

resisting their commands, she was to be confined in a gloomy and solitary apartment, deprived of every comfort, and only supplied with the smallest pittance to sustain life.— These were the cruel arrangements, and as the faithful attendant disclosed the plot, she wept at what she considered the inevitable fate of her mistress.

Athenais sat a few moments in deep thought, pondering upon the intelligence she had received, and revolving in her mind what course to pursue. There was not much time for reflection; only that night was left to decide and to act. The next morning she would be a prisoner in a dungeon, or a captive in a more fearful bondage still. At length her resolution was taken. She decided to steal noiselessly from the house—proceed without delay to the seat of government, and ask the aid of royal protection against her unnatural kindred. It was not a long journey from her brother's residence to the Imperial palace, and she felt that her desperate fortunes would give her energy and resolution to endure whatever fatigue or hardship she would have to incur.

The eastern Empire was, at that time, under the dominion of Pulcheria, daughter of Arcadius, and grand-daughter to Theodosius the Great. She was invested with the sovereign power, during the minority of her brother, the younger Theodosius. Although possessing a high, proud spirit, she was renowned for the justice and benevolence of her character, and Athenais felt, as she reflected upon what she was about to undertake, that the Empress might be awakened to womanly tenderness and pity for one so desolate and unhappy.

As soon as her design was formed, she proceeded to put it in execution. She fortunately escaped from the house without arousing suspicion, and with no companion but her attendant, proceeded on the journey. In due season, and without obstacle she reached the palace. Then, and not 'till then did she pause and hesitate, and think fearfully upon the ordeal she was about to endure. She had been reared in the simplest and plainest manner.— She was totally unacquainted with the forms and rules of a court, and dreaded to pass those lofty portals that seemed frowningly to forbid her entrance. But one thought of her friendless situation called back her courage and nerve her to the task. Without difficulty she gained admittance, and ere long, was ushered into the presence of the Empress. Nothing could afford a better illustration of the industry and simplicity of the females of that day, than

the sight which met the eye of Athenais, as she entered the stately apartment. A group of maidens were seated round the room, all engaged on works of embroidery, and in their midst, portioning out their respective tasks, and occupying herself, from time to time, with the same feminine employment, was the Empress of the East, the proud ambitious woman, who, at the age of sixteen, received the lofty title of Augusta, and wielded the sceptre with some of the wisdom, and much of the spirit that characterized her illustrious progenitor, Theodosius the Great.

As soon as Athenais beheld the benevolent features of the Empress, her fears were dispelled, and, advancing with graceful ease, she knelt at her feet. In the kindest manner Pulcheria raised the maiden, and bade her make known her wishes. That she might attract less observation, Athenais had arrayed her form in a plain and humble garb—her eyes were dimmed with tears—her features wore the languor of weariness and the gloom of anxiety, yet, despite these disadvantages, her beauty shone conspicuous and charmed the eyes of beholders. With a low but firm voice, she said—

“Illustrious Sovereign, you see before you, in the character of a supplicant, an unhappy, destitute and desolate orphan. If one who has no inheritance but Sorrow—no friend but Hope, and no shelter but Heaven, can claim your pity, then, most gracious lady, award that pity to me. Driven by unnatural kindred from an unhappy home, and flying from the persecution of one who would force me into a union whose ties were more fearful than death, I come to plead, with voice and heart, for the boon of your favour and protection. I am a humble maiden—born, reared and educated in retirement, I know not the language of a Court, and if my freedom of expression offend your ear, I pray your Majesty's pardon; but listen, oh, deign to listen kindly to my appeal. I know not what words to use, but I feel that the voice of Pity in your own breast will plead eloquently in my behalf. I am poor and miserable, but beneath my humble garb beats a heart filled with loyal and generous emotions. Grant me the boon I ask, oh, Sovereign, and the service, the devotion, I had almost said worship of that heart: shall be yours. Shield me with your gracious power, from the loneliness and sorrow that oppress my spirit, and life will be too short to pay the debt of gratitude I shall thus incur.”

The voice, the words, the manner of Athenais, all had a powerful effect over the Empress.