

mitted him,
to celebrate

XVII. HOW SHE SAVED FIVE HUNDRED HARLOTS FROM A LIFE OF SIN, MADE AWAY WITH HER OWN NATURAL SON, AND OTHER CURIOUS INCIDENTS OF HER PASSION FOR MATCH MAKING

I HAVE told earlier in this narrative what she did to Belisarius, Photius and Buzes.

There were two members of the Blue faction, Cilicians by birth, who with a mob of others offered violence to Callinicus, Governor of the second Cilicia; and when his groom, who was standing near his master, tried to protect him, they slew the fellow before the eyes of the Governor and all the people. The Governor, convicting the two of this and many previous murders, sentenced them to death. Theodora heard of this, and to show her preference for the

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Blues, crucified Callinicus, without troubling to remove him from his office, on the spot where the murderers had been buried.

The Emperor affected to lament and mourn the death of his Governor, and sat around grumbling and making threats against those responsible for the deed. But he did nothing, except to seize the estate of the dead man.

Theodora also devoted considerable attention to the punishment of women caught in carnal sin. She picked up more than five hundred harlots in the Forum, who earned a miserable living by selling themselves there for three obols, and sent them to the opposite mainland, where they were locked up in the monastery called Repentance to force them to reform their way of life. Some of them, however, threw themselves from the parapets at night and thus freed themselves from an undesired salvation.

There were in Constantinople two girls:

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sisters, of a very illustrious family—not only had their father and grandfather been Consuls, but even before that their ancestors had been Senators. These girls had both married early, but became widows when their husbands died, and immediately Theodora, accusing them of living too merrily, chose new husbands for them, two common and disgusting fellows, and commanded the marriage to take place. Fearing this repulsive fate, the sisters fled to the Church of St. Sophia, and running to the holy water, clung tightly to the font. Yet such privations and ill treatment did the Empress inflict upon them there, that to escape from their sufferings they finally agreed to accept the proposed nuptials. For no place was sacred or inviolable to Theodora. Thus involuntarily these ladies were mated to beggarly and negligible men, far beneath their rank, although they had many wellborn suitors. Their mother, who was also a widow, attended the

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ceremony without daring to protest or even weep at their misfortune.

Later Theodora saw her mistake and tried to console them, to the public detriment, for she made their new husbands Dukes. Even this brought no comfort to the young women, for endless and intolerable woes were inflicted on practically all their subjects by these men; as I have told elsewhere. Theodora, however, cared nothing for the interest of office or government, or anything else, if only she accomplished her will.

She had accidentally become pregnant by one of her lovers, when she was still on the stage; and perceiving her ill luck too late, tried all the usual measures to cause a miscarriage, but despite every artifice was unable to prevail against nature at this advanced stage of development. Finding that nothing else could be done, she abandoned the attempt and was compelled to give birth to the child. The father of the

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baby, seeing that Theodora was at her wits' end and vexed because motherhood interfered with her usual recreations, and suspecting with good reason that she would do away with the child, took the infant from her, naming him John, and sailed with the baby to Arabia. Later, when he was on the verge of death and John was a lad of fourteen, the father told him the whole story about his mother.

So the boy, after he had performed the last rites for his departed father, shortly after came to Constantinople and announced his presence to the Empress's chamberlains. And they, not conceiving the possibility of her acting so inhumanly, reported to the mother that her son John had come. Fearing the story would get to the ears of her husband, Theodora bade her son be brought face to face with her. As soon as he entered she handed him over to one of her servants who was ordinarily entrusted with such commissions. And in what manner the poor

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lad was removed from the world, I cannot say, for no one has ever seen him since, not even after the Queen died. The ladies of the court at this time were nearly all of abandoned morals. They ran no risk in being faithless to their husbands, as the sin brought no penalty: even if caught in the act, they were unpunished, for all they had to do was to go to the Empress, claim the charge was not proven, and start a countersuit against their husbands. The latter, defeated without a trial, had to pay a fine of twice the dower, and were usually whipped and sent to prison; and the next time they saw their adulterous wives again, the ladies would be daintily entertaining their lovers more openly than ever. Indeed, many of the latter gained promotion and pay for their amorous services. After one such experience, most men who suffered these outrages from their wives preferred thereafter to be complaisant instead of being whipped, and gave them every liberty

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rather than seem to be spying on their affairs.

Theodora's idea was to control everything in the state to suit herself. Civil and ecclesiastical offices were all in her hands, and there was only one thing she was always careful to inquire about and guard as the standard of her appointments: that no honest gentleman should be given high rank, for fear he would have scruple against obeying her commands.

She arranged all marriages as if that were her divine right, and voluntary betrothal before a ceremony were unknown. A wife would suddenly be found for a man, chosen not because she pleased him, which is customary even among the barbarians, but because Theodora willed it. And the same was true of brides, who were forced to take men they did not desire. Frequently she even made the bride jump out of her marriage bed, and for no reason at all sent the bridegroom away before he had

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reached the chorus of his nuptial song; and her only angry words would be that the girl displeased her. Among the many to whom she did this were Leontius, the Referendar, and Saturninus, the son of Hermogenes the Master of Offices.

Now this Saturninus was betrothed to a maiden cousin, freeborn and a good girl, whom her father Cyril had promised him in marriage just after the death of Hermogenes. When their bridal chamber was in readiness, Theodora arrested the groom, who was conducted to another nuptial couch, where, weeping and groaning terribly, he was compelled to wed Chrysomallos's daughter. Chrysomallos herself had formerly been a dancer and a hetaera; at this time she lived in the palace, with another woman of the same name and one called Indaro, having given up Cupid and the stage to be of service to the Queen.

Saturninus, lying down finally to pleasant dreams with his new bride, discovered

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she was already unmaiden; and later told one of his friends that his new-found mate came to him not imperforate. When this comment got to Theodora, she ordered her servants, charging him with impious disregard of the solemnity of his matrimonial oath, to hoist him up like a schoolboy who had been saucy to his teacher: and after whipping him on his backsides, told him not to be such a fool thereafter.

What she did to John the Cappadocian I have told elsewhere; and need add only that her treatment of him was due to her anger, not at his transgressions against the state (and a proof of this is that those who later did even more terrible things to their subjects met no such similar fate from her), but because he had not only dared oppose her in other things, but had denounced her before the Emperor: with the result that she was all but estranged from her husband. I am explaining this now, for it is in this book, as I said in the foreword, that I

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necessarily tell the real truths and motives of events.

When she confined him in Egypt, after he had suffered such humiliations as I have previously described, she was not even then satisfied with the man's punishment, but never ceased hunting for false witnesses against him. Four years later, she was able to find two members of the Green party who had taken part in the insurrection at Cyzicus, and who were said to have shared in the assault upon the bishop. These two she overwhelmed with flattery and threats, and one of them, inspired by her promises, accused John of the murder; while the other utterly refused to be an accomplice in this libel, even when he was so injured by the torture that he seemed about to die on the spot. Consequently for all her efforts she was unable to cause John's death on this pretext. But the two young men had their right hands cut off: one, because he was unwilling to bear false

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witness; the other, that her conspiracy might not be utterly obvious. Thus she was able to do things in full public sight, and still nobody knew exactly what she had done.]

