ГЕНРИК СЕНКЕВИЧ

QUO VADIS

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Quo Vadis

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Quo Vadis: A Narrative of the Time of Nero:

Содержание

Henryk Sienkiewicz
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INTRODUCTORY

IN the trilogy "With Fire and Sword," "The Deluge," and "Pan Michael," Sienkiewicz has given pictures of a great and decisive epoch in modern history. The results of the struggle begun under Bogdan Hmelnitski have been felt for more than two centuries, and they are growing daily in importance. The Russia which rose out of that struggle has become a power not only of European but of world-wide significance, and, to all human seeming, she is yet in an early stage of her career.

In "Quo Vadis" the author gives us pictures of opening scenes in the conflict of moral ideas with the Roman Empire, – a conflict from which Christianity issued as the leading force in history.

The Slays are not so well known to Western Europe or to us as they are sure to be in the near future; hence the trilogy, with all its popularity and merit, is not appreciated yet as it will be.

The conflict described in "Quo Vadis" is of supreme interest to a vast number of persons reading English; and this book will

rouse, I think, more attention at first than anything written by Sienkiewicz hitherto.

JEREMIAH CURTIN ILOM, NORTHERN GUATEMALA,

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Chapter I

PETRONIUS woke only about midday, and as usual greatly wearied. The evening before he had been at one of Nero's feasts, which was prolonged till late at night. For some time his health had been failing. He said himself that he woke up benumbed, as it were, and without power of collecting his thoughts. But the morning bath and careful kneading of the body by trained slaves hastened gradually the course of his slothful blood, roused him, quickened him, restored his strength, so that he issued from the elæothesium, that is, the last division of the bath, as if he had risen from the dead, with eyes gleaming from wit and gladness, rejuvenated, filled with life, exquisite, so unapproachable that Otho himself could not compare with him, and was really that which he had been called, – arbiter elegantiarum.

He visited the public baths rarely, only when some rhetor happened there who roused admiration and who was spoken of in the city, or when in the ephebias there were combats of exceptional interest. Moreover, he had in his own "insula" private baths which Celer, the famous contemporary of Severus, had extended for him, reconstructed and arranged with such uncommon taste that Nero himself acknowledged their excellence over those of the Emperor, though the imperial baths were more extensive and finished with incomparably greater luxury.

After that feast, at which he was bored by the jesting of Vatinius with Nero, Lucan, and Seneca, he took part in a diatribe as to whether woman has a soul. Rising late, he used, as was his custom, the baths. Two enormous balneatores laid him on a cypress table covered with snow-white Egyptian byssus, and with hands dipped in perfumed olive oil began to rub his shapely body; and he waited with closed eyes till the heat of the laconicum and the heat of their hands passed through him and expelled weariness.

But after a certain time he spoke, and opened his eyes; he inquired about the weather, and then about gems which the jeweller Idomeneus had promised to send him for examination that day. It appeared that the weather was beautiful, with a light breeze from the Alban hills, and that the gems had not been brought. Petronius closed his eyes again, and had given command to bear him to the tepidarium, when from behind the curtain the nomenclator looked in, announcing that young Marcus Vinicius, recently returned from Asia Minor, had come to visit him.

Petronius ordered to admit the guest to the tepidarium, to which he was borne himself. Vinicius was the son of his oldest sister, who years before had married Marcus Vinicius, a man of consular dignity from the time of Tiberius. The young man was serving then under Corbulo against the Parthians, and at the close of the war had returned to the city. Petronius had for him a certain weakness bordering on attachment, for Marcus was beautiful and athletic, a young man who knew how to preserve a

certain aesthetic measure in his profligacy; this, Petronius prized above everything.

"A greeting to Petronius," said the young man, entering the tepidarium with a springy step. "May all the gods grant thee success, but especially Asklepios and Kypris, for under their double protection nothing evil can meet one."

"I greet thee in Rome, and may thy rest be sweet after war," replied Petronius, extending his hand from between the folds of soft karbas stuff in which he was wrapped. "What's to be heard in Armenia; or since thou wert in Asia, didst thou not stumble into Bithynia?"

Petronius on a time had been proconsul in Bithynia, and, what is more, he had governed with energy and justice. This was a marvellous contrast in the character of a man noted for effeminacy and love of luxury; hence he was fond of mentioning those times, as they were a proof of what he had been, and of what he might have become had it pleased him.

"I happened to visit Heraklea," answered Vinicius. "Corbulo sent me there with an order to assemble reinforcements."

"Ah, Heraklea! I knew at Heraklea a certain maiden from Colchis, for whom I would have given all the divorced women of this city, not excluding Poppæa. But these are old stories. Tell me now, rather, what is to be heard from the Parthian boundary. It is true that they weary me every Vologeses of them, and Tiridates and Tigranes, – those barbarians who, as young Arulenus insists, walk on all fours at home, and pretend to be human only when

in our presence. But now people in Rome speak much of them, if only for the reason that it is dangerous to speak of aught else."

"The war is going badly, and but for Corbulo might be turned to defeat."

"Corbulo! by Bacchus! a real god of war, a genuine Mars, a great leader, at the same time quick-tempered, honest, and dull. I love him, even for this, – that Nero is afraid of him."

"Corbulo is not a dull man."

"Perhaps thou art right, but for that matter it is all one. Dulness, as Pyrrho says, is in no way worse than wisdom, and differs from it in nothing."

Vinicius began to talk of the war; but when Petronius closed his eyes again, the young man, seeing his uncle's tired and somewhat emaciated face, changed the conversation, and inquired with a certain interest about his health.

Petronius opened his eyes again.

Health! – No. He did not feel well. He had not gone so far yet, it is true, as young Sissena, who had lost sensation to such a degree that when he was brought to the bath in the morning he inquired, "Am I sitting?" But he was not well. Vinicius had just committed him to the care of Asklepios and Kypris. But he, Petronius, did not believe in Asklepios. It was not known even whose son that Asklepios was, the son of Arsinoe or Koronis; and if the mother was doubtful, what was to be said of the father? Who, in that time, could be sure who his own father was?

Hereupon Petronius began to laugh; then he continued, –

"Two years ago, it is true, I sent to Epidaurus three dozen live blackbirds and a goblet of gold; but dost thou know why? I said to myself, 'Whether this helps or not, it will do me no harm.' Though people make offerings to the gods yet, I believe that all think as I do, – all, with the exception, perhaps, of mule-drivers hired at the Porta Capena by travellers. Besides Asklepios, I have had dealings with sons of Asklepios. When I was troubled a little last year in the bladder, they performed an incubation for me. I saw that they were tricksters, but I said to myself: 'What harm! The world stands on deceit, and life is an illusion. The soul is an illusion too. But one must have reason enough to distinguish pleasant from painful illusions.' I shall give command to burn in my hypocaustum, cedar-wood sprinkled with ambergris, for during life I prefer perfumes to stenches. As to Kypris, to whom thou hast also confided me, I have known her guardianship to the extent that I have twinges in my right foot. But as to the rest she is a good goddess! I suppose that thou wilt bear sooner or later white doves to her altar."

