

CHAPTER XXIV

MASTER AND SLAVE

Now a hush of expectancy fell upon the crowd, till presently two attendants appeared, each of them holding in his hand a flaming torch, and between them the captive Pearl-Maiden. So beautiful did she look as she advanced thus with bowed head, the red light of the torches falling upon her white robe and breast and reflected in a faint, shimmering line from the collar of pearls about her neck, that even that jaded company clapped as she came. In another moment she had mounted the two steps and was standing on the block of marble. The crowd pressed closer, among them the merchant of Egypt, Demetrius, and the veiled woman with the basket, who was now attended by a little man dressed as a slave and bearing on his back another basket, the weight of which he seemed to find irksome, since from time to time he groaned and twisted his shoulders. Also the chamberlain, Saturius, secure in the authority of his master, stepped over the rope and against the rule began to walk round and round the captive, examining her critically.

"Look at her!" said the auctioneer. "Look for yourselves. I have nothing to say, words fail me--unless it is this. For more than twenty years I have stood in this rostrum, and during that time I suppose that fifteen or sixteen thousand young women have been knocked down to my hammer. They have come out of every part of the world; from the farthest East, from the Grecian mountains, from Egypt and Cyprus, from the Spanish

plains, from Gaul, from the people of the Teutons, from the island of the Britons, and other barbarous places that lie still further north. Among them were many beautiful women, of every style and variety of loveliness, yet I tell you honestly, my patrons, I do not remember one who came so near perfection as this maiden whom I have the honour to sell to-night. I say again--look at her, look at her, and tell me with what you can find fault.

"What do you say? Oh! yes, I am informed that her teeth are quite sound, there is no blemish to conceal, none at all, and the hair is all her own. That gentleman says that she is rather small. Well, she is not built upon a large scale, and to my mind that is one of her attractions. Little and good, you know, little and good. Only consider the proportions. Why, the greatest sculptors, ancient or modern, would rejoice to have her as model, and I hope that in the interests of the art-loving public"--here he glanced at the Chamberlain, Saurius--"that the fortunate person into whose hands she passes will not be so selfish as to deny them this satisfaction.

"Now I have said enough and must but add this, that by the special decree of her captor, the Emperor Titus, the beautiful necklace of pearls worn by the maiden goes with her. I asked a jeweller friend of mine to look at it just now, and judging as well as he could without removing it from her neck, which was not allowed, he values it at least at a hundred sestertia. Also, there goes with this lot considerable property, situated in Tyre and neighbouring places, to which, had she

been a free woman, she would have succeeded by inheritance. You may think that Tyre is a long way off and that it will be difficult to take possession of this estate, and, of course, there is something in the objection. Still, the title to it is secure enough, for here I have a deed signed by Titus Cæsar himself, commanding all officials, officers and others concerned, to hand over without waste or deduction all property, real or personal, belonging to the estate of the late Benoni, the Jewish merchant of Tyre, and a member of the Sanhedrim--the lot's grandfather, I am informed, gentleman--to her purchaser, who has only to fill in his own name in the blank space, or any representatives whom he may appoint, which deed is especially declared to be indefeasible. Any one wish to see it? No? Then we will take it as read. I know that in such a matter, my patrons, my word is enough for you.

"Now I am about to come to business, with the remark that the more liberal your bidding the better will our glorious general, Titus Cæsar, be pleased; the better will the poor and the invalided soldiers, who deserve so well at your hands, be pleased; the better will the girl herself be pleased, who I am sure will know how to reward a generous appreciation of her worth; and the better shall I, your humble friend and servant, be pleased, because, as I may inform you in strict secrecy, I am paid, not by a fixed salary, but by commission.

"Now, gentlemen, what may I say? A thousand sestertia to begin with? Oh! don't laugh, I expect more than that. What! Fifty? You are joking, my friend. However, the acorn grows into the oak, doesn't it? and I am told

that you can stop the sources of the Tiber with your hat; so I'll start with fifty. Fifty--a hundred. Come, bid up, gentlemen, or we shall never get home to supper. Two hundred--three, four, five, six, seven, eight--ah! that's better. What are you stopping for?" and he addressed a hatchet-faced man who had thrust himself forward over the rope of the ring.

The man shook his head with a sigh. "I'm done," he said. "Such goods are for my betters," a sentiment that seemed to be shared by his rivals, since they also stopped bidding.

