imperial master, found it expedient to obey, but with an expression of misery upon his beardless face. He foresaw an unhappy future if it were to be his task to serve this haughty beauty, who, after one night in Hormisdas, seemed so sure of herself, and so certain that she had come to stay.

Veiled, so that no shriek of *"Haire!* but there goes Theodora of the Brothel, returned from Africa!" should greet her, she followed the sulking eunuch to the Augusteon—the great entrance square before the Palace. Jammed between a Hun spearsman's ill-smelling wife, into whose blond hair were braided silver coins, and on whose arms clanked heavy metal bracelets, and the equally unsavory slave who bore the lady's squalling son and heir, Theodora moved with the crowd of gaping foreigners through the Court of the Scholes, into the anteroom of the Consistory, where such audiences took place.

The details of these State occasions have been preserved for an incredulous posterity in the vast tome compiled under the direction of a tenth-century Byzantine emperor. Constantine VII's Book of Ceremonies describes in faithful det? every step of the rigid formalities which made

so large a part of Byzantine court life. What the Emperors and their retinues wore, what they said, the order of procession, the kind of presents they gave and received—all have been carefully noted down, so that the records of audiences and fêtes, given by the most fantastic court in the history of the world, leap at the reader with glowing splendor from the cold background of the printed page.

It was not merely the indulgence of a childish urge for pageantry which had led the Byzantines to lay such weight on rites and ceremonies. The Emperors felt, and Justinian more strongly than any of them, that this display of power was a determining factor in impressing the rest of the world with the wealth and might of the Empire. The more pomp and purple robes, the more deeply would the barbarians from the remoter parts of Europe feel that this King was indeed mighty among men, and the kingdom which he ruled, the most staunch and powerful on the earth.

Straight through the two great rooms leading to the audience chamber, he stretched a line of Imperial Guards, swords slung at their sides, shields of gold on their arms, exciting scarlet plumes floating from the golden casques. One

man held his lance on high, in a salute of honor, the next carried on his shoulder the terrible two-edged Byzantine hatchet, feared in battle from the borders of Persia to the coasts of Spain. Between them the standard bearers moved slowly forward, raising the multi-colored banners of the Empire. Behind these filed the foreign envoys, dwarfed by the gigantic stature of the guards, escorted by interpreters and ministers of the Foreign Office. Reduced to incoherent awe and astonishment by the splendor of the marble halls and the adroit glitter of golden arms and flashing colors, the proudest of the barbarian chiefs trembled in anticipation of what was to come.

On the other side of the silk curtains, Justinian, in place of the aged ruler who was quite willing to leave these matters to his nephew, gravely climbed upon the throne, and settled himself with the least trace of satisfaction. His bodyguard gathered about him, the round tubes of their golden collars gleaming over the white tunics. Eunuchs of the Imperial Bedchamber stood behind him. Senators, resplendent in their robes of office—each with the border of purple on his tunic which marked him as a patrician—and high dignitaries of the Empire, dressed in dull crimson

silks, took their places about the great hall. The Throne, with the seated Regent, was hoisted aloft, and at a signal from the Master of Ceremonies, there was a tremendous blast upon a hidden organ.

After a breathless moment, the gorgeously embroidered curtains parted, and golden canaries in golden trees about the hall began to sing. The Throne, canopy and all, blazing with gems, the purple silk cushions covered with pearls and diamonds, descended slowly from the heavens, and came to rest upon two bronze lions, between the laurel crowns held by heroic statues of Victory, one on either side. Robed in gold, crowned with the ringed circlet of a Cæsar, holding in his hand a little bag of dust to remind him that all men are mortal and must be treated with kindness and clemency, the stocky man with ruddy cheeks and black hair shot with gray, who impersonated the glory of the Empire, sat revealed to the overwhelmed barbarians.

Down they flung themselves upon the floor, their arms outstretched, their chins pressed tight upon a porphyry slab set in the marble pavement, indicating the spot for the first obeisance. Again in the middle of the room, and a third time before the Throne the envoys kissed the ground. At

another signal from the Master of Ceremonies, Alaric, the chief, crept forward on his hands and knees to touch the foot of the August and Thrice Holy with his lips, his retinue following suit. Stuttering with excitement and reverence, he begged through an interpreter, the Glory of the Purple and Lieutenant of God on Earth, to accept his few poor gifts. This the Regent graciously consented to do, having carefully perused a list of all the presents with their exact value two days before. Then, while the guards stood at attention, and his audience cowered lower still, the August spoke, in a voice which held the proper note of solemnity.

"We thank you, Prince of the Huns," he said, "for your gracious favors toward us, and for the magnificent gifts which you have deigned out of your generosity to bring us. We feel that we are privileged in counting you among the stalwart defenders of the Empire, and still more privileged in being able to count you"—here his voice dropped to a deeper tone—"among the stalwart defenders of Our Lord. It gives us untold happiness that this day we are to be responsible for bringing a chieftain of your greatness into the Church of Christ."

The organ sounded again, the barbarians

wormed themselves backwards upon their knees; once more the Throne and its solemn occupant floated upward, while the bronze lions flanking it roared mightily and moved their tails with a thunderous crash. The silken curtains were pulled to with a *swish!* The glorious spectacle was swiftly blotted out, leaving the visitors in a state bordering on stupefaction.

"By the bones of Sappho!" murmured Theodora to herself. "But that is the way to do the thing." The actress in her applauded the consummate skill with which the pageant had been handled, and the fierce ambition which was slowly dominating her entire personality leaped at the thought——

"Make way, make way!" shouted the captain of the guard. "His Highness, Prince Alaric, passes through!"

The eunuch tugged at her sleeve. "There will be no women present in the church," he whispered. "It were better to return."

Undecided as to the status of his charge, whether she were actually guest or prisoner, he felt that were there any possibility of her being summoned by the Regent, it would be worth his life to produce her swiftly. For all he knew, the little silver gong might ring frantically the mo-

ment Alaric turned from the altar, a Christian and godson of an Emperor.

Something of the same thought entered Theodora's mind, and she fairly dragged the panting Narses after her.

"Bring me rosewater," she commanded the slave girl who answered her summons, "and then unguents, and then a mirror."

The girl appeared again, carrying a silver tray, upon which were arranged dozens of tiny jars with bright mosaic tops. Theodora scanned them with a practiced eye. It would be good to feel the velvet of cosmetics again, after the lean, unbeautiful days of Alexandria. There were the curling irons, which, thanks to a bountiful Providence, she did not need. She combed out her wavy night-black hair, and anointed it with oil of roses, twisting it into little curls which she bound with a silver ribbon. Here were the aromatic powders for cleaning the teeth, here the musk, to be lightly touched to the ear lobes, and here the blacking for the eyebrows. Skillfully she rubbed a finger, just barely smirched with the dark paste over her upper lids and out a little at the corners. Scorning the cheek rouge, she dusted a thin ricy powder on her neck and arms, and as a final

touch, brightened with a cherry red paste the fine curve of her mouth.

"Now let him call for me!" she thought, surveying herself in the mirror which the little slave held for her.

She tried to compose herself to wait, nervous at the expectation of sandaled feet in the marble corridor at any moment. The Palace seemed quiet as the desert. The wing to which she had been conducted jutted out over the water, on a shelf of rock, and to while away the time she sat leaning over the balustrade, watching the little ferry-boats, each rowed by two men, ply back and forth between the marble quay under the lee of the Palace and the distant shore. Farther down the bay, she could see two Imperial galleys riding at anchor, the rowers' benches empty, and beyond them a fleet of fishing boats coming in with the tunny for which Byzantium was famous. In spite of herself, her mind rehearsed furiously the drama she had played and misgivings stabbed her as to the strategy she had used in her approach to Justinian.

Surely that was a master stroke she had played yesterday? Surely her instinct had not been wrong when it urged her to thrust her way into

Justinian's presence without the usual formalities of presentation to the Emperor's nephew? Surely she had been right in uttering that word which had startled him so, and caused him to hesitate?

For here was a man, unless her intuition was very far askew, who had had enough of wantons and lush femininity, a man who, through some strange coldness in his own nature, which paradoxically cried out for affection, had never been close to anyone, and who, destined to bear the heavy burden of kingship alone, was frightened at the thought. Here was a man, unless she had guessed fatally wide of the mark, who wanted his deeds and intentions applauded, and who would work better when his vanity was salved, not so much with flattery as with a genuine appreciation of his ambitions. Beauty appealed to him—true, or she would not have scented her black hair with roses and drawn her tunic tight enough to show the long curve of her hips and thighs. But beauty this man could buy wherever his fancy struck, and grace and charm and youthful impudence, while behind no other eyes in all the Empire lay Theodora's chilly faculty of clarity and the burning impetus to see something tangible and eternal grow under human hands.

She listened again for footsteps in the corridor, and still in vain.

For Justinian, his ceremonial robes flung aside, a golden cup of honey and water on the lapis table before him, was plunged into his daily mass of correspondence, and with the help of two busily scribbling secretaries was dispatching the business of a Cæsar, with that attention to routine and meticulousness of detail which made his light-minded contemporaries regard him as a phenomenon of industry, if not actually possessed by some strange devil. Methodical and slave to routine as he was, no slightest matter was permitted to go without his attention. Filled with a sense of immense importance, rejoicing in the opportunity to indulge in his favorite occupation of writing—he was as voluminous a writer as Queen Victoria herself—he answered petitions, issued edicts, indited long letters to friendly sovereigns, penned tactful overtures to unfriendly ones, with ease and fluency. Misgivings as to right and wrong, and the relaxation of sacred composition were something he allowed himself only after all the multitudinous affairs of State had been most carefully completed.

This was no toy kingdom that could be dealt with in spare moments. This was an Empire, in-

herited from Rome, reaching from the Persian tip of the Caucasus, sweeping around the shores of the Black Sea, skirting the Mediterranean from Greece to Pentapolis, in a great arc of colonies. To carry on the tradition of the Roman Emperors, to hold these widely scattered provinces in a firm grip, to add, nibble by nibble, to the possessions of Byzantium, called for a ruler of initiative and ambition—a man whose interests must be centered upon one goal, and who must never allow himself to forget that the duties of a King are many, and the pleasures of a Prince are few.

The strangely beautiful and taciturn woman, with her remarkable notions of what she wanted from him, was forgotten by Justinian as he plunged happily into a basket of papyri, and dictated in sharp phrases suitable answers to Tiberius the farmer, whose God-forsaken little plot of ground in Paphlagonia was being taxed too heavily, according to his miserable wails; and to a hundred others of his ilk.

Then there was an edict to be drafted which took long and serious thought. "In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Emperor and Cæsar, Justinus of Allemania, of the Goths, of the Germans, of the Franks, and of Africa; Mild in

Nature, Happy, Renowned, Victor and Triumphant, Always August, to his subjects in Thrace, Greetings——"

And the letter to Theodoric, the not too friendly King in Rome, who must be placated with smooth words—"Justinus, Imperator, to Theodoric, Rex: We approach you with the language of veneration because it is agreed on all hands that your virtues increase more and more. Friendship exists not for those who are in one another's presence, but also for the absent. Rendering you, therefore, reverent saluations, we hope that our ambassadors, whom we have directed to the most clement King, will bring us news of your welfare."

It was a wearing business, this diplomacy. The sky was dark when he had finished, and dismissing the two aching-fingered scribes, he began to pace his balcony, absorbed in thoughts of the matters just accomplished. It was nearly midnight before he turned to go back into his sleeping apartment, kicking into wakefulness the slave who slept upon the threshold. In the dim light which came from the bronze lamps suspended from the ceiling, he saw a shadow flit from the ivory couch at the far corner of the room to stand beside his bed.

"Eternal Virgin," he swore under his breath.

"No eternal virgin," answered Theodora, stepping into the light. "I thought you had forgotten me, and so I came to see what it was that kept you over long. I was weary of waiting."

"Our guests usually await our pleasure," said the displeased Cæsar, who was in the worst possible mood for entertaining ladies. It was hard enough for him at any time to think of the things that would please a woman's ears, erring as he did more than trifle on the ponderous side. Tonight of all nights he was exhausted from the long ritual of the morning, and the creative efforts of his afternoon's epistolatory labors. His voice grew tarter still as he said, motioning toward the doorway,

"We shall send for you when we have leisure, and not before. It occurs to us that you misuse our hospitality."

"On the contrary," said Theodora with dignity. "I came because the eunuch Narses told me you were busy with the affairs of Egypt and Africa, and having lately returned from there, I thought to put my knowledge of the provinces at your disposal. It is not the time for that tonight. But I shall hope to be allowed to aid the Thrice Glorious another day."

She bowed to him and turned to go, the faint light catching at the silver ribbon in her hair, outlining the metal girdle at her waist, twinkling for a last instant on the buckle of her sandals.

Justinian had almost said "Stay!" when the curtain fell across the door.

He settled himself uneasily against his silken pillow. Should he send this disturbing person away without further ado, or should he keep her until he had had time to talk with her at length? She was good to look upon, she had intelligence and dignity, and he had an almost uncanny premonition that here, perhaps, was the staff upon which it was meant for him to lean. Could she really aid him? Well, to-morrow he would decide.

CHAPTER V

"THE ANOINTED OF CHRIST" GOES WOOING

THEODORA laughed. She was standing at the window, looking down upon a courtyard, where swarms of servants ran to and fro, carrying bundles, falling over one another, calling directions, making a great todo of busy-ness. Three or four were clustered about a litter, apparently waiting for its occupant, and these, watching the others scurrying in and out, made some small joke among themselves and snickered.

She turned to the man beside her and laughed again.

"They chatter like so many magpies," she said. "One would think the end of the world had come."

"It has for several ladies I could name, no doubt," he answered dryly. "They had not reckoned on moving from the Palace, and, knowing them as I do, their tempers will be somewhat short at such an enforced evacuation."

Theodora nodded. "And yet it will be for the best," she said. "I could not brook a rival now, and you yourself admit that one woman in Hormisdas is enough."

Justinian laid his hand upon her arm. "One woman," he said with an odd break in his voice, "is all I think I shall ever want."

The pedantic, pompous man who took himself so seriously, upon whose shoulders the weight of an Empire was destined to rest, looked at the beautiful woman beside him with a flicker of fire in his eyes. Then he said slowly:

"I have spoken to my uncle."

"So?" said Theodora. "And what did the Basileus answer?"

"He was willing enough"—Justinian spoke still more slowly—"but there is his wife. She would not hear of it."

"So?" she said again.

This was an unexpected barrier. How carefully she had planned, how subtly she had made her way step by step into the favor of this born-old Prince, how many obstacles she had vanquished, until she was installed as his mistress in the Palace—only to be thwarted by a stubborn old peasant woman, who in her youth had plied

her trade in the wake of an army. It was only natural, she thought moodily, that having once fought her way up the ladder that she, Theodora, had also set herself to climb, the Empress, watching her doddering old husband warily, should, with all the strength at her command, forbid him to let his successor become entangled with such as she had once been. There were no words spoken, but Theodora and the Empress Euphemia both knew what was at stake, and each, through the man she could influence, sought for a stranglehold.

Aloud she said, "What does she give as her reason?"

"The law," Justinian answered. "The law which says that a patrician may marry only one of patrician birth. She quoted in particular the passage referring to actresses and daughters of innkeepers."

Theodora stamped her foot. "By Christ and the Blessed Virgin!" she broke out hotly. "She was no better than a soldier's whore herself. And just because she married him before there was a question of the Throne, and had smooth sailing, she denies the same to others. There is but one answer. Change the law!"

Justinian passed a tired hand across his brow. Like lightning Theodora dropped defiance as she would a cloak.

"Ah, beloved," she said tenderly, "you are overtired, and have worried yourself on my behalf. Let us walk in the garden, and leave the question for to-day."

She took Justinian's hand as if he were a little boy and led him out upon the terrace, away from the sharp-voiced wrangling below, along the right-angled paths of the formal Roman garden with its geometric beds of flowers, its mossy statues and artificial grottos, into a cool lane of cypress and aloe trees. This led to the work of a newly imported landscape gardner from Persia, who, with the Oriental love for the sound of running water, had fashioned a most marvelous balustrade to the stairway which led to a discreet and private orange grove. Down this hollow banister tumbled a cascade of rippling, ice-clear water, rushing from a mountain stream above to spill itself into a quiet pool outlined with heaven-blue mosaics.

Theodora's eyes took in the picture of the dark cypresses, the bright flecks of orange, the peaceful shadows in the water—hungrily. The hot Egyptian desert was still too recent in her mem-

ory for her to pass by water without a grateful glance. Her ear was still too newly attuned to the harsh jangling of alien streets for her to listen to the murmuring of that exquisite balustrade without a little start of surprise, and the swift thought, "Can this be I?"

Often during the three months since she had walked haughtily unannounced into the Regent's presence, she had paused in wonder at the almost terrifying precision with which her dreams were day by day resolving themselves into realities. A hearing from the nephew of the Emperor she had expected, but that he should have fallen so quickly and so eagerly under the spell of her beauty, her intelligence and her quick-witted ambition—she trembled as she thought of the lavish way the Fates had smiled upon her, and the suddenness with which they might as easily snatch their gifts away.

She must work quickly, quickly, to make secure that which she already had, before the inexorable Three began to snip the threads of the pattern they had let her weave.

The man at her side kept pace with her, deep in his own thoughts. It was strange, he pondered, that life could change so abruptly. Before this woman had bent her great black eyes upon him,

and had made him feel the rigid bracing of her will, reinforcing his more vacillating spirit, helping him, he felt, to wear the purple not only outwardly but in his soul, he had lacked something —what, he did not know. By some strange miracle, with her beside him, with her to say "You did well to dismiss that præfect," or "It would be wise to rescind that law," this something came to him unbidden, and he who had been only half a man before, was now a King.

There had been rumors of her past, it was true. There had been those who laughed when they found out for whom the *Gynæceum* was being emptied of its former charming inmates. "What!" they roared. "Theodora of the Brothel in Hormisdas? Putting the Emperor's successor under her spell? Wait until he hears the story of Hecebolus—wait until he finds out why they called her Pearl of the Hippodrome."

Let them laugh. Wanton she may once have been, lustful and abandoned. But the Theodora who walked with him in the cool of the Persian garden eased the burden from his heart, and if there had been talk of marriage, he had made it, for deep within him he felt that here indeed was the anchor of his life.

"Come," he said at last, breaking the long

silence. "There is something which I commanded the master craftsman, Leo, to fashion for you. It may give you pleasure."

She followed him with head bent, trying to hide the smile which flickered on her lips. Each day there was a gift for her—some new and beautiful treasure to assure her that she still basked in the princely favor. Riches were being heaped at her feet, riches such as she had never dreamed existed, and with each new acquisition the flame of something very like avarice crackled still higher.

"There," he said, when they had reached the entrance to the suite which was now hers. "It is a fitting ornament for a Princess's chamber."

Theodora cried aloud with delight. Leo had fashioned a small ebony leopard, his spots clustered three by three of Oriental pearls, his eyes blazing green tourmalines, and the crimson spot of his tongue, garnets. Ah, but the jewels were lovely!

And lovelier still, the diadem of pearls which crowned an Empress.

The Fates, either neglectful or for once benign, withheld their hands from the mystic shears. Within a few months after her definite and final refusal to permit her nephew to marry a woman

of obscure birth, the Empress Euphemia died, worn out by luxury, and her feeble husband, unable to resist the persuasive tongue of his heir, rescinded the law so that in the future a patrician might marry whom he chose. The way was clear. Unless there was some sudden cataclysmic tearing of the web of Fate, the long diamond pendants of an Emperor's bride would soon dangle from ears which had once seemed destined to hear nothing more weighty than brothel gossip, and be adorned with nothing more important than hoops of enameled gold, donated by some customer in a generous mood.

"What would the people say," said Theodora to Justinian, "if they were asked to hail me as 'Augusta,' and 'Empress of the Romans'?"

"Once you are crowned," he answered, "you will see how they show you reverence. It is not in any reflection of my glory and power that you will shine, but because you in your own right will be the God-chosen and God-protected Basilissa. That is the heritage of a Roman Empress, and it will descend to you. We have but to wait until my uncle is called by our Lord Jesus."

If Theodora had directed events with her own hands she could not have raced toward the ful-

fillment of her hopes more surely or more swiftly. Before the marriage plans were complete the aged Emperor had shuffled to another world after his wife, early in the year 527. There remained between her and the ambition which had been growing in her for such a long and weary time, nothing which could rob her now—nothing which could snatch away the diadem of pearls.

Justinian, caught in the toils of the one genuine and heartfelt emotion which had ever upset his mental calm, bound to another person by links invisible and yet never to be broken, in love as only a cold and indecisive person can be when a warmer and more aggressive nature presents itself—Justinian looked at her with glances full of doting devotion and called her his sweetest charmer.

The babel in the streets reaching her through the ears of slaves and servants indicated that the Byzantine sense of humor and love of romance was being roused by the fabulous fate in store for the woman once avoided in the market place. The Senate and the Army, apathetic to the political importance of their sovereign's marriage and interested in the flashing eyes and ready wit of the bride, declared themselves in accord with his

plans. Poverty and uncertainty, social ostracism and neglect were buried. The harlot of Constantinople was about to become an Empress.

Three days before Easter the ceremonies began. Since it was not by marriage that any woman was elevated to the throne, but by God's actual choice, the coronation was to take place before the wedding.

For twelve hours the *Gynæceum* was in an uproar. Great vats of perfume and incense steamed and sent forth choking, spicy odors in the laboratories off the tiring rooms, where the cosmeticians attached to the Empress' household toiled that her Imperial Highness might show a milky skin and waft sweet scents on her coronation day. A corps of women, under the direction of the Grand Mistress of the Palace—Patrician of the Girdle—unlocked the inlaid chests of sandalwood where the coronation robes were kept. The Patrician herself, toiling and harassed, opened the jewel caskets and laid out the rings and bracelets, the girdles and brooches that traditionally adorned an Empress of Byzantium for her marriage. Adding to the noise and confusion, a dozen men-at-arms, in shields and helmets, clanked up and down the corridors, guarding the ceremonial panoply, and nipping the smooth arm

of any pretty young slave who happened to dash past. Wardrobe mistresses and frantic eunuchs got in one another's way in desperate efforts to be useful, and to avoid the caustic tongue of the bride-to-be, who lay, clear-eyed and in full command of all activities, upon a silver and ivory couch, while her women dressed her for the great occasion. A thin silken undertunic they put upon her, and then another soft, sheer garment, cream colored, gathered close at the neck, and tight at the wrists. Upon her feet they bound golden sandals, studded with sapphires and amethysts, and upon her hair they smoothed sweet-smelling unguents.

There was nothing of the spirit of humility in the woman who was so soon to walk down the passages and corridors to the Church of St. Stephen where the Patriarch would await her with the crown of the Empire. No trembling—no choking excitement. Theodora was prepared to accept her investiture as an inalienable right—calm in her sense of the inevitability of the God-sent honor, tongue in cheek, unflinching in her acceptance of the great responsibilities which would be hers, tight-mouthed in her resolve to wear the diadem as an outward symbol of the power which she had so coveted.

Trumpets sounded. Outside the *Gynæceum* there was a rush and roar of many voices, and then silence. The doors swung open and Theodora stepped out, surrounded by the dignitaries of the Palace, a queenly insolence in her carriage.

The procession moved slowly to the church within the Palace grounds.

"Look," said the women among the onlookers. "There she goes. Do you remember when she used to sit in taverns and give her favors to any man that pleased her? How pale she is! And what must be the cost of the jewels upon her hands! Ah, well, so it goes. Born in the dust of the circus, one might say, and now she goes to sit upon a throne. Exciting, is it not? Even our small Eudoxia here, may some day wear the purple, who can tell?"

At the door of the church, the Patriarch, preceded by the enormous two-armed Greek cross of the Eastern Church, bowed low and then raised his hands in apostolic blessing. Justinian, already crowned in St. Sophia, the single circlet of gold, plain but how fraught with meaning, resting upon his gray curls, met her in the nave. Together they knelt before the altar as the Patriarch read the words which signified that God was pleased with his choice of Emperor and Empress,

and quite willing to designate them as His deputies on earth.

With a great "Kyrie Eleison" from the choir, the procession swept out of the church and on to the great hall of the Augusteon.

"Hail, God-chosen!" called the people.

"She is paler still—you can see it through the veil," they said. "But she holds her head higher. Nobody can deny that she will make an Empress worth looking at. See—see—there they come. Mother of God, but she is beautiful."

In the center of the hall the rulers halted.

As many of the citizens of Byzantium as had aunts, uncles, cousins, or still more distant relatives among the enormous retinue of the Palace; as many as could coerce a friend among the slaves and eunuchs to let them in, poured after the kingly parade into the vast marble enclosure.