"True," answered Vinicius. "The arrows of the Parthians have not reached my body, but a dart of Amor has struck me – unexpectedly, a few stadia from a gate of this city."

"By the white knees of the Graces! thou wilt tell me of this at a leisure hour."

"I have come purposely to get thy advice," answered Marcus.

But at that moment the epilatores came, and occupied themselves with Petronius. Marcus, throwing aside his tunic,

entered a bath of tepid water, for Petronius invited him to a plunge bath.

"Ah, I have not even asked whether thy feeling is reciprocated," said Petronius, looking at the youthful body of Marcus, which was as if cut out of marble. "Had Lysippos seen thee, thou wouldst be ornamenting now the gate leading to the Palatine, as a statue of Hercules in youth."

The young man smiled with satisfaction, and began to sink in the bath, splashing warm water abundantly on the mosaic which represented Hera at the moment when she was imploring Sleep to lull Zeus to rest. Petronius looked at him with the satisfied eye of an artist.

When Vinicius had finished and yielded himself in turn to the epilatores, a lector came in with a bronze tube at his breast and rolls of paper in the tube.

"Dost wish to listen?" asked Petronius.

"If it is thy creation, gladly!" answered the young tribune; "if not, I prefer conversation. Poets seize people at present on every street corner."

"Of course they do. Thou wilt not pass any basilica, bath, library, or book-shop without seeing a poet gesticulating like a monkey. Agrippa, on coming here from the East, mistook them for madmen. And it is just such a time now. Cæsar writes verses; hence all follow in his steps. Only it is not permitted to write better verses than Cæsar, and for that reason I fear a little for Lucan. But I write prose, with which, however, I do not honor

myself or others. What the lector has to read are codicilli of that poor Fabricius Veiento."

"Why 'poor'?"

"Because it has been communicated to him that he must dwell in Odyssa and not return to his domestic hearth till he receives a new command. That Odyssey will be easier for him than for Ulysses, since his wife is no Penelope. I need not tell thee, for that matter, that he acted stupidly. But here no one takes things otherwise than superficially. His is rather a wretched and dull little book, which people have begun to read passionately only when the author is banished. Now one hears on every side, 'Scandala! scandala!' and it may be that Veiento invented some things; but I, who know the city, know our patres and our women, assure thee that it is all paler than reality. Meanwhile every man is searching in the book, – for himself with alarm, for his acquaintances with delight. At the book-shop of Avirnus a hundred copyists are writing at dictation, and its success is assured."

"Are not thy affairs in it?"

"They are; but the author is mistaken, for I am at once worse and less flat than he represents me. Seest thou we have lost long since the feeling of what is worthy or unworthy, – and to me even it seems that in real truth there is no difference between them, though Seneca, Musonius, and Trasca pretend that they see it. To me it is all one! By Hercules, I say what I think! I have preserved loftiness, however, because I know what is deformed and what is

beautiful; but our poet, Bronzebeard, for example, the charioteer, the singer, the actor, does not understand this."

"I am sorry, however, for Fabricius! He is a good companion."

"Vanity ruined the man. Every one suspected him, no one knew certainly; but he could not contain himself, and told the secret on all sides in confidence. Hast heard the history of Rufinus?"

"No."

"Then come to the frigidarium to cool; there I will tell thee."

They passed to the frigidarium, in the middle of which played a fountain of bright rose-color, emitting the odor of violets. There they sat in niches which were covered with velvet, and began to cool themselves. Silence reigned for a time. Vinicius looked awhile thoughtfully at a bronze faun which, bending over the arm of a nymph, was seeking her lips eagerly with his lips.

"He is right," said the young man. "That is what is best in life."

"More or less! But besides this thou lovest war, for which I have no liking, since under tents one's finger-nails break and cease to be rosy. For that matter, every man has his preferences. Bronzebeard loves song, especially his own; and old Scaurus his Corinthian vase, which stands near his bed at night, and which he kisses when he cannot sleep. He has kissed the edge off already. Tell me, dost thou not write verses?"

"No; I have never composed a single hexameter."

"And dost thou not play on the lute and sing?"

"No."

"And dost thou drive a chariot?"

"I tried once in Antioch, but unsuccessfully."

"Then I am at rest concerning thee. And to what party in the hippodrome dost thou belong?"

"To the Greens."

"Now I am perfectly at rest, especially since thou hast a large property indeed, though thou art not so rich as Pallas or Seneca. For seest thou, with us at present it is well to write verses, to sing to a lute, to declaim, and to compete in the Circus; but better, and especially safer, not to write verses, not to play, not to sing, and not to compete in the Circus. Best of all, is it to know how to admire when Bronzebeard admires. Thou art a comely young man; hence Poppæa may fall in love with thee. This is thy only peril. But no, she is too experienced; she cares for something else. She has had enough of love with her two husbands; with the third she has other views. Dost thou know that that stupid Otho loves her yet to distraction? He walks on the cliffs of Spain, and sighs; he has so lost his former habits, and so ceased to care for his person, that three hours each day suffice him to dress his hair. Who could have expected this of Otho?"

"I understand him," answered Vinicius; "but in his place I should have done something else."

"What, namely?"

"I should have enrolled faithful legions of mountaineers of that country. They are good soldiers, – those Iberians."

"Vinicius! Vinicius! I almost wish to tell thee that thou

wouldst not have been capable of that. And knowest why? Such things are done, but they are not mentioned even conditionally. As to me, in his place, I should have laughed at Poppæa, laughed at Bronzebeard, and formed for myself legions, not of Iberian men, however, but Iberian women. And what is more, I should have written epigrams which I should not have read to any one, – not like that poor Rufinus."

"Thou wert to tell me his history."

"I will tell it in the unctorium."

But in the unctorium the attention of Vinicius was turned to other objects; namely, to wonderful slave women who were waiting for the bathers. Two of them, Africans, resembling noble statues of ebony, began to anoint their bodies with delicate perfumes from Arabia; others, Phrygians, skilled in hairdressing, held in their hands, which were bending and flexible as serpents, combs and mirrors of polished steel; two Grecian maidens from Kos, who were simply like deities, waited as vestiplicæ, till the moment should come to put statuesque folds in the togas of the lords.

