

BARING-GOULD SABINE

DOMITIA

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Domitia

BOOK I

CHAPTER I. THE PORT OF CENCHRÆA

Flashes as of lightning shot from each side of a galley as she was being rowed into port. She was a bireme, that is to say, had two tiers of oars; and as simultaneously the double sets were lifted, held for a moment suspended, wet with brine, feathered, and again dipped, every single blade gleamed, reflecting the declining western sun, and together formed a flash from each side of the vessel of a sheaf of rays.

The bireme was approaching the entrance to the harbor of Cenchræa.

The one white sail was filled with what little wind breathed, and it shone against a sapphire sea like a moon.

Now, at a signal the oars ceased to plunge. The sail was furled, and the galley was carried into the harbor between the temple that stood on the northern horn of the mole, and the great brazen statue of Poseidon that occupied a rock in the midst of the entrance, driven forward by the impulse already given her by the muscles of the rowers and the east wind in the sail.

This Cenchræan harbor into which she swept was one of the busiest in the world. Through it as through a tidal sluice rushed the current of trade from the East to the West, and from the Occident to the Orient. It was planted on a bay of the Saronic Gulf, and on the Isthmus of Corinth, at the foot of that lovely range of mountains thrown up by the hand of God to wall off the Peloponnesus as the shrine of intellectual culture and the sanctuary of Liberty.

And a furrow – like an artificial dyke – ran between this range and Hellas proper, a furrow nearly wholly invaded by the sea, but still leaving a strip of land, the Corinthian isthmus, to form a barrier between the Eastern and the Western worlds.

On the platform at the head of a flight of marble steps before a temple of Poseidon, in her open litter, lounged a lady, with the bloom of youth gone from her face, but artificially restored.

She was handsome, with finely moulded features and a delicate white hand, the fingers studded with rings, and a beautiful arm which was exposed whenever any one drew near whose admiration was worth the acquisition. Its charm was enhanced by armlets of gold adorned with cameos.

Her arched brows, dark in color, possibly owed their perfection of turn and their depth of color to dye and the skill of the artist who decorated her every day, but not so the violet-blue of her large eyes, although these also were enhanced in effect by the tinting of the lashes, and a touch of paint applied to their roots.

The lady, whose name was Longa Duilia, was attended by female slaves, who stood behind the litter, and by a freedman, Plancus, who was at her side with a set smile on his waxen face, and who bowed towards the lady every moment to hear her remarks, uttered in a languid tone, and without her troubling to turn her head to address him.

“He will soon be here,” said the lady; “the bireme is in the port. I can see the ruffle before her bows as she cuts the water.”

“Like the wave in my lady’s hair,” sighed Plancus.

“Abominable!” exclaimed Duilia, “when the ripple in my hair is natural and abiding, and that in the water is made and disappears.”

“Because, Mistress, the wavelets look up, see, and fall back in despair.”

“That is better,” said the lady.

“And the swelling sail, like your divine bosom, has fallen, as when – ”

“Ugh! I should hope the texture of my skin was not like coarse sail-cloth; get behind me, Plancus. Here, Lucilla, how am I looking? I would have my lord see me to the best advantage.”

“Madam,” said the female slave, advancing, “the envious sun is about to hide his head in the west. He cannot endure, after having feasted on your beauty, to surrender it to a mortal.”

“Is not one eyebrow a trifle higher than the other?” asked Duilia, looking at herself in a hand mirror of polished metal.

“It is indeed so, lady, but has not the Paphian Goddess in the statue of Phidias the same characteristic? Defect it is not, but a token of divinity.”

“Ah,” said Duilia, “it is hereditary. The Julian race descends from Venus Genetrix, and I have the blood of the immortal ancestress in me.”

“Much diluted,” muttered Plancus into the breast of his tunic; he was out of humor at the failure of his little simile of the sail.

“By the way,” said the lady; “the stay in this place Cenchræa is positively intolerable. No society, only a set of merchants – rich and all that sort of thing – but nobodies. The villa we occupy is undignified and uncomfortable. The noise of the port, the caterwauling of sailors, and the smell of pitch are most distasteful to me. My lord will hardly tarry here?”

“My lord,” said the freedman, pushing forward, “he who subdued the Parthians, and chained the Armenians, to whom all Syria bowed, arrives to cast himself at your ladyship’s feet, and be led by you as a captive in your triumphal entry into the capital of the world.”

“You think so, Plancus.” She shook her head, “He is an obstinate man – pig-headed – I – I mean resolute in his own line.”

“Madam, I know you to be irresistible.”

“Well, I desire to leave this odious place. I have yawned here through three entire months.”

“And during these months, the temple of Aphrodite has been deserted, and the approaches grass-grown.”

“How would my Lady like to remove to Corinth?” said Lucilla. “The vessel will be taken to Diolcus, and there placed on rollers, to be drawn across the isthmus.”

“Oh! Corinth will be noisier than this place, and more vulgar, because more pretentious. Only money-lending Jews there. Besides, I have taken an aversion to the place since the death of my physician. As the Gods love me, I not see the good of a medical attendant who is so ignorant as to allow himself to die, and that at such an inconvenient moment as the present. By the Great Goddess! what impostors there be. To think that for years I committed the care of my precious health to his bungling hands! Plancus, have you secured another? I suffer frightfully at sea.”

“A sure token of your divine origin,” said the steward. “The Foam-born (Venus) rose out of and left the waves because the motion of them disagreed with her.”

“There is a good deal in that,” observed Longa Duilia. “Plancus, have you secured another? I positively cannot cross Adria without one to hold my head and supply anti – anti – what do you call them?”

“Madam,” said the freedman, rubbing his hands together, “I have devoted my energies to your service. I have gone about with a lantern seeking an honest physician. I may not have been as successful as I desired, but I have done my utmost.”

“I prithee – have done with this rodomontade and to the point. Have you secured one? As the Gods love me! it is not only one’s insides that get upset at sea, but one’s outside also becomes so tousled and tumbled – that the repairs – but never mind about them. Have you engaged a man?”

“Yes, my Lady, I have lighted on one Luke, a physician of Troas; he is desirous of proceeding to Rome, and is willing to undertake the charge of your health, in return for being conveyed to the capital of the world at your charges.”

“I make you responsible for his suitability,” said Longa Duilia.

“Body of Bacchus!” she exclaimed suddenly, after a pause, “Where is the child?”

“Where is the lady Domitia Longina?” asked Plancus, as he looked about him.

“The lady Domitia, where is she?” asked Lucilla.

“The lady Domitia?” – passed from one to another.

“Where is she? What has become of her? As the Gods love me – you are a pack of fools. The more of you there are, so much the more of folly. You have let her gallop off among the odious sailors, and she will come back rank with pitch. Lucilla, Favonia, Syra, where is she?”

Duilia sat upright on her seat, and her eyes roamed searchingly in every direction.

“I never met with such a child anywhere, it is the Corbulo blood in her, not mine. The Gods forbid! O Morals!”

“Madam,” said a slave-girl coming up. “I saw her with Eboracus.”

“Well, and where is Eboracus. They are always together. He spoils the child, and she pays him too much consideration. Where are they?”

The slaves, male and female, looked perplexedly in every direction.

“Perhaps,” said Plancus, “she has gone to the altar of Poseidon to offer there thanks for the return of her father.”

“Poseidon, nonsense! That is not her way. She has been in a fever ever since the vessel has been sighted, her cheeks flaming and in a fidget as if covered with flying ants. Find the girl. If any harm shall have come to her through your neglect, I will have you all flayed – and hang the cost!”

She plucked a bodkin from her dress, and ran it into the shoulder of the slave-woman, Favonia, who stood near her, and made her cry out with pain.

“You are a parcel of idle, empty-headed fools,” exclaimed the alarmed and irritated mother, “I will have the child found, and that instantly. You girls, you have been gaping, watching the sailors, and have not had an eye on your young mistress, and no concern for my feelings. There is no more putting anything into your heads than of filling the sieves of the Danaides.”

“Madam,” said Plancus, for once without a smile on his unctuous face, “you may rest satisfied that no harm has befallen the young lady. So long as Eboracus is with her, she is safe. That Briton worships her. He would suffer himself to be torn limb from limb rather than allow the least ill to come to her.”

“Well, well,” said the lady impatiently, “we expect all that sort of thing of our slaves.”

“Madam, but do we always get it?”

“We! The Gods save me! How you talk. *We!* We, indeed. Pray what are you to expect anything?”

“The other day, lady,” hastily continued the steward eager to allay the ebullition he had provoked. “The other day, Eboracus nigh on killed a man who looked with an insolent leer at his young mistress. He is like a faithful Molossus.”

“I do not ask what he is like,” retorted the still ruffled lady, “I ask where she is.”

Then one of the porters of the palanquin came forward respectfully and said to the steward: – “If it may please you, sir, will you graciously report to my Lady that I observed the young mistress draw Eboracus aside, and whisper to him, as though urging somewhat, and he seemed to demur, but he finally appeared to yield to her persuasions, and they strolled together along the mole.”

Longa Duilia overheard this. It was not the etiquette for an underling to address his master or mistress directly unless spoken to.

She said sharply: – “Why did not the fellow mention this before? Give him thirty lashes. Where did they go, did he say?”

“Along the mole.”

“Which mole?”

“Madam, Carpentarius is afraid of extending his communication lest he increase the number of his lashes.”

“Well, well!” exclaimed the mistress, “We may remit the lashes – let him answer.”

“Carpentarius,” said the steward, “Her ladyship, out of the superabundance of her compassion, will let you off the thirty lashes, if you say where be Eboracus and the young lady, your mistress Domitia Longina.”

“Sir,” answered the porter, “that I cannot answer positively; but – unless my eyes deceive me, I see a small boat on the water, within it a rower and a young girl.”

“By the Immortal Brothers! he is right,” exclaimed Plancus. “See, lady, yonder is a cockle boat, that has been unmoored from the mole, and there be in it a rower, burly, broadbacked, who is certainly the Briton, and in the bow is as it were a silver dove – and that can be none other than your daughter.”

“As the Gods love me,” gasped Duilia, throwing herself back in the litter; “what indelicacy! It is even so, the child is besotted. She dotes on her father, whom she has not seen since we left Antioch. And she has actually gone to meet him. O Venus Kalyppe! What are we coming to, when children act in this independent, indecent manner. O Times! O Morals!”

CHAPTER II. AN ILL-OMEN

It was even so.

The young girl had coaxed the big Briton to take her in a boat to the galley, so as to meet and embrace her father, before he came on shore.

She was a peculiarly affectionate child, and jealous to boot. She knew that, so soon as he landed, his whole attention would be engrossed by her very exacting mother, who moreover would keep her in the background, and would chide should the father divert his notice from herself to his child.

She was therefore determined to be the first to salute him, and to receive his endearments, and to lavish on him her affection, unchecked by her mother.

As for the slave, he knew that he would get into trouble if he complied with the girl's request, but he was unable to resist her blandishments.

And now Domitia reached the side of the galley, and a rope was cast to the boat, caught by Eboracus, who shipped his oars, and the little skiff was made fast to the side of the vessel.

The eyes of the father had already recognized his child. Domitia stood in the bows and extended her arms, poised on tiptoe, as if, like a bird about to leap into the air and fly to his embrace.

And now he caught her hand, looked into her dancing, twinkling eyes, as drops of the very Ægean itself, set in her sweet face, and in another moment she was clinging round his neck, and sobbing as though her heart would break, yet not with sorrow, but through excess of otherwise inexpressible joy.

For an hour she had him to herself – all to herself – the dear father whom she had not seen for half a year, to tell him how she loved him, to hear about himself, to pour into his ear her story of pleasures and pains, great pleasures and trifling pains.

And yet – no, not wholly uninterrupted was the meeting and sweet converse, for the father said:

“My darling, hast thou no word for Lucius?”

“Lamia! He is here?”

The father, Cnæus Domitius Corbulo, with a smile turned and beckoned.

Then a young man, with pleasant, frank face, came up. He had remained at a distance, when father and daughter met, but had been unable to withdraw his eyes from the happy group.

“Domitia, you have not forgotten your old playmate, have you?”

With a light blush like the tint on the petal of the rose of June, the girl extended her hand.

“Nay, nay!” said Corbulo. “A gentler, kinder greeting, after so long a separation.”

Then she held up her modest cheek, and the young man lightly touched it with his lips.

She drew herself away and said:

“You will not be angry if I give all my thoughts and words and looks to my father now. When we come on shore, he will be swallowed up by others.”

Lamia stepped back.

“Do not be offended,” she said with a smile, and the loveliest, most bewitching dimples came into her cheeks. “I have not indeed been without thought of you, Lucius, but have spun and spun and weaved too, enough to make you a tunic, all with my own hands, and a purple *clavus*— it nigh ruined me, the dyed Tyrian wool cost¹— I will not say; but I wove little crossed L's into the texture.”