Up went the cross again. The Patriarch, holding the purple chlamys in the air, passed it to the Emperor, who, unveiling her, slipped it over Theodora's head. Snugly it fitted—the loose folds of her tunic swelling out under the tight elbow sleeves, encrusted to the shoulder with embroidery and gems, the hem falling stiff with gems to the ground. In her ears he fastened the sparkling diamond pendants which she had coveted so

long, and as the final sign of royalty, he placed upon her head the great crown, heavy with pearls, which fell in clusters to her shoulders.

"Now I am a Queen," said Theodora to herself, and smiled.

Then she turned, leaving Justinian, and went, surrounded only by her women, to display herself to the people of the Palace. Slowly she passed between the ranks of guardsmen, Senators, patricians and high officials, and went out onto a terrace. Standing above the crowd in her Imperial robes, she showed herself to her new subjects, and solemnly made herself known to them.

"I, Theodora, by the Grace of God, Empress and Augusta, greet you, my people."

She spoke the words clearly and quietly.

The colors dipped before her, the grandees prostrated themselves. Very reverently, a candle in each hand, she bowed before the cross, and turned to salute her subjects once again.

A unanimous cry went up: "God save the Augusta!"

The interminable ritual dragged on. Having joined Justinian in St. Sophia for the marriage ceremony, Theodora once more was greeted by the Patriarch at the door, and this time met him as an Empress. She carefully removed the Im-

perial diadem, and handed it to him as token that earthly power was as naught before the omnipotence of the Lord, and also for the very practical reason that her black hair must be left unadorned for the nuptial crown. Once more she knelt before the altar, Justinian at her side, to rise not only as a Queen, but as the lawful wedded wife of the ruler of the Kingdom.

She remembered the earnest thoughts she had had on the subject in Antioch. To marry and to marry well. "How Macedonia will rejoice," flashed through her mind . . . "Sow new seed." . . . This was a mighty planting indeed.

Side by side, she and her husband advanced to a dais in the apse, and mounted their thrones to hold their first audience. First of all the men, and then the women of the court, passed before them and each, after being presented, and supported under the arms by two officials, prostrated himself and kissed the knees of the Basileus and the Basilissa.

It took hours for the line to pass. The sun was already low by the time the last kiss had been impressed upon the stiffly smiling monarchs. An Empress of less stern stuff than Theodora might have longed for rest and seclusion, but refreshed with a surreptitious sip of wine, she rose, aching,

from her throne, ready to be escorted to the bridal chamber, eager to wring out the last drop of glory and homage due her. The ceremonies might have lasted twice twelve hours, and she still would have found the strength to hold her head high and play the Queen. It was not as dull and prescribed ritual that she viewed the unending bowing and kissing, the lighting of candles, the chant of the choir, and the suffocating odor of incense. It was, to her eyes, a cup of clear, cool water, offered to a thirsty wayfarer, or the thunder of applause that comes to an actor when, after many vain attempts, he finally achieves his aim and holds the center of the stage.

The sovereigns passed between lanes of shouting subjects, still escorted by the entire roster of Palace dignitaries.

Whispers ran through the respectfully bowing line of tiring women.

"I will wager a seat in Heaven," said a stout, elderly female under the tall *proploma*—the ceremonial headdress—to the woman beside her, "that this is the finest bedchamber she has ever entered, and she has climbed upon more beds than most of us!"

"Ssh," whispered back her confidante. "*I* would give a good gold centenary, if I had it, to

be allowed to stay hidden under a couch, so that I might see if she will use any of her old brothel tricks to-night."

"Silence!" hissed the Lord Chamberlain.

Over a mosaic floor strewn with roses the sovereigns advanced, up to the Imperial bed of gold, canopied with priceless Persian tapestries in which figures of flying birds held sprays of grapevine in their bills. Here they halted for a last siege of acclamations and congratulations from the entire Court, and then those whose office was not directly connected with the Imperial Wardrobes and Bedchambers withdrew. Under the high ceiling, studded with stars, Justinian and Theodora stood, while the *Præpositus,* or Lord Chamberlain, superintended the doffing of the Imperial robes and the solemn laying aside of the Crown Jewels. The enormous headdress of pearls, the diamond pendants, the heavy collar of gold and precious stones, the brooch of sapphires as big as hazelnuts, the girdle of yellow, yellow gold, so pure that it was almost pulled out of shape by its own weight, the rings, and finally the jeweled sandals, they stripped from Theodora, leaving her clad in the filmy white tunic in which she had gone forth that morning. Over it the Patrician of the Girdle placed a shimmering

garment of finest silk, adorned with a phœnix. Two amazing little statues of nude bronze cherubs, with trumpets to their mouths, blew a single blast. The silver lamps, hanging from silvered bronze chains, were dimmed. The Emperor, Champion of God on Earth, Infallible, Happy, Master of the World, was raised by four nobles onto the golden tapestry of the bed. The Augusta, God-chosen, was laid beside him. The slaves, eunuchs, officials, and maids of honor, withdrew. Outside the door, four captains of the guard stood watch.

The Empress was not seen publicly again, according to etiquette, until three days later. Then she appeared, to take her bath; courtiers and servants lining the paths of the garden through which she went with her suite. To the outer world Theodora had ceased, during those three days, to be a person, and had become a symbol. It was almost impossible to move through the rigid pace of court ceremony and still remain an actual personality; and Theodora, absorbing the adulation, reveling clear-headed in the marvelous fulfillment of her desires, walked like an automaton, precise, correct, beautiful and regal.

As she passed through the Palace grounds on

her way to the baths, she was preceded by attendants bearing dressing-gowns, perfumes, boxes and vessels. Immediately before her went three maids of honor, holding red apples encrusted with pearls, symbol of love and fecundity. From some hidden bower in the gardens an organ played as she was greeted by officials who waited for her at the door to conduct her back to the nuptial chamber.

It was the function of the court jesters to make appropriate jokes upon such an occasion, and the prerogative of those who lined the path to comment as lewdly as the native Byzantine wit was able, upon the significance of the pearl-encrusted apple, and the probable efficacy of the symbol. With such a target as Theodora, the comments of the audience as she neared the baths were enough to cause the ornamental stone Hippocamps before the gate—those curious Persian beasts, half-dragon and half-lion—to blush for shame.

"Ho!" snorted the people, egged on by the jesters. "Here she comes. Say, Augusta, have the last days been well spent? Tell us, have you worked for the glory of the Empire?"

"Not she," someone in the crowd called aloud. "She knows better than to let a nuptial bed make

her forget what she has learned on less elaborate furniture—is it not so, Basilissa?"

"Let them call," thought Theodora. "Let them call me every name they can lay tongue to. Even if they shout 'harlot!' after me when I stand in the Hippodrome to-morrow, they cannot cast me out."

The Lieutenant of God on Earth, the Apostolic Prince, Emperor and Basileus, the Anointed of Christ had accomplished his wooing, and his bride, from the heights of the loftiest throne man has ever raised for man, looked coolly at the world, and, as she entered the Palace, after the last ceremony of the bath, she was at peace. Life for her had really just begun.

CHAPTER VI

JUSTINIAN'S SWEETEST CHARMER

THE HIPPODROME was filled to bursting. No yellow dog, no chariot race, no piffling political spat, no racy pantomimes, no Pearl of the Hippodrome in a low comedy act could compete with this attraction which had brought every able-bodied citizen to the great amphitheater, panting with curiosity. It was not every day—it was not every generation, nor every hundred years even, that there came the rare opportunity of seeing a familiar harlot hailed Empress of the Romans.

The walls rang with the shouts of forty thousand frenzied citizens.

"Come forth, O Glory of the Purple!" they shouted respectfully. "Come forth, Theodora, and let us see if you have forgotten *Leda and the Swan!*" they roared in groups.

The clamor beat against the bronze doors of the Kathisma, tightly shut, in alternating waves of veneration and mockery. The incessant move-

ment in the tiers, the continuous din and shouting, the royal banners snapping in the breeze, turned the Hippodrome into a vast caldron, ready to boil over.

In all that seething throng there were only two spectators who sat quietly, eyes fastened on the Royal Box, hands pleating and unpleating the folds of their white festal tunics.

"Well, Mother," said Comito at last. "I told you Theodora was ambitious, didn't I?"

The older woman, with her wrinkles hidden under a bright mask of rouge and powder, sighed.

"I should be proud to have a daughter of mine crowned Empress," she said, "but somehow this is not quite what I thought it would be like. We are not to go to her until she sends for us, we are not to molest her in any way, we are to bide our time, and she will care for us—what good does that do?"

"At least we shall not starve," said Comito philosophically. "Look—look—the doors are opening! Mercy of Mary, there she is!"

Into the Royal Box advanced a small figure, standing stiff and stately in her Imperial vestments, glittering with gold and blazing with purple. The pale face between the strands of pearls

which fell from the heavy diadem to the shoulders was as expressionless as if it had been chiseled out of stone. The heavy eyebrows were drawn together, and the dark eyes looked coldly out over the shrieking multitude. Justinian, wearing the plain circlet of the Emperor, stood beside her, and together the two rulers raised their right hands in the gesture of a blessing.

The old woman in white stared.

"Yes," she said at last. "You are right. She is ambitious. She is careless now whether she pleases or not. She can afford to be. She has become an Empress."

"Haire! Haire! Welcome, O Christ-loving Augusta!" The comments of the vulgar were drowned in a great surge of acclamation.

"You see," said Comito, watching the little sister who had followed her from one brothel to another, "you see—she is not overjoyed at all this welcome. I know her. She is coldly satisfied, and that is all. She has got what she was working for, and this is an anticlimax. Watch her—she is turning away already."

The noisy occupants of the tiers began to swarm toward the wine barrels which always flowed freely on the occasion of an Emperor's coronation, and the monarchs, followed by their

retinue, the guards in white, the ladies of honor in their high ceremonial headdresses, left the Kathisma as trumpets blared.

"Come," said Comito, "we might as well go home. We shall see no more of her until it suits her pleasure. I myself can thank the Virgin that I am not malicious"—she rose and pulled her tunic straight—"and that the thought of Theodora wallowing in luxury disturbs me very little. At least *I* do not have to sleep with that cold-blooded Justinian."

"I do not know," said the mother wistfully, as they fought their way through the tightly packed crowds at the gate. "I hear the nuptial chamber is vaulted in gold, and that all the furniture is so covered with gems you cannot see the wood. I must admit that I should like to have at least a glimpse of it."

"That is all very well," retorted Comito. "If I know anything of her, she will act as if she had been used to golden beds and silver chamber pots all her life, and she will make up for lost time in taking care of those precious looks of hers. Mark my words—next time you see her she will be handsomer than ever."

Comito spoke the truth. Once the ceremonies were over, and she could be Queen in earnest,

Theodora accommodated herself swiftly and easily to a regal life. At nine in the morning, pushing her black hair out of her eyes, and yawning, she rang for her slaves and commanded a mirror so that she might observe how rested and refreshed she looked. Next, attended by six or eight harried females carrying perfumes and unguents, she went to the baths, and sat for an hour in hot, clove-scented steam, after which the masseuse was called in, from under whose skillful hands the Empress emerged lithe and sweet-smelling, ready to toy with a breakfast of breast of pheasant, and clear light wine. Justinian might content himself with broth and herbs, but Theodora, firmly convinced that Royalty was entitled to a superlative cuisine, began by loading her table with delicacies at every meal—with peaches, grapes and dates, with succulent lettuces and onions, with all sorts of cabbages and greens, with broiled doves, peacocks and geese, steeped in wine sauces, tender pork cooked in sweet olive oil, cakes of almond paste and rich confections of honey. The lean years in Egypt had left their mark, and it was noted in all the kitchens and scullery rooms of the Palace that this Augusta knew how to please an epicure, although she herself, careful of her beauty, tasted sparingly.

Carping historians insist that, recognizing this loveliness of face and figure as one of her chief assets, she spent far too many leisurely hours caring for the smooth whiteness of her skin, and the trim grace of her body, but the fact remains that she had time left over from these exclusively personal preoccupations to arrange, carefully, a sumptuous background for her charms, and then to poke a very active finger into the pie of State.

The Sacred Palace, a fabulous collection of buildings, over which she was now mistress, comparing only with the Alhambra in Spain, or the Forbidden City in Peking, was in itself a challenge to rival in magnificence.

First there was the entrance, the great square and hall called Augusteon, then the Chalce—a palace containing three enormous guard rooms, a hall of justice, a reception room, a banquet hall, and several chapels. This in turn led to the Palace of Daphne, where the Emperor's private apartments were situated, and from which a covered passageway led directly into the Hippodrome. Near here stood the Palace of the Triclinium, under the roof of which was the incredible dining hall known in history as the Hall of the Nineteen Couches. Robber barons, sitting in

their cold stone castles on top of all the most inaccessible hills in Europe, thought wistfully of its splendors as late as the Middle Ages, for returning Crusaders, back from the Holy Land by way of Constantinople, brought tales of the roof of gold, the crescent-shaped, purple-draped tables for three hundred guests, the couches inlaid with enamels and ivory, covered with rich Persian tapestry, all of which had been kept up by the Byzantine emperors as part of the panoply of State banquets for upwards of six hundred years.

It was only in the Empress' private apartments, contemporary descriptions of which leave the imagination stunned, that Theodora was able to exercise her own taste, and satisfy a decorative, if somewhat upstart, penchant for quantities of gold. There was the Pavilion of the Pearl, with its golden vault upheld by four columns of marble and its mosaic wainscot with hunting scenes, containing the summer bedchamber of the sovereigns, and appropriately opening upon cool gardens through porticos on two sides. A winter bedchamber was selected in the Carian Pavilion, constructed throughout of Carian marble, protected from the violent winds which might blow in from the sea upon their High-

ness' slumbers. The bedchamber of the Empress herself was the most gorgeous of them all, with its marble pavement like a meadow of enameled flowers. The walls of this astounding apartment were lined with porphyry, Thessalian breccia, and white Carian, and so beautiful were the natural colors of the stone that it was known as the Pavilion of Harmony.

The lavish taste of the Byzantine emperors, and the regal ideas of the latest Empress did not stop at merely erecting splendid buildings. The palace furnishings, both those inherited and those commanded by the beauty-loving Theodora, were sumptuous beyond belief. The ladies of the Empress' court, in their apple-green or peach-colored tunics and long overmantles heavy with embroidery, the Empress herself still more ornately arrayed in purple and gold (for Theodora showed no inclination to relax in the privacy of her apartments) sat upon chairs of ivory patterned with mother-of-pearl and gold, reclined upon couches bedizened with the finest inlay, and habitually ate from square or triangular plates of precious metals, pearl-bordered. The commonest utensils were at least of silver, and the glitter of gold was everywhere. There was no tapestry upon the walls or at the doors that did not show

aureate threads in warp or woof, no lamp swinging from the ceiling that did not depend from chains of gilded bronze, no covering for couch or bed that was not of the rarest Persian stuff, dyed to the deep purplish crimson which was reserved for royalty.

Moving serenely in the midst of this choking gorgeousness, Theodore held conferences with Justinian, read dispatches from the provinces, and stored away a formidable quantity of helpful data in her agile mind.

Having made sure of her ground—her next concern was to have posted on the pillars of the Royal library an Imperial fiat to the effect that the coronation and wedding ceremonies having been celebrated, the Most High and Exalted Augusta would in her own right dispense justice to all those who cared to come to her—an innovation in Imperial procedure which set all the tongues in Constantinople wagging.

"Have you seen?" men asked each other in the taverns and wineshops. "The Augusta will hold her own audiences from now on. Ha! but that causes one to laugh!"

"Yes, yes," the political sages in the town shook their heads. "It is easy to see what will come of it. Half the people who go there will

think they can win her over because she is a woman, and the other half will try to trick her, for the same reason. This fiat may be the Emperor's undoing. On the other hand. . . ."

All Byzantium bubbled with inquisitiveness. Each audience day saw a stream of suppliants converging toward the Augusta's salon. There were among them elderly noblemen who wished Imperial intercession in their private affairs; sly ambassadors, as had been prophesied, who argued that the approach to the Emperor would be smoothed by an introductory audience with the new Basilissa; respectable fathers of plain daughters, seeking to find lucrative occupation for their offspring within the advantageous Palace walls; and not unnaturally many gentlemen of varying ranks, who boasted openly that they had known her Highness when. . . . In the small reception rooms people trod upon each other's feet in their frantic efforts to win a word with the lady whom Justinian was known to have called his dear delight.

"Bah!" said Theodora to her spouse, when word was brought that half the Empire was crowding the narrow passages to her door. "They think that because I was once one of them they can browbeat me, and ask irritating favors. I

will show them that I do not hold audiences merely to while away the time."

She soon made it evident to her callers that this Basilissa was not inclined to take the duties of her new station in life in the light spirit of amusement. Elected by God (with some slight mortal assistance) to rule an Empire, savoring the delights of Queenship keenly, she insisted that the rigid etiquette of the Byzantine court be carried out to the letter, and no slightest homage due her be omitted. She installed Narses, the eunuch who had waited on her when she first came to Hormisdas, as her majordomo, and his instructions were explicit. No one was to be allowed to underestimate the importance of an audience with the Basilissa. The highest officials of the kingdom were to be kept waiting until she saw fit to see them, and many a patrician found to his bitter disappointment and annoyance that old acquaintance was no pretext on which to try to win a word with Theodora Augusta, and that her excellent sense of humor and sparkling wit were uncomfortably and frequently unleashed. Audiences with the Emperor's bride were apt to be brief, concise and amusing to everyone but the suppliant. There was for example the case of Basanius, an aged and furtively libidinous noble-

man who had waited half a day to see his Queen, in the fond hope that out of gratitude for employment he had given her in the past, she would show him mercy and grant his son a quaestorship. When he was finally admitted to her presence he found her aloof and stony, surrounded by a terrifying array of supercilious ladies in waiting, guards in the four corners of the room, a scribe at her elbow. Basanius, blinking his bleary eyes, began to doubt the wisdom of trying to put the interview on a friendly basis.

The eunuch, Narses, who escorted him, poked his brittle ribs none too gently. "Down!" he snapped. The wretched sextagenarian slowly and painfully prostrated himself, hands and feet outstretched.

"You may kiss the feet of the All Merciful Augusta," commanded the eunuch, "and then wait until her Majesty deigns to speak."

Her Majesty was gratifying a very human urge to lord it over this senile fool who not so long ago had stood in the relation of employer to her, and did not deign to speak until the rheumatic patrician began to wonder whether he should ever stand upright again.

At last she nodded, and Basanius, creaking in every joint, wringing out a few tears to further

his cause, his thoughts fearfully disrupted, began in a trembling voice,

"Theodora. . . ."

"Silence!" bleated Narses in the deepest voice he could muster. "It is customary to begin any address to the Throne with the words, 'Your Highness.'"

"Your Highness," quavered the unhappy Basanius, "I have come in the memory of. . . ."

"Silence!" The eunuch fairly danced with rage. "It is customary in addressing the Most August Basilissa, never to use the pronoun 'I' without adding 'your humble slave.'"

"I, your humble slave," began Basanius again, "have come, in the memory of our former warm friendship, to ask most earnestly. . . ."

"That will be enough," said the Empress. "We cannot seem to remember that whatever friendship there was between us, was particularly warm." In an aside to Narses she remarked only too audibly, "This man's hernia seems to be bothering him."

Turning to Basanius she continued, "You are dismissed, and fined a gold centenary yearly, for your presumption in coming here on such an errand."

She let her hands fall in her lap, and the eunuch

Narses, clapping Basanius on the shoulder, announced sententiously:

"The audience with the Mild and Happy Augusta is at an end!"

The bewildered old gentleman was led from the room, his gray hairs standing on end, his tunic askew, the conviction dawning on his mind that it would be better for him, and for the rest of Constantinople society, not to rely upon fond remembrance of the past. This lady's memory obviously did not go back more than a year or two.

Equally chilly was the reception accorded to the flock of money seekers who tried to squeeze past Narses. One doddering, bibulous spendthrift, continuously in debt, upon the news of the Augusta's audiences shambled to the Palace as fast as his dissipated legs could carry him, and after endless hours of waiting, was finally admitted to the Royal presence.

When he had kissed the feet of the Basilissa, and shed his quota of tears, he embarked upon a flowery discourse, dwelling on the poverty of his old age, the hardships he was forced to undergo because of lack of money, the harshness of his creditors, and the ruthlessness of money lenders.

"Highness," he wound up pitifully. "I, your humble slave, beg and beseech you to aid me in my troubles, and release me from my present woeful plight."

Theodora bent an appraising eye upon him.

"Your nose is very red," she remarked, "and a strong odor of wine appears to emanate from your person. Apparently you are a connoisseur of liquors. For your loyalty in coming to the Augusta with your troubles, and as an assuagement for your monetary griefs, we shall allow you to present us with three tuns yearly of the finest Syrian wines. Narses, you may bring us the next suppliant."

Such audiences took hours, and could only have been adroitly sandwiched in between the innumerable demands made upon the Empress by the crowded calendar of court etiquette. Certainly no slothful indolence is indicated by the energy with which Theodora threw herself into the round of knee-kissing and gift-giving which tradition demanded of a Byzantine Empress.

Almost immediately after her marriage, the Easter ceremonies, which had been postponed because of the coronation, were held in great state. While Justinian, in the nave of St. Sophia,

was receiving the high dignitaries of the Empire who gave him the kiss of peace in memory of Christ's resurrection, Theodora sat enthroned in the women's gallery of the Great Church, surrounded by her chamberlains and bodyguards, receiving the wives of high officials.

The ladies moved past the Throne in a bright parade of gems and colors, yellows melting into scarlet and purple, pale tourmalines catching fire from garnets, pearls set off with sapphires. Great bracelets with diamond-bordered amulets encircled their arms, and crescent earrings of enameled gold dragged down their ear lobes. Stiffly they carried themselves as they bent to kiss the knees of their new sovereign, the pale veils from the peaks of their tall headdresses floating behind them, the younger women first, followed by elderly and critical matrons who had lived to see this, their third Empress, crowned.

"I swear," whispered the more charitable to one another as they waited in the anterooms for their parade to form again, "but she looks like one who will keep things humming in the Palace."

The older ladies whose tongues were sharper, and who had hoped to detect a lingering hint of low theatrical behavior in their new Queen,

sniffed audibly and reluctantly admired her aplomb and dignity.

"This receiving women is all very well," they said, "but wait until Theodora presides at a banquet. Wait until the eyes of foreign envoys are bent upon her. Wait until she has to hold her own in diplomatic repartee with men of learning. How will the lady manage then?"

The malicious satisfaction of seeing the Basilissa falter upon an occasion of such importance unfortunately was denied them, for the Persian envoys, foremost to be accorded hospitality under the new régime, went home to the court of Chosroes, their king, himself no niggard in fantastic magnificence, with their eyes bulging out, their tongues weak with wagging, and unbounded admiration for the Byzantine Empress coloring their reports.

The first great State banquet was held in the Hall of the Nineteen Couches upon a warm June night. As the guests entered the lofty hall, a double row of slaves prostrated themselves and motioned them to move forward over a thick carpet of vivid yellow roses, to the circular table in the center of the room, where Justinian and Theodora sat waiting, dressed alike in tunics of purple with overmantles of cloth-of-gold. After

the homage to the sovereigns, each guest was assisted to his feet by an ebony-black eunuch, who conducted him to a couch at one of the nineteen crescent-shaped tables. To the surprise of the beholders there was nothing on the tables—no dishes, no crystal ewers for wine, nothing but a great bowl of purple and blue enamel rising fluted from an ivory inlaid stem. The Persians looked at each other in astonishment. What sort of feast was this, where no steaming dishes were borne in by a procession of slaves, no goblets ready for the guests to pledge their hosts?

They took their places. The slaves brought silver bowls of rosewater and fine linen towels, imperially monogrammed. Still no sign of the savory dainties they had been led to expect. The diplomats' mouths watered at the memories of past excursions into Byzantine cookery and yet no sound came from the passage leading to the kitchens. Theodora and Justinian, apparently unconcerned, conversed easily and tactfully, their long gold mantles shiftily reflecting the light of the swinging lamps.

Suddenly there was a slight creaking and a rumble. The floor beside each couch trembled and opened. Through the apertures came serving tables laden with dishes. With dishes? The Per-

sians rubbed their eyes—with salvers and platters, with cups and basins, with trenchers and goblets of bright gold, the shining surface of each vessel showing in high relief a scene from the life of John the Baptist. Two slaves advanced to each table, and, both grasping a platter firmly, tried to lift it. The Persians gasped. It was so heavy that the strength of two men was not sufficient to raise it an inch. The slaves apparently had not expected to place the dishes upon the table, for after demonstrating the weight of the huge gold platters, they reached into the air, and there, suspended from the ceiling, were blocks and pulleys. Before the guests could realize what had happened, wine and meat were wafted through the air and set before them.