"By the cloud-scattering Zeus!" said Marcus Vinicius, "what a choice thou hast!"

"I prefer choice to numbers," answered Petronius. "My whole 'familia' [household servants] in Rome does not exceed four hundred, and I judge that for personal attendance only upstarts need a greater number of people."

"More beautiful bodies even Bronzebeard does not possess,"

said Vinicius, distending his nostrils.

"Thou art my relative," answered Petronius, with a certain friendly indifference, "and I am neither so misanthropic as Barsus nor such a pedant as Aulus Plautius."

When Vinicius heard this last name, he forgot the maidens from Kos for a moment, and, raising his head vivaciously, inquired, – "Whence did Aulus Plautius come to thy mind? Dost thou know that after I had disjointed my arm outside the city, I passed a number of days in his house? It happened that Plautius came up at the moment when the accident happened, and, seeing that I was suffering greatly, he took me to his house; there a slave of his, the physician Merion, restored me to health. I wished to speak with thee touching this very matter."

"Why? Is it because thou hast fallen in love with Pomponia perchance? In that case I pity thee; she is not young, and she is virtuous! I cannot imagine a worse combination. Brr!"

"Not with Pomponia – eheu!" answered Vinicius.

"With whom, then?"

"If I knew myself with whom? But I do not know to a certainty her name even, – Lygia or Callina? They call her Lygia in the house, for she comes of the Lygian nation; but she has her own barbarian name, Callina. It is a wonderful house, – that of those Plautiuses. There are many people in it; but it is quiet there as in the groves of Subiacum. For a number of days I did not know that a divinity dwelt in the house. Once about daybreak I saw her bathing in the garden fountain; and I swear to thee by that foam

from which Aphrodite rose, that the rays of the dawn passed right through her body. I thought that when the sun rose she would vanish before me in the light, as the twilight of morning does. Since then, I have seen her twice; and since then, too, I know not what rest is, I know not what other desires are, I have no wish to know what the city can give me. I want neither women, nor gold, nor Corinthian bronze, nor amber, nor pearls, nor wine, nor feasts; I want only Lygia. I am yearning for her, in sincerity I tell thee, Petronius, as that Dream who is imaged on the Mosaic of thy tepidarium yearned for Paisythea, – whole days and night do I yearn."

"If she is a slave, then purchase her."

"She is not a slave."

"What is she? A freed woman of Plautius?"

"Never having been a slave, she could not be a freed woman."

"Who is she?"

"I know not, – a king's daughter, or something of that sort."

"Thou dost rouse my curiosity, Vinicius."

"But if thou wish to listen, I will satisfy thy curiosity straightway. Her story is not a long one. Thou art acquainted, perhaps personally, with Vannius, king of the Suevi, who, expelled from his country, spent a long time here in Rome, and became even famous for his skilful play with dice, and his good driving of chariots. Drusus put him on the throne again. Vannius, who was really a strong man, ruled well at first, and warred with success; afterward, however, he began to skin not only his

neighbors, but his own Suevi, too much. Thereupon Vangio and Sido, two sister's sons of his, and the sons of Vibilius, king of the Hermunduri, determined to force him to Rome again – to try his luck there at dice."

"I remember; that is of recent Claudian times."

"Yes! War broke out. Vannius summoned to his aid the Yazygi; his dear nephews called in the Lygians, who, hearing of the riches of Vannius, and enticed by the hope of booty, came in such numbers that Cæsar himself, Claudius, began to fear for the safety of the boundary. Claudius did not wish to interfere in a war among barbarians, but he wrote to Atelius Hister, who commanded the legions of the Danube, to turn a watchful eye on the course of the war, and not permit them to disturb our peace. Hister required, then, of the Lygians a promise not to cross the boundary; to this they not only agreed, but gave hostages, among whom were the wife and daughter of their leader. It is known to thee that barbarians take their wives and children to war with them. My Lygia is the daughter of that leader."

"Whence dost thou know all this?"

"Aulus Plautius told it himself. The Lygians did not cross the boundary, indeed; but barbarians come and go like a tempest. So did the Lygians vanish with their wild-ox horns on their heads. They killed Vannius's Suevi and Yazygi; but their own king fell. They disappeared with their booty then, and the hostages remained in Hister's hands. The mother died soon after, and Hister, not knowing what to do with the daughter, sent her to

Pomponius, the governor of all Germany. He, at the close of the war with the Catti, returned to Rome, where Claudius, as is known to thee, permitted him to have a triumph. The maiden on that occasion walked after the car of the conqueror; but, at the end of the solemnity, – since hostages cannot be considered captives, and since Pomponius did not know what to do with her definitely – he gave her to his sister Pomponia Græcina, the wife of Plautius. In that house where all – beginning with the masters and ending with the poultry in the hen-house – are virtuous, that maiden grew up as virtuous, alas! as Græcina herself, and so beautiful that even Poppæa, if near her, would seem like an autumn fig near an apple of the Hesperides."

"And what?"

"And I repeat to thee that from the moment when I saw how the sun-rays at that fountain passed through her body, I fell in love to distraction."

"She is as transparent as a lamprey eel, then, or a youthful sardine?"

"Jest not, Petronius; but if the freedom with which I speak of my desire misleads thee, know this, – that bright garments frequently cover deep wounds. I must tell thee, too, that, while returning from Asia, I slept one night in the temple of Mopsus to have a prophetic dream. Well, Mopsus appeared in a dream to me, and declared that, through love, a great change in my life would take place."

"Pliny declares, as I hear, that he does not believe in the gods,

but he believes in dreams; and perhaps he is right. My jests do not prevent me from thinking at times that in truth there is only one deity, eternal, creative, all-powerful, Venus Genetrix. She brings souls together; she unites bodies and things. Eros called the world out of chaos. Whether he did well is another question; but, since he did so, we should recognize his might, though we are free not to bless it."

"Alas! Petronius, it is easier to find philosophy in the world than wise counsel."

"Tell me, what is thy wish specially?"

"I wish to have Lygia. I wish that these arms of mine, which now embrace only air, might embrace Lygia and press her to my bosom. I wish to breathe with her breath. Were she a slave, I would give Aulus for her one hundred maidens with feet whitened with lime as a sign that they were exhibited on sale for the first time. I wish to have her in my house till my head is as white as the top of Soracte in winter."

"She is not a slave, but she belongs to the 'family' of Plautius; and since she is a deserted maiden, she may be considered an 'alumna.' Plautius might yield her to thee if he wished."

"Then it seems that thou knowest not Pomponia Græcina. Both have become as much attached to her as if she were their own daughter."