“What,” said Corbulo. “For Lucius and Longina?”

The girl became crimson.

¹ Double-dyed Tyrian wool cost over £40 in English money per lb.

Lamia came to her succor. "That could not be," said he, "for Longina and Lucius are never across, but alack! Lucius is often so with Lamia, when he has done some stupid thing and he sees a frown on his all but father's face, but hears no word of reproach."

"My boy," said Corbulo, "when a man knows his own faults, then a reprimand is unnecessary, and what is unnecessary is wrong."

Lamia bowed and retired.

And now again father and daughter were alone together in the prow observing the arc of the harbor in which the ship was gliding smoothly.

And now the sailors had out their poles and hooks, and they ran the vessel beside the wharf, and cast out ropes that were made fast to bronze rings in the marble breasting of the quay.

Domitia would at once have drawn her father on shore, but he restrained her.

"Not yet, my daughter," he said; "the goddess must precede thee."

And now ensued a singular formality.

From the bows of the vessel, the captain and steerer took a statuette of Artemis, in bronze, the Ephesian goddess, with female head and numerous breasts, but with the lower limbs swaddled, and the swaddling bands decorated with representations of all kinds of beasts, birds, and fishes.

This image was now conveyed on shore, followed by the passengers and crew.

On the quay stood an altar, upon which charcoal ever burnt, under the charge of a priest who attended to it continuously, and whenever a ship entered the port or was about to leave, added fuel, and raked and blew up the fire.

Simultaneously from a small temple on the quay issued a priest with veiled head, and his attendants came to the altar, cast some grains of incense on the embers, and as the blue fragrant smoke arose and was dissipated by the sea breeze, he said: —

"The Goddess Aphrodite of Corinth salutes her divine sister, the Many-Breasted Artemis of Ephesus, and welcomes her. And she further prays that she may not smite the city or the port with fire, pestilence or earthquake."

Then captain, steerman, pilot and the rest of the company advanced in procession to the temple, and on reaching it offered a handful of sweet gums on an altar there, before the image of the foam-born goddess of Beauty, and said: —

"We who come from the sea, having safely traversed the Ægean, escaped rocks and sand-banks, whirlpools and storms, under the protection of the great goddess of Ephesus, salute in her name the goddess of Beauty, and receive her welcome with thankfulness. And great Artemis beseeches her sister to suffer her and the vessel with passengers and goods and crew, that she conducts and protects, to pass across the isthmus, without let and molestation; and she for her part undertakes to pay the accustomed toll, and the due to the temple of Aphrodite, and that neither the passengers nor the crew shall in any way injure or disturb the inhabitants of Corinth or of the Isthmus."

This ceremony concluded, all were at liberty to disperse; the sailors to attend to the vessel, the slaves of Corbulo to look to and land such of his luggage as he was likely to want, and Corbulo to go to his wife, who had placed herself in an attitude to receive him.

The captain, at the same time, entered the harbor-master's office to arrange about the crossing of the isthmus, and to settle tolls.

For the vessel was not to make more stay than a few days at the port of Cenchræa. After Longa Duilia was ready, then she and her husband and family were to proceed to Lechæum, the port on the Corinthian Gulf, there to embark for Italy. The vessel would leave the harbor and go to Diolchus, that point of the Isthmus on the east where the neck of land was narrowest. There the ships would be hauled out of the water, placed on rollers, and by means of oxen, assisted by gangs of slaves, would convey the vessel over the land for six miles to the Gulf of Corinth, where again she would be floated.

Immediately behind the Roman general, Corbulo, the father of Domitia, walked two individuals, both wearing long beards, and draped to the feet.

One of these had a characteristically Oriental head. His eyes were set very close together, his nose was aquiline, his tint sallow, his eyebrows heavy and bushy, and his general expression one of cunning and subtlety. His movements were stately.

The other was not so tall. He was clumsy in movement, rugged in feature, with a broken nose, his features distinctly Occidental, as was his bullet head. His hair was sandy, and scant on his crown. He wore a smug, self-complacent expression on his pursed-up lips and had a certain "I am Sir Oracle, let no dog bark" look in his pale eyes.

These two men, walking side by side, eyed each other with ill-concealed dislike and disdain.

The former was a Chaldæan, who was usually called Elymas, but affected in Greek to be named Ascleterion.

The latter was an Italian philosopher who had received his training in Greece at a period when all systems of philosophy were broken up and jostled each other in their common ruin.

No sooner was the ceremony at an end, and Corbulo had hastened from the wharf to meet and embrace his wife, and Lamia had drawn off Domitia for a few words, than these two men left to themselves instinctively turned to launch their venom at each other.

The philosopher, with a toss of his beard, and a lifting of his light eyebrows, and the protrusion of his lower lip said:

"And pray, what has the profundity of Ascleterion alias Elymas beheld in the bottom of that well he terms his soul?"

"He has been able to see what is hidden from the shallowness of Claudius Senecio alias *Spermologos*² over the surface of which shallowness his soul careers like a water spider."

"And that is, O muddiness?"

"Ill-luck, O insipidity."

"Why so? – not, the Gods forbend, that I lay any weight on anything you may say. But I like to hear your vaticinations that I may laugh over them."

"Hear, then. Because a daughter of Earth dared to set foot on the vessel consecrated to and conducted by Artemis before that the tutelary goddess had been welcomed by and had saluted the tutelary deity of the land."

"I despise your prophecies of evil, thou crow."

"Not more than do I thy platitudes, O owl!"

"Hearken to the words of the poet," said the philosopher, and he started quoting the *Œdipus Tyrannus*: "The Gods know the affairs of mortals. But among men, it is by no means certain that a soothsayer is of more account than myself!" And Senecio snapped his fingers in the face of the Magus.

"Conclude thy quotation," retorted Elymas. " 'A man's wisdom may surpass Wisdom itself. Therefore never will I condemn the seer, lest his words prove true.' How like you that?" and he snapped his fingers under the nose of the philosopher.

² The term used of St. Paul by the wise men of Athens. It means a picker up of unconsidered trifles which he strings together into an unintelligible system.

CHAPTER III. CORBULO

Cnæus Domitius Corbulo was the greatest general of his time, and he had splendidly served the State.

His sister Cæsonia had been the wife of the mad prince Caligula. She was not beautiful, but her flexible mouth, her tender eyes, the dimples in her cheeks, her exquisite grace of manner and sweetness of expression had not only won the heart of the tyrant, but had enabled her to maintain it.

Once, in an outburst of surprise at himself for loving her, he threatened to put her to the torture to wring from Cæsonia the secret of her hold on his affections. Once, as he caressed her, he broke into hideous laughter, and when asked the reason, said, "I have but to speak the word, and this lovely throat would be cut."

Yet this woman loved the maniac, and when he had been murdered in the subterranean gallery leading from the palace to the theatre, she crept to the spot, and was found kneeling by her dead husband with their babe in her arms, sobbing and wiping the blood from his face. The assassins did not spare her. They cut her down and dashed out the brains of the infant against the marble walls.

Corbulo was not only able, he was successful. Under Nero he was engaged in the East against the Parthians, the most redoubted enemies of the empire. He broke their power and sent their king, Tiridates, a suppliant to Rome.

His headquarters had been at Antioch, and there for a while his wife and daughter had resided with him. But after a while, they were sent part way homewards, as Corbulo himself expected his recall.

They had been separated from him for over six months, and had been awaiting his arrival in a villa at Cenchræa, that had been placed at their disposal by a Greek client.

It was customary for those who did not live in Rome but belonged to a province, to place themselves under the patronage of a Roman noble; whereupon ensued an exchange of "cards" as we should say, but actually of engraved plates or metal fishes on which the date of the agreement was entered as well as the names of the contracting parties. Then, when a provincial desired assistance at the capital, in obtaining redress for a grievance in a lawsuit, or in recovering a debt, his patron attended to his client's interests, and should he visit Rome received him into his house as an honored guest.

On the other hand, if the patron were on a journey and came to the place where his client could serve him, the latter threw his house open to him, treated him with the most profound respect and accorded to him the largest hospitality. So now the villa of a client had been placed at the disposal of Corbulo and his family, and he occupied it with as little hesitation as though it were his own.

It was a matter of pride to a Roman noble to have a large number of silver engraved plates and fishes suspended in his atrium, announcing to all visitors what an extensive *clientèle* he had, and the provincial was not less proud to be able to flourish the name of his distinguished patron at the capital.

On the evening following the disembarkation, Corbulo and his wife were seated on a bench enjoying the pleasant air that fanned from the sea; and looking over the terraced garden at their daughter, who was gambolling with a long silky-haired kid from Cilicia, that her father had brought as a present to his child.

She was a lovely girl, aged sixteen, with a remarkably intelligent face, and large, clear, shrewd eyes.

Yet, though lovely, none could say that she was beautiful. Her charm was like that of her aunt, Cæsonia, in grace of form, in changefulness and sweetness of expression, and in the brimming intellect that flashed out of her violet eyes. And now as she played with the kid, her every movement formed an artist's study, and the simple joy that shone out of her face, and the affection wherewith

she glanced at intervals at her father, invested her with a spiritual charm, impossible to be achieved by sculptor with his chisel or by painter with his brush.

The eyes of Domitius Corbulo followed his child, wherever she went, whatever she did. He was a man of somewhat advanced age, shaven, with short shorn hair, marked features, the brow somewhat retreating, but with a firm mouth and strong jaw. Though not handsome, there was refinement in his countenance which gave it a character of nobleness, and the brilliant eye and decision in the countenance inspired universal respect. Every one could see that he was not merely a commander of men in war, but a man of culture in the forum and the academy.

“Wife,” said he, “I pray you desist. It was for this that I sent you back from Antioch. You ever twanged one string, and I felt that your words, if overheard, might endanger us all.”

“I speak but into thine ear.”

“A brimming vessel overflows on all sides,” said Corbulo.

“Ah well! some men make themselves by grasping at what the Gods offer them. Others lose themselves by disregarding the favors extended by the Immortals.”

“I deny that any such offer was made me,” said the general in a tone of annoyance.

“What!” exclaimed Longa Duilia, “art thou so blind as not to see what is obvious to every other eye, that the Roman people are impatient at having a buffoon, a mimic, a fiddler wearing the purple?”

“Nevertheless, he wears it, by favor of the gods.”

“For how long? Domitius, believe me. In the heart of every Roman citizen rage is simmering, and the wound of injured pride rankles. He has insulted the majesty of eternal Rome. After having acted the buffoon in Italy, running up and down it like a jester on a tight-rope mouthing at the people, and with his assassins scattered about below to cut them down if they do not applaud – then he comes here also into Greece, to act on stages, race chariots, before Greeks – Greeks of all people! To me this is nothing, for all princes are tyrants more or less, and so long as they do not prick me, I care not. But here it does come close. In every army, in the breast of every soldier, rebellion springs up. Every general is uneasy and looks at the face of every other and asks, Who will draw the sword and make an end of this? O Morals! it makes me mad to see you alone quiescent.”

“When the Gods will a change, then the change will be granted.”

“You speak like a philosopher and not a man of action. If you do not draw, others will forestall you, and then – instead of my being up at the top – I shall be down in Nowhere.”

“Never will I be a traitor to Rome, and go against my oath.”

“Pshaw! They all do it, so why not you?”

“Because my conscience will not suffer me.”

“Conscience! The haruspices have never found it yet. They can discover and read the liver and the kidneys, but no knife has yet laid bare a conscience as big as a bean. You were the darling of the soldiery in Germany. You are still the idol of those who have fought under you in Parthia and Armenia. I am sure I did my best to push your cause. I was gracious to the soldiery – sent tit-bits from the table to the guard. I tipped right and left, till I spent all my pocket-money, and smiled benignantly on all military men till I got a horrible crumple here in my cheek, do you see?”

“Yes, shocking,” said Corbulo, indifferently.

“How can you be so provoking!” exclaimed Duilia pettishly. “Of course there is no wrinkle, there might have been, I did so much smiling. Really, Corbulo, one has to do all the picking – as boys get wrinkles out of their shells with a pin – to extract a compliment from you. And out comes the pin with nothing at the end. Plancus would not have let that pass.”

“Do you say that Nero is here?”

“Yes, here, in Greece; here at our elbow, at Corinth. He has for once got a clever idea into his head and has begun to cut a canal through the isthmus. It has begun with a flourish of trumpets and a dinner and a dramatic exhibition – and then I warrant you it will end.”

“The Prince at Corinth!”

“Yes, at Corinth; and you are here with all the wide sea between you and your troops. And docile as a lamb you have come here, and left your vantage ground. What it all means, the Gods know. It is no doing of mine. I warned and exhorted at Antioch, but you might have been born deaf for all the attention you paid to my words.”

“Never would I raise my sacrilegious hand against Rome – my mother.”

