

Byzantium, and in course of time the answer came in a letter from the Emperor. This letter coldly approved of my act in set and formal phrases. It added that the truth had been conveyed publicly to those slanderers of the Emperor who announced that he had caused Irene to be first blinded and then put to death in Lesbos, whereby their evil tongues had been silenced.

Then came this pregnant sentence :

"We command you, with your wife and children and your lieutenant, the Captain Jodd, with his wife and children, to lay down your offices and report yourselves with all speed to Us at our Court of Byzantium, that we may confer with you on certain matters. If it is not convenient to you, or you can find no fitting ship in which to sail at once, know that within a month of your receipt of this letter our fleet will call at Lesbos and bring you and the others herein mentioned to our Presence."

"That is a death sentence," said Martina, when she had finished reading out this passage. "I have seen several such sent in my day, when I was Irene's confidential lady. It is the common form. We shall never reach Byzantium, Olaf, or, if we do, we shall never leave it more."

I nodded, for I knew that this was so. Then, at some whispered word from Martina, Heliodore spoke.

"Husband," she said, "foreseeing this issue, Martina, Jodd, the most of the Northmen and I have made a plan which we now submit to you, praying that for our sakes, if not for yours, you will not thrust it aside. We have bought two good ships, armed them and furnished them with all things needful. Moreover, during the past two months we have sold much of our property, turning it into gold. This is our plan—that