"Pomponia I know, – a real cypress. If she were not the wife of Aulus, she might be engaged as a mourner. Since the death of Julius she has not thrown aside dark robes; and in general she

looks as if, while still alive, she were walking on the asphodel meadow. She is, moreover, a 'one-man woman'; hence, among our ladies of four and five divorces, she is straightway a phoenix. But! hast thou heard that in Upper Egypt the phoenix has just been hatched out, as 'tis said? – an event which happens not oftener than once in five centuries."

"Petronius! Petronius! Let us talk of the phoenix some other time."

"What shall I tell thee, my Marcus? I know Aulus Plautius, who, though he blames my mode of life, has for me a certain weakness, and even respects me, perhaps, more than others, for he knows that I have never been an informer like Domitius Afer, Tigellinus, and a whole rabble of Ahenobarbus's intimates [Nero's name was originally L. Domitius Ahenobarbus]. Without pretending to be a stoic, I have been offended more than once at acts of Nero, which Seneca and Burrus looked at through their fingers. If it is thy thought that I might do something for thee with Aulus, I am at thy command."

"I judge that thou hast the power. Thou hast influence over him; and, besides, thy mind possesses inexhaustible resources. If thou wert to survey the position and speak with Plautius."

"Thou hast too great an idea of my influence and wit; but if that is the only question, I will talk with Plautius as soon as they return to the city."

"They returned two days since."

"In that case let us go to the triclinium, where a meal is

now ready, and when we have refreshed ourselves, let us give command to bear us to Plautius."

"Thou hast ever been kind to me," answered Vinicius, with vivacity; "but now I shall give command to rear thy statue among my lares, – just such a beauty as this one, – and I will place offerings before it."

Then he turned toward the statues which ornamented one entire wall of the perfumed chamber, and pointing to the one which represented Petronius as Hermes with a staff in his hand, he added, – "By the light of Helios! if the 'godlike' Alexander resembled thee, I do not wonder at Helen."

And in that exclamation there was as much sincerity as flattery; for Petronius, though older and less athletic, was more beautiful than even Vinicius. The women of Rome admired not only his pliant mind and his taste, which gained for him the title Arbiter elegantiæ, but also his body. This admiration was evident even on the faces of those maidens from Kos who were arranging the folds of his toga; and one of whom, whose name was Eunice, loving him in secret, looked him in the eyes with submission and rapture. But he did not even notice this; and, smiling at Vinicius, he quoted in answer an expression of Seneca about woman, – Animal impudens, etc. And then, placing an arm on the shoulders of his nephew, he conducted him to the triclinium.

In the unctorium the two Grecian maidens, the Phrygians, and the two Ethiopians began to put away the vessels with perfumes. But at that moment, and beyond the curtain of the frigidarium,

appeared the heads of the balneatores, and a low “Psst!” was heard. At that call one of the Grecians, the Phrygians, and the Ethiopians sprang up quickly, and vanished in a twinkle behind the curtain. In the baths began a moment of license which the inspector did not prevent, for he took frequent part in such frolics himself. Petronius suspected that they took place; but, as a prudent man, and one who did not like to punish, he looked at them through his fingers.

In the unctorium only Eunice remained. She listened for a short time to the voices and laughter which retreated in the direction of the laconicum. At last she took the stool inlaid with amber and ivory, on which Petronius had been sitting a short time before, and put it carefully at his statue. The unctorium was full of sunlight and the hues which came from the many-colored marbles with which the wall was faced. Eunice stood on the stool, and, finding herself at the level of the statue, cast her arms suddenly around its neck; then, throwing back her golden hair, and pressing her rosy body to the white marble, she pressed her lips with ecstasy to the cold lips of Petronius.

Chapter II

After a refreshment, which was called the morning meal and to which the two friends sat down at an hour when common mortals were already long past their midday prandium, Petronius proposed a light doze. According to him, it was too early for visits yet. “There are, it is true,” said he, “people who begin to visit their acquaintances about sunrise, thinking that custom an old Roman one, but I look on this as barbarous. The afternoon hours are most proper, – not earlier, however, than that one when the sun passes to the side of Jove’s temple on the Capitol and begins to look slantwise on the Forum. In autumn it is still hot, and people are glad to sleep after eating. At the same time it is pleasant to hear the noise of the fountain in the atrium, and, after the obligatory thousand steps, to doze in the red light which filters in through the purple half-drawn velarium.”

Vinicius recognized the justice of these words; and the two men began to walk, speaking in a careless manner of what was to be heard on the Palatine and in the city, and philosophizing a little upon life. Petronius withdrew then to the cubiculum, but did not sleep long. In half an hour he came out, and, having given command to bring verbena, he inhaled the perfume and rubbed his hands and temples with it.

“Thou wilt not believe,” said he, “how it enlivens and freshens one. Now I am ready.”

The litter was waiting long since; hence they took their places, and Petronius gave command to bear them to the Vicus Patricius, to the house of Aulus. Petronius's "insula" lay on the southern slope of the Palatine, near the so-called Carinæ; their nearest way, therefore, was below the Forum; but since Petronius wished to step in on the way to see the jeweller Idomeneus, he gave the direction to carry them along the Vicus Apollinis and the Forum in the direction of the Vicus Sceleratus, on the corner of which were many tabernæ of every kind.

Gigantic Africans bore the litter and moved on, preceded by slaves called pedisequii. Petronius, after some time, raised to his nostrils in silence his palm odorous with verbena, and seemed to be meditating on something.

"It occurs to me," said he after a while, "that if thy forest goddess is not a slave she might leave the house of Plautius, and transfer herself to thine. Thou wouldst surround her with love and cover her with wealth, as I do my adored Chrysothemis, of whom, speaking between us, I have quite as nearly enough as she has of me."

Marcus shook his head.

"No?" inquired Petronius. "In the worst event, the case would be left with Cæsar, and thou mayst be certain that, thanks even to my influence, our Bronzebeard would be on thy side."

"Thou knowest not Lygia," replied Vinicius.

"Then permit me to ask if thou know her otherwise than by sight? Hast spoken with her? hast confessed thy love to her?"

"I saw her first at the fountain; since then I have met her twice. Remember that during my stay in the house of Aulus, I dwelt in a separate villa, intended for guests, and, having a disjointed arm, I could not sit at the common table. Only on the eve of the day for which I announced my departure did I meet Lygia at supper, but I could not say a word to her. I had to listen to Aulus and his account of victories gained by him in Britain, and then of the fall of small states in Italy, which Licinius Stolo strove to prevent. In general I do not know whether Aulus will be able to speak of aught else, and do not think that we shall escape this history unless it be thy wish to hear about the effeminacy of these days. They have pheasants in their preserves, but they do not eat them, setting out from the principle that every pheasant eaten brings nearer the end of Roman power. I met her a second time at the garden cistern, with a freshly plucked reed in her hand, the top of which she dipped in the water and sprinkled the irises growing around. Look at my knees. By the shield of Hercules, I tell thee that they did not tremble when clouds of Parthians advanced on our maniples with howls, but they trembled before the cistern. And, confused as a youth who still wears a bulla on his neck, I merely begged pity with my eyes, not being able to utter a word for a long time."