“Nay – it is Rome that cries out to be rid of a man that makes her the scorn of the world.”

“She has not spoken. She has not released me of my oath.”

“Because her mouth is gagged. As the Gods love me, they say that the god Caius (Caligula) named his horse Consul. Rome may have a monkey as her prince and Augustus for aught I care, were it not that by such a chance the handle is offered for you to upset him and seat yourself and me at the head of the universe.”

“No more of this,” said the general. “A good soldier obeys his commander. And I have an *imperator*,” he touched his breast; “a good conscience, and I go nowhere, undertake nothing which is not ordered by my master there.”

“Then I wash my hands of the result.”

“Come hither!” Corbulo called, and signed to his daughter who, with a flush of pleasure, left her kid and ran to him.

He took both her hands by the wrists, and holding her before him, panting from play, and with light dancing in her blue eyes, he said, “Domitia, I have not said one grave word to thee since we have been together. Yet now will I do this. None can tell what may be the next turn up of the die. And this that I am about to say comes warm and salt from my heart, like the spring hard by, at the Bath of Helene.”

“And strong, father,” said the girl, with flashes in her speaking eyes. “So strong is the spring that at once it turns a mill, ere rushing down to find its rest in the sea.”

“Well, and so may what I say so turn and make thee active, dear child, – active for good, though homely the work may be as that of grinding flour. When you have done a good work, and not wasted the volume of life in froth and cascade, then find rest in the wide sea of – ”

“Of what?” sneered Duilia, “say it out – of nobody knows what.”

“That which thou sayest, dearest father, will not sleep in my heart.”

“Domitia, when we sail at sea, we direct our course by the stars. Without the stars we should not know whither to steer. And the steering of the vessel by the stars, that is seamanship. So in life. There are principles of right and wrong set in the firmament – ”

“Where?” asked Duilia. “As the Gods love me, I never saw them.”

“By them,” continued Corbulo, disregarding the interruption, “we must shape our course, and this true shaping of our course, and not drifting with tides, or blown hither and thither by winds – this is the seamanship of life.”

“By the Gods!” said Duilia. “You must first find your stars. I hold what you say to be rank nonsense. Where are your stars? Principles! You keep your constellations in the hold of your vessel. My good Corbulo, our own interest, that we can always see, and by that we ought ever to steer.”

“Father,” said the girl, “I see a centurion and a handful of soldiers coming this way – and, if I mistake not, Lamia is speeding ahead of them.”

“Well, go then, and play with the kid. Hear how the little creature bleats after thee.”

She obeyed, and the old soldier watched his darling, with his heart in his eyes.

Presently, when she was beyond hearing, he said: —

“Now about the future of Domitia. I wish her no better fortune than to become the wife of Lucius Ælius Lamia, whom I love as my son. He has been in and out among us at Antioch. He returns with me to Rome. In these evil times, for a girl there is one only chance – to be given a good husband. This I hold, that a woman is never bad unless man shows her the way. If, as you say, there be no stars in the sky – there is love in the heart. By Hercules! here comes Lamia, and something ails him.”

Lucius was seen approaching through the garden. His face was ashen-gray, and he was evidently a prey to the liveliest distress.

He hastened to Corbulo, but although his lips moved, he could not utter a word.

“You would speak with me,” said the old general rising, and looking steadily in the young man’s face.

Something he saw there made him divine his errand.

Then Corbulo turned, kissed his wife, and said —

“Farewell. I am rightly served.”

He took a step from her, looked towards Domitia, who was dancing to her kid, above whose reach she held a bunch of parsley.

He hesitated for a moment. His inclination drew him towards her; but a second thought served to make him abandon so doing, and instead, he bent back to his wife, and said to her, with suppressed emotion —

“Bid her from me – as my last command – Follow the Light where and when she sees it.”

CHAPTER IV. THERE IS NO STAR

A quarter of an hour had elapsed since Corbulo entered the peristyle of the villa, when the young man Lamia came out.

He was still pale as death, and his muscles twitched with strong emotion.

He glanced about him in quest of Longa Duilia, but that lady had retired precipitately to the *gynaikonitis*, or Lady's hall, where she had summoned to her a bevy of female slaves and had accumulated about her an apothecary's shop of restoratives.

Domitia was still in the garden, playing with the kid, and Lamia at once went to her, not speedily, but with repugnance.

She immediately desisted from her play, and smiled at his approach. They were old acquaintances, and had seen much of each other in Syria.

Corbulo had not been proconsul, but legate in the East, and had made Antioch his headquarters. He had been engaged against the Parthians and Armenians for eight years, but the war had been intermittent, and between the campaigns he had returned to Antioch, to the society of his wife and little daughter.

The former, a dashing, vain and ambitious woman, had made a *salon* there which was frequented by the best society of the province. Corbulo, a quiet, thoughtful and modest man, shrunk from the stir and emptiness of such life, and had found rest and enjoyment in the company of his daughter.

Lamia had served as his secretary and aide-de-camp. He was a youth of much promise, and of singular integrity of mind and purity of morals in a society that was self-seeking, voluptuous, and corrupt.

He belonged to the *Ælian gens* or clan, but he had been adopted by a Lamia, a member of a family in the same clan, that claimed descent from Lamius, a son of Poseidon, or Neptune, by one of those fictions so dear to the Roman noble houses, and which caused the fabrication of mythical origins, just as the ambition of certain honorable families in England led to the falsification of the Roll of Battle Abbey.

Pliny tells a horrible story of the first Lamia of importance, known to authentic history. He had been an adherent of Cæsar and a friend of Cicero. He was supposed to be dead in the year in which he had been elected prætor, and was placed on the funeral pyre, when consciousness returned, but too late for him to be saved. The flames rose and enveloped him, and he died shrieking and struggling to escape from the bandages that bound him to the bier on which he lay.

Lucius Lamia had been kindly treated by Corbulo, and the young man's heart had gone out to the venerated general, to whom he looked up as a model of all the old Roman virtues, as well as a man of commanding military genius. The simplicity of the old soldier's manner and the freshness of his mind had acted as a healthful and bracing breeze upon the youth's moral character.

And now he took the young girl by the hand, and walked with her up and down the pleached avenues for some moments without speaking.

His breast heaved. His head swam. His hand that held hers worked convulsively.

All at once Domitia stood still.

She had looked up wondering at his manner, into his eyes, and had seen that they were full.

"What ails you, Lucius?"

"Come, sit by me on the margin of the basin," said he. "By the Gods! I conjure thee to summon all thy fortitude. I have news to communicate, and they of the saddest –"

"What! are we not to return to Rome? O Lamia, I was a child when I left it, but I love our house at Gabii, and the lake there, and the garden."

“It is worse than that, Domitia.” He seated himself on the margin of a basin, and nervously, not knowing what he did, drew his finger in the water, describing letters, and chasing the darting fish.

“Domitia, you belong to an ancient race. You are a Roman, and have the blood of the Gods in your veins. So nerve thy heroic soul to hear the worst.”

And still he thrust after the frightened fish with his finger, and she looked down, and saw them dart like shadows in the pool, and her own frightened thoughts darted as nimbly and as blindly about in her head.

“Why, how now, Lamia? Thou art descended by adoption from the Earth-shakes, and tremblest as a girl! See – a tear fell into the basin. Oh, Lucius! My very kid rears in surprise.”

“Do not mock. Prepare for the worst. Think what would be the sorest ill that could befall thee.”

Domitia withdrew her eyes from the fish and the water surface rippled by his finger, and looked now with real terror in his face.

“My father?”

Then Lamia raised his dripping finger and pointed to the house.

She looked, and saw that the gardener had torn down boughs of cypress, and therewith was decorating the doorway.

At the same moment rose a long-drawn, desolate wail, rising, falling, ebbing, flowing – a sea of sound infinitely sad, heart-thrilling, blood-congealing.

For one awful moment, one of those moments that seems an eternity, Domitia remained motionless.

She could hear articulate words, voices now.

“Come back! O Cnæus! Come, thou mighty warrior! Come, thou pillar of thy race! Come back, thou shadow! Return, O fleeted soul! See, see! thy tabernacle is still warm. Return, O soul! return!”

She knew it – the *conclamatio*; that cry uttered about the dead in the hopes of bringing back the spirit that has fled.

Then, before Lamia could stop her, Domitia started from the margin of the pool, startling the fish again and sending them flying as rays from where she had been seated, and ran to the house.

The gardener, with the timidity of a slave, did not venture to forbid passage.

A soldier who was withdrawing extended his arm to bar the doorway. Quick as thought she dived below this barrier, and next moment with a cry that cut through the wail of the mourners, she cast herself on the body of her father, that lay extended on the mosaic floor, with a blood-stained sword at his side, and a dark rill running from his breast over the enamelled pavement.

Next moment Lamia entered.

Around the hall were mourners, slaves of the house, as also some of those of Longa Duilia, raising their arms and lowering them, uttering their cries of lamentation and invocations to the departed soul, some rending their garments, others making believe to tear their hair and scratch their faces.

In the midst lay the dead general, and his child clung to him, kissed him, chafed his hands, endeavored to stanch his wound, and addressed him with endearments.

But all was in vain. The spirit was beyond recall, and were it to return would again be expelled. Corbulo was dead.

The poor child clasped him, convulsed with tears; her copious chestnut hair had become unbound, and was strewed about her, and even dipped in her father’s blood. She was as though frantic with despair; her gestures, her cry very different from the formal expressions and utterances of the servile mourners.

But Lamia at length touched her, and said —

“Come away, Domitia. You cannot prevent Fate.”

Suddenly she reared herself on her knees, and put back the burnished rain of hair that shrouded her face, and said in harsh tones: —

“Who slew him?”

“He fell on his own sword.”

“Why! He was happy?”

Before an answer was given, she reeled and fell unconscious across her father’s body.

Then Lamia stooped, gathered her up tenderly, pitifully, in his arms, and bore her forth into the garden to the fountain, where he could bathe her face, and where the cool air might revive her.

Why was Corbulo dead? and why had he died by his own hand?

The Emperor Nero was, as Duilia had told her husband, at this very time in Greece, and further, hard by at Corinth, where he was engaged in superintending the cutting of a canal, that was to remove the difficulty of a passage from the Saronic to the Corinthian Gulf.

Nero had come to Greece attended by his Augustal band of five thousand youths with flowing locks, and gold bangles on their wrists, divided into three companies, whose duty it was to applaud the imperial mountebank, and rouse or lead enthusiasm, the Hummers by buzzing approval, the Clappers by beating their hands together, and the Clashers by kicking pots about so as to produce a contagious uproar.

Nero was possessed with the delusion that he had a fine voice, and that he was an incomparable actor. Yet his range was so small, that when striving to sink to a bass note, his voice became a gurgle, and when he attempted to soar to a high note, he raised himself on his toes, became purple in face, and emitted a screech like a peacock.

Not satisfied with the obsequious applause of the Roman and Neapolitan citizens who crowded the theatre to hear the imperial buffoon twitter, he resolved to contest for prizes in the games of Greece.

A fleet attended him, crowded with actors, singers, dancers, heaped up with theatrical properties, masks, costumes, wigs, and fiddles.

He would show the Greeks that he could drive a chariot, sing and strut the stage now in male and then in female costume, and adapt his voice to the sex he personated, now grumbling in masculine tones, then squeaking in falsetto, and incomparable in each.

But with the cunning of a madman, he took with him, as his court, the wealthiest nobles of Rome, whom he had marked out for death, either because he coveted their fortunes or suspected their loyalty.

Wherever he went, into whatsoever city he entered, his artistic eye noted the finest statues and paintings, and he carried them off, from temple as from marketplace, to decorate Rome or enrich his Golden House, the palace he had erected for himself.

Tortured by envy of every one who made himself conspicuous; hating, fearing such as were in all men’s mouths, through their achievements, or notable for virtue, his suspicion had for some time rested on Domitius Corbulo, who had won laurels first in Germany and afterwards in Syria.

He had summoned him to Rome, with the promise of preferments, his purpose being to withdraw him from the army that adored him, and to destroy him.

No sooner did the tidings reach the tyrant at Corinth, that the veteran hero was arrived at Cenchræa, than he sent him a message to commit suicide. A gracious condescension that, for the property of the man who was executed was forfeit and his wife and children reduced to beggary, whereas the will of the testator who destroyed himself was allowed to remain in force.

Lamia washed the stains from the hands and locks of the girl, and bathed her face with water till she came round.

Then, when he saw that she had recovered full consciousness, he asked to be allowed to hasten for assistance. She bowed her head, as she could not speak, and he entered the women’s portion of the villa to summon some of the female slaves. These were, however, in no condition to answer his call and be of use. Duilia had monopolized the attentions of almost all such as had not been commissioned to raise the funeral wail. Some, indeed, there were, scattered in all directions, running against each

other, doing nothing save add to the general confusion, but precisely these were useless for Lamia's purpose.