"Well, friend Saturius," said the auctioneer, "have you gone to sleep, or have you anything to say? Only in hundreds, now, gentlemen, mind, only in hundreds, unless I give the word. Thank you, I have nine hundred," and he looked round rather carelessly, expecting at heart that this bid would be the last.

Then the merchant from Alexandria stepped forward and held up his finger.

"A thousand, by the Gods!"

Saturius looked at the man indignantly. Who was this that dared to bid against Domitian, the third dignitary in all the Roman empire, Cæsar's son, Cæsar's brother, who might himself be Cæsar? Still he answered with another bid of eleven hundred.

Once more the finger of Domitian went up.

"Twelve. Twelve hundred!" said the auctioneer, in a voice of suppressed excitement, while the audience gasped, for such prices had not been heard of.

"Thirteen," said the Chamberlain.

Again the finger went up.

"Fourteen hundred. I have fourteen hundred. Against you, worthy Saturius. Come, come, I must knock the lot down, which perhaps would not please some whom I could mention. Don't be stingy, friend, you have a large purse to draw on, and it is called the Roman Empire. Now. Thank you, I have fifteen hundred. Well, my friend yonder. What! Have you had enough?" and he pointed to the Alexandrian merchant, who, with a groan, had turned aside and hidden his face in his hands.

"Knocked out, knocked out, it seems," said the auctioneer, "and though it is little enough under all the circumstances for this lot, who is as lovely as she is historical, I suppose that I can scarcely expect----" and he looked around despondently.

Suddenly the old woman with the basket glanced up and, speaking in a quiet matter-of-fact voice but with a foreign accent, said:

"Two thousand."

A titter of laughter went around the room.

"My dear madam?" queried the auctioneer, looking at her dubiously, "might I ask if you mean sestertii or sestertia?[*] Your pardon, but it has occurred to me that you might be confounding the two sums."

[*] A sestertius was worth less than 2d., a sestertium was a sum of money of the value of about £8.

"Two thousand sestertia," repeated the matter-of-fact voice with the foreign accent.

"Well, well," said the auctioneer, "I suppose that I must accept the bid. Friend Saturius, I have two thousand sestertia, and it is against you."

"Against me it must remain, then," replied the little man in a fury. "Do all the kings in the world want this girl? Already I have exceeded my limit by five hundred sestertia. I dare do no more. Let her go."

"Don't vex yourself, Saturius," said the auctioneer, "bidding is one thing, paying another. At present I have a bona-fide bid of fifteen hundred from you. Unless this liberal but unknown lady is prepared with

the cash I shall close on that. Do you understand, madam?"

"Perfectly," answered the veiled old woman. "Being a stranger to Rome I thought it well to bring the gold with me, since strangers cannot expect credit."

"To bring the gold with you!" gasped the auctioneer. "To bring two thousand sestertia with you! Where is it then?"

"Where? Oh! in my servant's and my own baskets, and something more as well. Come, good sir, I have made my bid. Does the worthy gentleman advance?"

"No," shouted Saturius. "You are being fooled, she has not got the money."

"If he does not advance and no other worthy gentleman wishes to bid, then will you knock the lot down?" said the old woman. "Pardon me if I press you, noble seller of slaves, but I must ride far from Rome to-night, to Centum Cellæ, indeed, where my ship waits; therefore, I have no time to lose."

Now the auctioneer saw that there was no choice, since under the rules of the public mart he must accept the offer of the highest bidder.

"Two thousand sestertia are bid for this lot No. 7, the Jewish captive

known as Pearl-Maiden, sold by order of Titus Imperator, together with her collar of pearls and the property to which, as a free woman, she would have been entitled. Any advance on two thousand sestertia?" and he looked at Saturius, who shook his head. "No? Then--going--going--gone! I declare the lot sold, to be delivered on payment of the cash to the person named--by the way, madam, what is your name?"

"Mulier."

At this the company burst into a loud laugh.

"Mulier?" repeated the auctioneer, "M u l i e r--Woman?"

"Yes, am I not a woman, and what better name can I have than is given to all my sex?"

"In truth, you are so wrapped up that I must take your word for it," replied the auctioneer. "But come, let us put an end to this farce. If you have the money, follow me into the receiving house--for I must see to the matter myself--and pay it down."

"With pleasure, sir, but be so good as to bring my property with you. She is too valuable to be left here unprotected amongst these distinguished but disappointed gentlemen."