Between the dazzle of the service and the magnificence of the fare, the glutted ambassadors were in no state to resist the brilliance of Theodora's smile and the cordiality of her conversation. She deprecated the poor hospitality of the Sacred Palace, and inquired after the health of their king and his court. She spoke delicately of the Nestorians, an heretical sect which was gaining strength in the neighboring kingdom, and appeared to be intimately acquainted with all the goings-on in the Persian court. If there were

anything that made that particular diplomatic entertainment more noteworthy than the fabulous elegance of the appointments, it was the ease and skill shown by the Basilissa in handling those always possible enemies, the Persians.

And yet there are scraps and notes by scandalized sixth-century writers remaining, which indicate that Theodora's metamorphosis into a well-bred Empress was never quite complete. Haughty she was, and overbearing and regal to a degree, but underneath the eminently queenly manner there still bubbled cascades of broad humor and little freshets of circus rowdiness. In her own pavilions, and before her intimate friends, there were robust relapses into low comedy and buffoonery.

There was, for example, the entertainment given by the Empress for Antonina, wife of Belisarius, Byzantium's leading general, on her return from a campaign against the Huns. The privileged guests, arranged on gold and purple brocaded couches around a miniature stage, and plentifully supplied with rarest wines, were treated to the spectacle of the Empress herself upon the boards, and listened to that marvellously flexible and richly timbred voice reciting doggerel evidently traced by the Imperial pen itself.

Inasmuch as the subject matter was wholly composed of hitherto secret and not altogether creditable episodes in the lives of the listeners, the applause at the conclusion of the Imperial performance was not so much enthusiastic as forced.

The Empress was also pleased to play practical jokes at her banquets, and if a guest arrived home with his finest silk tunic splotched with wine, and his beard matted, it was because at the height of the festivities slaves had appeared to hold the banqueters upside down over fountains of intoxicating vintages, and her Highness had insisted that a round of toasts be drunk to her in this highly indecent position.

Orgies, in the late Roman and early Alexandrian sense of the word, were not indulged in under Theodora's auspices. Indiscriminate intercourse, and lecherous perversions held no charm for her, and although the couches in the pavilions frequently groaned with a double weight, it was none of Theodora's doing, and she rather shunned the sight of any display of the passion for which she had been so profligately notorious in her youth. Bawdy wit there was, and suggestive pantomime aplenty, but no guest failed to notice that Queenship had dried the springs of Theodora's lust. It is one of the authentic sur-

prises in history that Justinian's Sweetest Charmer could add to the list of such virtues as diplomacy, tact, political insight and clarity of judgment, the crowning epithet of faithful wife.

CHAPTER VII

A THORN IN THE REGAL FLESH

BYZANTIUM was swooping down on Carthage. Hun soldiers from the North, blond and blue-eyed, were being sent in boatloads to fight their brothers of Germanic blood in Africa. Belisarius, the great Byzantine general, believed in fighting fire with fire.

In the Sacred Palace, Justinian and Theodora were reckoning the extent of the Empire were Africa added to their domain. In all the churches of Constantinople litanies were being sung to insure victory. In all the patrician homes, young men were girding on their swords to help bring the Arian heretics—Vandals who had ravaged Rome and made the rebuilt City of Dido their stronghold—into the true Church of Christ. Many a young bride of noble birth welcomed the opportunity to follow her husband to the battle front, welcomed the opportunity to travel and to see these barbarians who were said to be such handsome men. No less a person than Prejecta,

Justinian's niece, elected to accompany her husband, the general Catullus, that she might with her own eyes see Constantinople conquer Carthage.

Catullus' forces, instead of seeking the sea way, were ordered to march overland from Egypt, and, nothing daunted, Prejecta set out on the hundred and fifty day journey with her spouse. Through the desert they went, as part of the advance guard, from oasis to oasis, the women and officers riding, the soldiers trudging through the clinging sand. Long before the outposts of the Vandal territory were reached, Moorish arrows began to fly, and Moorish lances were hurled from rocks and crags.

The last twenty miles were accomplished in spite of a running battle between the Byzantines and the Vandals' Moorish mercenaries, and when the last halt was made, almost in sight of their goal, Catullus saw to it that they were securely intrenched on a rocky hilltop which commanded the neighboring desert. The Byzantines congratulated themselves that they would be safe here from the sudden raids in the night which had made the past few days so perilous, and pitched their tents around the camp fires. Prejecta, rolled in a blanket, drowsed off with a feel-

ing of comparative security, while Catullus laid his plans to meet with the Byzantine army which had come by sea, and, with their united forces, storm the town.

Suddenly the high, screaming sob of a mother leopard broke out behind the camp. From in front came the whining of a leopard cub. The sentries raised their bows. The female screamed again. Several soldiers rushed forward to stab her. Into the gap they left before the camp sprang four dark figures, and then four more. In a second the place was alive with Moors. Catullus seized his spear and burst from the tent. Before he could get across the threshold, a Moorish lance had pinned him back against the wall. Prejecta crouched in the corner, her voice frozen in her throat. The Moor who had killed her husband advanced toward her, ready to grasp his prize. Prejecta cowered lower still, and felt a hand slide underneath the edge of the tent wall. It gave her tunic a quick jerk and lifted the rough canvas. Before the Moor could touch her, she had rolled out and vanished.

She lay face down on the earth, struggling for breath. The hand which had saved her, pulled her to her knees.

"Follow me," a voice said. "I am going to

crawl down the other side of the hill, and leave these Huns and bloody Moors to fight it out."

Pitching, stumbling, her hands cut by the rough grass, her knees lacerated by the rocks, she crept on all fours after her salvation. Only when the man had reached the shelter of a great stone away from the line of attack and the dying fire light, did he stop and turn around.

"Now, my lady," he said softly, "I think the Moors will not look for us here. It would be better if we did not linger, but tried to make our way to Carthage as quickly as possible. Can you walk the nine leagues, do you think?"

Prejecta for the first time saw her rescuer clearly. He was the young Armenian, Artobanus, who had served her husband as aide on the campaign, and who had followed her with his eyes wherever she went.

She looked up at him, and thought to herself that he looked gentle, that he spoke kindly, that for whatever reason he had saved her, she must trust herself to him, since she was now alone. The dreadful scene she had just lived through flashed before her eyes again—Catullus starting from the tent, the Moor, the sickening thud of her husband's body against the wall, and sud-

denly the young widow felt herself sinking, sinking through space.

When she came to, she still lay beneath the crag, while Artobanus bent over her, moistening her forehead with wine from his leather pouch. The sky was lighter, and in the east the horizon glowed yellow.

"Come," said the young man in an urgent whisper, "we must leave this hill at once. If you cannot walk, I can carry you until we at least have put a league between us and this spot. I know the ground well, and I think we can get to Carthage safely, but it will mean twisting and turning on our tracks. Do you feel stronger now?"

Prejecta sat erect. A cold lucidity flooded her mind, an inrush of energy helped her to her feet.

"I am ready," she said. "It will help me to forget the hideous night if I have physical difficulties to overcome. Let us go toward Carthage. I shall walk if each step tortures me."

Moving cautiously, creeping around rocks, taking advantage of every bit of cover, the two, guided by the fading stars, set out on their dangerous pilgrimage. Not a word was spoken, not a look exchanged. If Artobanus had followed the slim girl at his side with longing gaze while

there was a husband to protect her, his only thought now was for her comfort. One league—two leagues—three leagues—and they were in the desert, ploughing through the sand. At a tiny oasis they halted.

"We shall rest here while the sun is at its height," said Artobanus. "This is so far off the main track, that I doubt whether the Moors would think of looking here for refugees."

Prejecta lay under the single palm tree and let Artobanus unstrap her sandals.

"I shall be grateful of a respite," she said and tried to smile at him. Her tunic was torn, her dark hair had fallen onto her shoulders. Blue-shadowed, her eyes looked at him almost tenderly, and he thought how much lovelier she was, even with her pale cheeks mud-streaked and her mouth drawn with fatigue, than when she had ridden so gayly and carelessly beside her husband —the young wife of the General out on a joyous adventure, gently tended and shielded from all possible hardships.

After the noon rest they set out again. Four leagues, five leagues, six leagues and finally Prejecta stopped in the desert.

"I can go no farther now," she faltered. "I must rest again."

"Another league," urged Artobanus, "and then I know where we can get a mount from a friendly Moorish village which I passed through when I was here last."

He took her hand and braced her as she tottered forward. Stopping, gasping, with her white teeth set in her underlip, she staggered beside him. At last they reached the village. She felt herself lifted up and in her semi-consciousness knew that Artobanus was holding her in front of him on horseback. The warmth of his body comforted her, the strength of his arm about her helped her to relax. Her last thought as she drifted into a sleep of utter exhaustion was that never had she known such peace.

When she awoke, she found herself in another tent, a Moorish slave girl beside her. As she stirred, a figure rose in the doorway and Artobanus came to her.

"You are safe, my lady," he said. "We met the Byzantines before the city, and by the orders of Belisarius himself, you are being cared for, and attended. I waited here beside you to tell you that you are in good hands, and all is well."

Prejecta found her voice.

"Tired as you were, you waited to reassure me?" she asked. "After you had saved my life?

Then I owe you a double debt which I can never properly repay. I can only promise to speak to the Emperor on your behalf when I reach Constantinople."

"Ah, then you go back at once?" asked Artobanus.

"I am but barely wakened," she murmured, "and I hardly know what I shall do. But why should I stay on in Africa? When I have seen if I can lay the body of my husband under a Christian tomb, there will be nothing and no one to keep me."

There was a pause.

"You are right, my lady," said Artobanus finally. "When you are rested and refreshed, I shall ask permission to come to you once more." And, stooping to kiss the coverlet, he left her.

Belisarius, the great general, listened to his Emperor's niece respectfully next day when Prejecta, still pale, still heavy-eyed, sought an audience.

"My heart is laden with grief for you," he said, "and I shall do what I can to recover your husband's body, although I do not doubt that the Moors have carried it off. And as for you yourself, Lady, I can only advise you to leave by the first boat for Sicily, on your way to Byzantium.

This is no place for an unprotected woman, and I even think it wise to send an officer to escort you safely to the Sacred Palace." He stopped to ponder. "Whom can I spare, now—what soldier can I detail to safeguard you?"

Prejecta colored. "I know of one," she said. "The young officer who saved my life is now without a command, and also has earned the Emperor's gratitude for his chivalry to me. If he were to appear before the Basileus in person, he could be more fittingly rewarded than if he lingered on in Africa and his bravery were allowed to be forgotten."

Belisarius permitted himself to smile.

"The young man does deserve a reward," he answered gravely, "but I suspect that perhaps a sea voyage in the company of the Lady Prejecta will recompense him for his valor more fully than any decoration the Emperor can bestow. I shall make arrangements for your departure at once."

Bewildered, she returned to her quarters, her mind a confusion. So much had happened in the last few days, so many thoughts and emotions had beset her. With her husband scarcely cold in death, she had allowed herself to infer that another man's company might be pleasing to her.

It seemed difficult now to think of herself as ever having had a husband. Catullus had been good, he had been kind, he had appreciated her beauty, but she had married him not of her own free will—rather at the suggestion of her aunt, the Empress Theodora. She had never longed to see him, as at this moment she confessed to herself she longed to see Artobanus.

The hours dragged on. Her little slave girl was busy assembling what she could gather in the way of a wardrobe for the Emperor's niece who had only the torn tunic and tattered sandals in which she had fled through the desert. Prejecta sat in the doorway of her tent waiting. The noonday heat fell upon the encampment, and soldiers drowsed on guard. Late afternoon came, and still Artobanus had not appeared. The sun began to set and with the cool of the evening a renewed activity began, as the little army grouped itself around the camp fires to consume what the day's foraging had produced in the way of dinner. A man came suddenly running toward Prejecta's tent. Her heart pounded. No, no, it was not he. It was an aide from Belisarius' staff who came to tell her that she was to board a ship that very night and under cover of the darkness set sail toward friendly Sicily.

The little maid jumped up and down with glee.

"I can go, too!" she laughed. "I have so long wanted to see your wonderful city, Lady, and now Allah is granting me my wish! Come, let us hurry. Quickly, my lady, we have no time to lose."

Prejecta moved heavily. She dawdled in the tent and finally, when there was no excuse for waiting longer, allowed herself to be led to the beach, her feet dragging, her eyes searching through the darkness. It was no use. He had not remembered his promise to come to her and Belisarius, too busy to take heed of a woman's whim in the press of preparing for battle, had doubtless forgotten the escort he had promised her, and would send her to her uncle under the protection of the captain of the ship. She would have to leave Africa without seeing her rescuer—she would have to go through life without ever meeting him again.

"Here," said a rough voice, "this way. Into the boat, my lady. We must row quickly. The captain wishes us to come on board at once."

She was hoisted into the little boat that lay drawn up at the water's edge and swiftly, quietly, with muffled oars, was rowed out to the waiting galley, the little Moor beside her quivering with

an excitement that Prejecta could not feel. Before she knew it, she found herself on deck, replying to the captain's greetings.

"We sail as soon as it is light enough to see," said he, "before the Vandals can head us off. No one else comes on board to-night. You will be comfortable aft, I think, and I should advise you to keep to your cabin until we have stood out to sea."

Prejecta lay for a long time in the stuffy little cubby hole allotted to her, still listening for footsteps, still straining her ears for a certain voice, although she knew that it was futile. In another few hours the sea would stretch between them—between her and the only person who could soothe this strange inquietude which filled her. At last she said to the little girl:

"I can bear this foul air not a moment longer. Bring me a rug on deck. I shall lie on the poop awhile and watch the stars."

The sky stretched over her more gorgeous than an Emperor's robe, the bright constellations reflected in the pitch-black waters. The galley rose and fell with the long roll of the tide and the muffled commotion from the shore died down. Prejecta abandoned herself to the quiet of the lovely night and thought, "This is a fitting fare-

well to Carthage, and the little feeble hope I had. It is well that I am going."

"Did you think I had forgotten you?" said Artobanus, beside her.

The stars seemed to rush together in a blazing pattern, the night suddenly grew brilliant.

"No," said Prejecta, hardly recognizing her own voice.

"I went to your tent to look for you as soon as the General's order was brought to me," he went on, "but you had gone. I ran to the beach and the little boat was just reaching the ship's side."

"How did you get here, then?" she asked in astonishment.

"I played Leander," he confessed with a little laugh, "and swam the Hellespont. If I had had to stand and watch this vessel sail without me—" The Armenian broke off in confusion.

"Would that have been so dreadful?" queried Prejecta.

"It would have been the end of life for me," said Artobanus, sinking to his knees beside her. "You embolden me to tell you I only began to live the first day I saw you in Egypt, so little and so dainty, laughing as you were lifted on camel back and declaring that you would tame the beast with kindness."

They both sat silent for a moment.

At last Prejecta said, smoothing her rug with her fingers and trying to throw a note of casual unconcern into her trembling voice:

"How long before we reach Constantinople?"

"With fair winds, at least eighty days," answered Artobanus.

Suddenly his soldierly bearing, his deferential solicitude, the respectful courtesy with which he had always treated the wife of his late commander broke down before a great and overwhelming gush of emotion, and grasping her hand, he whispered fervently:

"Oh, Prejecta—eighty days—eighty days of happiness."

The winds were fair and the galley slaves, resting on their oars, watched the blue waters scud past. Sicily! Metone, Sigeum, Heraclea, Syracuse—to Prejecta and Artobanus, the ports seemed to fly by. Now they were skirting Asia Minor, swiftly they were nearing the long strait to-day called the Dardanelles. The captain sending his carrier pigeons out to ascertain the ship's course and whereabouts, watched the two on the poop deck and smiled.

"I'll wager my pay for the next voyage," he

said to his mate, "that our fair passenger will not be a widow long."

Artobanus had, in truth, pressed his suit so diligently that Prejecta, answering the promptings of her heart, had capitulated before the adoration burning in his dark eyes.

"But," she demurred, "what will my uncle say? And still more to the point, how will Theodora receive us, if we arrive betrothed?"

"My love, desire of my life," said Artobanus, kissing her ten rosy finger tips, "if you feel half as strongly buoyed up by the affection you have avowed for me, as I do by the great love which surges in my breast for you, kings, empresses, empires—the whole array of majesty will not come between us."

Prejecta looked out to sea, and sighed.

"Yes, but," she answered, "you do not know the Empress, my aunt. It was she who married me to Catullus"—she could speak the name now, without a pang—"and I know that since I am the Emperor's ward she will find a way to use me for the furtherance of her own desires. Nothing—nobody—no love, no hate, no family ties nor bonds of friendship can stand between her and her ambitions."

Artobanus stroked her hair.

"You feel too much alarm," he comforted. "You have already been sacrificed to statecraft once. Now, surely, she will let you follow the dictates of your own heart?"

She shuddered ever so slightly. "I cannot tell," she confessed. "I have forebodings. But we will see my uncle first, and when he hears of your bravery and courage he may very well grant you your dearest wish—that is"—she grew a little shy—"that is, if it in any way concerns his niece?"

Under the awning on the after deck, in the bright sunlight, Artobanus took her in his arms.

"My dearest wish?" he whispered with his lips against her cheek. "You know all the wishes of my life have been fused into one, a wish so strong that were it granted, there would be nothing under the heavens left to ask for, and if it were refused, there would be nothing above the earth worth having."

Into the Sea of Marmora they sailed, and now there were familiar landmarks. Closer and closer they drew, until they could see the dim coast of the province of Brusa on one side and Byzantium on the other. At last the marble towers of Constantinople swam in a nebulous sunny fog before

their eyes. The two lovers stood by the captain and sighed.

"Thanks be to the Mother of God," said that sturdy individual, "I am glad this trip is over. It has been too long since I last saw the Hippodrome and St. Sophia."

Artobanus and Prejecta smiled forlornly.

"It has not seemed long to me," said the Armenian emphatically.

"No," answered the captain, "I can believe that. When next I see Belisarius, I can tell him that no lady ever had a kinder escort—or a more attentive one. I plan to sail straight into the wharf under Hormisdas, so that his Majesty will not have long to wait to greet his kinswoman."

"I tremble," said Prejecta under her breath. "I tremble, Artobanus. Would it be better for me to go at once to Justinian and plead your cause alone, or shall you come with me?"

Artobanus squared his shoulders.

"Belisarius gave you into my charge," he retorted stoutly, "and I must myself turn over the person of the Lady Prejecta to the Emperor. Let us go together."

Justinian looked up in surprise as word was brought to him that his niece sought audience.

"Prejecta? But she went off to Africa with Catullus many months ago. Is he with her?"

"No, Majesty," said the slave. "Another soldier."

"So?" The Emperor turned this over in his mind. "Then bring them both in to me at once."

Hand in hand they entered and stood before the Basileus in his private writing room. Prejecta's color came and went, as she introduced Artobanus to her uncle and explained why she had returned with him. Justinian listened to the story intently and drummed with his fingers on the table. He seemed lost in thought.

"And so," Prejecta finished, gasping a little at her own temerity, "since my period of mourning will be ended in another two months, I ask your permission to betroth myself to Artobanus of Armenia."

"And I, Majesty," said Artobanus, stepping forward and kneeling at the Emperor's feet, "ask your permission to marry your niece Prejecta, widow of Catullus. My family is of ancient lineage, my occupation is the honorable one of soldier. I promise by the holy Choir of Saints in Heaven to love her faithfully and to serve you well."

"Yes, yes," said Justinian a little testily. "I see you want to marry the girl and she wants to marry you. But it cannot be done so quickly as all that. There are other matters to be considered, although I do not say that they need interfere with your happiness. In any case we are grateful for your conduct toward my niece, and we shall order two centenaries from the Royal Treasury to be paid to you. Further we give you this ring of sapphires and pearls as token of our esteem, and raise your rank to that of General in the Army of the Eastern Empire. At the next audience, you shall receive the title of Count. Now you may go. Her Majesty the Empress will doubtless wish to see you at once," he called to Prejecta as she moved to the door.

"Shall you see her to-day?" asked Artobanus when they were in the corridor. "I hate so to part from you. When I see the *Gynæceum* swallow you, I shall not know how soon we can meet again, and you know, my beloved, that every hour I am away from you is an endless expanse of time. Wait until to-morrow. Stay with me to-day and we can spend our last carefree hours like simple country folk climbing the hillsides and wandering under the sky, happy to be to-

gether. Then you can go to the convent where you spent your schooldays and to-morrow wait upon the Empress."

"No—no—you must not urge me," said Prejecta. "Putting off seeing her will only make it worse. I shall visit her now—at once, and perhaps if she is in a gentle mood—although I have hardly ever seen her so!—we can be together to-morrow and from then on, forever. I know my uncle. He will bless our marriage, even though he did not embrace you as his nephew instantly. But Theodora—we must move carefully, and I dare not anger her by delay."

"You are right." Artobanus spoke sorrowfully. "Go to her, then, and return to me soon —the hours of waiting will be so long! I shall stay within the Sacred Palace and each evening when the sun goes down, I shall wait for you in the Persian grotto. Prejecta, my bride, do not disappoint me!"

He drew her to him and laid his cheek against her silky hair.

"I must go, I must go," she whispered, and with one swift embrace fled through the gardens to the Pavilion of Harmony.

She found the Empress reclining on the terrace, listening to Megas, the court poet, chanting

the verses he had just composed to celebrate the battles of the brave Belisarius in Africa.

"The two black vultures on the crest of Gelimer,
The skins of leopards and the red flamingoes' plumes,
All, all will tumble in the dust,
When Carthage bows to Roman rule,
And Belisarius, Byzantium's brightest star
Blazes on Africa, and burns to ashes
Vainglorious Arians and defamers
Of Christus' name and the Basileus'
Eternal might."

"Very good, very good," said Theodora, "but hardly accurate. However, it sounds well, and you have shown some skill in stringing words together. More one cannot expect from a poet. Narses, give the good Megas a glass of wine and let him go back for further inspiration."

She rose from her couch, and, turning, saw Prejecta standing before her.

"By the holy St. John!" said the Empress in astonishment. "Here is my niece who left for Africa. What brings you back so soon?"

Frowns of displeasure marred her smooth white brow as Prejecta told her of Catullus' death and of the part Artobanus had played in the rescue from the Moors. She waved a regal hand and stopped the girl halfway through her story.

"You need not go on," she said. "I know the rest. This handsome Armenian has persuaded himself that you are the one woman in the world for him, and you have both asked the Emperor for permission to marry when your period of mourning is done. Am I right?"

"Yes, Highness," admitted Prejecta. Kneeling at the Empress' feet, she kissed the hem of her tunic. "We both beg for your indulgence, and throwing myself on your mercy, I plead to be allowed to make this, my second marriage, a union of love."

"We shall see about it," answered Theodora coldly. "I had other plans for you, and while Catullus' untimely death has altered matters, you still are ward of the Emperor, and as such must await his pleasure. This is too important to be decided lightly. I shall speak to your uncle, and in the meantime, suggest that you stay within the confines of the *Gynæceum,* to see if absence will not cool your ardor for this doughty soldier, and bring you to your senses."

For a whole week, Artobanus waited in the Persian grotto when the sun went down. The water cascaded down the balustrades, a cool wind rustled the leaves of the orange trees. At every noise he started, at every rustle he peered

along the paths in vain. Prejecta dared not brook her aunt's displeasure.

On the seventh day, their Majesties, the God-crowned rulers of the Eastern Empire sat in council. The founding of three new hospitals was decided upon, and the erection of several statues to themselves. A note was dispatched to Persia, an invitation to Arethas, Chief of the Ghassanides, to visit Constantinople. A long document was dictated with instructions for Belisarius, and the African situation was discussed from every angle.

Suddenly the Emperor said:

"What about this niece of mine, Prejecta? I have seen that young bridegroom of hers brooding about for the last week. Did you tell her she could marry him?"

Theodora looked up, annoyed.

"I sometimes think, my love," she said, "that you are more impulsive than is good for us. What do you know of this Artobanus? Who is he? What does he want with the girl? Before I should give my consent to any marriage between your blood and a rank outsider, I should have to ask myself those questions."

Justinian moved a little pettishly in his ivory chair.