Unwilling to leave the child longer alone, Lucius returned to the garden, and saw Domitia seated on the breastwork of the fountain.

Ten years seemed to have passed over her head, so altered was she.

She was not now weeping. The rigidity of the fainting fit seemed not to have left her face, nor relaxed the stony appearance it had assumed. Her eyes were lustreless, and her lips without color.

The young man was startled at her look.

"Domitia!" said he.

She raised her eyes to him, and said in reply,

"Lucius!" Then letting them fall, she added in hard, colorless tones, "There is one thing I desire of thee. By some means or other, I care not what, bring me into the presence of the monster. I know how my father has come by his death – as have so many others, the best and the noblest. I have but one ambition on earth, I see but a single duty before me – to drive if it be but a silver bodkin into his heart."

"Domitia!"

"Lucius, the last words my father used to me were to bid me look to the stars and to sail by them. I look and I see one only star. I feel but one only duty on earth – to revenge his death."

"My friend!" said Lamia, in a low tone. "Be careful of thy words. If overheard, they might cause your blood to be mingled with his."

"I care not."

"But to me it matters sovereignly."

"Why? Dost thou care for me?"

"Above all in the world."

"Then revenge me."

"Domitia, my grief is little less than thine. If you would revenge the loss, so would I. But what can be done? He, the coward, is carefully guarded. None are suffered to approach him who have not first been searched, and even then are not allowed within arm's length. Nothing can be done, save invoke the Gods."

"The Gods!" laughed the girl hoarsely. "The Gods! They set up the base, the foul, and crown him with roses, and trample the noble and good into the earth. The Gods! see you now! They set a star in heaven, they grave a duty in my heart, and the star is unattainable, and the duty, they make impossible of achievement. Bah! There is no star. There are no duties on earth, and no Gods in heaven."

CHAPTER V. THE SHIP OF THE DEAD

"It is of no use in the world, Plancus, your attempting to reason me out of a fixed resolve," said the lady Longa Duilia, peevishly. "My Corbulo shall not have a shabby funeral."

"Madam, I do not suggest that," said the steward humbly, rubbing his hands.

"Yes, you do. It is of no good your standing on one leg like a stork. Shabby it must be – no ancestors present. As the Gods love me, you would not have me borrow ancestors of Asclepiades, our client, who has lent us this villa! He may have them or not, that is no concern of mine. Will you have done preening yourself like an old cockroach. I say it would be an indignity to have a funeral for my Corbulo without ancestors. O Times! O Morals! What is the good of having ancestors if you do not use them?"

"But, Madam, they are in your palace at Rome in the Carinæ – or at the Gabian villa."

"And for that reason they are not here. Without the attendance of his forbears, my Corbulo shall not be buried. Besides, who is there to impress here with the solemnity? Only a lot of wretched sailors, ship sutlers, Jew pedlers and petty officials, not worth considering. I have said it."

"But, Lady, Lucius Lamia agrees with me –"

"Lucius Ælius Lamia – it will not exhaust your lungs to give him his name more fully – is not as yet one of the family."

"Madam, consider how Agrippina did with Germanicus – she had his pyre at Antioch, and conveyed his ashes to Rome."

"Agrippina was able to have the funeral conducted with solemn pomp at Antioch. There were the soldiers, the lictors, great officers and all that sort of thing. Here – nothing at all. By the Immortals – consider the expenses, and none to look on gaping but tarry sailors and Jew rag-and-bone men."

"Madam!"

"Silence. Without ancestors! – as impossible as without wood."

To understand the point made so much of by the widow, the Roman funeral custom must be understood.

On the death of a noble or high official, his face was immediately moulded in wax, into a mask, or rather, into two masks, that were colored and supplied with glass eyes. One was placed over the dead face, when the corpse lay in state, and when he was conveyed to his funeral pyre, and the first effect of the rising flames was to dissolve the mask and disclose the dead features.

The ancient Greeks before they burned their dead laid gold-leaf masks on their faces, and in a still earlier time the face of the corpse was rouged with oxide of iron, to give it a false appearance of life.

But the second mask was preserved for the family portrait gallery.

When a Roman gentleman or lady was carried forth to his funeral pyre, he was preceded by a procession of actors dressed up in the togas and military or municipal insignia of departed ancestors, each wearing the wax mask of him he personified. For these masks were preserved with great care in the *atrium* of the house.

Now as Longa Duilia saw, to have her husband burned at Cenchræa, without a procession of imitation ancestors, would be to deprive the funeral of its most impressive feature.

Plancus had advised the burning at the port, with shorn rites, and that the ashes should be placed in the family mausoleum at Gabii, and that the utmost dignity should be accorded to this latter ceremony sufficient to content the most punctilious widow.

But this did not please the lady. The notion of a funeral with maimed pomp was distasteful to her; moreover, as she argued, it was illegal to have two funerals for the same man.

"That," said Plancus, "hardly applies to one who has died out of Italy."

"It is against the law," replied Duilia. "I will give no occasion to objection, offer no handle to informers. Besides, I won't have it. The respect I owe to Corbulo forbids the entertainment of such an idea. Really, and on my word, Plancus, I am not a child to be amused with shadow pictures, and unless you are making a rabbit, a fish, or a pig eating out of a trough, I cannot conceive what you are about with your hands, fumbling one over the other."

"Madam, I had no thought –"

"I know you have none. Be pleased another time when addressing me to keep your hands quiet, it is irritating. One never knows where they are or will be, sometimes folding and unfolding them, then – they disappear up your sleeves and project none can guess where – like snails' horns. Be pleased, – and now pawing your face like a cat washing itself. Please in future hold them in front of you like a dog when sitting up, begging. But as to the funeral – I will not have it cheap and nasty. Without ancestors a funeral is not worth having."

"Then," said the harassed freedman, "there is nothing for it but to engage an embalmer."

"Of course – one can be obtained at Corinth. Everything can be had for money."

As Plancus was retiring, the lady recalled him.

"Here," said she, "do not act like a fool, and let the man charge a fancy price. Say that I have an idea of pickling Corbulo in brine, and have brought an *amphora* large enough for the purpose. Don't close with his terms at once."

When the steward was gone, then Longa Duilia turned her head languidly and summoned a slave-girl.

"Lucilla! The unfortunate feature of the situation is that I must not have my hair combed till we reach Gabii. It is customary, and for a bracelet of pearls I would not transgress custom. You can give my head a tousled look, without being dishevelled, I would wish to appear interesting, not untidy."

"Lady! Nothing could make you other than fascinating. A widow in tears – some stray locks – it would melt marble."

"And I think I shall outdo Agrippina," said Duilia, "she carried her husband's cinders in an urn at the head of her berth and on appropriate occasions howled in the most tragic and charming manner. But I shall convey the unconsumed body of my Corbulo in state exposed on his bier, in his military accoutrements all the way to Rhegium, then up the coast to Ostia and so to Gabii. There will be talk!"

"You will be cited in history as a widow the like of which the world has never seen. As for Agrippina, in your superior blaze she will be eclipsed forever."

"I should prefer doing what Agrippina did – make a land journey from Brindisium, but – but – one must consider. It would be vastly expensive, and –"

But the lady did not finish the sentence. She considered that Nero might resent such a demonstration, as exciting indignation against himself, in having obliged Corbulo to put an end to his life. But she did not dare to breathe her thought even into the ear of a slave.

"No," she said; "it would come too expensive. I will do what I can to honor my husband, but not ruin myself."

When Longa Duilia had resolved to have her own way, and that was always, then all the entire family of slaves and retainers, freedmen and clients knew it must be done.

The vessel after a brief stay at Cenchræa had left for Diolcus where it had been placed on rollers and conveyed across the isthmus, and was launched in the Corinthian Gulf.

Nero had been engaged for some days in excavating a canal between the two seas. He had himself turned the first sod, but after getting some little way, rock was encountered of so hard a quality that to cut through it would cost time, toil and money.

He speedily tired of the scheme, wanted the money it would have cost for some dramatic exhibition, and was urged by Helios, a freedman whom he had left in Rome, to return to Italy, to prevent an insurrection that was simmering. Nero did not much believe in danger, but he had laden his fleet with the plunder of Greece, he had strutted and twittered on every stage, carried off every

prize in every contest, and was desirous of being applauded in Italy and at Rome for what he had achieved, and exhibit there the chaplets he had won.

Accordingly he started, and hardly had he done so before the Artemis with spread sail swept down the Corinthian Gulf.

The ship, a Liburnian, of two banks of oars, was constructed very differently from a modern vessel. The prow was armed above water-mark with three strong and sharp blades, called the *rostra*, the beaks, which when driven into the side of an enemy would tear her open and sink her.

The quarter-deck was midships, and served a double purpose, being raised as high as the bulwarks it served as an elevated place where the captain could stand and survey the horizon and watch the course of the vessel, and it also served to strengthen the mast.

On this quarter-deck, on a bed of state, lay the body of Cnæus Domitius Corbulo, with his sword at his side, and the wax mask over his face. At his feet was a tripod with glowing coals on which occasionally incense and Cilician crocus were sprinkled, and on each side of his head blazed torches of pinewood dipped in pitch.

The poop had a covered place, called the *aplaustre*, in which sat the steerer. The hinged rudder had not then been invented, it was a discovery of the Middle Ages, and the head of the vessel was given its direction by the helmsman, *gubernator*, who worked a pair of broad flat paddles, one on each side.

The rowers, under the deck, were slaves, but the sailors were freemen. The rowers were kept in stroke by a piper, who played continually when the vessel was being propelled; and the rowers were under the direction and command of a *hortator*, so called because his voice was incessantly heard, urging, reprimanding, praising, threatening.

The captain of a Roman vessel was not supreme in authority on board ship as with us, but if the vessel contained military, he was subject to the control of the superior military officer.

The passage down the Corinthian Bay was effected without difficulty, before a favorable wind, but as the vessel was about to pass out of it, the wind suddenly changed and blew a squall from the west. And at this moment an accident occurred that was seriously embarrassing. Whilst the captain was standing near the steersman giving him directions relative to the passage of the straits, a wave rolling in caught the paddle, and caused it by the blow to snap the bronze bolt of the eye in which it worked, and the handle flying up and forward, struck the captain on the forehead, threw him down, and he fell against the bulwark so as to cut open his head. He had to be carried below insensible.

The Artemis lay under shelter till the gale abated, and then consultation arose as to what was to be done.

Lucius Lamia took the command, he was competent to manage the vessel, with the advice, if needed, of the mate. He and all were reluctant to put back to Lechæum, the port of Corinth, on the Gulf, and the broken eye in which the paddle worked was repaired with a stout thong, which, as the steersman said, would hold till Adria was crossed and Rhegium was reached.

The squall had passed, and the look of the sky was promising; moreover the wind was again favorable.

“Sir,” said the mate, “my opinion is that we should make all speed across Adria. This is a bad season of the year. It is a month in which sailing is overpassed. We must take advantage of our chances. While the wind blows, let us spread sail. The rowers can ship their oars; should the wind fail, or prove contrary, they will be required, and they may have a hard time of it. Therefore let them husband their strength.”

“So be it,” answered Lucius Lamia.

And now the Artemis, with sail spread, leaning on one side, drave through the rippling water, passed the Straits into the Adriatic, with the mountains of Ætolia to the north, and the island of Cephalonia in the blue west before her; and as she flew, she left behind her a trail of foam in the water, and a waft of smoke in the air from the torches that glowed about the dead general on the quarter-deck.

CHAPTER VI. “I DO NOT KNOW.”

The day was in decline, and although the season was winter yet the air was not cold. The mountains of Greece lay in the wake like a bank of purple cloud tinged with gold.

On the quarter-deck reposed the corpse, with the feet turned in the direction of the prow; the torches spluttered, and cast off sparks that flew away with the smoke.

On each side were three slave women, detailed to wail, but Longa Duilia had issued instructions that they were not to be noisy in their demonstration so as to disturb or swamp conversation aft.

The undulating lament swerving through semi-tones and demi-semi-tones, formed a low and sad background to the play of voices on the lower deck, where, sheltered from the wind, the widow reclined on cushions, and her daughter Domitia sat at her side in conversation.

A change had come over the girl, so complete, so radical, that she seemed hardly to be the same person as before her father's death. This was noticeable as being in appearance and manner, – noticeable even to the slaves, not the most observant in matters that did not particularly concern their comfort and interests. She had been transmuted from a playful child into a sad and serious woman.

The sparkle had left her eyes to make way for an eager, searching fire. The color had left her cheek; and her face had assumed a gloomy expression. The change, in fact, was much like that in a landscape when a sunny May day makes place for one that is overcast and threatening. The natural features are unaltered, but the aspect is wholly different in quality and character.

A mighty sorrow contracting, bruising, oppressing the heart sometimes melts it into a sweetness of patient endurance that inspires pity and love. But grief seemed to have frozen Domitia and not to have dissolved her into tears.