Accordingly Miriam was led from the marble stand into an office annexed

to the receiving-house, whither she was followed by the auctioneer and by Nehushta and her servant, whose backs, it was now observed, bent beneath the weight of the baskets that were strapped upon them. Here the door was locked, and with the help of her attendant Nehushta loosened her basket, letting it fall upon the table with a sigh of relief.

"Take it and count," he said to the auctioneer, untying the lid.

He lifted it and there met his eye a layer of lettuces neatly packed.

"By Venus!" he began in a fury.

"Softly, friend, softly," said Nehushta, "these lettuces are of a kind which only grow in yellow soil. Look," and lifting the vegetables she revealed beneath row upon row of gold coin. "Examine it before you count," she said.

He did so by biting pieces at hazard with his teeth and causing them to ring upon the marble table.

"It is good," he said.

"Quite so. Then count."

So he and the clerk counted, even to the bottom of the basket, which was found to contain gold to the value of over eleven hundred sestertia.

"So far well," he said, "but that is not enough."

The buyer beckoned to the man with her who stood in the corner, his face hidden by the shadow, and he dragged forward the second basket, which he had already unstrapped from his shoulders. Here also were lettuces, and beneath the lettuces gold. When the full two thousand sestertia were counted, that is, over fifteen thousand pounds of our money, this second basket still remained more than a third full.

"I ought to have run you up, madam," said the auctioneer, surveying the shining gold with greedy eyes.

"Yes," she replied calmly, "if you had guessed the truth you might have done so. But who knows the truth, except myself?"

"Are you a sorceress?" he asked.

"Perhaps. What does it matter? At least, the gold will not melt. And, by the way, it is troublesome carrying so much of the stuff back again. Would you like a couple of handfuls for yourself, and say ten pieces for your clerk? Yes? Well, please first fill in that deed with the name that I shall give you and with your own as witness? Here it is--'Miriam, daughter of Demas and Rachel, born in the year of the death of Herod Agrippa.' Thank you. You have signed, and the clerk also, I think. Now I will take that roll.

"One thing more, there is another door to this Receiving-house? With your leave I should prefer to go out that way, as my newly acquired property seems tired, and for one day has had enough of public notice. You will, I understand, give us a few minutes to depart before you return to the rostrum, and your clerk will be so courteous as to escort us out of the Forum. Now help yourself. Man, can't you make your hand larger than that? Well, it will suffice to pay for a summer holiday. I see a cloak there which may serve to protect this slave from the chill air of the night. In case it should be claimed, perhaps these five pieces will pay for it. Most noble and courteous sir, again I thank you. Young woman, throw this over your bare shoulders and your head; that necklace might tempt the dishonest.

"Now, if our guide is ready we will be going. Slave, bring the basket, at the weight of which you need no longer groan, and you, young woman, strap on this other basket; it is as well that you should begin to be instructed in your domestic duties, for I tell you at once that having heard much of the skill of the Jews in those matters, I have bought you to be my cook and to attend to the dressing of my hair. Farewell, sir, farewell; may we never meet again."

"Farewell," replied the astonished auctioneer, "farewell, my lady Mulier, who can afford to give two thousand sestertia for a cook! Good luck to you, and if you are always as liberal as this, may we meet once a month, say I. Yet have no fear," he added meaningly, "I know when I

have been well treated and shall not seek you out--even to please Cæsar himself."

Three minutes later, under the guidance of the clerk, who was as discreet as his master, they had passed, quite undisturbed, through various dark colonnades and up a flight of marble stairs.

"Now you are out of the Forum, so go your ways," he said.

They went, and the clerk stood watching them until they were round a corner, for he was young and curious, and to him this seemed the strangest comedy of the slave-market of which he had ever even heard.

As he turned to go he found himself face to face with a tall man, in whom he recognized that merchant of Egypt who had bid for Pearl-Maiden up to the enormous total of fourteen hundred sestertia.

"Friend," said Demetrius, "which way did your companions go?"

"I don't know," answered the clerk.

"Come, try to remember. Did they walk straight on, or turn to the left, or turn to the right? Fix your attention on these, it may help you," and once more that fortunate clerk found five gold pieces thrust into his hand.

"I don't know that they help me," he said, for he wished to be faithful to his hire.

"Fool," said Demetrius in a changed voice, "remember quickly, or here is something that will----" and he showed him a dagger glinting in his hand. "Now then, do you wish to go the same road as they carried the Jewish girl and the Eastern?"