"Now," Theodora continued, "with these things in mind, I saw to it that several pairs of eyes watched this Armenian as he brooded. What does he do? Clinks the gold together that you have given him. Boasts that with it he can set up such an establishment as befits his rank. What is his rank? He tells all who will listen that you have promised to make him Count, and lest they doubt his word, shows them a ring you gave him. Does that look as if he were interested in Prejecta alone? Does it not seem to you that he thinks more of winning your favor than a bride? I must confess, although I have never seen this paragon, that I should prefer not to have him connected with the Sacred Palace by marriage. It would be far wiser, in my opinion, to marry this blooming young widow, who after all, is a person of some importance to the Empire, where it will help, not harm us. There are enough glances cast upon the Throne, as it is."

"Well," said Justinian, swayed by the logic of her reasoning, and by the magic of her very presence always worked on him, "you may be right. I have no talents for match-making, and I leave it to your judgment."

Back in her pavilions, the Empress commanded the Lady Prejecta to be summoned. The miser-

able girl, knowing that she would hear the outcome of the conference between the rulers, stood before the Queen, with a great lump in her throat, and eyes that, in spite of her best efforts at self-control, would fill with tears.

"Sit down, my child," said Theodora, assuming an air of maternal dignity, which was not hampered by the fact that she and her niece were nearly of an age. The two women sat looking at each other—Theodora, dark and queenly, calm and implacable, in her purple silk mantle with the great phoenix birds worked in gold, winking their jeweled eyes upon her breast; Prejecta, trembling, her face tear-stained, her apricot-yellow tunic clutched about her nervously.

"I have been speaking with the Basileus," began the Basilissa, looking slyly at her niece to see what effect her words would take, "and we have decided, he and I, that it would be better for you if you were to give up all thoughts of this Armenian who comes from God knows where, and were to enter my service as maid of honor, until such time as we can find a husband fitting for a person of your accomplishments and rank. You are too young, too lovely, to be thrown away upon the first handsome officer who saves you in the desert. Remember that Justinian's blood

flows in your veins, and that that raises you above the level of any pretty widow looking for a mate."

Prejecta listened silently. At last she said in a choking voice,

"Majesty, you do not understand. Rank and thrones—these things have nothing to do with Artobanus and me. We love each other, and wish to end our days together. I should not trouble you—I should never come near the court, and neither would he, if it were your pleasure to be rid of us."

"Do not be too sure," Theodora retorted. "In the first flush of this great love you speak of, you both may think that nothing else matters. I know better. Artobanus sounds like an ambitious young man, and I tell you frankly, I want no ambitious young men interfering with my plans. Put this fellow from your mind, and have no more to do with him. Those are my final words. I shall shortly induct my maids in waiting, and I command you to be among those whom I shall honor with an appointment to attend me. You may leave me now."

There was but one thought in Prejecta's mind —to reach Artobanus, to seek the comfort of his arms, to tell him of the dreadful words she had

just listened to, to plan with him how they could outwit the unswerving purpose of this Empress to whom love was only an empty word. Following the eunuch who had been ordered to conduct her to the pavilion of the maids of honor, she suddenly darted down a passageway, turned a corner, turned another corner and found herself under a portico leading to the gardens. Without looking behind her, she ran swiftly along the covered way, her sandaled feet flying silently, her heart pounding. Past the stiff Roman hedges she flew, over the graveled paths, until she heard the sound of running water. There at the balustrade was Artobanus, waiting as he had waited for seven weary nights. He came toward her in one joyful stride.

"My life!" he said, and held her tightly to his heart.

Sobbing, panting, Prejecta poured out the mournful story on his shoulder.

"But, sweet," he said dismayed, "I had no thought of claiming kinship or giving anyone to understand that I had designs upon the Throne."

"I know, I know," Prejecta answered him, "but that is the meaning that Theodora has chosen to put upon your innocent speech and until she can be made to see that it is only each other we

desire, and not rank or power—there can be no hope of marriage," and she dropped her head upon her hands and wept bitterly.

"Prejecta, Prejecta!" he gently pulled her hands from her face, and covered her tear-wet lips with kisses. "We must not let them part us. I cannot live without you—I cannot face the future alone. What shall we do? Can we not escape from Constantinople and go to Armenia?"

"No, oh, no!" cried Prejecta, shrinking at the very thought. "She has spies everywhere. We cannot marry without her consent—that is plain to me."

"Then," Artobanus spoke resolutely, "we must get her consent, if it takes years. How shall we go about it?"

"There is one way, and only one. We must work gradually, very gradually upon her sympathies and see if by constant faithfulness to her, and honest servitude on my part, I cannot make her reward me by allowing me to marry the man I love." The girl's voice had a defiant ring.

"And I—what part do I play in this drama of watching and waiting?" asked her lover.

"You must go away, but not too far, and must act as though you had in truth given up all thought of me——"

"That will be hard," he groaned.

"We may be able to steal a meeting at long intervals, but I need not urge you to be careful."

Artobanus thought for a moment. "I have a solution," he said. "I can attach myself to the garrison in Scutari, and I shall take old Keos, my servant, who has been with me from childhood. He can speak all the tongues of the world, and can disguise himself in a dozen different ways. I can send him to you with messages, and you can trust him with words for me"—he broke off —"with words of love, my Prejecta, for unless I have assurance that your heart still beats for me while we must be apart, I shall not live."

They clung to each other in the darkness. Shadowless, for the moon was not yet high, soundless, but for the purling of the water and the soft *ssh-ssh* of the leaves, the grotto seemed to close in on the two unhappy lovers and protect them with its obscurity, to comfort them with the sweet scent of its blossoms, and to brush a benediction over their young heads.

Prejecta tore herself from Artobanus' arms.

"I am going," she said faintly, "but I leave you in faith. Nothing can part us if we love each other—not even the ambition of a Queen! Farewell!"

Artobanus stretched his hands out after her, as she slipped from him through the night. She was gone. He stood a moment, listening to the water coursing down the balustrade. Then he flung his head back and repeated defiantly, "Not even the ambition of a Queen."

CHAPTER VIII

THE EARTHLY DWELLING PLACE OF THE ELECT OF GOD

SOUNDS of the Basilissa's rage swept gustily out of the Pavilion of Harmony and down the marble corridors. A group of eunuchs carrying scrolls and writing implements flattened themselves against the walls, and jerked their heads in the direction of the tempest with rolling eyes. Two little Circassian slaves, trotting toward the Royal Bedchamber with a silver ewer of hot, musk-scented water, stopped short, looked at each other and, without a word, laid the pitcher silently before the curtains at the door and fled.

"Amantius!" came from the Empress' room. "Bring me Amantius. Why do you stand there and stare at me, you lily-livered goose? Who is it that gives orders here? Am I the Augusta, or am I not?"

A eunuch in the corridor spoke with trembling lips.

"Why does she want Amantius?" he whispered.

"Sssh!" hissed the man next to him. "She's got wind of what Amantius said about the Patriarch."

"What did he say, then?" His neighbor could not restrain his curiosity.

The Empress' voice rang out again.

"If you do not produce Amantius here before the sun leaves this spot on the floor, I will bind a thong of leather so tight about your head that your eyes will leave their sockets. It is time you learned that my commands are to be obeyed, *implicitly.*"

Sergius, captain of the Empress's bodyguard, rushed past, his scarlet plume floating wildly, his sword held clanking against his shield with one hand, while he wiped his brow with the other.

"Ah!" The group of eunuchs shuddered as he swept by. As one man they turned and crept quietly away. This was no time for a eunuch to present himself before the Augusta, for if she had lashed herself into such an erupting rage over Amantius, the chief eunuch of the Palace, others of his kind might fare even more badly than he.

That whole day no one who was not expressly

sent for ventured within a courtyard of the Empress' apartment. The entire corps of slaves and eunuchs stayed in the servants' quarters, gossiping, speculating and eagerly pouncing upon such tidbits of information as came drifting their way from the Pavilion of Harmony.

Late in the afternoon a little chocolate-colored page boy crept to the eunuchs' dining hall, and, with his teeth chattering, told how he had been ordered to carry a message from the Basilissa to the Basileus, and how, when he entered her room he saw the unlucky Amantius lashed to a marble column between the windows.

"She was pacing back and forth in front of him," he recounted as his knees shook, "and every time she passed him she struck him with a little golden whip, and commanded him to tell her what he had said. And while I waited for the message, she cut him straight across the mouth so that the blood spurted out, and then he said that he had told Narses in jest that the Patriarch must have a supple conscience to have been able to perform a certain marriage ceremony with such ease and grace. The Augusta stood quite still while he spoke, and then she bade me tell the Emperor that with his permission she would like to deal with Amantius herself."

"Go on, go on," said the eunuchs in a chorus.

"Blessed Mother of God," gasped the little page, "is that not enough? When I got back to her with the Basileus' message that she could consult her own wishes as to Amantius, he was still lashed to the pillar and the Augusta was calling for Sergius again. That is all I saw with my own eyes. But I heard her women whispering that she intended to have his tongue torn out by the roots."

"Yes, yes," said the eunuchs, "one must step softly now. This Basilissa is not an easy mistress."

That she was not, even in an era when the lives of slaves were of no more account than those of the goldfish flickering back and forth in the garden pools, and when the power of an Empress was without question absolute in the management of her personal retinue.

Like the Emperor, she had under her command an entire corps of officials, headed by the *Præpositus* or Lord Chamberlain, who was in supreme command of all the multitude of referendaries, ushers, silentaries, and the halbardiers of her bodyguard. At the head of her women was the astute and elderly lady whom custom had endowed with the resounding title of Grand Mis-

tress of the Palace and Patrician of the Girdle and who, with the *Protovestarius,* managed the innumerable throngs of maids of honor, ladies of the bedchamber, and ladies in waiting. The Emperor, in the week before the coronation, had invested the Grand Mistress with the insignia of her office. Less ascetic rulers than Justinian had been known to indulge in a gala celebration as newly appointed and pulchritudinous maids of honor paid him homage after their appointment to the Basilissa's staff, but that preoccupied Prince had merely remarked to his spouse that she might have anyone she pleased.

"Then I may choose my own women?" asked Theodora.

"You may, my idol," answered her husband. "I have had enough dealings with ladies who fancied their own beauty in the days of the *Gynæceum* at Hormisdas. It would be quite to my liking if I never saw another maid of honor."

Accordingly the Basilissa held a special investiture for those who were to have the honor of obeying her commands. It was a comparatively simple and private ceremony held in her own apartments, but each black-eyed maid in golden tunic and white mantle, with the tall *proploma,* white-veiled, tied over her dark hair, was made

to feel by the quiet intensity with which the Empress listened to her oath of faithfulness that this was a most solemn moment. Tribonian, the *Præpositus,* stood beside the Empress' chair and scanned the round young faces intently.

"Do you swear to fear God, and be sincerely faithful to the God-chosen Augusta?" he asked each one.

"Yes, my Lord."

"Do you swear to be wholly devoted to her to the exclusion of all other fealties?"

"Yes, my Lord."

"Then you may advance and kiss the feet of the Augusta."

As the maids bent down before her, Theodora leaned over, and raising them to their feet, pinned upon them the brilliant "T" of diamonds which bound them to serve her and none other on this occasion.

Last in the line of white-and-gold clad girls knelt Prejecta, wan and slender. The Empress looked at her curiously. She was taking it hard, this separation from her lover, and an all too apparent misery dimmed the black eyes and drew down the corners of the pretty mouth. Theodora said to her softly, as she fastened the brooch upon her breast:

"Are you not glad that you have been chosen to serve your Queen?"

"Yes, Majesty," answered Prejecta, "but"—and she raised her eyes—"though I shall serve you faithfully, you and none other, as I have just vowed, I cannot still my heart."

Theodora laughed a little.

"That will come with time," she said. "Go, join the maids and forget what you consider sorrow. See, they are waiting for you to take you to their feast. I am well pleased."

These women, she knew, would keep their vows and guard her interests before their own. It had been the eunuchs who had made trouble for her. Cruelly mutilated as they were, by a single knife stroke which completely removed the genitals, the ensuing change in character made them especially difficult to deal with. There was no eunuch who was not avaricious and who did not have some secret hoard into which he smuggled all the wealth that he could quietly lay his hands on. Without exception they were very susceptible to suggestion and unbelievably superstitious, and worse, Theodora knew that gossip was the bone from which they drew their vital nourishment. Some few, with more than average intelligence, were to be trusted, but the rest of the tall,

delicately featured men who, according to Imperial convention, swarmed about the Basilissa's palace, aroused her distrust and a prickling sense of aversion.

It was common knowledge in the Sacred Palace that the new Augusta intended to treat them with a strong hand. Indeed, the veteran who kept the Imperial dungeons could have told, if he had not fortunately been a deaf mute, that the new prisoners committed to his care by a zealous Empress were predominantly beardless. One by one they were thrust into the damp black holes under the eastern end of the palace, and chained to the walls. Amantius was there, silent perforce; and a slim boy who had taken a fancy to one of the Empress' emerald rings; a gaunt old man crouched at the foot of a stone pillar, one ear and his right hand gone, for having listened behind a tapestry and written to an interested friend living in Gaza what he heard fall from Theodora's lips on the subject of customs duties. Another eunuch, a Nubian whose black face melted into the darkness, lay upon his back on the wet floor, with a large round weight on his stomach, day and night. His was the tongue which had erroneously spread the gossip that a lady in waiting was pregnant by the Emperor.

Still another wretch either stood, or lay upon his face, for he had insinuated the word "pederasty" into his conversation once too often, and as a result of the punishment he was condemned to endure, would in all likelihood never sit again.

In the midst of these miserable offenders there lay a man who once had been handsome, but whose skin was now stretched so tightly over his bones that he was nothing but a very feebly animated skeleton. He had been Tatian, Chief Taster at the Empress' table, until the day when he had listened unwisely to one of the jealous ladies who had been moved out of Justinian's bachelor palace under Theodora's watchful eye. What was demanded of him was very simple, and the sum of money offered as a reward was so very large that it would have made him a rich man on the spot.

With a little vial of colorless, slightly oily liquid concealed in his wide sleeve, he had poured the Augusta's wine into the dainty silver and blue enameled goblet which she used daily, and then allowed the little bottle to come uncorked so that a few drops trickled down his wrist into the purple of the wine. It was all very artfully done, except that the Basilissa's slender fingers

grasped the goblet by the base instead of by the stem.

"Holy St. George!" she swore. "What is this that wets my fingers, you clumsy oaf? Can you never learn to pour wine without spilling it?"

Taking her napkin, she wiped her fingers with it, and then stared at Tatian, wordless. The stain on the napkin was not purple, but very slightly yellow.

She drew a deep breath, and then spoke clearly and quietly.

"It would be the usual thing to do, I suppose, for me to make you drink from this goblet, now, before my eyes. But that would, after all, be a quick and perhaps a merciful death. I think we shall arrange things differently."

To the guards she said,

"Take this man to the dungeons and see that he is given a cup of wine daily, and nothing else, for as long as he can manage to hang on to life. I shall come to visit him in three weeks and see how his appetite progresses."

It was not an age of nicety or of concern for human life, and there was but one way to deal with those who threatened the life of the Basilissa or her Imperial husband, or who attempted to poke about too zealously in the business of the

Empire. It was evident to Theodora that if she were to maintain the heights up which she had toiled, there could be no halfway measures, no sentimental quivers, no hesitating, no clemency and no quarter for her enemies. Her spies, mingling with the crowds outside the Palace, slinking carelessly by open doorways, kept her forewarned.

Indeed, as Prejecta had prophesied, it was not long before they had even ferreted out Artobanus' retreat in Scutari, and were bringing the Empress reports of his behavior. Only the old man Keos, he of the dozen disguises and the many tongues, was able to slip past the cordon set about the Armenian and to warn the lovers that on no account must they try to meet. Faint with longing the two went sadly about the business of their separate lives. Artobanus, restricted in the garrison, grew surly with anxiety and waiting. Prejecta, no whit comforted by the "T" of diamonds, walked with the Queen, attended her, fulfilled the many duties of a maid of honor and grew paler day by day.

She realized the danger of trying to catch even a glimpse of the man she loved. She saw how many a citizen with rebellious ideas in his head learned, to his bitter surprise, that the faint-

est whispers reached the Basilissa's ears, and the object of the most furtive glances was known to her. Had Theodora been less cautious upon any one of a hundred occasions within the first year of her reign, the funeral candles in the Triclinium might have been lighted for her. Had she been less wary, so dull and clumsy a lout as Vitalian might even have harmed the Empire.

This Vitalian, ostensibly an emissary from the Queen who since the death of her father Theodoric ruled the Goths in Rome, had been received at the Byzantine court with the usual ceremonies and loaded with the usual gifts. Justinian and he, in the interests of diplomacy and that Christianity which was so vital, and at the same time so useful, had partaken of communion together under the great dome of St. Sophia. But no sooner had Vitalian swallowed the Blood of the Lord, and nibbled at the sacred bread of His Body, than Theodora began reading with more than ordinary attention the dispatches from the outposts of the Byzantine army on the frontier nearest Italy.

A short time after the touching and brotherly ritual in the church, Vitalian and his followers were invited to a banquet in the Sacred Palace—a farewell courtesy from the Basileus and the

smooth-spoken Basilissa. The Goths filed into the rose-scented hall, boisterous in their profession of gratitude for favors received at the hands of the Emperor. They reclined upon the couches with the air of men who can say "We have done our work well." They drank the bubbling wine provided by a lavish host, and wiped their beards on their sleeves like honest toilers. They told jokes and roared in appreciation of one another's bawdy humor. It was all very pleasant and friendly and to anyone looking in at the scene—the Emperor and Empress seated at their circular table, smiling blandly upon the guests—the huge blond Goths clustered about Vitalian, full to bursting with the choicest fare and leaning back in attitudes of ease and repletion—it would have seemed the very acme of joyous hospitality.

The same observer might have witnessed the identical scene the next day—guests leaning back, sated with good food, gorgeous purple draping the tables, in every man's fist a cup of gold shining coldly in the morning light. Only two details were not as they had been the night before. The Imperial table was empty, and under each man's couch a little pool of blood was drying slowly on the marble floor.

"The gods guard me," said Queen Amasalon-

tha in Rome, "but that Sacred Palace is unholy ground!"

"Mother of Christ watch over us," said those in the Palace who kept their eyes open, "but things go on here. . . ."

The people in the streets speculated eagerly as to the doings within the walls.

"Have you heard?" they asked each other. "The new Basilissa is said to keep thirty men of science brewing up new poisons for her. They say, too, she will not touch anything not made of gold. Theodora has learned fast!"

They stood in the spacious Augusteon, watching Royalty's visitors come and go. They stared at the foreigners who streamed through the outer courts, and commented upon their outlandish costumes. They bowed low before the palace dignitaries, and kept respectful silence before the prattling eunuchs. But most of all, they waited for the artists and artisans from the Imperial factories to keep appointments with the Emperor, for then they caught glimpses of the most marvelous beauty, and saw for themselves that the Elect of God dwelt in a splendor beyond belief.

Hustling through the Augusteon, each with a mysterious air of special business about him, came dyers with purple fingers; tailors, stooped

from hunching over Imperial seams; hard-muscled goldbeaters; hard-bitten buyers, charged with important missions, and pale-faced weavers—cogs in the vast wheel of industry which was kept turning solely that the Basileus might have the rarest and most costly silks, dyed to a color that no one else should wear, the most delicate jewel mountings, the most beautiful mosaics.

What significance had a gift from the Emperor, if one could find its twin in the Houses of Light (the shops along the Mese brilliantly illuminated after sundown to attract leisurely strollers); what awe and admiration could be roused by Imperial vestments if every bandy-legged bungler with a needle in his hand could fashion something like them? The *textores* or weavers engaged in the manufacture of silks for the Palace and in the making of costumes for Imperial receptions and official fêtes, the artists who designed the bands of gold which adorned the hems of all Imperial mantles, plied their art for the Palace, alone, and were strictly prohibited from engaging in other business.

It was an unalterable law. Imperial colors were not for other men to delight in, Imperial silks were not for the stroking fingers of every

sensualist, Imperial jewels could not delight the eye of every greedy window shopper in Byzantium.

Such things were reserved for Royalty alone and an army of skilled artisans toiled under royal scrutiny that the Sacred Palace might dazzle dumfounded Avars and Iberians, and tales of the great city-within-a-city arouse the wonder of a marveling world. So essential were the Emperor's gifts in the scheme of Byzantine diplomacy, and so dependent was the Byzantine prestige on the grandeur to be seen within the Sacred Palace, that Peter Barsyames, the *comes largitionum* in charge of the Imperial monopolies, was seen hustling through the Augusteon once every week, to report on the work in progress, and bring for the approval of the monarchs such masterpieces as had been completed.

Guarded by a dozen halbardiers in white tunics edged with brown, their rolled gold collars tight about their throats, followed by a company of porters bearing chests and boxes, he swept grandly into the august presence, a short stout man, swelling like a pouter pigeon with the importance of his position.

Justinian, determined to be magnificent, but callous to the beauties of delicate workmanship,

looked upon this audience as an Imperial duty rather than a rare pleasure, but Theodora watched the portly Peter superintend the unwrapping of his precious exhibits with shivers of delight.

First he displayed box after box of silken garments, intended for those long-limbed barbarians who must be placated to keep the Empire safe. Tunics there were, appliqued in gold with strips of embroidery running from knee to shoulder; mantles, to be worn over the tunics, closing on the right shoulder with a gemmed buckle, and heavy with gold. Every color in the rainbow flashed from Peter Barsyames' chests—apricot, scarlet, rose and citron, pale apple-green and rich lead-blue, but not purple. These were the gifts for vassal kings.

Theodora sat looking at this lustrous splendor.

"Where does all this silk come from?" she asked.

"From China, Majesty, by way of Persia," answered Peter. "Every thread of it. If we only knew how to make it here—but they are clever, those people in the East. They will not let their secret slip out. Now here I have a piece that will take your Highness' fancy—" And he unrolled a bolt of tawny brocade upon the floor so that it

swept in great waves and billows about the Empress' feet. Nude dancers tripped across its colored surface, their breasts tipped with scarlet, on their upturned palms huge clusters of apples and of grapes.

Theodora gasped at the beauty of the fabric, but Justinian squirmed in his chair.

"Yes, yes," he said summarily, "that is well woven, too. What of the chairs and tables I commanded to be installed in the pavilions for King Coutsima when he comes from Numidia?"

"I have them, I have them, O God-chosen," answered Peter, leaping with surprising agility over the gorgeous sheen of the silks upon the floor.

Two porters brought them forward—delicate pieces, the ivory legs carved into lions' claws. Two great dragons sprawled across the table top, outlined in mother-of-pearl and malachite, their plumy tails dark with the red of sardonyx, each eye an emerald, and the fire from their nostrils, gold. It was workmanship of a fantastic loveliness, created by the most skillful masters, and its like could have been bought no place within the Empire.

"Very good," said Justinian. "Did you bring the jewels?"

"Certainly, Majesty, oh, certainly."

Theodora wrenched her eyes from the glowing harmony of the patterned dragons to the casket Peter held out for Justinian to see. In it was a linked girdle of rich gold coins, bearing the head of the Emperor, and as large as small saucers. She smiled.

"And where is this ostentatious clump of weight to be sent?"

Justinian looked aggrieved.

"To Queen Boa," he said shortly.

"Queen Boa! That fat blonde Hun who thinks she rules the earth because a dozen tattered tribesmen do her bidding? It looks like her—heavy and uninteresting."

Peter, trembling with anxiety lest he should be ordered to work the girdle over, thrust his way between the sovereigns and said eagerly to Justinian,

"Here, Highness—here is something new. We have lately employed a master calligrapher and an illustrator from the famous school of St. John the Baptist, to work upon the manuscripts of the hymns so gloriously composed by you, God-loving. Here is their feeble effort."

Theodora took the frail rolls of papyrus and unwound them carefully. A long band of pure gold zigzagged down the side of the manuscript

and across the bottom a row of bearded saints' heads rested gravely upon another band of gold. The initial letters were quaintly made of animals —two blue fishes joined together for an O, two scarlet birds with bills together for an E, and a venomous T made by a green and writhing snake.

"To whom does this go?" she asked.

"I have no orders, Highness," said Peter.

"Then send it to Timothy, Patriarch of Alexandria, with my compliments," she commanded, "and next week come to my apartments for your audience. I have an interest in these things."

Here was another field to conquer. The domestic arrangements of the Palace were well under her thumb. Now it was time to bring the great commercial activities of her kingdom under her sway, and this was the first step. She inspected the silk factories with a keen eye, and from the *murileguli* in charge of getting the purple mollusks and preparing the dye, which was then taken to the Imperial dyers, who alone knew how to get the special shade of purple demanded by the court, to the *commercantes* or dealers who supplied the raw materials, she understood the duty of every specialist. The irking deadlock with the Persians who effectively commanded both

land and water routes from the Far East, making sure that Byzantium's enormous raw silk supply passed through their hands, she studied coolly with a view to urging decisive action on the part of Justinian. Bit by bit, she gleaned a useful store of information as to the great markets in India, and listened with alert curiosity to tales of the stupendous clearing house for spices and precious commodities on the island of Taprobane, now Ceylon.