The philosopher approached with solemn stalk, walking on the flat of his soles.

Such men were retained in noble households as family chaplains, to advise, comfort, and exhort. And this man at intervals approached the widow, who on such occasions assumed a woe-begone expression, beat her brow and emitted at intervals long-drawn sighs.

At such times, the Magus, standing near, curled his lip contemptuously, and endeavored by shrugs and sniffs to let the bystanders perceive how little he valued the words of the stoic.

The philosopher Senecio now in formal style addressed the widow, and then turned to harangue the daughter, on the excellence of moderation in grief as in joy, on the beauty of self-control so as to suffer the storms of life to roll over the head with indifference. In this consisted the Highest Good, and to attain to such stolidity was the goal of all virtuous endeavor.

Then he thrust his hand into the folds of his toga, and withdrew, to be at once attacked and wrangled with by the Chaldæan.

Domitia, who had listened with indifference, turned to her mother as soon as he was gone, and said —

“The *Summum Bonum*, the crown and glory of Philosophy is to become in mind what the slave becomes after many bastinadoes, as callous in soul as he is on the soles of his feet. The lesson of life is not worth the acquisition.”

“I think he put it all very well.”

“Why are the strokes applied? Why should we bear them without crying out? After all, what profit is there in this philosophy?”

“Really, my dear, I cannot tell. But it is the correct thing to listen to and to talk philosophy, and good families keep their tame stoics, – even quite new and vulgar people, wretched knights who have become rich in trade – in a word, they all do it.”

“But, mother, what is this Highest Good?”

“You must inquire of Claudius Senecio himself. It is, I am sure something very suitable to talk about, on such solemn occasions as this.”

“But what is it? A runner in the course knows what is the prize for which he contends, a singer at the games sees the crown he hopes to earn – but this Highest Good, is it nothing but not to squeal when kicked?”

“I really do not know.”

“Mother, would to the Gods I did know! My sorrow is eating out my heart. I am miserable. I am in darkness, like Theseus in the labyrinth, but without a clue. And the Highest Good preached by philosophy is to sit down in the darkness and despair of the light. I want to know. Has my father’s life gone out forever, like an extinguished torch cast into the sea? or is it a smouldering ember that may be blown again into flame?”

“Have you not heard, Domitia, how Senecio has assured you that your father will live.”

“Where?”

“On the page of history.”

“First assure me that the page will be written, and that impartially. What I know of historians is that they scribble all the scurrility they can against the great and noble, in the hope of thereby advancing the credit of their own mean selves. Has a man no other hope of life than one built on the complaisance of the most malignant of men?”

“My dear, – positively, I do not know. You turn my head with your questions. Call Plancus that I may scold him, to ease my overwrought nerves. The fellow has been stopping up his wrinkles with a composition of wax, lard and flour, and really, at his age, and in his social position – it is absurd.”

“But, mother, I want to know.”

“Bless me, you make me squeamish. Of course we want to know a vast number of things; and the Highest Good, I take it, is to learn to be satisfied to know nothing. Cats, dogs, donkeys, don’t worry themselves to know – and are happy. They have, then, the *Summum Bonum*. If you want to know more, ask the philosopher. He is paid for the purpose, and eats at our expense, and ye gods! how he eats. I believe he finds the Highest Good in the platter.”

The lady made signs, and a slave, ever on the watch, hastened to learn her desire, and at her command summoned the Stoic.

The philosopher paced the deck with his chin in the air, and came aft.

“My daughter,” said the widow, “is splitting my suffering head with questions. Pray answer her satisfactorily. Here Felicula, Procula, Lucilla, help me to the cabin.”

When the lady had withdrawn, the philosopher said:

“Lady, you will propound difficulties, and I shall be pleased to solve them.”

“I ask plain answers to plain questions,” said Domitia. “At death – what then?”

“Death, young lady, is the full stop at the end of the sentence, it is the closing of the diptychs of life, on which its story is inscribed.”

“I asked not what death is – but to what it leads?”

“Leads! – it – leads! ahem! Death encountered with stoic equanimity is the highest point to which – ”

“I do not ask how to meet death, but what it leads to. You seem unable or unwilling to answer a plain question. My dear father, does he live still – as a star that for a while sets below the horizon but returns again?”

“He lives, most assuredly. In all men’s mouths – on the snowy plains of Germany, on the arid wastes of Syria, the fame of Cnæus Domitius Corbulo – ”

“I asked naught about his fame, but about himself. Does he still exist, can he still think of, care for, love me – as I still think of, care for, love him – ”

Her voice quivered and broke.

“Young lady – Socrates could say no more of the future than that it is a brilliant hope which one may run the risk of entertaining. And our own Immortal Cicero declared that the hope of the soul living after death is a dream, and not a doctrine. The Immortals have seen fit to cut the thread of his life – ”

“The Immortals had no scissors wherewith to do it. He fell on his own sword. Is there a soul? And after death where does it go? Is it a mere shadow?”

“My dear lady, philosophy teaches us to hope – ”

“Natural instinct does that without the cumbrous assistance of philosophy – but what is that hope built on?”

“I cannot tell.”

“Then of what avail is it to lead a good life?”

“On the page of history – ”

“That is where the great man lives – but the poor girl or the mechanic? Of what avail is a good life? What motive have we to induce us to lead it?”

“The approval of the conscience.”

“But why should it approve? What is good? Where is it written that this is good and that is evil?”

“I cannot tell.”

“So,” said the girl, and she signed to Elymas to approach. He came up with a sneer at the philosopher, who retired in discomfiture.

“You, Chaldæan, answer me that which confounds the Stoic. You have learning in the East which we have not in the West. Tell me – what is the human soul? and has it an existence after death?”

“Certainly, lady. The soul is a ray of Divine light, an æon out of infinite perfection. This ray is projected into space and enters into and is entangled in matter, and that is life, in the plant, in the fish, in the bird, in the beast, in man.”

“And what after death?”

“Death is the disengagement of this ray from its envelope. It returns to the source, to the *pleroma* or fulness of being and light whence it emanated, and loses itself in the one urn of splendor!”

“But when Pactolus and Styx run into the sea, the waters are mingled and lost, as to their individuality.”

“And so with the spirits of men.”

“What!” exclaimed Domitia. “When I die my little ray re-enters the sun and is lost in the general glory – and my father’s ray is also sucked in and disappears! There is no comfort in a thought where individuality is extinguished. But say. How know you that what you have propounded is the truth?”

The Magus hesitated and became confused.

“It is,” said he, “a solution at which the minds of the great thinkers of the East have arrived.”

“I see,” said Domitia, “it is no more than a guess. You and all alike are stagnant pools, whose muddy bottoms ferment and generate and throw up guesswork bubbles. One bubble looks more substantial than another, yet are all only the disguise of equal emptiness.”

The Chaldæan withdrew muttering in his beard. Domitia looked after him and noticed the physician Luke standing near, leaning over the bulwarks.

He was an elderly man, with kindly soft eyes, and a short beard in which some strands of gray appeared. A modest man, ready when called on to advise, but never self-assertive.

Domitia had noticed him already and had taken a liking to him, though she had not spoken to him. An unaccountable impulse induced her to address him.

“They are all quacks,” she said.

“They must needs be seekers, and the best they can produce, is out of themselves, and that conjecture. From the depths of the intellect what can be brought up than a more or less plausible guess?”

“And on these guesses we must live, like those who float across the Tigris and Euphrates – on rafts supported by inflated bladders. There is then no solid ground?”

“Man inflates the bladders – God lays the rocky basis.”

“What mean you?”

“No certainty can be attained, in all these things man desires to know, the basis of hope, the foundation of morality, that cannot be brought out of man. It can only be known by revelation of God.”

“And till he reveals we must drift on wind-bags. Good luck!”

“Do you think, Lady, that He who made man, and planted in man’s heart a desire for a future life, and made it necessary for his welfare that he should know to discern between good and evil, should leave him forever in the dark – like as you said Theseus in the labyrinth, without a clue?”

“But where is the clue?”

“Or think you that He who launched the vessel of man, having carefully laid the keel and framed the ribs, and set in her a pilot, should send her forth into unknown seas to certain wreckage – to be wafted up and down by every wind – to be carried along by every current – to fall on reefs, or be engulfed by quicksands, and not to reach a port, and He not to set lights whereby her course may be directed?”

“But where are the lights?”

At that moment, before Luke could answer, Lamia, who had been in the fore part of the vessel, came hastily aft, and disregarding the physician, heedless of the conversation on which he broke in, said hurriedly and in agitated tone: —

“The Imperial galley!”

CHAPTER VII. THE FACE OF THE DEAD

The Imperial galley!

Domitia leaped to her feet. Everything was forgotten in the one thought that before her, on the sea, floated the man who had caused the death of her father.

“Lucius I must see – ”

He drew her forward, but at the same time checked her speech.

“Every word dropped is fraught with danger,” he said. “What know you but that yon physician be a spy?”

“He is not that,” she answered, “show him to me – him – ”

They walked together to the bows.

With the declining of the sun, the light wind had died away, and, although the sea heaved after the recent storm, like the bosom of a sleeping girl, in the stillness of the air, the sail drooped and the ship made no way.

Accordingly the sail was furled, and, by the advice of the mate, the rowers, who had rested during the day, were summoned to their benches and bidden work the oars during the night.

The sky was clear, and the stars were beginning to twinkle. No part of the voyage in calm weather would be less dangerous than this, which might be performed at night, across open sea, unbroken by rocks and sand-banks.

So long as the vessel had to thread her way between the headland of Araxus and the Echinades, and then betwixt the isles of Cephalonia and Zacynthus, an experienced navigator was necessary, and caution had to be exercised both in the management of the sail and in the manipulation of the helm. But now all was plain, and the mate had retired below to rest. During the time he reposed Lamia took charge of the vessel, assisted by the second mate.

“You take your meridian by Polaris, Castor and Pollux, steer due west; if there be a slight deviation from the right course, that is a trifle. I will set it right when my watch comes.”

Such was the mate’s injunction as he retired below.

“The steersman is done up,” said Lamia; “he shall rest now, and no better man can be found to replace him than Eboracus, who has been accustomed to the stormy seas of Britain, and whose nerves are of iron.”

Indeed, the *gubernator* or helmsman had hard work for his arms. The two enormous paddles had short cross-pieces let into them, like the handles of a scythe, and the clumsy and heavy mechanism for giving direction to the head of the vessel was worked by leverage in this manner.

The sailors managed everything on deck, the cordage, the anchors, the sail and the boats. In rough weather they undergirded the ship; that is to say, passed horizontal cords round her to brace the spars together so as to facilitate resistance to the strain when laboring against the waves. The sailors were under the direction of the captain or trierarch, so called whether he commanded a trireme or a Liburnian of two benches.

On deck the steersman occupied a sort of sentry-box in the stern, and beside him sat the mate, the second mate, and often also the captain, forming a sort of council for the direction of the vessel.

It was a favorite figure in the early Church to represent the Bishop as the helmsman of the sacred vessel, and the presbyters who sat about him as the mates occupying the stern bench. As already said, in a Roman vessel, there was a lack of that unity in direction under the captain to which we are accustomed. A military officer was always supreme everywhere on sea as on land.

When the sailors were engaged in sailing, then the rowers rested or caroused, and when they in turn bowed over the oars, the sailors had leisure.

The sun went down in the west, lighting up the sky above where he set with a rainbow or halo of copper light fading into green.

The night fell rapidly, and the stars looked out above and around, and formed broken reflections in the sea.

In winter the foam that broke and was swept to right and left had none of the flash and luminosity it displayed in summer, when the water was warm.

Already in the wake the Greek isles and mountain ridges had faded into night.

The oars dipped evenly, and the vessel sped forward at a speed equal to that of a modern Channel steamer.

At a signal from Lamia the mourners on the quarter-deck ceased to intone their wail.

He and Domitia stood in the bows and looked directly before them. They could see a large vessel ahead, of three banks of oars, but she floated immovable on the gently heaving, glassy sea. The oars were all shipped and she was making no way.

The deck sparkled with lights. Torches threw up red flames, lamps gave out a fainter yellow gleam. To the cordage lights had been suspended, and braziers burning on the quarter-deck, fed with aromatic woods, turned the water around to molten fire, and sent wafts of fragrance over the sea.

The twang of a lyre and the chirp of a feeble voice were faintly audible; and then, after a lull, ensued a musical shout of applause in rhythmic note.

"It is the Augustus singing," said Lamia in a tone of smothered rage and mortification. "And he has his band of adulators about him."

"But why do not the rowers urge on the vessel?" asked Domitia.

"Because the piper giving the stroke would be committing high treason in drowning the song of the princely performer. By the Gods! the grinding of the oars in the rowlocks and the plash in the water would drown even his most supreme trills."

"Hast thou seen him on the stage, Lamia?"

