

the time came for us to embark, since the people of Lesbos only knew of our scheme by rumour.

"Whither do you go, Olaf?" she asked.

"Back to the North, whence I came, Madam," I answered, "to save the lives of these," and I waved my hand towards the children. "If I bide here all must die. We have been sent for to Byzantium, as I think you were wont to send for officers who had ceased to please you."

"I understand, Olaf; moreover, I know it is I who have brought this trouble upon you because you spared me, whom it was designed you should kill. Also I know, through friends of mine, that henceforth, for reasons of policy, my little end of life is safe, and perhaps with it my sight. All this I owe to you, though now at times I regret that I asked the boon. From the lot of an Empress to that of a spinning-wife is a great change, and one which I find it hard to bear. Still, I have my peace to make with God, and towards that peace I strive. Yet will you not take me with you, Olaf? I should like to found a nunnery in that cold North of yours."

"No, Augusta. I have done my best by you, and now you must guard yourself. We part for ever. I go hence to finish where I began. My birthplace calls me."

"For ever is a long word, Olaf. Are you sure that we part for ever? Perchance we shall meet again in death or in other lives. Such, at least, was the belief of some of the wisest of my people before we became Christian, and mayhap the Christians do not know everything, since the world had learnt much before they came. I hope that it may be so, Olaf, for I owe you a great debt and would repay it to you full measure,