"They turned to the right," said the clerk sulkily. "It is the truth, but may that road you speak of be yours who draw knives on honest folk."

With a bound Demetrius left his side, and for the second time the clerk stood still, watching him go.

"A strange business," he said to himself, "but, perhaps my master was right and that old woman is a sorceress, or, perhaps, the young one is the sorceress, since all men seem ready to pay a tribe's tribute to get hold of her; or, perhaps, they are both sorceresses. A strange story, of which I should like to know the meaning, and so, I fancy, would the Prince Domitian when he comes to hear of it. Saturius, the chamberlain, has a fat place, but I would not take it to-night, no, not if it were given to me."

Then that young man returned to the mart in time to hear his master knock down Lot thirteen, a very sweet-looking girl, to Saturius himself, who proposed, though with a doubtful heart, to take her to Domitian as a

substitute.

Meanwhile, Nehushta, Miriam and the steward Stephanus, disguised as a slave, went on as swiftly as they dared towards the palace of Marcus in the Via Agrippa. The two women held each other by the hand but said nothing; their hearts seemed too full for speech. Only the old steward kept muttering--"Two thousand sestertia! The savings of years! Two thousand sestertia for that bit of a girl! Surely the gods have smitten him mad."

"Hold your peace, fool," said Nehushta at length. "At least, I am not mad; the property that went with her is worth more than the money."

"Yes, yes," replied the aggrieved Stephanus, "but how will that benefit my master? You put it in her name. Well, it is no affair of mine, and at least this accursed basket is much lighter."

Now they were at the side door of the house, which Stephanus was unlocking with his key.

"Quick," said Nehushta, "I hear footsteps."

The door opened and they passed in, but at that moment one went by them, pausing to look until the door closed again.

"Who was that?" asked Stephanus nervously.

"He whom they called Demetrius, the merchant of Alexandria, but whom once I knew by another name," answered Nehushta in a slow voice while Stephanus barred the door.

They walked through the archway into an antechamber lit by a single lamp, leaving Stephanus still occupied with his bolts and chains. Here with a sudden motion Nehushta threw off her cloak and tore the veil from her brow. In another instant, uttering a low, crooning cry, she flung her long arms about Miriam and began to kiss her again and again on the face.

"My darling," she moaned, "my darling."

"Tell me what it all means, Nou," said the poor girl faintly.

"It means that God has heard my prayers and suffered my old feet to overtake you in time, and provided the wealth to preserve you from a dreadful fate."

"Whose wealth? Where am I?" asked Miriam.

Nehushta made no answer, only she unstrapped the basket from Miriam's back and unclasped the cloak from about her shoulders. Then, taking her by the hand, she led her into a lighted passage and thence through a door into a great and splendid room spread with rich carpets and adorned

with costly furniture and marble images. At the end of this room was a table lighted by two lamps, and on the further side of this table sat a man as though he were asleep, for his face was hidden upon his arms. Miriam saw him and clung to Nehushta trembling.

"Hush!" whispered her guide, and they stood still in the shadow.

The man lifted his head so that the light fell full upon it, and Miriam saw that it was Marcus. Marcus grown older and with a patch of grey hair upon his temple where the sword of Caleb had struck him, very worn and tired-looking also, but still Marcus and no other. He was speaking to himself.

"I can bear it no longer," he said. "Thrice have I been to the gate and still no sign. Doubtless the plan has miscarried and by now she is in the palace of Domitian. I will go forth and learn the worst," and he rose from the table.

"Speak to him," whispered Nehushta, pushing Miriam forward.

She advanced into the circle of the lamplight, but as yet Marcus did not see her, for he had gone to the window-place to find a cloak that lay there. Then he turned and saw her. Before him in her robe of white, the soft light shining on her gentle loveliness, stood Miriam. He stared at her bewildered.

"Do I dream?" he said.

"Nay, Marcus," she answered in her sweet voice, "you do not dream. I am Miriam."

In an instant he was at her side and held her in his arms, nor did she resist him, for after so many fears and sufferings they seemed to her a home.

"Loose me, I pray you," she said at length, "I am faint, I can bear no more."

At her entreaty he suffered her to sink upon the cushions of a couch that was at hand.

"Tell me, tell me everything," he said.

"Ask it of Nehushta," she answered, leaning back. "I am spent."