Petronius looked at him, as if with a certain envy. "Happy man," said he, "though the world and life were the worst possible, one thing in them will remain eternally good, – youth!"

After a while he inquired: "And hast thou not spoken to her?"

"When I had recovered somewhat, I told her that I was returning from Asia, that I had disjointed my arm near the city, and had suffered severely, but at the moment of leaving that hospitable house I saw that suffering in it was more to be wished for than delight in another place, that sickness there was better than health somewhere else. Confused too on her part, she listened to my words with bent head while drawing something with the reed on the saffron-colored sand. Afterward she raised her eyes, then looked down at the marks drawn already; once more she looked at me, as if to ask about something, and then fled on a sudden like a hamadryad before a dull faun."

"She must have beautiful eyes."

"As the sea – and I was drowned in them, as in the sea. Believe me that the archipelago is less blue. After a while a little son of Plautius ran up with a question. But I did not understand what he wanted."

"O Athene!" exclaimed Petronius, "remove from the eyes of this youth the bandage with which Eros has bound them; if not, he will break his head against the columns of Venus's temple.

"O thou spring bud on the tree of life," said he, turning to Vinicius, "thou first green shoot of the vine! Instead of taking thee to the Plautiuses, I ought to give command to bear thee to the house of Gelocius, where there is a school for youths unacquainted with life."

"What dost thou wish in particular?"

"But what did she write on the sand? Was it not the name of

Amor, or a heart pierced with his dart, or something of such sort, that one might know from it that the satyrs had whispered to the ear of that nymph various secrets of life? How couldst thou help looking on those marks?"

"It is longer since I have put on the toga than seems to thee," said Vinicius, "and before little Aulus ran up, I looked carefully at those marks, for I know that frequently maidens in Greece and in Rome draw on the sand a confession which their lips will not utter. But guess what she drew!"

"If it is other than I supposed, I shall not guess."

"A fish."

"What dost thou say?"

"I say, a fish. What did that mean, – that cold blood is flowing in her veins? So far I do not know; but thou, who hast called me a spring bud on the tree of life, wilt be able to understand the sign certainly."

"Carissime! ask such a thing of Pliny. He knows fish. If old Apicius were alive, he could tell thee something, for in the course of his life he ate more fish than could find place at one time in the bay of Naples."

Further conversation was interrupted, since they were borne into crowded streets where the noise of people hindered them.

From the Vicus Apollinis they turned to the Boarium, and then entered the Forum Romanum, where on clear days, before sunset, crowds of idle people assembled to stroll among the columns, to tell and hear news, to see noted people borne past

in litters, and finally to look in at the jewellery-shops, the book-shops, the arches where coin was changed, shops for silk, bronze, and all other articles with which the buildings covering that part of the market placed opposite the Capitol were filled.

One-half of the Forum, immediately under the rock of the Capitol, was buried already in shade; but the columns of the temples, placed higher, seemed golden in the sunshine and the blue. Those lying lower cast lengthened shadows on marble slabs. The place was so filled with columns everywhere that the eye was lost in them as in a forest.

Those buildings and columns seemed huddled together. They towered some above others, they stretched toward the right and the left, they climbed toward the height, and they clung to the wall of the Capitol, or some of them clung to others, like greater and smaller, thicker and thinner, white or gold colored tree-trunks, now blooming under architraves, flowers of the acanthus, now surrounded with Ionic corners, now finished with a simple Doric quadrangle. Above that forest gleamed colored triglyphs; from tympans stood forth the sculptured forms of gods; from the summits winged golden quadrigæ seemed ready to fly away through space into the blue dome, fixed serenely above that crowded place of temples. Through the middle of the market and along the edges of it flowed a river of people; crowds passed under the arches of the basilica of Julius Cæsar; crowds were sitting on the steps of Castor and Pollux, or walking around the temple of Vesta, resembling on that great marble background

many-colored swarms of butterflies or beetles. Down immense steps, from the side of the temple on the Capitol dedicated to Jupiter Optimus Maximus, came new waves; at the rostra people listened to chance orators; in one place and another rose the shouts of hawkers selling fruit, wine, or water mixed with fig-juice; of tricksters; of venders of marvellous medicines; of soothsayers; of discoverers of hidden treasures; of interpreters of dreams. Here and there, in the tumult of conversations and cries, were mingled sounds of the Egyptian sistra, of the sambuké, or of Grecian flutes. Here and there the sick, the pious, or the afflicted were bearing offerings to the temples. In the midst of the people, on the stone flags, gathered flocks of doves, eager for the grain given them, and like movable many-colored and dark spots, now rising for a moment with a loud sound of wings, now dropping down again to places left vacant by people. From time to time the crowds opened before litters in which were visible the affected faces of women, or the heads of senators and knights, with features, as it were, rigid and exhausted from living. The many-tongued population repeated aloud their names, with the addition of some term of praise or ridicule. Among the unordered groups pushed from time to time, advancing with measured tread, parties of soldiers, or watchers, preserving order on the streets. Around about, the Greek language was heard as often as Latin.

Vinicius, who had not been in the city for a long time, looked with a certain curiosity on that swarm of people and on that

Forum Romanum, which both dominated the sea of the world and was flooded by it, so that Petronius, who divined the thoughts of his companion, called it "the nest of the Quirites – without the Quirites." In truth, the local element was well-nigh lost in that crowd, composed of all races and nations. There appeared Ethiopians, gigantic light-haired people from the distant north, Britons, Gauls, Germans, sloping-eyed dwellers of Lericum; people from the Euphrates and from the Indus, with beards dyed brick color; Syrians from the banks of the Orontes, with black and mild eyes; dwellers in the deserts of Arabia, dried up as a bone; Jews, with their flat breasts; Egyptians, with the eternal, indifferent smile on their faces; Numidians and Africans; Greeks from Hellas, who equally with the Romans commanded the city, but commanded through science, art, wisdom, and deceit; Greeks from the islands, from Asia Minor, from Egypt, from Italy, from Narbonic Gaul. In the throng of slaves, with pierced ears, were not lacking also freemen, – an idle population, which Cæsar amused, supported, even clothed, – and free visitors, whom the ease of life and the prospects of fortune enticed to the gigantic city; there was no lack of venal persons. There were priests of Serapis, with palm branches in their hands; priests of Isis, to whose altar more offerings were brought than to the temple of the Capitoline Jove; priests of Cybele, bearing in their hands golden ears of rice; and priests of nomad divinities; and dancers of the East with bright head-dresses, and dealers in amulets, and snake-tamers, and Chaldean seers; and, finally,

people without any occupation whatever, who applied for grain every week at the storehouses on the Tiber, who fought for lottery-tickets to the Circus, who spent their nights in rickety houses of districts beyond the Tiber, and sunny and warm days under covered porticos, and in foul eating-houses of the Subura, on the Milvian bridge, or before the "insulæ" of the great, where from time to time remnants from the tables of slaves were thrown out to them.

