

of her palace on the Bosphorus, and described its differences to me. She asked me as to the Caliph Harun-al-Rashid, whom she understood I had seen, inquiring as to the estimate I had formed of his character. Lastly, with a laugh, she dwelt upon the strange vicissitudes of life.

"Look at me," she said. "I began my days as the daughter of a Greek gentleman, with no dower save my wit and beauty. Then I rose to be a ruler of the world, and knew all that it has to give of pomp and power. Nations trembled at my nod; at my smile men grew great; at my frown they faded into nothingness. Save you, Olaf, none ever really conquered me, until I fell in the appointed hour. And now! Of this splendour there is left but a nun's robe; of this countless wealth but one silver crucifix; of this power—naught."

So she spoke on, still not knowing to what decision I had come; whether she were to be blinded or to live or die. To myself I thought it was a proof of her greatness that she could thus turn her mind to such things while Fate hovered over her, its hand upon a sword. But it may be that she thought thus to impress me and to enmesh me in memories which would tie my hands, or even from the character of my answers to draw some augury of her doom.

The women came at length. Heliodore entered first, and to her Irene bowed.

"Greeting, Lady of Egypt," she said. "Ah! had you taken my counsel in the past, that title might have been yours in very truth, and there you and your husband could have founded a new line of kings independent of the Empire which totters to its fall."

"I remember no such counsel, Madam," said Helio-