

the only object external to their everyday lives on which their thoughts can dwell, and the only object also which can touch ever so lightly the slumbering depths of passion that lie hid in the ardent Eastern nature.

"But, *mitera mou*," said Xanthi, still pursuing her researches into the history of the poor old worn-out heart that was beating so feebly now with the last remnant of life, "if you lived a whole year with your husband, you must remember if you grew to love him, and if it seemed to you when he died as if the sun had gone out, as I am sure it would to me?"

"I tell you, *poulaki*, I remember nothing about him. I know I got the public mourners to come and shriek when he died, for I always did my duty, I did—but I don't care anything about it—I want to die, if only Saint Dimitri would act like a Christian, and take me."

"Well, *mitera mou*, you are very old, I know," said Xanthi with a sigh, "but I do not think if I lived even as long as you have done I should wish to die. I should not like to have my best clothes put on me, and be carried away to be hid underground. I want to live; I do not want ever to die.—Oh, life is sweet!" Her voice grew tremulous, and her eyes shone with a softened light as she turned them to a distant point in the olive grove, which seemed to suggest some thought to her that lay far deeper than her words.

"Ah, well," grumbled Diamanti; "you will not find it so pleasant when you have no teeth to eat even olives with, and when you cannot see whether it is a grape or a blue beetle you are putting in your mouth, as it happened to me yesterday." Just at this moment Apostoli came slowly up, pipe in hand, and told Xanthi to come into the house, as he had something to say to her.

She obeyed, and the old man seated himself cross-legged on the divan, where a little square carpet formed his bed at night, while his daughter sat down on the ground at his feet. Apostoli smoked in silence for a few minutes with great solemnity, and then said:

"My daughter, you are now fifteen, are you not?"

"Yes, father; I began my sixteenth year on the feast of the sleep of the Virgin."

"It is a great age," said the old man, gravely; "you should have gone home to a husband last year, but I have been so occupied with those accursed Turks that I have neglected my duty to you; however, it is all settled now. I have found you a bridegroom, and you will be married next week."

Xanthi started violently, while the sudden colour dyed her face with as rich a glow as that which blushes over Hymettus when the sun is sinking.

"Oh, my father, no!" she exclaimed. "I do not wish to marry."

Apostoli took his pipe out of his mouth, and stared at her in utter amazement.

"Xanthi, have you slept under the moon and gone mad that you speak such words? You ought to hide your face for shame that you are not married already; but there will be no more delay now; your godfather and godmother are preparing your crown, and the *papas* has promised to have the wedding next Sunday."

"But who is the bridegroom, father?" asked Xanthi, clasping her hands with a movement of pain.

"Xanthi, is that a proper question for you to ask?" said Apostoli severely. "What bad spirit is come to you to-day?"

The young girl bent down her head in silence, tears dropping from her eyes.

"You can ask me, if you like, what I intend to give you for your portion, and you will see you have a good father. I have promised that you are to have three beehives and your mother's clothes. The bridegroom's father is to give two olive trees and the house furnished. Ah! it is a good bargain"—and he stroked his head in a self-satisfied manner.

"Do I know the bridegroom's father?" asked Xanthi, with apparent unconcern.

"No, you have never seen him; he is the demark of Keffesin," said the old man, falling

into the trap, "and Manolaki is his only son, so he is willing to do great things for him. Now, my little bird, I have told you thus early of your wedding in order that you may have time to get the sweetmeats ready, and the gold threads to mix with your hair, and it may be as well to have your eyebrows and eyelids painted to-morrow; but your godmother will see to all that—she is coming as soon as the sun rises."

While he spoke Costandi came through the garden and into the house with the peculiarly haughty, almost insolent bearing which the Greek peasant is so apt to assume; he had the delicate profile and short upper lip of his race, and was a fine-looking youth, full of energy and vigour—strangely different, indeed, to what he was later in life when he was known to the writer as a worn, moody, restless man, who wandered about in the deadly sunshine when every one else was sleeping, as if haunted by fatal memories that would not die.

"I have told Xanthoula," said Apostoli, addressing him, "that the bridegroom you know of is coming for her on Sunday."

"Ah, it is time, indeed," said Costandi. "I am ashamed to see her still in her father's house; there is not a maiden in the village so old as she is, and unmarried; you should have seen to it earlier, *patera mou*."

"Is it my fault? Could I bring bridegrooms down from heaven when they had all gone off to fight with these dogs of Turks? but we shall soon see her taken home now. Xanthi, are you dreaming, that you do not fill your brother's chibouki? Do not you see that he is waiting for it?"

Xanthi had been sitting with her eyes hidden in her hands; she now rose with a heavy, sullen look on her beautiful face, and, dragging her feet slowly along, went to fill Costandi's pipe.