"The Gods forbid," answered the young man passionately, "this fancy to be the first of singers and mimes had not come on him before I left Rome for Syria. To think of it, that he – the head of the magistracy, of the army, of the senate, of the priesthood, should figure as Apollo, half naked, in a gold-powdered wig, and with painted cheeks before sniggering Greeks! The Gods deliver me from such a sight!"

"But you will behold it now. As we speed along we shall overtake this floating dramatic booth."

"I will give her a wide berth, and stop my ears with wax, though, by the Gods! this is no siren song."

Domitia leaned over the side of the vessel.

"Are they sharp, Lucius?"

"Are what sharp, Domitia?"

"The beaks."

"Sharp as lancets."

"And strong?"

"Strong as rams."

"Then, Lucius, we will not give her wide berth. You loved my father. You regard me. You will do what I desire, for his sake and for mine."

"What would you have of me?"

"Ram her!"

Lucius Lamia started, and looked at the girl.

She laid her hand on his arm, and gripped it as with an iron vice.

"Run her down, Lucius! Sink the accursed murderer and mountebank in the depths of the Ionian sea."

Lamia gasped for breath.

She looked up into his face.

“Can it be done?”

“By Hercules! we could rip up her side.”

“Then do so.”

He stood undecided.

“Hearken to me. None will suspect our intention as we swiftly shoot up – no, none in this vessel, only Eboracus must be in it. Suddenly we will round and ram and welt her; and send the new Orion with his fiddle to the fishes. By the Furies! We shall hear him scream. We shall see him beat the waves. Lucius, let me have a marline-spike to dash at him as he swims and split his skull and let out his brains for the fishes to banquet on them.”

“We risk all our lives.”

“What care I? My father, your friend, will be avenged.”

Still Lamia stood in unresolve.

“Lucius! I will twine my white arms about your neck, and will kiss you with my red lips, the moment his last scream has rung in my ears.”

“In the name of Vengeance – then,” said Lamia.

“Eboracus I can count on,” said Domitia.

“There is the under-mate. If any one on board suspect our purpose, we are undone.”

“None need suspect,” said the girl. “Say that the prince is holding festival on board the trireme, and that it behoves us to salute. None will think other than that we are befooling ourselves like the rest. At the right moment, before any has a thought of thy purpose, call for the double-stroke, and trust Eboracus – he will put the helm about, and in a moment we run her down.”

Lamia walked to the quarter-deck, bade the mourning women go below. He extinguished the funeral torches, and threw the ashes from the tripod into the sea. Then the Artemis was no longer distinguishable by any light she bore.

Next Lamia walked aft, and in a restrained voice said:

“The vessel of Cæsar is before us. We dare not pass without leave asked and granted.”

“All right, sir,” said the second mate. “Any orders below?”

“Keep on at present speed. When I call Slack, then let them slacken. When I call Double, then at once with full force double.”

“Right, sir. I will carry down instructions.”

The mate went to the ladder and descended into the hold.

There were now left on deck only Lamia, Domitia, the steersman, Eboracus, one sailor and the physician, who was leaning over the bulwarks looking north at the glittering constellation of Cassiopea’s Chair.

He was near the quarter-deck, in the fore part of the vessel, and had been unobserved in the darkness by Lamia and Domitia, till they returned aft.

Then the young man started as he observed him.

Was it possible that the man had overheard the words spoken? There was nothing in the attitude or manner of the physician to show that he entertained alarm. Lamia resolved on keeping an eye upon him that he did not communicate with the crew.

Luke returned aft when the young people came in that direction, and seated himself quietly on a bench.

Eboracus was rapidly communicated with and gained.

The Artemis flew forward, noiselessly, save for the plunge of the oars and the hiss of the foam, as it rushed by like milk, and from the hold sounded the muffled note of the *symphonicius* or piper.

Every moment the vessel neared the imperial galley, and sounds of revelry became audible. Nothing showed that any on board were aware of the approach of a Liburnian.

It was now seen that tables were spread on the deck of the Imperial vessel, and that the prince and his attendants, and indeed the entire crew were engaged in revelry.

Between the courses which were served, Nero ascended the quarter-deck, and sang or else delivered a recitation from a Greek tragedian, or a piece of his own composition.

If the approach of the bireme was observed, which did not seem to be the case, it caused no uneasiness. The Emperor's vessel had been accompanied by a convoy, but the ships had been dispersed by the storm; and the bireme, if perceived, was doubtless held to be one of the fleet.

And now Helios, the confidant of Nero, had ascended the quarter-deck to his master, and began to declaim the speech of the attendant in the *Electra* descriptive of the conquests of Orestes – applying the words, by significant indications to the prince returning a victor from the Grecian games.

"He, having come to the glorious pageantry of the sports in Greece, entered the lists to win the Delphic prizes, he, the admired of every eye. And having started from his goal in wondrous whirls he sped along the course, and bore away the of all coveted prize of victory. But that I may tell thee in few words amidst superfluity I have never known such a man of might and deeds as he – " and he bowed and waved his hands towards Nero.

A roar of applause broke out, interrupted by a cry from Nero who suddenly beheld a dark ship plunge out of the night and come within the radiance of the lights on board his vessel.

Meanwhile, on the *Artemis*, with set face sat Eboracus, guiding the head of the *Liburnian* as directed. He could see the twinkling lights, and hear the sounds of rejoicing.

"Slack speed," called Lamia.

"Slack your oars," down into the hold.

There was a pause – all oars held poised for a moment.

"Double!" shouted Lamia.

"Double your oars!" down the ladder.

Instantly the water hissed about the bows, and the oars plunged.

Eboracus by a violent movement threw himself and his entire weight on the handle of one paddle, so as to turn the bireme about, and ram her midships into the Imperial trireme, when suddenly, without a word, Luke had drawn a knife through the thong that restrained the paddle, and instantly the *pedalion* leaped out of place, and would have gone overboard, had not the physician caught and retained it.

Immediately the direction of the *Artemis* was altered and in place of running into the trireme, she swerved and swung past the Imperial galley without touching her.

Nero, white with alarm and rage shrieked from the quarter-deck,

"Who commands?"

Then to those by him, "Pour oil on the flames."

At once from the braziers, tongues of brilliant light leaped high into the air.

"The name!" yelled the furious prince.

Then came the reply: —

"Cnæus Domitius Corbulo."

And by the glare he saw, standing by the mast, distinct against the darkness of the night behind, the form of a man – and the face was the face of the murdered general.

Nero staggered back – and would have fallen unless caught by Helios.

"The dead pursue me," he gasped. "Wife, mother, brother, and now, Corbulo!"

CHAPTER VIII. THE SWORD OF THE DEAD

“It is well done,” said Eboracus in an undertone to the physician; “Otherwise there had been the cross for you and me. The thong broke.”

“I severed it,” said Luke.

“That I saw,” said the slave, “I shall report that it yielded. One must obey a master even to the risk of the cross. Did’st see the noble Lamia, how ready he was? He assumed the mask of my dead master and we have slipped by and sent a shiver through the whole company of the Trireme, and the August too, I trow, – for they have thought us the Ship of the Dead.”

After a pause he said, – “In my home we hold that all souls go to sea in a phantom vessel; and sail away to the West, to the Isles of the Blessed. At night a dark ship with a sail as a thundercloud comes to the shore, and those near can hear the dead in trains go over the beach and enter the ghostly vessel, till she is laden, and then she departs.”

The Artemis made her way without disaster to Rhegium, and thence coasted up Italy to the port of Rome. She had gained on the Imperial vessel, that was delayed at Brundisium to collect the scattered fleet. Nero would not land until he reached Neapolis, and then not till all his wreaths and golden apples, as well as his entire wardrobe of costumes and properties had arrived.

Then only did he come ashore, and he did so to commence a triumphal progress through the Peninsula, the like of which was never seen before nor will be seen again.

This was on the 19th March, the anniversary of the murder of his mother. On the same day a letter was put into his hands announcing the revolt of the legions in Gaul and the proclamation of Galba, at that time Governor of Spain.

So engrossed, however, was his mind with preparation for his theatrical procession, that he paid no heed to the news, nor was he roused till he read the address of Vindex, who led the revolt, denouncing him as a “miserable fiddler.”

This touched him to the quick, and he addressed an indignant despatch to the Senate, demanding that Vindex should be chastised, and appealed to the prizes he had gained as testimony to his musical abilities.

So he started for Rome.

Eighteen hundred and eight heralds strutted before him, bearing in their hands the crowns that had been awarded him and announcing when and how he had succeeded in winning the award.

He entered Rome in this leisurely manner, in a triumphal chariot, wearing a purple robe, embroidered with gold, an olive garland about his head. Beside him a harper struck his instrument and chanted his praises.

The houses were decorated with festoons, the streets were strewn with saffron; singing birds, comfits, flowers were scattered by the people before him. If the Senate expected that now the prince was in Rome, he would attend to business, it was vastly mistaken. His first concern was to arrange for a splendid exhibition in which he might gratify the public with a finished study of his acting and singing.

Solicitude about his triumph, his voice, his reception, had so completely filled the shallow mind of Nero, that he gave no further thought to the vessel that had shot out of the darkness, nearly fouled his galley, and which had been apparently commanded by one of his noblest victims.

Longa Duilia arrived on the Gabian estate, with the corpse of her husband, her daughter, Lucius Lamia, and her entire “family,” as the company of household slaves was termed, without accident and without deter.

Gabii lay eleven miles from Rome at the foot of one of the spurs of the Alban mountains. The town stood on a small knoll rising out of the Campagna. The stone of which it was built was dark,

being a volcanic peperino; it was perhaps one of the least attractive sites for a country residence, which a Roman noble could have selected; but this was not without its advantage, when Emperors acted as did Ahab, and cut off those whose villas and vineyards attracted their covetous eyes.

A lake occupied the crater of an extinct volcano; the water was dark as ink, but this was due rather to the character of the bottom, than to depth, which was inconsiderable.

The villa and its gardens lay by the water's edge. The old city not flourishing, but maintaining a languid existence, was famous for nothing but a peculiarity in girding the toga adopted by the men, by the dinginess of its building stone, and by its temple of Juno, an object of pilgrimage when the deities of other shrines had proved unwilling or unable to help, a sort of *pis-aller* of devotion.

Longa Duilia hated the place; it was dull, and she would never have frequented it, had it not been the fashion at the period for all people of good family to affect a love of retirement into the country, and to pretend a taste for simplicity of rural life. Some fine fops had their "chambers of poverty" to which on occasions they retired, to lie on mats upon the ground, and eat pulse out of common earthenware. Such periods of self-denial added zest to luxury.

Domitia, on the other hand, was attached to the place. It was associated with the innocent pleasures of earliest childhood. Its spring flowers were the loveliest she had ever culled, its June strawberries the most delicious she had ever eaten. And the lake teeming with char gave opportunities for boating and fishing.

Here was the family burial-place; and here Corbulo was to be burnt, and then his ashes collected and consigned to the mausoleum.

Messengers had been sent forth to invite the attendance of all relations, acquaintances and dependents.

The invitation was couched, according to unalterable custom, in antiquated terms, hardly intelligible. When on the day appointed for the ceremony, vast numbers were collected, the funeral procession started.

First went the musicians under the conduct of a Master of the Ceremonies. By law, the number of flautists was limited to ten.

Then followed the professional mourners, hired for the occasion from the temple of Libitina, the priests of which were the licensed undertakers. These mourners chanted the *nænia*, a lament composed for the purpose of lauding the acts of the deceased and of reciting his honors. When they paused at the conclusion of a strophe, horns and trumpets brayed. Immediately after the wailers walked a train of actors, one of whom was dressed in the insignia of the deceased and wore a mask representing him. He endeavored to mimic each peculiarity of the man he personated, and buffoons around by their antics and jests provoked the spectators to laughter. This farcical exhibition was calculated to moderate the excessive grief superinduced by the lament of the wailers.

Then came the grand procession of the ancestors, especially dear to the heart of the widow. Not only did the effigies of the direct forefathers appear, but all related families trotted out their ancestors, to attend the illustrious dead, so that there cannot have been less than a hundred present.

As already mentioned, the wax masks of the dead of a family ornamented every nobleman's hall, usually enclosed in boxes with the titles of the defunct inscribed on them in gold characters. These were now produced. The mimes were costumed appropriately, as senators, generals, magistrates, with their attendants, wearing the wax masks, and artificial heads of hair.

The idea represented was that of the ancestors having returned from the land of Shadows to fetch their descendant and accompany him to the nether world. The corpse, that lay on a bier in the hall, was now taken up, and carried forth to a loud cry from all in the house of "Vale! Farewell! Fare thee well!" Between the lips of the dead man was a coin, placed there as payment of the toll across the River of Death in the ferry-boat of Charon. On each side of the bier walked attendants carrying lighted torches. In ancient times all funerals had been conducted at night. Now the only reminiscence

of this custom was in the bearing of lights; but the torches served as well a practical purpose, as they were employed to kindle the pyre.