To the astonishment of Narses, Theodora began calling all manner of strange people to her court.

"When the next caravan comes back from Hira," she said to him, "see if you can find a mariner who has sailed to the East. I wish to talk with him."

Longinus, master of a round-bowed Syrian merchantman, towered above the fastidious gentlemen in the Augusta's reception chambers and caused them to draw aside slightly as he shoved his uncouth way among them. But he had the advantage of these white-fingered aristocrats, anxiously awaiting their turn, for the Basilissa had sent for him, and if the Heaven-elected wished to speak with such a common man as he, well then, he said to himself, he would tell her all

she wished to know of foreign ports, and perhaps if he put the matter tactfully, there might be something in it for Longinus. He was curious to see the Augusta who was so beautiful and so decisive, and more eager still to see this fabulous Palace into which the finest silks, the rarest spices and jewels were being poured in a never-ending stream.

"You may rise," she said when he had prostrated himself at her feet, "and tell us of your last voyage. We wish to know how the affairs of the Empire progress abroad, and how you found the markets for those things we have need of here."

"Majesty," he said, spreading his feet apart, and putting his red seaman's fists behind his back as if he were addressing the mate upon the poop of his own ship, "Majesty, we have fared well this trip. A hundred and fifty days we were at sea, from Taprobane to the Gulf of Persia. Having a special commission from Peter Barsyames, your Highness' servant, I myself went up the Euphrates to Hira and from there took caravan to Byzance with a hundred bales of the finest silk that ever came out of China."

"That is the curse of all our commerce," said Theodora, "that we can get nothing from the

East except by way of Persia. What else did you have in the hold of your ship when you left Taprobane?"

"Highness," said Longinus, "there was such a quantity of aloes, cloves and sandalwood from Cathay that my cabin smelled like a spice market. Then we picked up some Indian pepper, and some musk, too, and then, Highness, there was a small bag of sapphires of such a blue that one would have sworn they were chipped off Heaven itself."

Theodora's eyes sparkled. "I will have a look at those sapphires," she said. "Tell us more. What manner of people did you meet abroad? What do the people of Cathay say of us here in the West?"

Longinus broke into a broad grin. "Indeed, Majesty, the tales they tell on the other side of the ocean would cause you to roll from your throne with laughter"—he broke off confused—"would cause you to laugh heartily," he substituted. "This last voyage, while I was waiting for my cargo to be loaded at the wharf in Taprobane, there chanced to come along some yellow men who knew a little of our language, and we fell into conversation. They told me of their country, and I told them of ours, and then they

said yes, they had heard of the lands of the West, and wanted to know if it were true that we had lambs that grew out of the ground."

"Grew out of the ground?" asked Theodora.

"Yes, Highness, those were the words they used. And when I questioned them, they said they had been told of lambs which sprouted from the earth and were attached to it by their navels. Our people were said to protect them from other animals by building screens around them. If the navels were cut, they would die, but it was said that after the farmers had fixed the buds, they would make the lambs bleat in alarm by frightening them with drums, or riding horses up to them, thus causing them to detach themselves, so that they could be harvested."

"Blessed St. John!" exclaimed the Queen. "If that were true, it would be far better to dress in wool, than to import all this costly silk. What else did they say?"

"Then," went on Longinus, "they told a marvelous tale of some king in Syria whose cap was shaped like a bird raising its wings, and who wore silk embroidered clothing without a lapel in front and heavy with gold ornaments. He is reputed to have a bird like a goose, whose feathers are green, and who always sits on a cushion by

his side. This bird crows whenever anything poisonous has been put into the king's food."

"By Christ's diadem!" Theodora swore with vehemence. "But I could do with a bird like that. Tatian shall hear this tale! I thank you, Longinus, for your news, and you may order new sails for your next voyage from our Imperial navy yard."

She signaled that the interview was at an end, her mind racing. The adoration of an Emperor, the security of marriage, the power of an autocrat over a corps of well-selected servitors, the breaking up of this foolish affair between Prejecta and the upstart Armenian, the regulation of an influx of such wealth as defied counting—shortly she could add another rein to the cluster she already held, stretching fanwise to the steeds which pulled the chariot of her power higher and still higher.

CHAPTER IX

THEODORA AUGUSTA

SUCH as she will burn in the black fires of Gehenna until the final Judgment Day, and at this awful Reckoning will be thrust down again into the lowest depths of Hell!"

Damned and three times damned in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, and all the hierarchy of the Orthodox clergy, on the one hand; lauded to the skies as the most worthy and exalted Empress ever to sit upon a throne, by the Monophysites, on the other, Theodora moved serenely through the howling controversies of the Church of Christ, and each month of her sovereignty saw a tightening on the reins of power.

Personal religion, it appeared, she had none, even in a frenziedly religious age, but the cause of political religion she espoused soon after her coronation, while anathemas and blessings crackled in the storm-swept theological heavens above her indifferent head.

"You," she said to Justinian, "may spend your time writing hymns and attending Church councils, if you like. But do not, my dear, expect me to be entirely in accord with you in your spiritual leanings. I am not one to forget a favor done me and for a long time I have wanted to repay a debt of gratitude to Timothy of Alexandria, the Monophysite. Therefore, I shall do what little I can to further his cause. Besides, these Monophysites appeal to me. They fight more earnestly for their beliefs, and hold more strictly to the tenets of their faith than all your Orthodox priests with their too-glib tongues."

"I know, my love," replied Justinian a little pettishly. "I have not the slightest wish to interfere with the matter of your personal creed, but how will it look if the Emperor champions the Orthodox faith and the Empress aids their bitter enemies?"

"That," said Theodora with calm finality, "is something for our diplomats to puzzle over. I only know that I intend to take Hormisdas and make it into a refuge for all the Monophysite monks who care to come to Constantinople."

Justinian looked at her aghast.

"Well?" she said. "You have no objection? We do not use the palace now, and it will be con-

venient for you with your love for disputation to have these clerical gentlemen so close at hand."

"No," said Justinian slowly, "I cannot put any barrier in your way if that is what you wish. In fact, I can only express myself as pleased that you wish to do something tangible for the Church, even though it be for that offshoot of the true Church, for which I have no sympathy."

Theodora sat back, smiling. Her point was won—she had been almost too easily victorious.

"Now," she went on, "there are other matters of importance to be discussed. There are those in the city, and you know who they are, who do not wish me well, there are others who would give their fortunes to see Justinian torn from his throne, and there are still others who harbor thoughts against you, and who by slow and careful plotting plan to deprive you of that for which we have struggled so long. I may be too suspicious—I may see danger where no danger lies, but it will cost us our Empire and our lives, Justinian, if we are careless. Since I have been Basilissa, my eyes have seen into many a dark corner, and my ears have been attuned to many a whispered threat."

Justinian stared at the floor.

"What would you have me do?" he asked

at last. "Begin on a program of widespread executions?"

"No, no," answered his consort, with a flash of irritation. "That would reveal our fear and weakness instantly. We must act far more subtly than that. There is Anatolius for instance, and the band of young men he leads, who meet weekly in the Forum and discuss politics. They are rich, they are idle—who knows but one day they may take it into their heads to put their wealth together and make devastating use of their leisure. Send them away—let them go on a voyage to the Caucasus and bring back furs from the tribes in the North. It is a hard journey and more than a few will probably not survive, in which case their estates would naturally revert to the Royal Treasury. Do you see what I mean? There are many others—I have made a list of them, and how they spend their time. Look at it, and tell me what you think."

The Emperor ran his eye down the strip of papyrus. He started.

"So you have added Artobanus' name to those whom you suspect?" he asked in surprise.

Theodora narrowed her eyes.

"I have discovered," she admitted, "that he is no farther away than Scutari and that somehow

he still gets messages to that foolish niece of yours—after my express orders that she was to have nothing more to do with the man. I consider him dangerous for two reasons. First, it is impossible for me to believe that his interest in the girl is purely personal—if she were a linen-weaver's niece, he would not be so persistent, I'll guarantee. Second, she may be very useful to us. There are too few maidens of patrician blood as it is, whom we can marry to these wife-hunting barbarians. I had already thought of her for Arethas of the Ghassanides. My advice to you is to let Artobanus' ardor cool between four walls of chilly stone. After the virtuous young widow is safely married where we would have her be, then he could be released—if he is still alive. But I tell you plainly, Justinian, this match between them must be broken off at all costs."

The Emperor nodded.

"You are right, of course," he said. "I shall leave these things in your hands."

The energy, the capacity to act, to decide, to do, not dream, which he found in such refreshing measure in his wife, pleased him, and infused him with a gratifying sense of omnipotence. He stretched out his hand to her.

Swiftly and astonishingly Theodora bent to

kiss the Imperial fingers. Half calculation, half impulse, the gesture touched the Emperor deeply, and as his regal spouse swept down the passageway to her pavilions, he sat a while playing with the recollection of that sudden, infrequent, and doubly sweet caress. Theodora could have had St. Sophia for her playground that day, if she had cared to ask for it.

Work on Hormisdas went forward at a tremendous pace. Within a month the spacious rooms and corridors, the opulent luxury of the *Gynæceum* had disappeared, and each of the great halls had been filled with rows of planks, cutting up the immense apartment into tiny, stuffy cells, less disturbing to the esthetic senses and better suited for religious meditation than a vaulted salon. Some were divided from each other by huge wooden partitions, and some by curtains, and there were mats for fasting monks, kneeling priests and penitents laid in rows upon the marble floor which had once been pressed by the tiny sandals of courtesans. In every corner was an altar, each dedicated to some saint whose pious features, stiffly stylized in mosaic, peered down upon his worshipers.

News of this marvelous retreat ran swiftly through the Near East, and the highways to Con-

stantinople were soon thronged with holy men who came to take advantage of the great Queen's hospitality. St. Simeon Stylites' followers climbed down off their pillars and hastened from all the remote corners of Asia Minor toward the palace where, they had heard, there were shafts of stone ready and waiting for devout occupants, as well as larger and more appreciative audiences. Fasters and flagellants, leaving off self-torture long enough to accumulate strength for the journey, sped as fast as their feebleness would let them, eager to wrestle with the Devil in the charming environs of what had been an emperor's palace. Exiled heads of the Monophysite Church converged from Syria and Armenia, Cappodocia, Cilicia, Isauria, Lycoania, Asia and Egypt, toward Byzantium, chanting loud pæans of praise to Theodora.

Within three months the doors were opened with an impressive ceremony, over which the Empress presided, blazing with gems and radiant with a sense of well-doing, a ceremony from which, not unexpectedly, the Emperor was absent. Five hundred holy men of all sects and nationalities and from every walk of life crowded into the Palace on the Sea, and as a contemporary observer remarks, "One could hear marvelous

canticles and melancholy voices wafted in the air above Hormisdas."

The Empress soon fell into the practice of strolling through the gardens in the twilight to see how her hospice fared, and to exchange a few words with the monks "of venerable appearance and honored old age" who headed this remarkable establishment. Justinian himself, in spite of his official attitude on the Monophysite question, went so far as to accompany the Empress occasionally on these little forays into a world of incessant prayers and humiliation of the flesh.

All Christendom looked on with boiling interest at this royal experiment in piety, and it was remarked that the God-loving and God-loved Basilissa had extended her sphere of activity still further and was showing an unusual interest in spiritual matters, an interest which might have God knew what results. Bishops and patriarchs shook their heads and whispered to each other that the Basileus meant well and did his best to neutralize the efforts of the Basilissa for the Monophysites, but the whole world knew that the black-eyed Empress, with her cruel directness and tiger temper, was the stronger of the two.

Later all Christendom was to be aroused by another stroke on the Empress' part, beside which

the excitement caused by the establishment of the monastery in Hormisdas was merely a quiet ripple in the pool of churchly intrigue. It was Narses, more and more her trusted emissary, now raised to the rank of General, who was the first to learn of the world-rocking plot simmering in that handsome head beneath the diadem.

"Arrange it," she commanded him, "that the deacon Vigilius, Papal Nuncio, comes to me privately, after my public audience to-morrow. And stay beside me when he comes, for I may need you."

Vigilius, squint-eyed and unscrupulous, known by Theodora to be a gentleman capable of keeping his balance astride any fence, was shown into the Pavilion of Harmony, a little surprised, but craftily aware that this visit boded good—if he allowed himself to be sufficiently pliant to the Empress' will—much good.

Narses, standing behind her chair, marveled at the strategy she used.

"What, Vigilius, is your dearest dream?" she asked him.

Vigilius' answer came before the words were out of her mouth.

"To serve the Church."

"Ah, yes," said Theodora, "I thought so. How

do you imagine you can best serve the Church—by following or leading?"

"By leading, Highness," replied Vigilius, correctly.

"As Papal Nuncio—or as a higher power, with more gold to back you up?"

Vigilius' thoughts danced in his brain. If he understood aright, the Basilissa was hinting at the Papacy. He steered a direct course.

"Your Majesty would like to see a Monophysite sit in the Apostolic Chair?"

Theodora hesitated, and toyed with the heavy collar of sapphires about her neck.

"Yes," she said briefly, "we deem it for the good of the Empire that the Monophysite influence be felt in Rome. We have chosen you, Vigilius, although you are now allied to Orthodoxy, because of your zeal, energy and loyalty to us, to help us carry out this plan. Do you agree to obey our orders?"

Vigilius stooped and touched the purple hem of Theodora's tunic with his lips.

"Then make your way to Rome with all speed," she commanded, "and take these letters to Belisarius, our General, and his wife Antonina. They will have instructions as to what to do for you, and should be able to place the Tiara upon your

brow within the year. You will be paid thirty gold centenaries, the fortune of a lifetime, when you ascend the Papal Throne. And you will swear, over your signature, to be a true and faithful servant to us, to follow our dictates and to receive the Monophysites into Communion."

That Silverus, a well-meaning and saintly old gentleman, was the legally selected Pope did not prevent his being peremptorily hauled down from the Apostolic Seat by Belisarius on a trumped-up charge of treachery. He was summarily exiled to an island in the Tyrrhenian Sea where he died, "miserably reduced to the bread of tribulation and the water of torture." Vigilius was hoisted up in his place and paid the money promised him by Theodora, part of which, it was rumored, he handed back to Belisarius in return for a watchful eye which the powerful General promised to keep upon him in the interests of personal safety.

But shortly, disturbing reports seeped through to the Sacred Palace in the City Guarded by God. God's representative on earth in Rome was apparently not attending to His will as interpreted by the sovereigns of the Eastern Empire. Justinian, secretly pleased that a Monophysite was now Pope, and that the Pontiff was thus brought

under the Oriental influence, found that Vigilius was distressingly dilatory in taking any definite stand, and Theodora, eagerly awaiting news of Vigilius' negotiations with the Monophysite Patriarchs Theosius and Severus, read the Roman dispatches in vain. Matters were at a standstill.

"By the Body of the Lord!" swore the Empress. "I will have to teach this upstart deacon whom I have lifted nearer Heaven than ever he could have climbed himself, that I will put up with no more of his feeble shilly-shallyings. He shall come back to Constantinople where I can have him under my eye."

To Antimus, the scribe, she entrusted the task of kidnaping the slippery Pontiff.

"Arrest him," she told the scribe, "wherever you first see his ugly, squinting face, save only in the Basilica of St. Peter's. Sacrilege we do not wish to commit, but obedience from our servants we must have."

"Highness," demurred Antimus, none too happy over his mission, "what if he should take fright and flee so that I am forced to return without him?"

Theodora rose, the black eyes glinting dangerously, both hands clenched tightly.

"Then," she said in a voice vibrant with anger, "by Him who lives forever, I will have you flayed alive, and your skinless body thrown to the sharks in the Bosphorus!"

Antimus, with the fear of the Empress animating him more potently than the fear of the Lord, found Vigilius celebrating mass in the Church of St. Cecelia in Rome, and forthwith took him off under heavy escort, to make his report to the fuming Theodora, who, raging at the thought that her first coup might be thwarted by the treachery of the Pope she had created, was preparing to redeem herself in the eyes of the disappointed Monophysites.

Vigilius, strabismic though he was, saw clearly enough what a reception would await him if he hastened straight to the Sacred Palace, and reflecting that the Imperial temper must be given sufficient time to cool, made every excuse to dawdle along the way, so that it was many months before he appeared for his first audience with his benefactress. Strengthened by conversations with various ecclesiastics on his circuitous travels, and fortified by numerous anti-Monophysite demonstrations which made him feel that Orthodoxy was the horse to ride, he arrived in a most refractory frame of mind.

The commands of the Basileus, the tact of the court theologians, and a little subtle pressure were not sufficient to change his attitude. It was only after a session of three uninterrupted hours with the Basilissa that he admitted the possibility of compromise. What transpired at the interview no one but Narses ever knew. It is significant, however, that for weeks afterwards, his Holiness the Pope of Rome kept his right hand hidden under his tunic, and affected unusually high-collared mantles. Shortly before Easter, in the year of his return to Constantinople, he published his famous *Judicatum,* upholding the belief in the single nature of Christ our Lord.

Theodora read the manuscript with triumph. Here was a signal victory.

Always a militant feminist, with a high and lofty scorn for the opposite sex, acquired no doubt in the lupanars which she had frequented in her extreme youth, and aggravated by such uncharitable treatment as she had received at the hands of Hecebolus and Herodes, Theodora found time, in the midst of her diplomatic and religious activities, to champion the cause of women stoutly. She instigated such reforms in their behalf that it is difficult to reconcile the picture of the bloodthirsty, avaricious Empress

with that of the understanding woman who worked for her less fortunate sisters in the Empire.

Her ragged, holy company of monks established in Hormisdas, she turned a thoughtful and reminiscent eye upon the poor harlots, the common street whores, the faded women who had sold their bodies so often in their youth that they found themselves, in middle age, condemned to poverty and disease.

One early morning an amazing procession was seen filing through the streets. Here came a company of hard-faced strumpets, blatantly dressed in high-slit tunics with artificial flowers in their hair, riding a trifle sheepishly in Imperial gilded litters, calling brazen greetings to the open-mouthed men who stood watching them pass by. Next came still fresh young girls, bumping along in adolescent glee, giggling and laughing, going to some new adventure. And then the older women, wrinkled and bent, painted and bedizened, some quiet, some cackling in high, cracked voices.

"Ho," they laughed, "look at the men. They are wondering where we are going. Watch them follow us. No, no, my lords. We need no more of you. You cannot come along. We are wards

of the Empress now, God shower blessings on her!"

They were, in truth. With the expansiveness and thoroughness so characteristic of her, Theodora had turned another old imperial palace on the Asiatic shore of the Bosphorus into a retreat for tired strumpets. Her agents had rounded up all the furtive accosters of the Forum, all the lecherous hangers-on of the more prosperous brothels, all the decrepit harridans huddled in doorways, and shipped them off to "Metanoia," their new home, appropriately named after the monastery near Alexandria where Theodora had appealed to Timothy for help, and still more appropriately translated by the English word "Repentance."

It was a magnificent gesture, and high-minded. The malicious critics who hinted that Theodora had an ulterior motive when she sequestered these five hundred miserable women, and endowed Metanoia with an income, maligned her blackly. Public opinion was certainly a trifle biased by the fact that several of the unfortunates, appalled by the quiet luxury of the spacious halls and the enforced air of respectability, longing for the noise and clamor, and the fleshly reek of brothels, threw themselves into the sea in a desperate at-

tempt to escape. The Empress took the news of this escapade with a wry grimace.

"Those ten times cursed sluts!" she said to her maids in waiting. "They had no more sense than to wish themselves back where they could gratify their burning love flesh. Fools!"

Prejecta, seated at her feet, a little loom between her knees on which she was weaving a purple-bordered towel, choked back the tears.

"She does so much for women," she thought bitterly; "she gives these poor creatures refuge—they who mean nothing to her, and she cannot find mercy in her heart for me who needs it so. Oh, Artobanus, Artobanus!"

Aloud she said, "Your Highness believes in freeing all women then, from the toils that make life harsh for them?"

Theodora looked down at the girl quickly.

"That, my dear," she said, "is far too general a statement. There is a difference between ameliorating the conditions of downtrodden women, and allowing silly young widows to ruin their lives by rushing headlong into alliances that could only do them harm. You must take my words in their broadest sense, when I speak of helping my sisters."

And yet Theodora's mounting interest in sub-

jugated womanhood even led her to invade the sanctimonious chambers where the leading savants of the day, lawyers and professors, sat codifying the Roman laws under the direction of the neat-minded and orderly Justinian. Standing in the midst of the vast heaps of papyri, brightening the musty room with her purple mantle and the flash and twinkle of her gems, she astonished her learned audience into speechlessness, not only with the unexpected bedazzlement of her person, but with the clear and forceful manner in which she explained her presence before them.

"You, my Lords and Lawyers," she began without preamble, "have now arrived at that stage in the classification of the Law, as ordered by his Majesty the Emperor, where you have begun to speak of women's rights. I wish to call your attention to the fact that I am actively interested in the conditions among women of the working classes, and I am determined to render this cause an actual, not a theoretical, service. I, therefore, suggest to you, my Lords, with the Emperor's full consent, that you incorporate in the Codex Justinianus the laws permitting actresses who have left the stage to marry dignitaries without Imperial rescript, women on the stage to be allowed to renounce their profession

if they wish, and a fine provided for those who attempt to hold them to it by pecuniary engagements. Moreover, the Emperor wishes it to be made known to you through me, that throughout the Empire, in all the barbarian tribes which swear us fealty, women shall have full and legal equality with men, and there shall be no discrimination against them."

The learned codifiers sat chewing the edges of their beards and making worried little notes. Together they murmured at intervals, "Yes, God-loving," and "Certainly, your Highness."

When Theodora had finished, she stood a moment looking at them.

"They look," she said to herself, "as if they had vinegar in their veins and turnip hearts, but perhaps the codification of the Law has a drying effect." Turning to the bent and wrinkled sage who commanded these mighty labors, she said:

"You are sure you understood me correctly?"

"Yes, Christ-chosen," said the old man, bowing low, "we have made notes on the changes you have requested, and at our next council with the God-crowned, you shall see them written into the Law of the Empire."

"Good," said Theodora. "That which I have accomplished to-day will make the name of Theo-

dora known when the very stones of the Sacred Palace have crumbled into the Sea of Marmora. That is the responsibility of an Empress, to leave behind such lasting tokens of her reign that future centuries will profit by the study of her deeds."

"A surprising homily," ventured one of the sages to another, when the last footstep had echoed down the hall, and only a slightly sweet and disturbing scent of musk hung in the air to remind them of their late visitor. "Since when has Theodora taken to worrying about her effect on posterity?"

"Since the day she was crowned," retorted his neighbor, scratching away busily. "Still, it is not bad, that which she outlined to us. It is hard to believe what they tell of her in the Forum. . . ."

"People's tongues must have something to wag about," said the near-sighted old gentleman who had spoken first. "Do you know what they are talking of now?"

"No," said his confidant. "What do they say?"

"That John of Cappodocia is getting ready to make a master stroke and that it will be directed against the Empress."

"Could he dare?" said the lawyer.

"Gentlemen, gentlemen," broke in their venerable overseer. "You sit chattering like a score of toothless old women instead of performing the honorable and significant task for which we are assembled. We must be ready to show the result of our labors to the Basilissa in scant ten days. To work!"

As matters turned out, in another ten days the Basilissa had no time for such theoretical matters as the law. The storm at which the old lawyer had hinted broke in full force, and caused her, albeit secretly, to tremble in earnest for her throne.

John of Cappadocia, for ten years prætorian prefect under Justinian, was as corrupt, as vicious, as hard and as efficient a minister as any monarch could have hoped for. His one overwhelming virtue, in Justinian's eyes, was that the man was a gifted money grubber. The Emperor had only to stretch forth his hands and John filled them to overflowing with the gold which was always so urgently needed for public buildings, for diplomatic bribes, for Imperial magnificence, and for waging needful and aggrandizing wars. Where the money came from, Justinian

never bothered to ask. It was sufficient that the Cappodocian had never failed him in a financial pinch, and that he held the secret of a bottomless treasury.

It was not with the most magnanimous feelings that John watched the Empress bringing her wavering husband more and more under her influence, and it was only as an undisguised menace that he observed her stretching out the tentacles of her power into the diplomatic and religious fields. For after a decade of being right-hand man to so omnipotent a Prince, visions of a treacherous nature had begun to dance before the crafty prefect's eyes, and it was inevitable for a nature such as his to seize every opportunity of edging closer and still closer to the golden lions holding up the Throne.