Soon after the family prepared to go to rest for the night, and as it was extremely hot Apostoli and his son took their carpets from the divan which formed their couch in colder weather, and went out to sleep in the garden. Xanthi had already lain down on a mat near the door, and appeared to be sunk in a profound slumber. There was, in reality, however, no sleep under those long eyelashes wet with tears, and the wild beating of her heart might almost have been heard in the intense stillness that soon fell on all around. For an hour or two the Greek girl lay perfectly still, then cautiously she sat up and listened, with her large dark eyes glancing from side to side like those of a young fawn when it fears an enemy. There was not a sound, however, except the little green frogs chirping in the trees, and the perpetual creaking noise of the cigala. At last she rose—laid aside her slippers—gathered her veil over her face, and stole out of the house. She passed her father and brother, who both lay buried in deep sleep, with the utmost caution, and then with a swift and noiseless step, her naked feet scarce touching the ground, she fled away through the village, and out into the olive grove beyond, never stopping till she reached a spot in the centre of the wood, marked by the traces of some very ancient ruins. Here she paused. Her feet, though she knew it not, were on the site of a temple once dedicated to Pallas, while at a little distance from her were the remains of a chapel which bore the evidence of four different epochs unmistakably on its crumbling walls. A bas-relief, in good preservation, showed that here a temple had stood in honour of Venus; an inscription somewhat less ancient told that it had been converted into a Christian church in the earliest ages of the faith; a round Byzantine dome, remaining entire, indicated that it had next been changed into a Turkish mosque, and now again the lamp burning before the broken altar proved that it was in the hands of those who style themselves pre-eminently the orthodox.

But Xanthi cared nothing for the classic associations of the spot, nor yet for the unspeakable beauty of the night, which must have filled almost with a sense of joy a heart less troubled than her own. The glorious stars of Greece were gleaming in the deep blue heaven with an intense brightness which was only rivalled by

the flashing of the great meteors that darted to and fro as if on mysterious messages; below, the vast expanse of the olive grove, silvered by the pure light, shimmered and glistened like the waves of the sea, while the soft purple of the hills melted into the cloudless sky, with an ethereal delicacy of outline which was exquisitely lovely.

But there was only one good in heaven or in earth for Xanthi in that hour, and she was waiting for it now with longing eyes and parted lips, and hands clasped tight to still the throbbing of her heart. Soon the sound which was the music of life to her came faintly on the air. She heard the galloping of a horse coming ever nearer and nearer towards her. Now her eyes grew larger with joyful excitement, her chest heaved, her breathing became short and hurried—nearer and nearer—through the trees she can discern the beautiful Arab mare that was bearing to her the desire of her heart, and in another moment the horseman was at her side. He flung himself to the ground and caught her in his arms, while she let her head fall on his breast with a faint cry of delight.

But now the terror and the curse of Xanthi's fate is seen, for the lover whom the Greek maiden has welcomed with such rapture is a Turk! A noble-looking man indeed; but a Turk wearing a green turban, which marks him as a descendant of Mahomet, and a scimitar which had often been reddened by the blood of Greeks.

Xanthi had loved her country and hated the Moslem once, and she knew but too well the infamy and loathing that would fall on her name if it were known that she showed favour to the tyrant of her people—but she loved him! She loved him with the devotion of a first affection—with the fire of youth—with the passion of her Eastern nature—country and home—father and friends—all were nothing to her now in comparison of one touch from that hand, one look from those eyes.

"Oh, Achmeti!" she said, as they sat down together at the foot of an olive-tree; "it is well we were to meet to-night, for you must save me now, or it will be too late for ever." And she shuddered, squeezing her little hands into his as if she wanted him to hold her safe from the grasp of others.

"What has happened?" he said, drawing her nearer to him.

"My father is going to bring a bridegroom on Sunday to take me away."

"A bridegroom?" said Achmet, scoffingly. "I am your bridegroom, Xanthoula, and none other shall you have."

"I know it, Achmeti mou, I would rather die than go with another; but what shall I do when my father brings him to marry me? Oh, don't let him take me away!"

"Fear nothing, my little bird, he shall never come near you, for you must do now what should have been done long ago. You must come with me to my strong tower in Negropont, where you will be safe for the present, and then, when I can get a ship, I will take you to Stamboul, where you shall live in my harem, and do nothing but amuse yourself all day long."

"Oh, Achmet, if only you were a Greek!" she said, putting her arms round his neck.

"Can you not love me as I am—Xanthi, can you not?" he answered, holding back her head that he might look into her eyes.

"I do, I do, better than life; but my father—my brother—if they were ever to know I had gone away with a Turk!" and she shuddered from head to foot.

"They never will know it, *angelaki mou* (my little angel); you must come with me now—at once. My good Arab will have placed you in safety before they have awakened to miss you. Come, my thrice beloved—light of my heart—we must not delay another instant."

He rose, and drew Xanthi to her feet. She stood for a moment trembling and changing colour, her eyes full of tears, her lips quivering; her country, her religion, her father, were straining on the chords that bound them to her heart—while before her was the face which was the sun of her existence.

"Choose, Xanthi," said Achmet, who was