Petronius was well known to those crowds. Vinicius's ears were struck continually by "Hic est!" (Here he is). They loved him for his munificence; and his peculiar popularity increased from the time when they learned that he had spoken before Cæsar in opposition to the sentence of death issued against the whole "familia," that is, against all the slaves of the prefect Pedanius Secundus, without distinction of sex or age, because one of them had killed that monster in a moment of despair. Petronius repeated in public, it is true, that it was all one to him, and that he had spoken to Cæsar only privately, as the arbiter elegantiarum whose æsthetic taste was offended by a barbarous slaughter befitting Scythians and not Romans. Nevertheless, people who were indignant because of the slaughter loved Petronius from that moment forth. But he did not care for their love. He remembered that that crowd of people had loved also Britannicus, poisoned by Nero; and Agrippina, killed at his command; and Octavia, smothered in hot steam at the Pandataria, after her veins had been opened previously; and Rubelius Plautus, who had been

banished; and Thrasea, to whom any morning might bring a death sentence. The love of the mob might be considered rather of ill omen; and the sceptical Petronius was superstitious also. He had a twofold contempt for the multitude, – as an aristocrat and an æsthetic person. Men with the odor of roast beans, which they carried in their bosoms, and who besides were eternally hoarse and sweating from playing mora on the street-corners and peristyles, did not in his eyes deserve the term "human." Hence he gave no answer whatever to the applause, or the kisses sent from lips here and there to him. He was relating to Marcus the case of Pedanius, reviling meanwhile the fickleness of that rabble which, next morning after the terrible butchery, applauded Nero on his way to the temple of Jupiter Stator. But he gave command to halt before the book-shop of Avirnus, and, descending from the litter, purchased an ornamented manuscript, which he gave to Vinicius.

"Here is a gift for thee," said he.

"Thanks!" answered Vinicius. Then, looking at the title, he inquired, "'Satyricon'? Is this something new? Whose is it?"

"Mine. But I do not wish to go in the road of Rufinus, whose history I was to tell thee, nor of Fabricius Veiento; hence no one knows of this, and do thou mention it to no man."

"Thou hast said that thou art no writer of verses," said Vinicius, looking at the middle of the manuscript; "but here I see prose thickly interwoven with them."

"When thou art reading, turn attention to Trimalchion's feast.

As to verses, they have disgusted me, since Nero is writing an epic. Vitelius, when he wishes to relieve himself, uses ivory fingers to thrust down his throat; others serve themselves with flamingo feathers steeped in olive oil or in a decoction of wild thyme. I read Nero's poetry, and the result is immediate. Straightway I am able to praise it, if not with a clear conscience, at least with a clear stomach."

When he had said this, he stopped the litter again before the shop of Idomeneus the goldsmith, and, having settled the affair of the gems, gave command to bear the litter directly to Aulus's mansion.

"On the road I will tell thee the story of Rufinus," said he, "as proof of what vanity in an author may be."

But before he had begun, they turned in to the Vicus Patricius, and soon found themselves before the dwelling of Aulus. A young and sturdy "janitor" opened the door leading to the ostium, over which a magpie confined in a cage greeted them noisily with the word, "Salve!"

On the way from the second antechamber, called the ostium, to the atrium itself, Vinicius said, – "Hast noticed that thee doorkeepers are without chains?" "This is a wonderful house," answered Petronius, in an undertone. "Of course it is known to thee that Pomponia Græcina is suspected of entertaining that Eastern superstition which consists in honoring a certain Chrestos. It seems that Crispinilla rendered her this service, – she who cannot forgive Pomponia because one husband has sufficed

her for a lifetime. A one-man Woman! To-day, in Rome, it is easier to get a half-plate of fresh mushrooms from Noricum than to find such. They tried her before a domestic court – "

"To thy judgment this is a wonderful house. Later on I will tell thee what I heard and saw in it."

Meanwhile they had entered the atrium. The slave appointed to it, called atriensis, sent a nomenclator to announce the guests; and Petronius, who, imagining that eternal sadness reigned in this severe house, had never been in it, looked around with astonishment, and as it were with a feeling of disappointment, for the atrium produced rather an impression of cheerfulness. A sheaf of bright light falling from above through a large opening broke into a thousand sparks on a fountain in a quadrangular little basin, called the impluvium, which was in the middle to receive rain falling through the opening during bad weather; this was surrounded by anemones and lilies. In that house a special love for lilies was evident, for there were whole clumps of them, both white and red; and, finally, sapphire irises, whose delicate leaves were as if silvered from the spray of the fountain. Among the moist mosses, in which lily-pots were hidden, and among the bunches of lilies were little bronze statues representing children and water-birds. In one corner a bronze fawn, as if wishing to drink, was inclining its greenish head, grizzled, too, by dampness. The floor of the atrium was of mosaic; the walls, faced partly with red marble and partly with wood, on which were painted fish, birds, and griffins, attracted the eye by the play of

colors. From the door to the side chamber they were ornamented with tortoise-shell or even ivory; at the walls between the doors were statues of Aulus's ancestors. Everywhere calm plenty was evident, remote from excess, but noble and self-trusting.

Petronius, who lived with incomparably greater show and elegance, could find nothing which offended his taste; and had just turned to Vinicius with that remark, when a slave, the velarius, pushed aside the curtain separating the atrium from the tablinum, and in the depth of the building appeared Aulus Plautius approaching hurriedly.

He was a man nearing the evening of life, with a head whitened by hoar frost, but fresh, with an energetic face, a trifle too short, but still somewhat eagle-like. This time there was expressed on it a certain astonishment, and even alarm, because of the unexpected arrival of Nero's friend, companion, and suggester.

Petronius was too much a man of the world and too quick not to notice this; hence, after the first greetings, he announced with all the eloquence and ease at his command that he had come to give thanks for the care which his sister's son had found in that house, and that gratitude alone was the cause of the visit, to which, moreover, he was emboldened by his old acquaintance with Aulus.