To aggravate the situation, John was abnormally superstitious, even for his times, and soothsayers and prophets, never slow to make those prophecies which they knew the wily minister ached to hear, began to allude to kingly mantles and gemmed diadems. In short, John of Cappadocia saw in Theodora the single barrier to his Imperial ambitions. He was not stupid and realized that his path was fraught with dangers, and that a direct attack was impossible. A word

here, and a word there, a slow undermining of the Emperor's confidence, that was the right beginning.

Just a word, nothing more. Little suggestions as to the Empress' extravagance, her meddling with diplomacy, and even hardly definable whispers of treason.

Carefully planned though they were, such hints fell on apparently fallow ground. With his customary indecisiveness, Justinian merely remarked to himself that John was obviously not in sympathy with Theodora, but either refused to admit the gravity of the charges against her or heard them with only half an ear.

Theodora, however, recognized their full importance as soon as her spies brought her word of the *sub rosa* campaign against her. In one blinding flash the whole intention of the Cappadocian's calumny became clear. She recognized this as the most dangerous attempt yet made upon her sovereignty, and prepared herself for battle.

Within a week after John knew that she had found him out, he doubled the guard about his person and tripled the guards about his bed. Sinister dreams began to haunt his nights and he imagined shadowy barbarians lurking in the cor-

ners of his bedchamber, ready to cut his throat. That he had aroused a formidable antagonist, he was well aware, and horrid thoughts of tortures and dungeons, of poverty and exile began to creep through his mind, in less secure moments. But a visit to the soothsayer could soon dispel them, and when he heard the frequently repeated, "Excellency, I see a Throne in the background, with broken, bloody glass strewing the pathway toward it, but I also see you picking your way among the fragments," his spirits rose and he could already feel a Cæsar's circlet tightening about his brow.

"This woman," he told his intimates, "this upstart harlot, thinks she can block me. She will find out with whom she has to deal. To-day I arranged it so that the entire income from her holdings in Paphlagonia, given to her before her marriage, will revert to the State Treasury, over which I have control, because of a technical error in the wording of the contract. That makes them howl, these intriguing shrews. Pinch their pocketbooks, and you have them where you want them. She will be eating out of my hand yet, mark my words."

"Not so fast, my Lord Prefect," said his chief

scribe uneasily. "None knows better than you how ferocious an animal this Queen can be."

"You are a pusillanimous idiot," John told him sharply. "In another month the Emperor will have shut her up in the *Gynæceum* and deprived her of her income, and then the way lies clear for John of Cappadocia!"

At that very moment, Antonina, Theodora's friend and the wife of Belisarius, was closeted with the Queen. The women sat in semi-darkness, silver lamps flickering in the small private chamber. Narses guarded the door, while the low murmur of voices went on and on. Theodora's black head was bent over a scroll on the table, and Antonina, her chin supported on the palms of her hands, followed the queenly forefinger with its great amethyst ring, as the Empress emphasized her point with sharp little stabs. After two hours wine was ordered, and the ladies lay back on their couches, saying little, and sipping slowly. Antonina's bold beauty, grown a trifle coarse, her flashy tunic with its too-wide bands of silver stuff from hem to knee, were subdued by the hesitant light, and she looked the very picture of faithfulness, trusting and affectionate as she hung on Theodora's words.

When she finally stood up to go, Theodora gripped her by the shoulder.

"You understand," said the Empress, "that in this we cannot fail. *Cannot,* I repeat. Do your part slackly, and a torture rack, or worse, awaits you—that I know. Do your part well, and you can tell the world that Theodora is your friend. Good night."

The plot laid that night was desperate, and complicated beyond the comprehension of a Western mind, but its execution lay in capable hands. Before another twenty-four hours had passed, Antonina had taken the first step—acquainting herself with John of Cappodocia's only child, a young lady of seventeen, with light-minded tendencies and social aspirations. Within a week, charmed at being sought out by so seasoned a society veteran as the wife of Byzantium's famous general, she was entertaining Antonina in her private rooms. Within two weeks she was prattling girlishly of her own affairs, and throwing out adolescent hints of her father's ambitions.

Antonina was all sympathy.

"Yes," she said, "I can understand so easily how your father feels. My husband, too, thinks that the Empress is tyrannical with faithful

servants, and would gladly welcome an opportunity to take power into his own hands."

John's daughter opened her eyes wide in astonishment.

"But he has the army back of him, has he not? Then why should it be hard for him to seize what he feels he is entitled to?"

"Ah, my child," answered Antonina, shaking her head. "You are too young to understand these things. Before Belisarius could hope for any success by turning the army to his own ends, he must have an ally in the City."

The significant words had been spoken. John of Cappodocia, delighted at an opportunity for military support, and discouraged by the failure of his attack by innuendo, instantly conveyed to Antonina, in a roundabout and discreet manner, his willingness to be that ally. Once more Antonina was closeted with the Empress, and once again the ladies talked far into the night. When Antonina left, the final steps of this Machiavellian intrigue were complete, and Antonina, as a mark of the Empress' enthusiastic approval, wore around her neck a collar of exquisite enamel medals, clasped with diamonds.

In the name of Belisarius, John's offer of help was accepted, a rendezvous was set a week hence,

at night, in a deserted village miles away. Narses and Marcellus, two of the Empire's trusted generals, were ordered to surprise the Cappodocian as he came to this meeting, and were instructed to arrest him if his treason appeared certain. If he resisted—Theodora made her command clear with one swift gesture across her throat.

The Emperor, told of the trap set for his favorite, and of the man's treachery, acted as only a weak man would. Confronted with the evidence of John's faithlessness, annoyed by his criticism of Theodora, convinced of his dishonesty, Justinian yet was unable to bring himself to watch this serpent crushed. Without revealing the plot, he warned the Cappodocian that he was in danger.

John listened to the warning, but laughed out of the corner of his mouth. He was so sure of himself that he went striding to the meeting with only the precaution of an extra guard.

"Then you will join my husband against the Throne?" asked Antonina.

John, standing in a deserted hut, dank and ill-lit, held out his hand.

"With all my heart," he answered.

"Seize him," called Narses from the doorway.

"He has avowed treason against the Heaven-elect, the Emperor and King!"

John drew his dagger and fought his way out of the hut. Fleeing down the alleyways, stumbling on the rutted country roads, he escaped into the darkness, hotly pursued, and finally flung himself, panic-stricken, upon the altar of St. Sophia, by this action foolishly admitting his guilt.

When Theodora heard where her enemy had taken refuge, she threw a dark mantle over her tunic, and herself went out to see him seized.

"Tear him from the altar," she called, standing in the very doorway of the church. "Break his knuckles if you must. Wrench his arms from their sockets and crush his knees, but bring me that coward. We will go to the Emperor this very night and have this craven given the punishment he deserves."

Justinian looked miserably from the bloody face of John to the blazing eyes and quivering nostrils of his consort, and back again.

"Yes," he faltered, "it is true. This Cappodocian has certainly plotted treasonably against the crown. What did you wish me to do with him?"

"Do? Execute him. Torture him. Tear his limbs from his body and his eyes out of their

sockets. Pull his fingers and toes off one by one and wrench his genitals out piece by piece with red-hot pincers. Then throw his carcass to the sharks!"

"No," said Justinian, sighing heavily, "I cannot take the life of my once faithful servant. I will exile him and take away his goods."

Theodora looked pityingly at her husband. This lump of wax, this spineless waverer, was Emperor, and she was powerless to reverse his weak and dangerous decision.

John drooped between two guards.

"As you will, your Majesty," said Theodora, in a tone of biting contempt.

Passing the Cappodocian, she spat in his face.

"Let this teach you," she said stingingly, "to keep your dreams of grandeur to yourself and not to lay your filthy paws upon that which by divine right belongs to Theodora."

CHAPTER X

THE PERSONAL AFFAIRS OF A WICKED WOMAN

"THERE!" shrieked the ladies. "There he goes. Now he is turning; now he is coming this way! Mother of God, protect us!"

Theodora, sitting pale and drawn upon the after deck of the Imperial ferry, looked at them scornfully.

"One would think," she said acidly, "that you had never seen a whale before, you screaming children. Often as you have made this crossing with me, you still screech like a flock of frightened geese every time you see Porphirio's tail. Be quiet. I am tired of your noise."

"Yes, Majesty," said the trembling maids of honor, rolling terrified eyes in the direction of the leisurely bulging waters. Porphirio, Constantinople's none too cordially welcomed whale, who had for some years chosen the harbor as his playground to the menace of all shipping, lolloped in the distance, spouting serenely.

"These silly women," said the Queen, turn-

ing to Comito, who sat beside her, "have taken my mind from what I was saying. Ah, yes. After these two weeks with me in Heræum, I think it would be better for you to return to the city, so that you may take my message to our sister Anastasia, and tell her that I am doing what I can for her son. It may take time, but I have hopes of uniting him to the heiress of a great fortune. I should like to attend to the matter myself, but this cursed pain that plagues me will keep me quiet for some time, that I know. Now tell me, Comito, how is it with you? Is Sittas faithful to you? Is that Sophie of yours still a virgin, eh?"

Comito, grown older and almost sedate after her years of married life, permitted herself a tight-lipped smile.

"Well," she said, "and if Sittas were not faithful to me, what could I do? Besides, I never laid much emphasis on marital fidelity. I am no fool, my sister. I know that it falls to the lot of few hetairæ to make such a marriage as you arranged for me, and if one's husband is an officer in the King's Guard, and the Emperor's boyhood friend as well, one must be satisfied. You have done well by your family. Certainly no one can reproach you on that score, even if we do

not see each other so frequently as sisterly love might demand. Now about Sophie."

Theodora listened to her sister silently. She lay upon a couch, purple draped, with a great purple awning bellying over her. The breeze from the sea was chilly, and a fur mantle was wrapped about her throat, her long pendant earrings swallowed up in its soft brown folds.

Already her mind had leaped far ahead of what Comito was saying, and was envisaging the green gardens of Heræum, the quiet grottos, and its cool pavilions, open on three sides to the sea. Frequently she gave the order to leave the Sacred Palace, and retreated to its peace and quiet, ignoring the danger of the passage, and content to direct the business of an Empire from this arboreal seclusion. Those who wished to see the Empress had more and more often to trust their lives to the whims of Porphirio, and the sea-tossed shells of ferryboats.

It was there that she received a boy from Antioch, a long-limbed lad with a nose too long for his face, and a curiously sensitive mouth. Narses had brought the boy to her privately, and presented him as John, the son of Herodes of Antioch.

Theodora looked at him long and searchingly.

"Then you are truly the son of Herodes?" she asked.

"Yes," replied the boy.

"Come closer to me," said the Queen. "I wish to compare your features with those of your ill-looking father. Who was your mother?"

The boy raised his shaggy black head, and looked at her with eyes as bold as her own. He said nothing.

"Yes," said Theodora, after a moment. "No doubt. Well, my lad, what is it you wish?"

"Money," was the brief reply. "My grandmother sent me this long way from Antioch to say that now she understood the message in the basket and that it was your duty to provide for me."

Theodora swung a slender, purple-sandaled foot back and forth over the edge of her couch.

"You shall be taken care of," she said at last. "Narses will pay you sufficient money to take you back to Antioch, and will see that a certain sum is forwarded to you twice a year. But under two conditions. You are not to leave Syria during your lifetime, and you are to speak to no one, not even to your grandmother, of your visit here. I have spies everywhere, and if you disobey me, it will go harder with you than you

think. I will say this to you, although you are too young to understand: I would give twenty years of my life to have had you born five years later, and of another father. You may go."

It was one of the bitter sorrows of her life that she could leave no son by Justinian to mount the throne as her direct descendant. It took endless plotting and scheming, and the shattering of more than one guileless and youthful romance to protect the succession—a problem which began increasingly to occupy her mind, as she felt her energy ebbing with the recurring pain which had begun to gnaw at her left side, under the smooth white flesh.

First as a menace was the blonde Queen Amasalontha in Rome, daughter of Theodoric, and after his death ruler of the Goths in the Western capital. Very shortly this lady decided that it would be safer to surrender her queenship and retire to Constantinople, under the Eastern Emperor's protection. Her letters to Justinian became warmer and warmer. "The friendship of Princes is comely," she wrote, "but your friendship absolutely ennobles me, since that person is exalted in dignity who is united by friendship to your glory."

Theodora reflected. Here was a Queen, good

to look upon, and charming, well versed in intrigues, and younger than herself. The Sacred Palace, for all its acres and pavilions, would not be large enough to hold them both. Quietly and without ado she despatched her faithful prefect, Peter Barsyames, John of Cappodocia's successor, to Rome, with a single secret command: Keep Amasalontha from coming to Constantinople! Peter managed so adroitly that Amasolontha unfortunately fell ill shortly before her departure. On the very day set for her embarkation, the unhappy lady fell into convulsions, and, before the sun had set, had departed for a world in which there were no rival queens.

And there was Artobanus. Many many suns had set, and many moons had risen, and still he was condemned to sit, his back against a damp and oozing stone, his eyes slowly becoming dimmed by the semi-darkness which surrounded him—cut off from Keos, longing for Prejecta, frantic with despair.

"Why should she keep me here?" he raged within himself. "What harm can I do that frozen queen? There are many men who have more power and more desire, too, to hurt her, and yet they walk about the streets of Constantinople, free to love where they please. I never

threatened her. Why should it give her pleasure to kill me by degrees, and keep me from my love?"

In the sunlit gardens above him, Prejecta pined. Month after month, and no sign from him, no hope. She only knew that he had been imprisoned. From a winsome creature with eyes that danced, and a lovely oval face that dimpled when she smiled, she had turned into a grave, sad, anguished woman, worn down by the endless waiting, watching, planning, scheming to free her lover. Time and time again she pleaded before the Empress. Daily her accusing face confronted Theodora, and still the Basilissa was adamant.

Finally in one mad burst of grief she flung herself at Theodora's feet.

"Most God-loving," she begged. "Most Gracious, have mercy on me. Release Artobanus—free him from the dungeons. Release me from this round of agony where I know that I am somewhere near him, and yet cannot hope. We will go away—we will accept exile cheerfully. Send us back to Africa—send us to Italy, send us to live with the barbarians—anything, but do not kill two innocent souls by this long parting. I am no longer young. I have lost what beauty I may have had through these endless eons of

suffering you have imposed upon me. For the sake of Christ's sweet Mother, I beg of you—restore my lover to me."

Theodora raised her up.

"You cry like a child who has lost a toy," she chided. "This fellow is not worth your devotion. I see myself that he is far too feeble, too impotent to constitute a danger to the Empire; but I have plans for you, my girl, and I will not free him before I can be certain of their accomplishment. It has been in my mind for a long time, that Arethas, chief of the Ghassanides, would find you a likely bride, and although his arrival among us has been put off far longer than I intended, I still wish to hold a patrician in readiness for his choosing. You must stop this weeping and mourning, and regain your looks, you little fool. Do you think he will want a wife whose eyes are red-rimmed from continual weeping and whose cheeks are furrowed by oceans of tears? Come, forget this Artobanus and think of the rich and influential husband you will shortly have."

Prejecta knelt again, a little lump of misery, and raised a tragic face.

"You may keep me here until I am a toothless hag," she said, "and Artobanus may die in

prison, but I will never tear him from my heart. You may give me to another man as slave, not wife, for marriage to any other would be to me only a sacrilege, only a dishonorable bondage."

The Queen's eyes flashed.

"I have heard enough of your idyllic nonsense," she said sharply, "and I warn you not to try my temper with another outburst of this sort. I am the Basilissa, chosen by God to rule my people, and petty unhappinesses cannot swerve me from the doing of that which I hold to be right."

There was a deep-seated reason back of Theodora's scheming. The heir whom she and Justinian awaited so eagerly still did not come, and she began to fence for time. These marriages which might lead to the Throne must be broken up, and the way left clear for her final choice, when the desperate moment of decision could no longer be delayed. It may be that in her effort to remove all possible obstacles from her path, she even whisked young men and women in and out of marriage beds with greater peremptoriness than was necessary—a situation grievous to the participants, but not wholly without elements of humor. A contemporary account of her interference with an ambitious young man

named Saturnius, son of Hermogenes, Master of Offices, reads:

"Now this Saturnius was betrothed to a maiden cousin, freeborn and a good girl. . . . When their bridal chamber was in readiness, Theodora arrested the groom, who was conducted to another nuptial couch, where, weeping and groaning terribly, he was compelled to wed Chrysomallo's daughter. Chrysomallo herself had formerly been a dancer and a hetaira. Saturnius, lying down finally to pleasant dreams with his new bride, discovered that she was already unmaidened; and later told one of his friends that his new-found mate came to him not a virgin. When this comment got to the Empress, she ordered her servants (charging him with impious disregard of the solemnity of his matrimonial oath) to hoist him up like a schoolboy who had been saucy to his teacher; and, after whipping him on his backside, told him not to be such a fool thereafter."

There was still another reason for this meddling with the marriage notions of the elegible young people within reaching distance of the Throne. Always in danger of running dry because of Justinian's vast building programs, the Imperial Treasury was a source of worry, and

no opportunity to fill the Royal coffers must be neglected. A rich alliance for the many nephews and nieces of Justinian, a wealthy bride for sister Anastasia's son—that, too, was a matter for Theodora's earnest thought. Together, she and Justinian discussed the possibilities of marrying young Anastasius to Joannina, Belisarius' only daughter, and heiress to his great fortune.

"There is no reason why this marriage should not be accomplished," urged Theodora. "Antonina is my friend, and Belisarius has always been loyal and faithful to you. The man should be eternally grateful for the triumph you accorded him when he returned from Africa."

"That is so," said Justinian.

The Emperor sat for a moment, his chin sunk on his chest, his mind racing back over that most glorious day, when the pomp of an ancient Roman triumph had been revived to honor the mighty Augustus, and to greet the victorious Belisarius on his return from Carthage.

That day the triumphal procession was marshaled on the plain in front of the Golden Gate, through which Belisarius, as a signal sign of victory, had been allowed to pass. The principal captives were divided into companies. Behind them came the brilliant standards, weapons of

the Vandals, and the spoils of war. Then, mounted on a magnificent white charger, rode the Emperor himself, arrayed in robes of gold and pearls, crowned, scepter in his right hand, victorious sword at his side. Before him was borne the Labarum, the Imperial standard, a long lance topped by a cross, from which hung a banner of purple silk, rich with gold and embroidery, also emblazoned with a cross and the monogram of Christ.

As the procession wound into the long white oval of the Hippodrome, the jubilant citizenry forgot its party differences and sharp-edged tongues were stilled. "Glory to God," they cried, "who allows our sovereign to be crowned with victory! Glory to God, who has magnified you, Emperor of the Romans! Welcome, Victor, most valiant sovereign!"

Justinian dismounted and took his seat in the Kathisma, with Theodora beside him, queenly, wrapped in the mantle of State, wearing a heavy girdle and collar of red, beaten gold, taken from the Vandal king.

The people on the tiers were struck dumb with astonishment. Golden thrones, jeweled litters, great heaps of silver and gold vases rattled past; masses of minted silver, enamels, and cases of

precious stones. One cart, pulled by four white horses draped in cloth of gold, bore the golden vessels taken from the Temple at Jerusalem to Rome by the great Titus, pillaged by the Vandals, and now, after twenty-four years restored to their rightful owners. The crowd shrieked and thundered as the beautiful chalices moved slowly by.

"Ours again!" they called. "Once more Rome triumphs!"

Then they saw the vanquished Vandal generals, stripped of their swords, trudging heavily through the sand, followed by hundreds of captives; tall, broad-shouldered and blond, heads bent, hands manacled.

Last of all walked Gelimer, the Vandal king, upright and alone, his purple robe about his shoulders, looking to right and left with a gentle hauteur. Gelimer knew how to play the rôle of conquered sovereign. When he was taken by the Byzantines, he had asked for but three things—a harp, to which to chant a dirge he had written on the fate of himself and the Vandal race, a sponge, to wipe away the tears, and a loaf of bread, to appease his kingly hunger. After the long cortege had wound around the *spina* twice, Imperial guards advanced, armored in gold, the

scarlet plumes of the Emperor floating from their helmets. Down they forced the melancholy Vandal, down upon his knees before Justinian, while they stripped the royal purple from his shoulders. Gelimer looked at the victorious Emperor with Belisarius by his side. He glanced around the Hippodrome, and smiled slightly at the frantic, shouting populace. His eyes rested on the gold and jewels taken from Carthage.

"Vanity," he said slowly. "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity."

That had been a day of triumph! Justinian's eyes brightened again with the memory of the Empire's glory which had been so bravely shouted to the world.

"Tell me," the Emperor demanded abruptly of his wife, "tell me, do you believe it was true what they said of Belisarius when I lay ill of the plague?"

"That he plotted treason against you?" asked Theodora. "I cannot say. There was some gossip that your generals spread abroad the news that you had died, but whether he wagged his tongue with the rest, I do not know."

"Then was it not a little unjust to strip his honors from him on that score?" said Justinian.

"That may be," remarked the Empress, "but I

thought it right at the time. You know as well as I that not even the most faithful of your servants must be allowed to share too widely in your triumphs. And as for this marriage with Joannina, I cannot see that it is in any way affected by what has gone before. Did I not restore some measure of Belisarius' old might, as reward for Antonina's services in—in a matter that we have agreed never to mention between us? Think of the centenaries the man has piled up in the course of all these years. Is that fortune to go to the first young dandy the girl takes a fancy to? We cannot confiscate it. But money we must have. Then why not press the matter, and marry her off to Anastasius while Belisarius and Antonina are still in Italy?"

"Oh," said Justinian, taken aback, "I hardly think it would become the Throne to take such a drastic step."

Theodora threw back her head and laughed. "Since when have we begun to talk of steps too drastic to be taken? This precious couple has served us well, because it was to their own ends to do so. Antonina can keep a lover right under her husband's nose only because I arranged it for her. Leave this matter to me."

With rare insight for a woman to whom love

meant so little, she introduced her nephew, Anastasius, to his prospective bride, and gave him unlimited opportunities to be alone with the young heiress, a personable girl, with her father's pliant character.

"How do they get along together, my two love birds?" she asked the slave she had assigned to Joannina as personal maid.

"They sit, Majesty, for hours at a time, saying nothing to each other, merely looking. Upon those days when Anastasius does not come to her, my lady Joannina is pale, and cannot eat. When his servant arrives to say that his master will dine in her apartments, she flushes rosy red and then turns white and trembling, and then rushes to her wardrobe to try on all the tunics that you sent to her."

"That looks promising," said the Empress. "What does she say of me?"

"Highness, her words of you are all gratitude and girlish affection. She was so lonely in her father's house, and she is still glorying in the honor of an invitation to spend the time of her parents' absence in the Empress' pavilions."

"Good. Now when he comes again see that they are left absolutely alone, and that there are roses everywhere about the room, and perfume

in the air. Use some of my special scent for Joannina's hair, and watch well, from behind the tapestry at the door. Tell me to-morrow what took place."

The slave came next day, bearing a silken bed-sheet.

"So," commented Theodora. "Now it will be too late for her parents to do anything but accept Anastasius as her husband. See that they are given a larger pavilion, and tend them as you would man and wife."

When the Empress' friend, Antonina, returned from Italy, she should find the Empress' nephew and Joannina living together, two enraptured eighteen-year-olds, brought into each other's lives by a loving Queen. It would be cruel to separate them, and it would be sinning against the law of propriety to hand the young girl, no longer a virgin, over to another husband. Belisarius' fortune would surely seep into the Imperial coffers.

Busy as she was dabbling in marriages, and planning for her family, matching intrigue for intrigue, and managing the Emperor with an expert hand, Theodora, in whose soul malice still flickered, found time for petty persecutions of any too obstreperous member of the Greens—

that hated party which had once hissed a little girl sitting on the sands of the Hippodrome.

Basanius referred to her in uncomplimentary terms, one unfortunate evening, when he had smacked his lips too often over the banquet wine. Basanius was followed into the Church of Michael the Archangel by Peter, that ubiquitous prefect, and hailed from the altar to appear before the Empress. Having pleaded his cause with more impertinence than tact, Basanius was flogged in public. Still daring to defy the Heaven-elect by refusing to recant his statements, the foolhardy young man who dared challenge the Empress was publicly castrated, and most miserably bled to death.

