

"I have seen it all," he whispered, faintly, "and I no longer care to live. The sun of my life has set forever."

"Nay, speak not so," quoth the tearful princess. "Thou art yet my dearest friend. Canst thou not outlive thy grief?"

"Never," replied Kaloumis, solemnly. "And so it is better that I should die at once, rather than that my sorrow should eat away my life by parts."

And then in a broken voice he continued:

"Oh, Mercade, why couldst thou not have loved me as I have cherished thee? How canst thou give thy heart to the cold, pitiless Meneptah? Dost thou not see that it is thy wealth he covets, and not thy love? Oh, Mercade, how canst thou be so blind?"

"Nay, Kaloumis, it is not my will. Is it not my father's greatest desire to have me wed Meneptah? Thou knowest that I loved ye both so well that I knew not which to choose. So I did leave it to Fate but a few minutes ago. It was Fate, and not I, oh beloved Kaloumis, that hast decreed against thee. And is not Osris just? Does he not work for the best, even though it seemeth unjust to us?"

"Thou art right, Mercade. Yet even all thy entreaty cannot alter my decision. I am resolved to die. But remember, loved Mercade, that even in death I am near thee and that I shall avenge every indignity which thou mayest suffer with my spirit. Farewell."

And ere she could divine his purpose he had bent and kissed her reverently on the brow, sprung to his feet and gone rapidly away across the gleaming desert, while Mercade, with sorrowful heart, wended her way back to the sleeping palace—but not to sleep.

Next morning Kaloumis did not present himself at court, as usual, nor the next morning, nor the next. Firm and steadfast in his resolve, he had killed himself rather than live to see the triumph of his rival. But his disappearance was scarcely thought of during the excitement attendant upon the preparations for the marriage of the princess, and ere long he had passed from the memory of all but one—of mayhap, two.

At last the day of the nuptials dawned, and for many hours great crowds of people flocked into the capital and thronged the public square where the ceremonies were to take place. Promptly at the appointed hour the gorgeous bridal party came into the square amid the thunderous cheers of the multitudes.