Nehushta ran to her side and began to chafe her hands. "Let be with your questions," she said. "I bought her, that's enough. Ask that old huckster, Stephanus, the price. But first in the name of charity give her food. Those who have walked through a Triumph to end the day on the slave block need victuals."

"It is here, it is here," Marcus said confusedly, "such as there is."

Taking a lamp he led the way to a table that was placed in the shadow, where stood some meat and fruit with flagons of rich coloured wine and pure water and shallow silver cups to drink from.

Putting her arm about Miriam's waist, Nehushta supported her to the table and sat her down upon one of the couches. Then she poured out wine and put it to her lips, and cut meat and made her swallow it till Miriam would touch no more. Now the colour came back to her face, and her eyes grew bright again, and resting there upon the couch, she listened while Nehushta told Marcus all the story of the slave sale.

"Well done," he said, laughing in his old merry fashion, "well done, indeed! Oh! what favouring god put it into the head of that honest old miser, Stephanus, from year to year to hoard up all that sum of gold against an hour of sudden need which none could foresee!"

"My God and hers," answered Nehushta solemnly, "to Whom if He give you space, you should be thankful, which, by the way, is more than Stephanus is, who has seen so much of your savings squandered in an hour."

"Your savings?" said Miriam, looking up. "Did you buy me, Marcus?"

"I suppose so, beloved," he answered.

"Then, then, I am your slave?"

"Not so, Miriam," he replied nervously. "As you know well, it is I who am yours. All I ask of you is that you should become my wife."

"That cannot be, Marcus," she answered in a kind of cry. "You know that it cannot be."

His face turned pale.

"After all that has come and gone between us, Miriam, do you still say so?"

"I still say so."

"You could give your life for me, and yet you will not give your life to me?"

"Yes, Marcus."

"Why? Why?"

"For the reasons that I gave you yonder by the banks of Jordan; because those who begat me laid on me the charge that I should marry none who is not a Christian. How then can I marry you?"

Marcus thought a moment.

"Does the book of your law forbid it?" he asked.

She shook her head. "No, but the dead forbid it, and rather will I join them than break their command."

Again Marcus thought and spoke.

"Well, then, since I must, I will become a Christian."

She looked at him sadly and answered:

"It is not enough. Do you remember what I told you far away in the village of the Essenes, that this is no matter of casting incense on an altar, but rather one of a changed spirit. When you can say those words from your heart as well as with your lips, then, Marcus, I will listen to you, but unless God calls you this you can never do."

"What then do you propose?" he asked.

"I? I have not had time to think. To go away, I suppose."

"To Domitian?" he queried. "Nay, forgive me, but a sore heart makes bitter lips."

"I am glad you asked forgiveness for those words, Marcus," she said quivering. "What need is there to insult a slave?"

The word seemed to suggest a new train of thought to Marcus.

"Yes," he said, "a slave--my slave whom I have bought at a great price. Well, why should I let you go? I am minded to keep you."

"Marcus, you can keep me if you will, but then your sin against your own honour will be greater even than your sin against me."

"Sin!" he said, passionately. "What sin? You say you cannot marry me, not because you do not wish it, if I understand you right, but for other reasons which have weight, at any rate with you. But the dead give no command as to whom you should love."

"No, my love is my own, but if it is not lawful it can be denied."

"Why should it be denied?" he asked softly and coming towards her. "Is there not much between you and me? Did not you, brave and blessed woman that you are, risk your life for my sake in the Old Tower at Jerusalem? Did you not for my sake stand there upon the gate Nicanor to perish miserably? And I, though it be little, have I not done something for you? Have I not so soon as your message reached me, journeyed here to Rome, at the cost, perhaps, of what I value more than life--my honour?"

"Your honour?" she asked. "Why your honour?"

"Because those who have been taken prisoner by the enemy and escaped are held to be cowards among the Romans," he answered bitterly, "and it may be that such a lot awaits me."

"Coward! You a coward, Marcus?"

"Aye. When it is known that I live, that is what my enemies will call me who lived on for your sake, Miriam--for the sake of a woman who denies me."

"Oh!" she said, "this is bitter. Now I remember and understand what Gallus meant."

"Then will you still deny me? Must I suffer thus in vain? Think, had it not been for you I could have stayed afar until the thing was forgotten, that is, if I still chose to live; but now, because of you, things are thus, and yet, Miriam--you deny me," and he put his arms about her and drew her to his breast.