Priscus, a clever undersecretary in the Palace, whose sympathies were unmistakably Green, and who had amassed a considerable fortune by his secretarial activities, was deemed too influential a partisan of that disfavored faction, and, much against his will, was shoved into a monastery, first having had his nose slit and his ears torn off. Theodorus, also a member of the Greens, made the acquaintance of one of the Palace dungeons because of his outspoken partisanship, and Diogenes, as happened to several prominent citizens who, Theodora thought, might serve Byzan-

tium best by quitting it, was dragged to the Roman boundaries, in the dead of night, with a sack over his head, and from this far outpost was shipped to some tiny village in a distant province.

Others, not so lucky, had their beards plucked out hair by hair, their heads shorn, and, mounted sideways on oxen, were led around the court of the Sacred Palace, and then along the Mese, crowned with horns and intestines of oxen and sheep.

"Beware of this woman," word ran through the ranks of the political parties. "She bears an ancient grudge, and besides, she deals in magic. How else could she bend the Emperor so completely to her will and play so wantonly with the lives of men?"

It became bruited about that there was something supernatural about the rulers in the Sacred Palace, and that their great powers were the result, not of concentrated and unscrupulous effort, but of dire and black magic.

The Emperor's nocturnal habits and sleepless wanderings at dawn gave rise to all manner of demon legends. His head was reputed to vanish while the rest of his body seemed to ebb and flow, leaving the beholder quite naturally aghast.

The guards before the great Augusteon were startled one day to see a monk come screaming out of the Palace, his beard flying behind him, one sandal gone, and terror written on his seamy face. He swore that when he came to Justinian's audience chamber he clearly saw a devil sitting on the Throne, and without waiting to present his petition, he waved his cross before the King of Evil and fled to save his soul from hell. It was even hinted that Justinian's mother had once told a close friend that this son was not of Sabbatius, her husband, nor of any man, but of a devil which had visited her intimately.

As companion pieces to these fantastic tales, there were many stories circulated about Theodora. One old crone who held her begging-bowl on the steps of the Cup Sellers, which led down the street of the Brass Beaters, told any who would listen of the gentleman whose fortune she had told, and who had admitted to her that he had been the Queen's lover in her lupanar days. Once, he confessed, when he came to lie with her, and had his arms ready outstretched to embrace her fragrant body, a demon rudely thrust him out of bed and himself slipped in beside the lovely harlot. This was supposed to have given her a start in the arts of magic, and from this demon

she learned all the unholy charms and spells with which she bewitched the Emperor and made him her abject tool.

The very means she used were whispered about in dark corners. "She takes salt," it was said, "the amount which can be bought for seven *nummia;* sulphur and a torch. Then she pours wine into a jar and drinks it all by herself. She then takes something belonging to the Augustus, and hangs it on a peg, while she burns sulphur underneath, after which she sprinkles salt on a brazier, muttering her name and his. Then she takes a wheel and whirls it rapidly about, while she repeats the spell the demon taught her, and so she enchants the Emperor and binds him to her."

There were some who swore they had seen her using a charm for hatred. "Yes," they said, "she follows the footprints of those she wishes to destroy and rubs them out by putting her right foot in the other's left footprint, and vice versa, saying as she does so, 'I am walking on you, I am walking on your heels.' "

Theodora dismissed these tales with a shrug.

"Prattle," she said, "nothing but prattle. I would to God that I did have some sorcery at my finger tips, so that I could solve the problems which beset me."

She knew now, and with appalling certainty, that she could never bear Justinian a son, and that the Empire must descend to one of her consort's numerous nephews who swarmed about the Palace. Not a strong prince, eager to rule as Justinian had been, but an acquiescent one who would wait until the time came for him to assume authority. It was finally upon Justin, son of Justinian's sister Vigilantia, that the Imperial choice fell.

This Justin was a mild man who had served for many years as *Curopalates*, or Master of the Palace, who was content to remain in the background, a small, meek figure on which to hang the robes of Imperialism when they should fall from the kingly shoulders.

His marriage to Sophie, daughter of Comito, caused little excitement in court circles. The girl, already in love with a young halbardier, wept bitterly at her aunt's feet, and Justin, nearing his thirties, treated his bride with placid indifference. Theodora swept aside these difficulties, and on the appointed day, escorted by the Emperor and the Empress, the young couple, robed in purple-bordered tunics, symbol of what was to come, were married by the Patriarch in St. Sophia. Afterwards in the presence of the Court,

and according to Byzantine custom, they were solemnly laid upon the golden coverlet of the great nuptial bed.

Trumpets rang loudly through the marble halls; clouds of incense floated through the tapestried door; the discreet whisperings of maids of honor faded into little sibilant hisses.

Theodora came out of the bridal chamber, leaning on her husband's arm.

"I have done this well," she said to him, and stopped. Among the women waiting to escort her, she caught sight of Prejecta, standing silent with head bent. A momentary uneasiness, a vague misapprehension, shot through the regal mind. Quickly she shook it off, and turned to shut out the sight of that reproachful face.

"This has been well done," Theodora repeated resolutely and triumphantly to Justinian. "I have united your blood and mine for the glory of the Empire. Come with me to my pavilion, Justinian. I am tired."

CHAPTER X

"HOW BRAVE A SEPULCHER A KINGDOM IS!"

DUST lay over the hillsides of Bithynia and hung thick in the mild May air—dust raised by thousands of marching feet and prancing hoofs.

Noisy chattering and laughter echoed through quiet village streets and country lanes. Dogs ran barking, chickens scuttled, little naked children toddled screaming from the loud roadside. Even the cows, grazing in the hill pastures, lifted their heads and stared in bovine astonishment at the strange brightness swarming through the fields.

Day and night the earth fairly rocked with tramping. Every inn was full of strangers, every wine barrel in the province was being poured down their thirsty throats. No woman under eighty dared to show her face abroad, for fear of falling prey to the men in scarlet silks and purple-edged tunics who came in a never-ending stream from the direction of Scutari and spread

over the country like a river overflowing its banks.

Wagons with stout wooden wheels creaked by in interminable procession, laden with stuffs the country folk could not even name; furniture, rich tapestries, carpets and silver cooking utensils. Finally great kitchens rolled past, reeking with the odor of good cooking. The peasants sniffed the air and smacked their lips.

Still the pageant came on. There were litters now upon the road which had been hammered out especially for the passage of this army—litters whose curtains were held back by gemmed hands, and from out of which peered delicate faces. The women in the villages looked at these curiously.

"Holy Virgin," they said to each other, "and those are the ladies of the court, those pale, peaked creatures who look as if they would melt in sunlight!"

Already the new road was rutted with the passage of the heavy vans. The village gardens began to show bare patches where the invaders had stripped radishes and early lettuces from their reluctant beds. Not an egg was left from Scutari to Brusa, and the villagers began to think that they had never known peace—that this flood

of men and horses had been rushing through the province ever since they could remember. So jaded were they, so tired of gazing at strange clothes and listening to strange tongues, that even the clink of armor and the flash and glitter of burnished gold, caused no comment. The peasants of the province stood dully, and without enthusiasm, watching the Imperial guard ride by.

"Perhaps," they whispered, "this is the end and we can go back to our fields."

Only the priests and monks from nearby monasteries, hopeful of Imperial largesse, brushed their worn cassocks and rushed to the roadside, ready to drop on their knees before her Imperial Highness. Theodora, sick and ailing, was traveling to the hot springs at Brusa, in search of easment for her pain, taking with her a retinue of four thousand men and women, distributing gifts and money on the way.

She half-lay, half-sat in her litter, propped up on silken cushions, looking out upon the spring landscape, her eyelids drooping, her body limp.

"Peter," she said to Barsyames, the Prætorian Prefect himself, who had come to escort her across land and sea to Brusa. "Peter, take care of these people for me. Give them money, tell them to found new hospitals, or build new mon-

asteries, or do what they like. I am too tired to see new faces and watch well-meaning monks lumber to their knees."

"Ah," cried the villagers, when they heard of her philanthropies, "but she has a heart of gold, our Empress. There is none like her and surely God will bless her and give her back her health."

"How smooth my life would have been," said Theodora, "if all gratitude and loyalty were bought so cheaply!"

Toward the evening of the third day's journey, a gleaming whiteness appeared within the folds of the dark green hills. This was the palace built especially to house Theodora while she tried to tempt back her failing appetite and waning energy with the famous warm baths, renowned throughout the ancient world for their healing properties. The Empress, having moved the population of her court over land and sea to reach it, planned to reside in this haven of health until the iron and sulphur springs which bubbled from the mountains had cured her pain and bathing in muddy medicinal waters had restored the energetic light to her black eyes.

At first she noted some improvement, and each evening when Peter Barsyames presented him-

self, sleek in embroidered tunic and gold girdle, to inquire after her health, she could tell him that she felt better.

At the end of the week, she spoke less cheerfully.

"Peter," she told him, shoving the pillows behind her to the floor, and petulantly tossing the heavy purple coverlet from her, "I drink this cursed water every day, oceans of it. I do what these learned doctors here tell me. There is a vile taste in my mouth from morning until night with all the reeking minerals I am forced to swill down. Still this pain plagues me, and my feet are heavy when I walk. These wise doctors are a pack of fools. I give them another week, and then if I feel no better, I shall go back to Constantinople, and let the devil take them."

Her temper, under the régime of the sanitorium, was fiery, even for Theodora, and her retinue trembled under the lashing of her tongue.

The maids in waiting dreaded the hours they were forced to spend in the company of the fretful Basilissa, and crept about their duties, scarcely daring to breathe.

"Imbeciles!" she cried at them. "You have served me long enough to know what I want—why do I have to tell you that I like my wine

warmed? Why must I explain every day, to each one of you, that I am not to be smothered under winter robes in spring? Prejecta! Where are you going with that ewer?"

The girl shrank together with fright.

"I—I was merely going to empty it," she stammered.

"Then go about your business and do not bother me with these petty details. Where are the slaves? Why must one of my maids attend to these affairs? Go on, go on! And when you have finished this important water-emptying business, Prejecta, come back to me. I have something to say to you."

"Now," she went on fiercely, when Prejecta had returned. "I must tell you once for all, that I have had enough of this moping, my girl. It is more than months—the time has lengthened into years—and still you wear the pained and sanctimonious look of an early martyr. Why? I know the reason why. Because you cannot have the man you set your giddy little mind upon, back there in Africa. Let me tell you this. When you have seen as much of the world as I have, you will know that one man's love is much like another's. Men are all alike, except that some are rich and some are poor, and women with in-

telligence pick the rich ones for husbands if they can. Take my word for it."

"Majesty," replied Prejecta with a quiet dignity. "I dare not gainsay you. I only know that for myself, life is not worth living without the man I love. I had rather be hungry and in rags with Artobanus in a Constantinople tenement, or a hut on the desert's edge, than live in a palace on the Black Sea with this rich Arethas, who has been so long in coming to claim me."

She kissed the Empress' hand and left the room.

Theodora looked after her, contempt mingled with unwilling admiration. This gently obstinate creature parried each sharp attack with soft, and at the same time, unyielding resistance that was hard to conquer. Suddenly she sank back, her lips white with agony. This was an enemy of sterner stuff than any strong-willed maid, this racking in her side. She called to her women, Prejecta forgotten in the fight to quell this dragon gnawing at her vitals.

Later, after six days of constant torment and restless tossing, Theodora gave way before the questioning eyes of her favorite Minister.

"Oh," she stormed, "this none of it is helping me to strength and I know as well as though they

put into words what they are thinking, those idiots who hold beakers of stinking sulphur to my lips. They think—'What does it matter? Nothing can help her now—What does it matter whether she chokes this down or spills it on the ground?' I know. I can read it in their eyes, and I can feel myself growing weaker. And yet I cannot lie down quietly in some forgotten corner of the *Gynæceum* and let them take my Empire from me. I cannot step aside and let others take my place with Justinian. You know, too, that he is a King too easily influenced and that if it were not for me, things might have been different in Constantinople. What can I do—tell me—I will *not* give up. I will not let myself grow feeble. Well—" she lay back, staring at the ceiling. "It does no good my staying in this quagmire of slimy waters. Call them together, Peter—all my people—and let us turn toward home."

The wagons, scarcely unloaded, were packed again. The horses, hardly accustomed to their new stables, were saddled once more. The court ladies, still groaning at the memory of the weary miles they had traversed in their litters, climbed back into them, the gemmed hands no longer holding back the curtains so that they might enjoy the scenery. Back through Bithynia, still

ravaged by the first passage of this vivid cavalcade, rode the Imperial guard, scarlet plumes waving from their casques. The Royal procession retraced its steps toward Constantinople, dragging a gigantic serpent's length of magnificence back over the new white road. The inns were filled once more, the haze of dust hung in the air.

In her heavy litter with the Imperial eagle raising its wings upon the swaying canopy, Theodora lay, still drooping, but with a new grim line about the corners of her mouth.

It was to an uneasy Empire that she returned.

The great Oriental kingdom which she had striven so long to build strong and firm, that it might present a united front against the Arabs and the Persians, was being threatened by revolt among the Lazarians. This barbarian tribe, wooed on the one hand by Byzantine diplomacy with enormous gifts of money and the prestige of being vassals of the Roman Empire, and on the other by Chosroes, the crafty and powerful Persian king, was showing indubitable signs of favor toward the latter. Trade routes of vital importance were being closed to Byzantine merchants. By means of Monophysite priests, Theodora had welded a strong adherence to Constantinople, for they not only spread the word of Christ

indivisible among the barbarians, but also served as a strong diplomatic link with the Sacred Palace. Now they were being attacked and driven from their churches. Justinian, uneasy, vacillating, fumbled for a solution, but during the weeks of Theodora's absence had accomplished nothing.

She read the dispatches he had sent, and looked at her Imperial husband with something very much like scorn.

"God guard you," she said, "I cannot leave the capital but that trouble breaks out some place. What you would do, were it not for me, I tremble to think. Can you not see that we must bring this Lazarian chief to Constantinople at once? Tell him to bring his wives and concubines and all his oily retinue. Heaven knows that I would rather spend the summer in Heræum than entertaining this outlandish collection of gaping provincials; but it must be done. If he has any sons or daughters, we must see that one or more is married into a senatorial family here. And make sure that they are greeted at the Golden Horn with a vociferous welcome. Processions, receptions, banners and much gold will smooth this matter over, I am sure."

Within the Empire, too, there were rumblings. The Blues and the Greens, always at logger-

heads, were becoming more audacious every day in the outrages and reprisals committed in lone fields and dark by-paths. Smarting under continued years of Royal displeasure (whipped up by Theodora's bitter memories), the Greens were beginning to turn the sharpness of their wrath from their Blue adversaries to the gray-haired man with increasingly tired eyes who permitted all the political and sporting plums to fall into the hands of their traditionary enemies. If Theodora had not been exhausted from her efforts to bring the Lazarian ladies under the spell of her charms, and had listened more closely to the tales brought to her pavilions by her spies; if Justinian had not been so earnest in his belief that he was the appointed Lieutenant of the Lord upon this earth, and so sure that no human agency could even raise a finger against the Throne of the Three Times August, Giver of Life, Immortal, Happy and Victorious Emperor, the greatest disaster in his reign might have been averted.

Undoubtedly Justinian knew that Tribonian, his Minister of Justice and Lord Chancellor, was desperately unpopular, and frequently accused, with reason, of selling judicial favors to the highest bidder. He also knew that Calopodios,

the Chamberlain of the Palace, was anathema to the Greens and had been openly threatened in the Hippodrome. And yet he was surprised to observe, upon a Sunday morning in January of that year, as he took his place in the Kathisma to attend the weekly races, that there was an incessant tumult and continual hooting in the Green tiers, and that little or no attention was being paid to the chariots.

The noise grew louder and then deafening. Justinian impatiently ordered the Imperial Herald to ask the Greens what the trouble was. That dignitary blew three blasts on his trumpet. Justinian fingered his *volumen* or little bag of sand, reminder that all men are mortal, and looked down his nose at the unruly spectators in a way that bespoke extreme annoyance.

"What," asked the Herald in loud clear tones, "what is it that you wish?"

The spokesman for the Greens answered him.

"Long live the Emperor Justinian!" he shouted. "May he be always victorious! But oh, best of Princes, they are oppressing us, and we can support it no longer. God be our witness! But we fear to name our persecutor lest it only augment his fury and we run into still greater dangers."

Justinian grunted.

"I do not know of what you speak," sang out the Herald. "No one is wronging you."

"A single man is persecuting us, O Mother of God protect us,' answered the spokesman.

"Rubbish!" said Justinian under his breath.

"I do not know who this man is," came the Herald's prompt response. "If anybody is persecuting you, I do not know him."

"Yes, Master of the World," answered the Greens, "it is Calopodios." There was a sudden hissing in the tiers. "He will have the reward of Judas and soon God will punish him for his injustice—him and that other who knows not the meaning of the word Justice."

Justinian suddenly let the little bag of sand slip through his fingers.

"You are here to see the spectacle, not to criticize officials," called the Herald.

"Yes, when one does us wrong, he will have the reward of Judas," was the reply.

Justinian started from his seat.

"Shut up, you Jews, you Manichees, you Samaritans!" he bawled.

"Ah," a rustle ran through the Greens. "He speaks to us of Jews and Samaritans, he, the Holy Prince."

"If you do not shut up," called Justinian in fury, thrusting the Herald aside, "I will have your heads cut off!"

The Green spokesman advanced into the arena, the benches behind him suddenly stilled.

"Each seeks to have power and glory," he said distinctly. "If our speech wounds you, your Majesty should not be annoyed. He who is Divine, ought to support all with patience. But when we have the floor, we intend to call all things by their proper names. We do not know, O Three Times August, what goes on in the Palace of the Government. We only know, O Three Times August, that we are being treated with injustice."

Even in the Blue tiers, there were gasps of astonishment.

Justinian pulled himself together.

"You are free men," placated the Herald.

"We know well that we are free men," a thousand voices answered. The spokesman continued: "But we are never allowed to use our liberty and if any free man is suspected of being a Green, he is always being punished by public authority."

The Emperor started up again, his face purple with rage.

"You gallows birds!" he roared. "Do you not fear for your souls?"

The Greens stood their ground.

"We could suppress the color we bear," they answered, "and justice would never be done. You allow us to be assassinated, and in addition you give the orders for our punishment. You are the source of Life and you put to death whom you will. Truly human nature cannot support those two extremes. Even now we have word that a murder has just taken place in the Zeugma."

The Blues thundered a protest.

"It is your party only which is responsible for these murders," they shouted.

The Greens answered hotly. "It is you who murder, and you who escape punishment." They turned toward the Kathisma. "Master, have pity on us, if it is true that God governs the world."

"Blasphemers!" Justinian prodded the trembling Herald. "Enemies of God! Will you not be silent!"

The Greens rose as one man. The air in the great Hippodrome crackled with hatred.

"If your Majesty orders it," said their spokesman slowly, "we will be silent, but against our will. We know all—all, but we shall keep silence. Adieu, Justice. You exist no longer." And they

turned to leave the amphitheater *en masse.* It was the gravest insult which could have been offered to his Imperial Majesty.

Justinian stared a moment and breathed heavily.

"We return to the palace," he said shortly. "The Blues will take their vengeance on that rabble, and it will be forgotten by to-morrow."

But for the stupidity of an overzealous petty official, Justinian's prophecy might have come true. As it was, Eudemius, the Prefect of the City, anxious to show the Emperor that he was not unmindful of his duty and could be relied upon to deal peremptorily with disturbers of the peace, arrested the leaders of the Greens, and several of the more prominent Blues. Without the formality of a trial, he hustled the offenders to a scaffold. In the presence of a stunned and unbelieving multitude he hanged them, alternately, first a Blue and then a Green, leaving their bodies to dangle in the wind. The hangman, shaking, put the noose around the necks of the last two, moving in a coma of terror. This would assuredly cost him his life. Blindly he kicked the block from under the feet of the two victims. Down they fell, half-choked but alive. The rope had broken.

A long sigh quivered through the audience. The hangman now in a frenzy, knotted the rope a second time about the bruised throats of the two culprits. This time, his fingers, stiff from fright, failed to adjust the noose tightly enough. The two men fell to the ground a second time.

The crowd sighed again—a drawn-out, hissing ominous sigh—and then swept forward in a mighty surge.

"Sanctuary, sanctuary!" they cried. "Sanctuary for the Blues and Greens!"

They overran the square and pulled down the gallows. The hangman and the Prefect fled for their lives. Seizing the victims, the angry mob poured into the neighboring monastery of Saint Conan and ranged a guard before the altar where they laid the two half-hanged sufferers.

Like a fire fanned by a high wind, Blues and Greens swept through the city, searching for Eudemius.

"Death to the Prefect!" echoed through the city streets. "Death to the murderer," and then with a shrillness that even penetrated into the Sacred Palace, "Down with Justinian!"

The Emperor knit his brows together. Theodora, lying on her pillows, pressed her hand to her side and said to him gravely:

"This is more serious than you, I think, realize. I am only a woman, and a sick woman. I cannot appear on terraces now, and dazzle our subjects into good behavior with my beauty. I can only tell you that I know the people in the streets better than you do. When the Blues and Greens unite, then it is time to be on guard."

"Nevertheless," Justinian answered her, "it would not befit me to take too much notice of these street brawls and scuffles. I shall go to the Hippodrome for the next race as usual and let the people see that I do not take them seriously."

It was upon that occasion, two days later, that the most astounding cry that had ever beaten against the walls of the amphitheater rose to crescendo as the trumpet sounded and the doors of the Kathisma swung back. Instead of the usual hymn of greeting and the calls of "Victory to the Emperor Justinian," the Blues and Greens, united for the first time by their common wrongs, cried "Nika! Victory!"

"Nika, Nika, Nika!" rang and reverberated through the stadium. "Nika, Nika, Nika!"

Justinian raging, abruptly left the Kathisma.

The mob swept out into the Augusteon and, making straight for the Prefecture from which the unlucky Eudemius had fled two days ago, set

fire to it. They massacred the guards and, kicking aside the bodies, fought their way into the dungeons to free the prisoners held by the City. All through the night the streets were filled with angry, restless throngs, moving aimlessly through the plazas and alleys like swarming bees escaped from a hive, seeking a branch upon which to come to rest.

The Emperor still waited for the disorders to cease, walking securely behind the walls of the Palace, surrounded by his Ministers who laughed a little and advised him:

"Majesty, we should advise you to do nothing. Wait. They will calm down and come to reason."

"But," said Justinian nervously, "should we not give them something to divert them now, before they become quite uncontrollable—would that not be wise?"

It was already too late. In the twenty-four hours which had elapsed since the burning of the Prefecture, the passions of the mob transcended all control and even as Justinian spoke, a swollen wave of humanity crashed into the Augusteon.

They stormed the gates of the palace, beating on the heavy bronze doors with sticks and stones, Blues and Greens shoulder to shoulder, calling hoarsely in one breath:

"Death to Eudemius! Give us Eudemius! Down with Calopodios—throw him to the sharks!"

From the edges of the crowd a few voices began, "Let the others have Eudemius and Calopodios—we want Tribonian, we want Tribonian, Tribonian!"

Justinian hurried to the Empress' pavilions.

"They are at the Palace gates," he cried. "They are calling for me to give them Tribonian."

Theodora half smiled.

"You waited too long to show yourself and appease them," she said. "It would have been better if you had appeared before them and played the part of Cæsar. Now there is nothing but to send Belisarius out to disperse them. It would be fatal to let them continue in this mood another hour."

But the mob was beyond quelling. Belisarius, at the head of the scant guard of barbarian soldiers then in the city, rushed into the streets. There was hand-to-hand fighting all along the Mese and the marble pavement of the great square showed stains dark and menacing. At the height of the fray, priests dashed out of St. Sophia carrying sacred relics, trying to separate the combatants. Slipping, shoving, pushing, fight-

ing to wield their swords, the mercenaries jostled them, and a little golden casket containing a finger nail of St. John, fell into the mud. The mob bellowed with anger.

From the balconies of adjacent houses, from windows and from terraces, a rain of tiles and stones fell upon the heads of the soldiers. Screaming women, their hair disheveled, their tunics sliding off their shoulders, took part in the battle and scratched and tore at the barbarians. Belisarius ordered a retreat.

"Burn, burn!" shrieked the people.

Seething through the Augusteon, they set fire to the Senate. The flames shot up—a dark cloud of smoke hung over the Palace. The buildings in the vicinity, covered with sparks, caught fire, too. The Chalce, entrance to the Palace itself, the Baths of Zeuxippus, the Church of St. Irene, the great hospital of Samson, filled with sick and dying, who perished in the flames—and at last the holy St. Sophia itself, the wonder church, the crowning glory of Christendom, smoldered to ashes.