Before the dead were carried the insignia of his offices, pictures of the battles he had won and statues of the kings and chiefs he had conquered. The corpse was followed by a number of manumitted slaves, all wearing the cap of liberty, in token of their freedom. Finally came the members of the family, friends, retainers, and the sympathizing public.

Longa Duilia and Domitia Longina walked in their proper place, with dishevelled hair, unveiled heads, and in the *ricinium* or black garment thrown over their tunics; the men all wore the *pænula*, or short travelling cloak.

The procession advanced into the marketplace of Gabii, where Lucius Lamia ascended the *rostrum* to pronounce the funeral oration.

Immediately, ivory chairs and inlaid stools were ranged in a crescent before him, and on these the ancestors seated themselves, the bier being placed before them.

The panegyric was addressed to the crowd outside the circle of mimes with wax faces. Lamia had a gift of natural eloquence, his feelings were engaged, but his freedom of speech was hampered by necessity of caution in allusion to the death of Corbulo, lest some word should be let slip which might be caught up and tortured into a treasonable reference to Nero.

The Laudation ended, the entire assembly arose and re-formed in procession to the place of burning, which by law must be sixty feet from any building. There a pit had been excavated and a grating placed above it. On this grating the pyre was erected, consisting of precious woods, sprinkled with gums and spices.

To this the corpse was conveyed. But, previous to its being placed on the fagots, a surgeon amputated one of the fingers, which was preserved for burial, and then a handful of earth was thrown over the face of the deceased.

Anciently the Roman dead had been buried, and when the fashion for incineration came in, a trace of the earlier usage remained in the burial of a member and the covering of the face with soil.

And now ensued a repulsive scene, one without which no great man's funeral would have been considered as properly performed.

Through the crowd pushed two small parties of gladiators, three in each, hired for the occasion of a company that let them out. Then ensued a fight – not mimic, but very real, in front and round the pyre. Now a hard-pressed gladiator ran and was pursued, turned sharply and hacked at his follower. This was continued till three men had fallen and had been stabbed in the breast. Whereupon, the survivors sheathed their swords, bowed and withdrew.

The torches were now put into the hands of Duilia and Domitia, and with averted faces they applied the fire to the fagot, and a sheet of flame roared up and enveloped the dead man.

And now the mourners raised their loudest cries, tore their hair, scarified their cheeks with their nails; pipes, flutes, horns were blown. In a paroxysm of distress, partly real, partly feigned, a rush was made to the pyre, and all who got near cast some offering into the flames – cakes, flowers, precious stuffs, rings, bracelets, and coins.

Duilia, in tragic woe, disengaged a mass of artificial hair from her head, and cast it into the fire. Then rang out the sacramental cry: – “*I, licet!* You are permitted to retire,” and gladly, sick at heart and faint, Domitia was supported rather than walked home.

Some hours later, when the ashes of the defunct had been collected and deposited in an urn, which was conveyed to the mausoleum, Lucius Lamia came to the house and inquired for the ladies.

He was informed that the widow was too much overcome by her feelings to see any one, but that Domitia was in the *tablinum* and would receive him.

He at once entered the hall and stepped up into the apartment where she was seated, looking pale and worn, with tear-reddened eyes.

She rose, and with a sweet sad smile, extended her hand to Lamia.

“No, Domitia,” said he gently, “as your dear father gave me permission on the wharf at Cenchræa, I will claim the same privilege now.”

She held her cold, tear-stained cheek to him without a word, then returned to and sank on her stool.

“I thank you, dear friend, and almost brother,” she said. “You spoke nobly of my father, though not more nobly than he deserved. Here, my Lucius, is a present for you, I intrust it to you – his sword, which he used so gallantly, on which he fell, and still marked with his blood.”

CHAPTER IX. SHEATHED

According to an Oriental legend, the dominion of Solomon over the spirits resided in the power of his staff on which he stayed himself. So long as he wielded that, none might disobey.

But the Jins sent a white ant up through the floor, that ate out the heart of the rod, so that when he leaned on it, it gave way and resolved itself into a cloud of fine powder. Solomon fell, and his authority was at an end forever.

The termites that consumed the core of the sceptre of Nero were his own vices and follies. Its power was at an end and his fall as sudden as in the case of Solomon, and as unexpected.

In March he was possessed of dominion over the world, and was at the head of incalculable forces. In June all was dissolved in the dust of decay; he was prostrate, helpless, bereft of the shadow of authority, unable to command a single slave. The first token of what was about to take place was this.

In Rome the rabble was kept in good humor by the Cæsars distributing among them bread gratis, and entertaining them with shows free of charge.

During the winter, contrary winds had delayed the corn-ships from Egypt, and the amount of bread distributed was accordingly curtailed. Games were, indeed, promised, but these would serve as condiments to the bread and not as substitutes. Then a vessel arrived in port, and the hungry people believed that she was laden with the wished-for corn. When, however, they learned that her cargo was white sand for strewing the arena at the sports, they broke into a storm of discontent and swept, howling insulting words, under Nero's windows.

Next day all Rome heard that Galba, at the head of the legions of Spain and Gaul, was marching into Italy, and that none of the troops of Nero sent to guard the frontier of the Alps would draw a sword in his defence.

The prince, now only seriously alarmed, bade his household guard conduct him to Ostia, where he would mount the vessel that had discharged its load of sand, and escape to Egypt. They contemptuously refused, and disbanded. Then, in an agony of fear, Nero left the Palatine, and fled across the river to the Servilian mansion that adjoined the racecourse, to light which he had burned Christians swathed in tarred wraps.

There he found none save his secretary Epaphroditus, whom he had sent there to be chained at the door, and to act as porter because he had offended him. Guards, freedmen, courtiers, actors, all had taken to their heels, but not before they had pillaged the palace.

He wandered about the house, knocking at every door, and nowhere meeting with an answer.

Night by this time had settled in, murk and close, but at intervals electric flashes shivered overhead.

Then suddenly the earth reeled, and there passed a sound as of chariot wheels rolling heavily through the streets; yet the streets were deserted. Trembling, despairing, Nero crouched on his bed, bit his nails till he had gnawed them to the quick, then started up and hunted for his jewel case. He would fly on foot, carrying that, hide in some hovel, till danger was past. But a thievish slave had stolen it.

Sick at heart, picking, then biting at his nails, shrinking with apprehension at the least noise, wrapping a kerchief about a finger where blood came, he looked with dazed eyes at the red flare of the heavenly fires pulsating through his open door.

He heard a step and ran out, to encounter a freedman, Phaon by name, who was coming along the passage, holding aloft a torch, attended by two slaves.

The wretched prince clung to him, and entreated that he might not be left alone; that Phaon would protect him, and contrive a means of escape.

“Augustus!” answered the freedman, “I am not ungrateful for favors shown me, but my assistance at this hour is unavailing. I am but one man, a stranger, a Greek, and all Rome, all Italy, the entire world, have risen against you.”

“I must fly. They will allow me to earn my livelihood on the stage. Of what value to any man is my life?”

“My lord, in what value have you held the lives of the thousands that you have taken? Each life cut off has raised against you a hundred enemies. All will pursue, like a pack of hounds baying for the blood of him who murdered their kinsfolk. Even now I passed one – Lucius Ælius Lamia, – and he stayed me to inquire where you might be found. In his hand he held an unsheathed sword.”

Nero shrieked out; then looked timidly about him, terrified at the sound of his own voice.

“Let us hide. Disguise me. Get me a horse. I cannot run, I am too fat; besides, I have on my felt slippers only.”

Phaon spoke to one of his slaves, and the man left.

“Master,” said the freedman, “Do not deceive yourself. There is no escape. Prepare to die as a man. Slay yourself. It is not hard to die. Better so fall than get into the hands of implacable enemies.”

“I cannot. I have not the courage. I will do it only when everything fails. I have many theatrical wigs. I can paint my face.”

“Sire! the people are so wont to see your face besmeared with color, that they are less likely to recognize a face bleached to tallow.”

“I have a broad-brimmed fisherman’s hat. I wear it against becoming freckled. That will shade my face. Find me an ample cloak. Here, at length, comes Sporus.”

An eunuch appeared in the doorway.

Breathless, in short, broken sentences, Nero entreated him to look out in his wardrobe for a sorry mantle, and to bring it him.

“But whither will – can you go?” asked Phaon. “The Senate has been assembled – it has been convoked for midnight to vote your deposition and death.”

“I will go before it. Nay! I will haste to the Forum, I will mount the Tribune. I will ask to be given the government of Egypt. That at least will not be refused me.”

“My lord, the streets are filling with people. They will tear you to pieces ere you reach the Forum.”

“Think you so! Why so? I have amused the people so well. Good Phaon, hire me a swift galley, and I will take refuge with Tiridates. I restored to him the crown of Armenia. He will not be ungrateful.”

“My lord, it will not be possible for you to leave Italy.”

“Then I will retire to a farm. I will grow cabbages and turnips. The god Tiberius was fond of turnips. O Divine Powers that rule the fate of men! shall I ever eat turnips again? Phaon, hide me for a season. Men’s minds are changeable. They are heated now. They will cool to-morrow. They cannot kill such a superlative artist as myself.”

“I have a villa between the Salarian and the Nomentane Roads. If it please you to go thither – ”

“At once. I think I hear horse-hoofs. O Phaon, save me!”

Sporus came up, offering an old moth-eaten cloak. The wardrobe had been plundered, only the refuse had been abandoned.

A voice was heard pealing through the empty corridors: “Horses! horses at the door!”

“Who calls so loud? Silence him. He will betray us!” said Nero. “Hah! It is Epaphroditus.”

At the entrance, chained to a cumbrous log, was the Greek, Epaphroditus, formerly a pampered favorite. But two days previously he had ventured to correct a false quantity in some verses by his master, and Nero, in a burst of resentment and mortified vanity, had ordered him to be fastened to a beam as doorkeeper to the Servilian Palace.

“The horses are here,” shouted the freedman. “May it please my lord to mount. Sporus and the slaves can run afoot.”

Nero unwound the kerchief from his hand and wrapped it about his throat, drew the broad-brimmed hat over his head, enveloped himself in the blanket cloak, and shuffled in his slippers to the door.

The chained Greek at once cried out: “Master! my chain has become entangled and is so knotted that I cannot stir. I have been thus since noon, and none have regarded me. I pray thee, let me go.”

“Thou fool! cease hallooing!” retorted Nero angrily. “Dost think I carry about with me the key of thy shackles?” Then to those who followed, “Smite him on the mouth and silence him, or he will call attention to me.”

“The gods smite thee!” yelled the scribe, striving to reach an upright posture, but falling again, owing to the tangle in the links. “May they blight thee as they have stricken Livia’s laurel!”³

Mounted on an old gray horse, Nero rode to the Ælian Bridge, where stands now that of St. Angelo, crossed it and began to traverse the Campus Martius.

Electric flashes quivered across the sky. Then again an earthquake made the city rock as if drunk; the buildings were rent, and masses of cornice fell down.

A glare of white lightning illumined the whole field and lighted up the mausoleum of Augustus, and the blank faces of such men as were abroad.

The horse trembled and refused to move. It was some time before the alarm of the brute could be allayed, and it could be coaxed to go forward and begin the ascent of the Quirinal. The advance was slow; and Nero’s fears became greater as the road approached the Prætorian Camp, and he expected recognition by the sentinels. Yet in the midst of his fear wild flashes of hope shot, and he said to Phaon:

“What think you, if I were to enter the camp? Surely the Prætorians would rally about me, and I might dissolve the Senate.”

“Sire, they have destroyed your images, and have proclaimed Galba. They would take off your head and set it on a pike.”

Nero uttered a groan, and kicked the flanks of his steed. At that moment a passer-by saluted him.

“By the Immortals! I am recognized.”

“We have but to go a little further.”

“Phaon, what if the Senate declare me an enemy of the State?”

“Then you will fare in the customary manner.”

“How is that?”

The prince put his trembling hand to his brow and in his agitation knocked off his hat.

The freedman picked it up.

“The customary manner, sire! your neck will be put in the cleft of a forked stick and you will be beaten, lashed, kicked to death. Better take the sword and fall on it.”

“Oh, Phaon! not yet! I cannot endure pain. I have a spring nail now – and it hurts! it hurts!”

“Ride on, my lord; at the cypress hedge we will turn our horses loose, and by a path through the fields reach my villa.”

Half an hour after Nero had left the Servilian palace, where now stands the Lateran, Lamia arrived followed by two servants. He found the secretary in a heap at the door, vainly writhing in his knotted chains. Lamia at once asked him about the prince, whether he was there.

“I will both answer and show you whither he is fled,” said Epaphroditus, “if you will release me. Otherwise my tongue is tied like my limbs.”