She did not struggle, she had no strength, only she wrung her hands and sobbed, saying:

"What shall I do? Woe is me, what shall I do?"

"Do?" said the voice of Nehushta, speaking clear as a clarion from the shadows. "Do your duty, girl, and leave the rest to Heaven."

"Silence, accursed woman!" gasped Marcus, turning pale with anger.

"Nay," she answered, "I will not be silent. Listen, Roman; I like you well, as you have reason to know, seeing that it was I who nursed you back to life, when for one hour's want of care you must have died. I like you well, and above everything on earth I wish that ere my eyes shut for the last time they may see your hand in her hand, and her hand in your hand, man and wife before the face of all men. Yet I tell you that now indeed you are a coward in a deeper fashion than that the Romans dream of; you are a coward who try to work upon the weakness of this poor girl's loving heart, who try in the hour of her sore distress to draw her from the spirit, if not from the letter, of her duty. So great a coward are you that you remind her even that she is your slave and threaten to deal with her as you heathen deal with slaves. You put a gloss upon the truth; you try to filch the fruit you may not pluck; you say 'you may not marry me, but you are my property, and therefore if you give way to your master it is no sin.' I tell you it is a sin, doubly a sin, since you would bind the weight of it on her back as well as on your own, and a sin that in this way or in that would bring its reward to both of you."

"Have you finished?" asked Marcus coldly, but suffering Miriam to slip from his arms back upon the couch.

"No, I have not finished; I spoke of the fruits of evil; now as my heart

prompts me I speak of the promise of good. Let this woman go free as you have the power to do; strike the chains off her neck and take back the price that you have paid for her, since she has property which will discharge it to the last farthing, which property to-day stands in her name and can be conveyed to you. Then, go search the Scriptures and see if you can find no message in them. If you find it, well and good, then take her with a clean heart and be happy. If you find it not, well and good, then leave her with a clean heart and be sorrowful, for so it is decreed. Only in this matter do not dare to be double-minded, lest the last evil overtake you and her, and your children and hers. Now I have done, and, my lord Marcus, be so good as to signify your pleasure to your slave, Pearl-Maiden, and your servant, Nehushta the Libyan."

Marcus began to walk up and down the room, out of the light into the shadow, out of the shadow into the light. Presently he halted, and the two women watching saw that his face was drawn and ashen, like the face of an old man.

"My pleasure," he said vacantly, "--that is a strange word on my lips to-night, is it not? Well, Nehushta, you have the best of the argument. All you say is quite true, if a little over-coloured. Of course, Miriam is quite right not to marry me if she has scruples, and, of course, I should be quite wrong to take advantage of the accident of my being able to purchase her in the slave-ring. I think that is all I have to say.

Miriam, I free you, as indeed I remember I promised the Essenes that I would do. Since no one knows you belong to me, I suppose that no formal

ceremony will be necessary. It is a manumission 'inter amicos,' as the lawyers say, but quite valid. As to the title to the Tyre property, I accept it in payment of the debt, but I beg that you will keep it a while on my behalf, for, at present, there might be trouble about transferring it into my name. Now, good-night. Nehushta will take you to her room, Miriam, and to-morrow you can depart whither you will. I wish you all fortune, and--why do you not thank me? Under the circumstances, it would be kind."

But Miriam only burst into a flood of tears.

"What will you do, Marcus? Oh! what will you do?" she sobbed.

"In all probability, things which I would rather you did not know of," he answered bitterly, "or I may take it into my head to accept the suggestion of our friend, Nehushta, and begin to search those Scriptures of which I have heard so much; that seem, by the way, specially designed to prevent the happiness of men and women." Then he added fiercely, "Go, girl, go at once, for if you stand there weeping before me any longer, I tell you that I shall change my mind, and as Nehushta says, imperil the safety of your soul, and of my own--which does not matter."

So Miriam stumbled from the room and through the curtained doorway. As Nehushta followed her Marcus caught her by the arm.

"I have half a mind to murder you," he said, quietly.

The old Libyan only laughed.

"All I have said is true and for your own good, Marcus," she answered,
"and you will live to know it."

"Where will you take her?"

"I don't know yet, but Christians always have friends."

"You will let me hear of her."

"Surely, if it is safe."

"And if she needs help you will tell me?"

"Surely, and if you need her help, and it can be done, I will bring her
to you."

"Then may I need help soon," he said. "Begone."