For three days the city was a fiery inferno. The shops for rare and precious stuffs lining the Mese, looted of their contents, were reduced to charred and tragic fragments. The library, filled

with six hundred thousand scrolls, was devoured by the fire. All the fine private houses in the patrician quarter, from the Sacred Palace to Constantine's Forum, were utterly demolished. The air was filled with the odor of burning, and smoky clouds lowered over the Sea of Marmora and the Golden Horn.

Justinian, intrenched in the Sacred Palace, was frantic. Besides the disgracefully routed barbarian troops, there was only the Palace guard, beautiful to look upon in shining armor, but useful only for parades. Contempt had given way to anger, anger to surprise and surprise to utter consternation. The Emperor lost his head. His city lay in ruins, "a heap of smoking hillocks." There seemed to be no one to defend him, and somehow, he was not quite sure how, his Empire had been brought to the brink of ruin by a series of clumsy and appalling mistakes.

Theodora, the one person whom he absolutely trusted, tossed on her couch, her face an ash gray, her mouth twisted with pain, scarcely able to speak.

"God guard me," moaned the Emperor. "I have no one to turn to. What shall I do?"

Various loyal friends came forward to assure

him of their undying devotion to the Throne. Justinian saw in each a spy, a traitor, or an usurper.

Narses and Belisarius, the two generals, alone were permitted to talk with him. "Tell the others," he commanded in hysteria, "that I see no one. I know them. I know what they are planning to do. They want to take my kingdom from me—they have already found a dungeon for me. I know them—puling, mouthing traitors, every one. No! I shall stay here until you can bring troops back from the frontier, Belisarius, to defend me."

Twittering and nervous, he even refused to see Hypatius, the nephew of the old Emperor Anastasius, who had ruled before Justin.

"What!" said Hypatius, when word was brought to him that the Emperor did not wish to be disturbed. "He will not even let the members of his family come to swear allegiance? Then tell me," he returned to Narses, "what does he wish me to do?"

"The Three Times August told me," Narses delivered the message, "to tell you to go back where you came from."

"Tell the Basileus," directed Hypatius, "that I am loathe to leave this Palace now—not be-

cause of my safety, but because of his. I shall not answer for the consequences if he sends me out."

The Emperor's answer was direct. He would see no one, least of all the scheming members of his family. His frightened and cowardly imagination capped the climax of disaster that day, for in turning out Hypatius, he furnished the rebels with the leader they had lacked.

As a last resort and supreme effort, his knees knocking together under his purple robe, the Bible held in his shaking hands, Justinian appeared in the Hippodrome once more, and addressed the people. His words were strangely humble.

"I swear by this Sacred Book," he said, standing in the Kathisma and looking down on the jeering crowd below, "that I will pardon you all your offenses. I will arrest no one, if you will calm yourselves. You are not responsible for these events. I alone am the sole cause. It was my sins which made me refuse what you demanded of me in the Hippodrome."

"You lie, you ass," called Blues and Greens together. "You are swearing falsely," they screamed and there was a movement toward the Royal Box. "Seize him," ran through the mob,

"take him prisoner, the chicken-hearted fool. Seize him and the harlot he made Empress!"

Justinian looked wildly about him. The people on the tiers began to pour down into the arena, snarling and cursing. A stone crashed just below the railing of the Loge.

"Christ, save me!" gasped the Emperor and turned in flight.

A man climbed on top of the *spina* and, cupping his hands, called to the crowd, "Wait—wait, you Byzantines! They are bringing you a real Emperor. Keep your seats!"

Through the south gate, came a group of patricians carrying Hypatius astride a battle shield, his wife beside him, protesting and in tears.

"Ah, ah!" roared the crowd. "Hypatius! Hypatius, Augustus, you have conquered. Crown him, crown him!" they called.

Still protesting, the pair was dragged to the Kathisma, past the barricaded doors leading to the Palace. A hand snatched the gold necklace from the woman's throat and twined it about Hypatius' unhappy head.

The Byzantines went wild. Calling, screeching, greeting their new Emperor, Blues and Greens, two short weeks before the deadliest of enemies, fell upon each other's necks and ex-

changed the kiss of friendship. On one end of the *spina,* patricians and Senators, caught up in the violent enthusiasm, held an impromptu meeting to propose besieging the Palace, and forcing Justinian to resign.

The roaring of the crowd reëchoed through the passages and corridors leading from the Hippodrome to the Palace, and reached the room where Justinian sat, pale and shaken, making a sullen undertone to his conversation with Narses and Belisarius.

"Are the boats ready?" he asked. "You have ordered them to await me?"

The two generals stared at their Emperor silently.

Belisarius said finally, "You are sure, Majesty, that you wish to flee?"

"Yes, yes!" cried Justinian. "They will tear me limb from limb, if I stay. I shall go in an hour, in half an hour, as soon as my money-bags are ready. "Now"—he leapt up—"I shall go to the Empress, and tell her to prepare for flight."

"It is not necessary," said a voice in the doorway. "The Empress has heard you."

The three men turned. Dressed in her robe of State, purple and gold from head to foot, the long gemmed mantle hiding the pathetic slimness

of her wasting body, the ceremonial diamonds flashing in her ears, Theodora stood, leaning against the door jamb for support. Behind her Justinian saw the Ministers whom he had refused to admit since his panic, and beside her walked a Monophysite priest.

She advanced into the center of the room.

"This is not the occasion to keep to the rule that a woman must not speak in council," she said clearly. "Those who are concerned most, have most right to dictate the course of action. Now every man must die once, and for a King, I know that death is better than dethronement and exile. May I never see the day"—and her voice became deeper and warmer—"when my purple robe is stripped from me and when I am no longer called Majesty!"

She turned to Justinian. "If you, Basileus, wish to save your life, nothing is easier. Your ships are ready and the sea road lies open. But I love the old saying that 'the finest shroud is purple and the bravest sepulcher a Kingdom.'"

The Throne had ceased to totter.

Narses was sent with money to see what could be done with the formerly loyal Blues, and Belisarius, with his lieutenant Muntus, sallied forth

to attack the Hippodrome. One took the gate called "the Gate of Death" from that time on, and the other forced his way into the east gate, backed by the Imperial guard, and the rehabilitated barbarian forces.

The citizens of Constantinople were still milling about in the amphitheater, shaking their fists and cursing Justinian when the Emperor's soldiers burst in, spears, lances and swords raised to let blood.

"This way out!" shrieked a woman's voice near the south gate.

"Closed, closed by death!" thundered the guard.

Pandemonium broke loose. The first ten men who rushed the gate dropped, the people behind them grinding their squirming bodies into the sand. The mass of excited Blues and Greens fell back before the lances.

On came the guard, stabbing as they stepped. The handful of women who had come to see Hypatius crowned, huddled under the Kathisma. Before them the arena became first crimson with blood, and then dark with the corpses of their husbands.

Thirty-five thousand Byzantines died that afternoon at the hands of the tiny army, and by

nightfall the city, reeking of burnt timber, was quieter than it had been for seven days.

The Emperor whom his people had called "ass" and "liar" received his loyal Ministers and friends at a jubilee in the great hall of the Triclinium.

The harlot who had been crowned Empress, and who had saved an Empire, lay under a dome studded with gold and marble, a silver lamp swinging over her head, the glitter of precious metals all around her, laughing quietly, her strength spent.

CHAPTER XI

THE PLANETS COMPLETE THEIR CYCLE

"WHAT is more grand," asks the preface to the great *Codex Justinianus,* "what is more saintly than Imperial Majesty?"

Justinian, his confidence once more burgeoning, his kingdom once more secure, preened himself in the eyes of the Lord, and answered, "Nothing."

The last traces of the Nika sedition had been wiped out with the execution of Hypatius, and from the ashes of the destroyed city rose a Constantinople more beautiful, more imposing, more breath-taking than ever.

Churches, hospitals, monasteries, and orphanages sprang out of the ground, not only in the capital but in the distant cities of the Empire—most of them named after the reëstablished Emperor as enduring and marble symbols of the grandeur and saintliness of Majesty. The Chalce, entrance to the Palace proper, which had suffered so disastrously from the temper of the mob,

was rebuilt, and on a scale of magnificence which left no doubt as to the omnipotence of their Most Christian Majesties, Justinian and Theodora, and proclaimed truly that "the All Powerful's Throne was like a sun, and the regard of God was fixed upon him."

The floor of its Hall of Justice was encrusted with marbles, some of Spartan stone which glowed as green as emeralds, others of white, veined with wavy lines of dark blue. About the walls were mosaics depicting Belisarius conquering Italy, and returning to his Emperor, bringing with him his army unscathed, burdened with spoils. In the midst of a riot of gold and silver stood the Emperor and Empress, both of them seeming to rejoice, surrounded by the Senate in festal array. No man could let his eyes roam over such testimony and still doubt that the Basileus was endowed with Divine privileges and power. But if there were such a skeptic, he had only to stand mute and reverent in the nave of St. Sophia to realize that the Emperor was indeed like "a statue of gold placed upon a mountain to be adored by all the peoples of the earth."

For such a temple of splendor as the new cathedral of Christianity truly transcended every

dream of loveliness. The ceiling of the great dome, soaring lightly in spite of its tremendous height, had been covered with layers of purest gold. The high altar was wholly of gold as was its spreading canopy. The screens in front of it with their images were of silver and the columns shutting it off from the main body of the church shone with the irridescence of silver gilt, of gems and pearls. The choir in the center was paneled with ivory set into marble and as a last touch the Imperial monogram blazed from the gallery where Royalty worshiped, the J and T twining in spirals of gold and purple.

The indecisive nervous man who had wrung his hands and babbled of fleeing from his Empire was forgotten—lost—smothered somewhere in the pride of an Emperor who could conceive of such marvels and who could pay such gorgeous homage to his Christ.

Upon the opening of the new St. Sophia, the Emperor and Empress had stood together in the doorway, handing their crowns to the Patriarch (for in the house of the Lord the ritual declared that no head was more lofty than another) and Theodora had listened as her husband, overwhelmed by the sublimity of the church he himself had caused to be built, smote himself upon

the chest, and cried so that many heard him, "Glory to God! I have vanquished Solomon!"

She had smiled—that irritating, half-smile that was now so frequently seen upon her face, transforming it into a mocking mask of beauty—and had said nothing, except that she was tired, and desired to withdraw. Since the Nika days, her vitality had seemed truly spent and after that last visit to the outside world, she never left the Pavilion of Harmony. But her mind was rapier sharp as ever, and her eyes seemed to flash with the old fire, so that Justinian said to her:

"My dear, it heartens me to see you. You gain strength every day, is it not so?"

"Strength for a certain battle, perhaps," said Theodora wearily.

"Ah, you mean the truce with Chosroes?" answered her husband. "It is true that that will cost us much in pride and money, but think what peace with Persia will mean."

"Yes, yes." She stilled him with a motion of her thin hand. "Of course, I think of that, too. Have you heard that there is a new pharmacopiast come from Tralles, bringing with him a most unusual astrologer?"

Justinian looked at her in astonishment.

"I had heard of him, certainly. But why?"

She turned her face against the pillow. "Curiosity, I suppose. But I should like to see them both."

"Do these court doctors not do their duty?" asked Justinian in alarm. "You told me you felt less pain. And as for astrologers, there are enough in Constantinople for every star to have its soothsayer. But if it pleases you to have this fellow from Tralles tell you what you already know —that this is a passing weakness, and that in the month of June you will feel your old strength pouring into you and will arise and adorn the Empire more gloriously than before—then certainly you shall have him."

He stood looking down upon her, and thought how right he had been, those many years ago, in defying precedent and changing the law itself for her sake. His love for her, the one emotion which had ever stirred him, was frigid, because there was no warmth in him, and it expressed itself in a deep dependence and an unbounding trust. Their marriage had been the mating of two natures perfectly suited to each other, two minds with congenial ambitions. There had been no demands of passion from either side, no swerving from their common goal. Each had known himself less powerful without the other,

and each had found in this cold union the fulfillment of his highest hopes.

This long illness was tedious, but would soon be over, and they could again work side by side to control the destinies of men. Let her have her doctors and fortune tellers if she wished!

The learned Alexander, the pharmacopiast, was called by Royal command, and appeared bringing the astrologer with him. The two savants were ushered into Theodora's presence, and bent to kiss the floor before her. Their black robes were strangely dark against the bright marble of the walls, their voices strangely deep.

"With your permission, Highness," began Alexander, "I will do what little I can to ease you. I have here a marvelous poultice——"

"I have been poulticed," broke in Theodora, "until I turn faint at the very sound of the word."

"Yes, but Highness," pleaded Alexander, "this is a very special medicament, which I am sure will cure the evil."

"Oh, well—" her voice trailed off. "I suppose it cannot harm me. Apply it then, but work quickly."

From his bag Alexander took bay leaves, flax seed, marjolaine, Greek fennel and barley seeds,

crushing them and sifting them, while the Empress' eyes followed his movements. Calling for a brazier, he added mulled wine, butter, hot oil of laurel, hot oil of camomile, and, spreading the sticky mixture upon his hands, deftly massaged the worn white body, applying heated sponges as he worked.

Theodora relaxed under his touch, and lay, smelling the fragrance of the herbs, thoughts darting aimlessly into her mind and out again—Hormisdas, be sure to make provision for the upkeep—Metanoia, it might be well to turn over the income from the estates in Paphlagonia—Sittas, a niece's husband, had a shrewd head for business and could manage that—Justinian—she moved uneasily under Alexander's supple fingers—how could he be so unseeing—why had this dream of playing Roman Cæsar to the West so blinded him to Persia and Arabia—if what this pharmacopiast said were true, perhaps she might rise and feel the Empire under her influence once more—a united Monophysite Egypt—Egypt was the nucleus—Egypt—how strange that she never thought of Alexandria now—Hecebolus and Herodes—John—strange, too, that since she had first slipped the purple chlamys of an Empress over her head, no man's body had

called to the bright flame which had burned so brightly once—so brightly and so profligately——

"Highness," said Alexander, "I have finished my ministrations and with your consent will come to repeat the treatment to-morrow. Shall I call my colleague now?"

The bent little man in his long black gown hustled forward.

"I need not tell you that I want the truth," Theodora said to him. "These other numbskulls in the capital have told me what they thought I wanted to hear. I am overfed with flattery"—her dark eyes burned into him—"and I do not fear the future."

The astrologer answered her look. "The stars cannot lie, Highness," he said, in a reedy bass, "and I can tell you only what they say. Shall I begin?"

She nodded. "Begin at the beginning and go through to the end," she commanded. "Keep nothing back. No matter what you tell me, I shall not interrupt. I have sent all my people away and we need not be disturbed."

The savant sank to his haunches beside the couch, pulling his robe around him. There was a moment's silence.

In a deep whisper he began:

"Jupiter, Mars, Saturn and Venus, Majesty—these four great planets have swung round you since you came to the world. And for the first years of your life, it was Venus who influenced you most. Indeed, you were perhaps her most assiduous priestess, and were inducted into her service before your breasts began to swell. You followed her with abandon—you left none of her secrets unexplored—not because the passions of your body called so loudly for satiation, but because it is your nature to drink to the dregs the cup which you hold in your hand, be it sweet or bitter, sparkling or foul. And from this devotion to the various occupations which the stars thrust on you—and this has been so all your life, Highness—you have never had the capacity to love. You have been loved—for your quivering body, for your hotly simulated lust, for your quick laugh, for your great beauty, but never since the day you flailed the air with your newborn fists have you felt a quickening of the heart for any man or woman."

Theodora seemed to slide, involuntarily, deeper among the cushions.

"In place of warmth, you were given the power to feign emotions that you have never felt. In place of love and loyalty, of trustfulness and sym-

pathy, you were given an ambition so overwhelming that the Purple itself would not still its clamorings and if you could, you would be Empress not of Byzantium, but of all the nations of the earth and of Heaven, too. Gratitude you have felt—and have expressed it in a Queenly manner—when it suited you to do so."

The wisp of a man rose to his knees and his whisper suddenly seemed to fill the room.

"Gratitude to Timothy of Alexandria, gratitude to Macedonia, and to Antonina? Theodora, how have you repaid them? You made the religion of one your diplomatic bulwark, out of expediency. You sent a gift of pearls to one and bade her keep out of Constantinople for fear that she should tell too much of a certain basket. You allowed one to keep her lover that her eyes might be blinded to your schemes for her husband's fortune."

The black head on the purple cushion moved slightly and the black eyes opened for an instant. They were filled with nothing like contrition or remorse. Any child could have seen that the pupils fairly danced with laughter.

The astrologer fell back and his voice went on.

"You have been cruel, you have been perfidious. You have played traitor when you chose,

and practiced tyranny. If I were Christian I could tell your Highness that your one redeeming feature in the eyes of your Lord is your understanding of women and the efforts you have made to protect them from the injustices of men. For you hold men in such contempt that in your soul you never think of one of them—not even Majesty—without a sneer."

The fingers on the brocaded cover fluttered restlessly.

The astrologer from Tralles looked at them intently and went on:

"But you did not ask me to here to talk only of the past. I read in the stars that there is much to come for Byzantium—wars, conquests, and religious strife. I read that before the century is out the secret of making silk will be wrested from China and the looms of Constantinople will be turning out the weaves which now must come the long way from Cathay. With this great advantage in the Emperor's hands, the Persians will no longer be able to levy taxes on your commerce, and their power will wane. But I must tell you also that Byzantium's power will wane and that Byzantium's Empire will shrink. I can see the reason for that also, Highness. The Empire should look Eastward and not West."

"I have said so these last ten years," said Theodora almost inaudibly.

The figure in black leaned forward.

"Shall I go on?" he asked.

The Empress's lips barely moved. "Yes," she answered.

"I see you becoming a legend, Highness, appealing to the popular imagination. In five hundred years they will be calling you the Great, the Good, the Help of Women. The dungeons underneath this *Gynæceum* will be forgotten, the eyes gouged out, the mutilations, the leather thongs and poisons lost in the mists of time. The story of your whoring in Alexandria will give way before the tale of Metanoia, the convent where the beautiful and virtuous Empress gave refuge to the harlots of the city.

"More, the weary pain and separation you have inflicted on that innocent girl—the girl called Prejecta—and her innocent lover—this will be obliterated. People will call them the Happily United, and will remember only that you brought them together at last. For you will bring them together. You will want to add that final glory to the luster of your name, that final touch of humanity without which posterity would

think of you without the admiration which will be accorded your memory if you do this one humane thing."

"Ah," said Theodora faintly. "Then you, too, plead for them. They are so unimportant to me now, those two. It may be that I once overrated the man's power to harm me, and the girl's power to charm. What would you have me do—release him?"

"Yes, Majesty," replied the little soothsayer gravely. "Release him, *now*."

There was a moment's silence.

"Bring me a papyrus from the table in the corner," she said finally. "There are some there with my seal already upon them."

Weakly she traced her signature above the scorpion encircled with darting flames, and then lay back, exhausted.

"Wait," she breathed. "Give me that roll again. I have something to add."

The old man watched her gravely, and after a pause went on:

"Your great intelligence, your clear foresight, your energy in doing and not dreaming will overshadow all the evil in you. For in a thousand years—yes, Highness, your name will live so

long, and longer, they will see that your vices were the vices of your age, and that your virtues were universal and timeless.

"In another hundred years, Justinian the Law Giver, the Builder, will take his place in history, an upright figure of achievement, but those who look closely will see you beside him, Highness, for they will come to know, those who read of what went on, that without you he would have been a feeble nothingness, a hollow figurehead, a spender of money, a dabbler, a pryer, a vain and petty tyrant. His will be known as a great mind linked to a weak will."

The monotonous voice paused and continued on a new note.

"I am an old man, Majesty, and I do not fear to say these things, for when I have finished I shall go back to Tralles, and none will consider it worth while to seek me out for punishment. This is the thirty-first of May. Shall I go on?"

"I have never known fear!" cried Theodora in a ringing voice and suddenly sat erect.

"Then I dare tell you, Basilissa," cried the astrologer in tones to match her own, "that Jupiter, Mars, Saturn and Venus will have completed their courses in the month of June, and that your cycle is ended!"

There was a crash as Theodora's body rolled to the floor. The little soothsayer leapt wildly to his feet.

"To the Empress! To the Empress!" he called and fled down the hall, screaming as he ran.

Gongs sounded, bells clanged. Waiting women, guards, physicians rushed from all quarters of the Palace. Eunuchs streamed into the pavilion, little pages slipped and fell in their hurry to reach the bedchamber.

"What is it? What has happened? Who called?"

The Mistress of the Girdle stood with her arms outstretched before the door.

"Bring the Prætorian Prefect," she said, "and summon the Emperor. The Empress is dead."

A thousand candles burned steadily in the Triclinium. In their soft light, the highest officers at court, the ranking dignitaries of the Church, and the heads of the patrician families of Constantinople knelt around the great golden bed, on which lay the body of Theodora, Augusta, Imperatrix, Regina, Most Christian Princess, God-loving and God-loved. They had wrapped her from head to foot in Imperial purple, with the diadem of an Empire upon her head, and the

diamonds of an Empress sparkling in her ears. The cross of diamonds and amethysts upon her breast caught the flickering light and broke it into a million tiny sparkles of purple and gold, so that there was incessant, mercury-quick movement about the silent mouth. In the play of shadows the exquisite lips almost seemed to curve, and the line between the strong black brows to come and go, as if she smiled and frowned by turns. Dead at forty of cancer, there was no maiden sweetness in the beautiful face, but a severe and haughty majesty that bespoke the woman and the Queen.

The lords of the temporal and spiritual worlds, kneeling beside her bier, knew her to have been the brilliance and strength of Byzantium, and paid her homage.

The people in the street, admitted after the aristocracy had kept their death watch, swarmed into the Palace in thousands and tens of thousands. For two days and nights the muted slap-slap of feet shuffling along the marble pavements never stopped. Sweetmeat sellers and merchants, fishwives and camel drivers, chariot racers and traders filed past the golden bed and looked curiously at the figure under the heavy purple brocades. Priests from Hormisdas mumbled their

prayers and wailed in grief. The choir from St. Sophia sang at intervals, a melancholy dirge which quavered in the hot air, thick with incense and candle smoke. And still the citizens of Constantinople filtered into the Triclinium in a great column which moved slowly around the hall. To them it was not an Empress they came to venerate but one of themselves who by some gorgeous stroke of luck had earned the right to lie at last, shining in gold and jewels.

"A harlot," they said to one another in amazement. "That's what she was—a harlot. Why, we can remember when she stood in the Forum rolling those black eyes of hers, and laughing at some barbarian who made the mistake of thinking he could get her cheap."

The women in particular could not look long enough at her. They stared and stared at the wax white face, as though, if only they gazed long enough, they could learn what it was about her that had so charmed men. They all sighed as they turned away, and each felt in her heart that she would gladly earn the title of whore and courtesan if she could die in splendor such as that.

Near the end of the long line came a couple, the man stooped but not yet old, shielding his

eyes from the candle-light, the woman worn and weary, with a kind of quiet, resigned beauty in her face. Together they stood looking at the bier, their hands clasped, their heads bent.

"My dear desire," Artobanus said, "you whom I never thought to see again, do you feel hatred for her?"

Prejecta leaned closer against him.

"No," she answered. "I should perhaps, for the suffering she caused us, and the wasted years that lie behind us, but I cannot. The tracing of those two words, 'forgive me,' on the scroll which released you, have somehow wiped out all the rancor I might bear her—I look at her, lying so beautiful in death, and I feel nothing but pity for that heart that never knew what it was to love—for the soul that reached out at the end when she wrote that pardon for something that she knew she had missed, in spite of all her glory. No, Artobanus, since by that act she confessed that she was human, and that we of all the world were allowed a tiny glimpse of her humanity, I cannot hate her. I forgive her, and reverence her as a great Queen."

"Come," said Artobanus when he had stamped each feature of the dead face upon his mind, "we have confessed before her, and paid our homage.

Now we can go—together—always together, Prejecta!"

The priests took up their dirge, the queue of mourners shuffled forward.

At length the huge bronze doors of the Chalce were shut as sign that the funeral ceremonies were to begin. In solemn procession, headed by the Emperor, the catafalque was borne out of the Triclinium where the Empress had sparkled at many a banquet and won many a victory for her Throne, through the Hall of Justice in the Chalce, where Theodora, triumphant in mosaic, smiled down upon Theodora magnificent and dead. Out of the Augusteon to the chanting of the choir, and into St. Sophia they carried her, and before the high altar, all of gold, they set down her golden bier.

Justinian knelt in the gallery behind the Imperial monogram, his hands in front of his face, tears trickling through his fingers. He heard the Patriarch begin the Prayers for the Dead, and he wept bitterly, for the "dearest wife God had given him," the staff upon which he had leaned, was gone.

Majesty was no longer grand or saintly in the face of Death.

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