“Is he here?”

³ A laurel on the Palatine, planted by the wife of Augustus. It died suddenly just before the end of Nero.

“Nay, he has been here, but is gone. Whither I alone can say. The price of the information is release.”

“Tell me where I can find tools.”

Epaphroditus gave the required information and Lamia despatched a servant to bring hammer and chisel. They were speedily produced; but some time was taken up in cutting through the links.

This, however, was finally effected, and the secretary gathered up a handful of the broken chain and clenched it in his fist.

“Now I will lead the way,” said he, stretching himself.

The wretched, fallen emperor had in the meanwhile scrambled through hedges and waded through a marsh, and had at last found a temporary shelter in a garden tool-house of the villa. Phaon feared to introduce him into his house.

Wearied out, he cast himself on a sort of bier on which the gardeners carried citron trees to and from the conservatory. The cloak had fallen from him and lay on the soil.

His feet were muddy and bleeding. He had tried to eat some oat-cake that had been offered him, but was unable to swallow.

He continued to be teased with, and to pick or bite at his spring nails.

“I hear steps!” he cried. “They will kill me!”

“Sire, play the man.”

Phaon offered him a couple of poniards.

Nero put the point of one to his breast, shrunk and threw it away.

“It is too blunt, it will not enter,” he said.

He tried the other and dropped it.

“It is over sharp. It cuts,” he said.

At that moment the door opened and Lamia and Epaphroditus entered.

Nero cried out and covered his face:

“Sporus! Phaon! one or both! kill yourselves and show me how to do it.”

“To do it!” said Lamia sternly. “That is not difficult. Do you need a sword? Here is one – the sword of Corbulo.”

He extended the weapon to the prince, who accepted it with tremulous hand, looking at Lamia with glassy eyes.

“Oh! a moment! I feel sick.”

Then Phaon said: “Sire – at once!”

Then Nero, with all power going out of his fingers, pointed the blade to his throat.

“I cannot,” he gasped, “my hand is numb.”

Immediately, Epaphroditus with his hand full of chain, brought the weighted fist against the haft, and drove the sword into the coward’s throat.

He sank back on the bier.

Then Lamia stooped, gathered up the moth-eaten cloak, and threw it over the face of the dying man.

CHAPTER X. UBI FELICITAS?

“Push, my dear Domitia, Push. Of course. What else would you have, but Push?”

“But, sweetest mother, that surely cannot give what I ask.”

“Indeed, my child, it does. It occupies all one’s energies, it exerts all one’s faculties, and it fills the heart.”

“But – what do you gain?”

“Gain, child? – everything. The satisfaction of having got further up the ladder; of exciting the envy of your late companions, the admiration of the vulgar, the mistrust of those above you.”

“Is that worth having?”

“Of course it is. It is – that very thing you desire, Happiness. It engages all your thoughts, stimulates your abilities. You dress for it; you prepare your table for it, accumulate servants for it, walk, smile, talk, acquire furniture, statuary, bronzes, and so on – for it. It is charming, ravishing. I live for it. I desire nothing better.”

“But I do, mother. I do not care for this.”

The girl spoke with her eyes on a painting on the wall of the atrium that represented a young maiden running in pursuit of a butterfly. Beneath it were the words “Ubi Felicitas?”

“Because you are young and silly, Domitia. When older and wiser, you will understand the value of Push, and appreciate Position. My dear, properly considered, everything can be made use of for the purpose – even widowhood, dexterously dealt with, becomes a vehicle for Push. It really is vexatious that in Rome there should just now be such broils and effervescence of minds, proclamation of emperors, cutting of throats, that I, poor thing, here in Gabii run a chance of being forgotten. It is too provoking. I really wish that this upsetting of Nero, and setting up of Galba, and defection of Otho, and so on, had been postponed till my year of widowhood were at an end. One gets no chance, and it might have been *so* effective.”

“And when you have obtained that at which you have aimed?”

“Then make that the start for another push.”

“And if you fail?”

“Then, my dear, you have the gratification of being able to lay the blame on some one else. You have done your utmost.”

“When you have gained what you aimed at, you are not content.”

“That is just the beauty of Push. No, always go on to what is beyond.”

“Look at that running girl, mother, she chases a butterfly, and when she has caught the lovely insect she crushes it in her hand. The glory of its wings is gone, its life is at an end. What then?”

“She runs after another butterfly.”

“And despises and rejects each to which she has attained?”

“Certainly!”

After a pause Longa Duilia said, as she signed to Lucilla the slave to fan her, “That was the one defect in your dear father’s character, he had no Push.”

“Mother! can you say that after his splendid victories, over the Chauci, over the Parthians, over – ”

“I know all about them. They should have served as means, child, not as ends.”

“I do not understand.”

“Poor simple man, he fought the enemies of Rome and defeated them, because it was, as he said, his duty to his country, to Rome, to do so. But, by Ops and Portumna! that was talking like a child. What might he not have been with those victories? But he couldn’t see it. He had it not in him. Some men are born to squint; some have club feet; and your poor dear father had no ambition.”

After a pause the lady added: “When I come to consider what he might have done for me, had he possessed Push, it makes my spleen swell. Just consider! What is Galba compared with him? What any of these fellows who have been popping up their heads like carp or trout when the May flies are about? My dear, had your dear father been as complete a man as I am a woman, at this moment I might be Empress.”

“That would have contented you.”

“It would have been a step in that direction.”

“What more could you desire?”

“Why, to be a goddess. Did not the Senate pronounce Poppæa divine, and to be worshipped and invoked, after Nero had kicked her and she died? And that baby of his – it died of fits in teething – that became a goddess also. Nasty little thing! I saw it, it did nothing but dribble and squall, but is a god for all that. My dear Domitia, think! the Divine Duilia! Salus Italiæ, with my temples, my altars, my statues. By the Immortal Twelve, I think I should have tried to cut out Aphrodite, and have been represented rising from the foam. Oh! it would have been too, too lovely. But there! it makes me mad – all that *might* have been, and *would* have been to a certainty, had your dear father listened to me at Antioch. But he had a head.” She touched her brow. “Something wrong there – no Push.”

“But, dearest mother, this may be an approved motive for such as you and for all nobles. But then – for the artisan, the herdsman, the slave, Push can’t be a principle of life to such as they.”

“My child, how odd you are! What need we consider them? They may have their own motives, I can’t tell; I never was a herdsman nor a slave – never did any useful work in my life. As to a slave, of course Push is a motive – he pushes to gain his freedom.”

“And when he has got that?”

“Then he strives to accumulate a fortune.”

“And then?”

“Then he will have a statue or a bust of himself sculptured, and when he gets old, erect a splendid mausoleum.”

“And so all ends in a handful of dust.”

“Of course. What else would you have? – Remember, a splendid mausoleum.”

“Yes, enclosing a pot of ashes. That picture teaches a sad truth. Pursue your butterfly: when you have caught it, you find only dust between your fingers.”

“Domitia! as the Gods love me! I wish you would refrain from this talk. It is objectionable. It is prematurely oldening you, and what ages you reflects on me – it advances my years. I will listen to no more of this. If you relish it, I do not; go, chatter to the Philosopher Claudius Senecio, he is paid to talk this stuff.”

“I will not speak to him. I know beforehand what he will say.”

“He will give you excellent advice, he is hired to do it.”

“O yes – to bear everything with equanimity. That is the sum and substance of his doctrine. Then not to be too wise about the Gods; to aim to sit on the fulcrum of a see-saw, when I prefer an end of the plank.”

“Equanimity! I desire it with my whole soul.”

“But why so, mother? It is not running thought, but stagnation.”

“Because, my dear, it keeps off wrinkles.”

“Mother, you and I will never understand each other.”

“As the Gods love me, I sincerely hope not. Send me Plancus, Lucilla. I must scold him so as to soothe my ruffled spirits.”

“And, Euphrosyne, go, send the Chaldaean to me in the garden,” said the girl.

The slave obeyed and departed.

“Ubi Felicitas? Running, pursuing and finding nothing,” said Domitia as she went forth.

The sun was hot. She passed under an arched trellis with vines trained over it; the swelling bunches hung down within.

At intervals in the arcade were openings through which could be seen the still lake, and beyond the beautiful ridges of the limestone Sabine Mountains. The air was musical with the hum of bees.

Domitia paced up and down this walk for some while.

Presently the Magus appeared at the end, under the guidance of the girl Euphrosyne.

He approached, bowing at intervals, till he reached Domitia, when he stood still.

“Ubi Felicitas?” asked she. And when he raised his eyebrows in question, she added in explanation: “There is a picture in the atrium representing a damsel in pursuit of a butterfly, and beneath is the legend I have just quoted. When she catches the butterfly it will not content her. It will be a dead pinch of dust. It is now some months since you spoke on the Artemis, when I asked you a question, and then you were forced to admit that all your science was built up on conjecture, and that there was no certainty underlying it. But a guess is better than nothing, and a guess that carries the moral sense with it in approval, may come near to the truth. I recall all you then said. Do not repeat it, but answer my question, *Ubi Felicitas*? I asked it of my mother, and she said that it was to be found in Push. If I asked Senecio, he would say in Equanimity. Where say you that it is to be found?”

“The soul of man is a ray out of the Godhead,” answered the Magus, “it is enveloped, depressed, smothered by matter; and the straining of the spirit in man after happiness is the striving of his divine nature to emancipate itself from the thralldom of matter and return to Him from whom the ray emanated.”

“Then felicity is to be found – ?”

“In the disengagement of the good in man from matter, which presses it down, and which is evil.”

“Evil!” exclaimed Domitia, looking through one of the gaps in the arcade, at the lake; on a balustrade above the water stood a dreaming peacock, whilst below it grew bright flowers. Beyond, as clouds, hung the blue Sabine hills.

“The Divine ray,” said the girl, “seems rarely to delight in its incorporation in Matter, and to find therein its expression, much as do our thoughts in words. May it not be that Primordial Idea is inarticulate without Matter in which to utter itself?”

“Felicity,” continued the Chaldæan, disregarding the objection, “is sought by many in the satisfying of their animal appetites, in pleasing eye and ear and taste and smell. But in all is found the after-taste of satiety that gluts. True happiness is to be sought in teaching the mind to dispense with sensuous delights, and to live in absorption in itself.”

“Why, Elymas!” said Domitia. “In fine, you arrive by another method at that Apathy which Senecio the Stoic advocates. I grant you give a reason – which seems to me lame – but it is a reason, whereas he supplies none. But I like not your goal – Apathy is the reverse from Felicity. Leave me.”

The Magus retired, mortified at his doctrine being so ill received.

Then Euphrosyne approached timidly.

Domitia, who was in moody thought, looked up. The girl could not venture to speak till invited to do so by her mistress.

“Your lady mother has desired me to announce to you that Lucius Ælius Lamia hath ridden over from Rome.”

“I will come presently,” said Domitia; “I am just now too troubled in mind. You, child, tell me, where is the physician, Luke?”

“Lady, I do not know; he quitted us on reaching Rome.”

“Stay, Euphrosyne. Thine is a cheerful spirit. Where is felicity to be found?”

“My gracious mistress, I find mine in serving thee – in my duty.”

“Ah, child! That is the sort of reply my father might have made. In the discharge of what he considered his duty, he was of a wondrous sweet and equable temper. Is it so, that Felicity is only to be

found in the discharge of duty? And those torpid flies, the young loafers of our noble families, whose only occupation is to play ball, and whose amusements are vicious; they have it not because none has set them tasks. The ploughman whistles as he drives his team; the vineyard rings with laughter at the gathering of the grapes. The galley-slaves chant as they bend over the oar, and the herdboys pipe as he tends the goats. So each is set a task, and is content in discharge thereof, and each sleeps sweetly at night, when the task is done. But what! is happiness reserved to the bondsman, and not for the master? And only then for the former when the duty imposed is reasonable and honest? – For there is none when such an order comes as to fall on the sword or to open the veins. How about us great ladies? And the noble loafers? No task is set us and them.”

“Surely, lady, to all God has given duties!”

“Nay – when, where, how? Look at me, Euphrosyne. When I was a little child here, we had a neighbor, Lentulus. He was a lie-abed, and a sot. He let his servants do as they liked, make love, quarrel, fight, the one lord it over the other, and all idle, because on none was imposed any duty. It was a villainous household, and the estate went to the hammer. It seems to me, Euphrosyne, as if this whole world were the estate of Lentulus on a large scale, where all the servants squabbled, and one by sheer force tyrannizes over the others, and none know why they are placed there, and what is their master’s will, and what they have to do. There is no day-table of work. There is either no master over such a household, or he is an Olympian Lentulus.”

“But, mistress, is that not impossible?”

“It would seem so, and yet – Where is the Day-Table? Show me that – and, by the Gods! it will be new life to me. I shall know my duty – and see Happiness.”

CHAPTER XI.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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