Aulus assured him that he was a welcome guest; and as to gratitude, he declared that he had that feeling himself, though surely Petronius did not divine the cause of it.

In fact, Petronius did not divine it. In vain did he raise his hazel eyes, endeavoring to remember the least service rendered to Aulus or to any one. He recalled none, unless it might be that which he intended to show Vinicius. Some such thing, it is true, might have happened involuntarily, but only involuntarily.

"I have great love and esteem for Vespasian, whose life thou didst save," said Aulus, "when he had the misfortune to doze while listening to Nero's verses."

"He was fortunate," replied Petronius, "for he did not hear them; but I will not deny that the matter might have ended with misfortune. Bronzebeard wished absolutely to send a centurion to him with the friendly advice to open his veins."

"But thou, Petronius, laughed him out of it."

"That is true, or rather it is not true. I told Nero that if Orpheus put wild beasts to sleep with song, his triumph was equal, since he had put Vespasian to sleep. Ahenobarbus may be blamed on condition that to a small criticism a great flattery be added. Our gracious Augusta, Poppæa, understands this to perfection."

"Alas! such are the times," answered Aulus. "I lack two front teeth, knocked out by a stone from the hand of a Briton, I speak with a hiss; still my happiest days were passed in Britain."

"Because they were days of victory," added Vinicius.

But Petronius, alarmed lest the old general might begin a narrative of his former wars, changed the conversation.

"See," said he, "in the neighborhood of Præneste country people found a dead wolf whelp with two heads; and during a

storm about that time lightning struck off an angle of the temple of Luna, – a thing unparalleled, because of the late autumn. A certain Cotta, too, who had told this, added, while telling it, that the priests of that temple prophesied the fall of the city or, at least, the ruin of a great house, – ruin to be averted only by uncommon sacrifices."

Aulus, when he had heard the narrative, expressed the opinion that such signs should not be neglected; that the gods might be angered by an over-measure of wickedness. In this there was nothing wonderful; and in such an event expiatory sacrifices were perfectly in order.

"Thy house, Plautius, is not too large," answered Petronius, "though a great man lives in it. Mine is indeed too large for such a wretched owner, though equally small. But if it is a question of the ruin of something as great, for example, as the domus transitoria, would it be worth while for us to bring offerings to avert that ruin?"

Plautius did not answer that question, – a carefulness which touched even Petronius somewhat, for, with all his inability to feel the difference between good and evil, he had never been an informer; and it was possible to talk with him in perfect safety. He changed the conversation again, therefore, and began to praise Plautius's dwelling and the good taste which reigned in the house.

"It is an ancient seat," said Plautius, "in which nothing has been changed since I inherited it."

After the curtain was pushed aside which divided the atrium from the tablinum, the house was open from end to end, so that through the tablinum and the following peristyle and the hall lying beyond it which was called the oecus, the glance extended to the garden, which seemed from a distance like a bright image set in a dark frame. Joyous, childlike laughter came from it to the atrium.

"Oh, general!" said Petronius, "permit us to listen from near by to that glad laughter which is of a kind heard so rarely in these days."

"Willingly," answered Plautius, rising; "that is my little Aulus and Lygia, playing ball. But as to laughter, I think, Petronius, that our whole life is spent in it."

"Life deserves laughter, hence people laugh at it," answered Petronius, "but laughter here has another sound."

"Petronius does not laugh for days in succession," said Vinicius; "but then he laughs entire nights."

Thus conversing, they passed through the length of the house and reached the garden, where Lygia and little Aulus were playing with balls, which slaves, appointed to that game exclusively and called spheristæ, picked up and placed in their hands. Petronius cast a quick passing glance at Lygia; little Aulus, seeing Vinicius, ran to greet him; but the young tribune, going forward, bent his head before the beautiful maiden, who stood with a ball in her hand, her hair blown apart a little. She was somewhat out of breath, and flushed.

In the garden triclinium, shaded by ivy, grapes, and woodbine, sat Pomponia Græcina; hence they went to salute her. She was known to Petronius, though he did not visit Plautius, for he had seen her at the house of Antistia, the daughter of Rubelius Plautus, and besides at the house of Seneca and Polion. He could not resist a certain admiration with which he was filled by her face, pensive but mild, by the dignity of her bearing, by her movements, by her words. Pomponia disturbed his understanding of women to such a degree that that man, corrupted to the marrow of his bones, and self-confident as no one in Rome, not only felt for her a kind of esteem, but even lost his previous self-confidence. And now, thanking her for her care of Vinicius, he thrust in, as it were involuntarily, "domina," which never occurred to him when speaking, for example, to Calvia Crispinilla, Scribonia, Veleria, Solina, and other women of high society. After he had greeted her and returned thanks, he began to complain that he saw her so rarely, that it was not possible to meet her either in the Circus or the Amphitheatre; to which she answered calmly, laying her hand on the hand of her husband:

"We are growing old, and love our domestic quiet more and more, both of us."

Petronius wished to oppose; but Aulus Plautius added in his hissing voice, – "And we feel stranger and stranger among people who give Greek names to our Roman divinities."

"The gods have become for some time mere figures

of rhetoric," replied Petronius, carelessly. "But since Greek rhetoricians taught us, it is easier for me even to say Hera than Juno."

He turned his eyes then to Pomponia, as if to signify that in presence of her no other divinity could come to his mind: and then he began to contradict what she had said touching old age.

"People grow old quickly, it is true; but there are some who live another life entirely, and there are faces moreover which Saturn seems to forget."

Petronius said this with a certain sincerity even, for Pomponia Græcina, though descending from the midday of life, had preserved an uncommon freshness of face; and since she had a small head and delicate features, she produced at times, despite her dark robes, despite her solemnity and sadness, the impression of a woman quite young.

Meanwhile little Aulus, who had become uncommonly friendly with Vinicius during his former stay in the house, approached the young man and entreated him to play ball. Lygia herself entered the triclinium after the little boy. Under the climbing ivy, with the light quivering on her face, she seemed to Petronius more beautiful than at the first glance, and really like some nymph. As he had not spoken to her thus far, he rose, inclined his head, and, instead of the usual expressions of greeting, quoted the words with which Ulysses greeted Nausikaa,

—

"I supplicate thee, O queen, whether thou art some goddess

or a mortal! If thou art one of the daughters of men who dwell on earth, thrice blessed are thy father and thy lady mother, and thrice blessed thy brethren."

The exquisite politeness of this man of the world pleased even Pomponia. As to Lygia, she listened, confused and flushed, without boldness to raise her eyes. But a wayward smile began to quiver at the corners of her lips, and on her face a struggle was evident between the timidity of a maiden and the wish to answer; but clearly the wish was victorious, for, looking quickly at Petronius, she answered him all at once with the words of that same Nausikaa, quoting them at one breath, and a little like a lesson learned, —

"Stranger, thou seemest no evil man nor foolish."

Then she turned and ran out as a frightened bird runs.

This time the turn for astonishment came to Petronius, for he had not expected to hear verses of Homer from the lips of a maiden of whose barbarian extraction he had heard previously from Vinicius. Hence he looked with an inquiring glance at Pomponia; but she could not give him an answer, for she was looking at that moment, with a smile, at the pride reflected on the face of her husband.

He was not able to conceal that pride. First, he had become attached to Lygia as to his own daughter; and second, in spite of his old Roman prejudices, which commanded him to thunder against Greek and the spread of the language, he considered it as the summit of social polish. He himself had never been able

to learn it well; over this he suffered in secret. He was glad, therefore, that an answer was given in the language and poetry of Homer to this exquisite man both of fashion and letters, who was ready to consider Plautius's house as barbarian.

"We have in the house a pedagogue, a Greek," said he, turning to Petronius, "who teaches our boy, and the maiden overhears the lessons. She is a wagtail yet, but a dear one, to which we have both grown attached."

Petronius looked through the branches of woodbine into the garden, and at the three persons who were playing there. Vinicius had thrown aside his toga, and, wearing only his tunic, was striking the ball, which Lygia, standing opposite, with raised arms was trying to catch. The maiden did not make a great impression on Petronius at the first glance; she seemed to him too slender. But from the moment when he saw her more nearly in the triclinium he thought to himself that Aurora might look like her; and as a judge he understood that in her there was something uncommon. He considered everything and estimated everything; hence her face, rosy and clear, her fresh lips, as if set for a kiss, her eyes blue as the azure of the sea, the alabaster whiteness of her forehead, the wealth of her dark hair, with the reflection of amber or Corinthian bronze gleaming in its folds, her slender neck, the divine slope of her shoulders, the whole posture, flexible, slender, young with the youth of May and of freshly opened flowers. The artist was roused in him, and the worshipper of beauty, who felt that beneath a statue of that maiden one might

write “Spring.” All at once he remembered Chrysothemis, and pure laughter seized him. Chrysothemis seemed to him, with golden powder on her hair and darkened brows, to be fabulously faded, – something in the nature of a yellowed rose-tree shedding its leaves. But still Rome envied him that Chrysothemis. Then he recalled Poppæa; and that most famous Poppæa also seemed to him soulless, a waxen mask. In that maiden with Tanagrian outlines there was not only spring, but a radiant soul, which shone through her rosy body as a flame through a lamp.

“Vinicius is right,” thought he, “and my Chrysothemis is old, old! – as Troy!”

Then he turned to Pomponia Græcina, and, pointing to the garden, said, – “I understand now, domina, why thou and thy husband prefer this house to the Circus and to feasts on the Palatine.”

“Yes,” answered she, turning her eyes in the direction of little Aulus and Lygia.

But the old general began to relate the history of the maiden, and what he had heard years before from Atelius Hister about the Lygian people who lived in the gloom of the North.

The three outside had finished playing ball, and for some time had been walking along the sand of the garden, appearing against the dark background of myrtles and cypresses like three white statues. Lygia held little Aulus by the hand. After they had walked a while they sat on a bench near the fish-pond, which occupied the middle of the garden. After a time Aulus sprang

up to frighten the fish in the transparent water, but Vinicius continued the conversation begun during the walk.

"Yes," said he, in a low, quivering voice, scarcely audible; "barely had I cast aside the pretexta, when I was sent to the legions in Asia. I had not become acquainted with the city, nor with life, nor with love. I know a small bit of Anacreon by heart, and Horace; but I cannot like Petronius quote verses, when reason is dumb from admiration and unable to find its own words. While a youth I went to school to Musonius, who told me that happiness consists in wishing what the gods wish, and therefore depends on our will. I think, however, that it is something else, – something greater and more precious, which depends not on the will, for love only can give it. The gods themselves seek that happiness; hence I too, O Lygia, who have not known love thus far, follow in their footsteps. I also seek her who would give me happiness – "

He was silent – and for a time there was nothing to be heard save the light plash of the water into which little Aulus was throwing pebbles to frighten the fish; but after a while Vinicius began again in a voice still softer and lower, – "But thou knowest of Vespasian's son Titus? They say that he had scarcely ceased to be a youth when he so loved Berenice that grief almost drew the life out of him. So could I too love, O Lygia! Riches, glory, power are mere smoke, vanity! The rich man will find a richer than himself; the greater glory of another will eclipse a man who is famous; a strong man will be conquered by a stronger. But can

Cæsar himself, can any god even, experience greater delight or be happier than a simple mortal at the moment when at his breast there is breathing another dear breast, or when he kisses beloved lips? Hence love makes us equal to the gods, O Lygia."

And she listened with alarm, with astonishment, and at the same time as if she were listening to the sound of a Grecian flute or a cithara. It seemed to her at moments that Vinicius was singing a kind of wonderful song, which was instilling itself into her ears, moving the blood in her, and penetrating her heart with a faintness, a fear, and a kind of uncomprehended delight. It seemed to her also that he was telling something which was in her before, but of which she could not give account to herself. She felt that he was rousing in her something which had been sleeping hitherto, and that in that moment a hazy dream was changing into a form more and more definite, more pleasing, more beautiful.

Meanwhile the sun had passed the Tiber long since, and had sunk low over the Janiculum. On the motionless cypresses ruddy light was falling, and the whole atmosphere was filled with it. Lygia raised on Vinicius her blue eyes as if roused from sleep; and he, bending over her with a prayer quivering in his eyes, seemed on a sudden, in the reflections of evening, more beautiful than all men, than all Greek and Roman gods whose statues she had seen on the façades of temples. And with his fingers he clasped her arm lightly just above the wrist and asked, – "Dost thou not divine what I say to thee, Lygia?"

"No," whispered she as answer, in a voice so low that Vinicius

barely heard it.

But he did not believe her, and, drawing her hand toward him more vigorously, he would have drawn it to his heart, which, under the influence of desire roused by the marvellous maiden, was beating like a hammer, and would have addressed burning words to her directly had not old Aulus appeared on a path set in a frame of myrtles, who said, while approaching them, – "The sun is setting; so beware of the evening coolness, and do not trifle with Libitina."

"No," answered Vinicius; "I have not put on my toga yet, and I do not feel the cold."

"But see, barely half the sun's shield is looking from behind the hill. That is a sweet climate of Sicily, where people gather on the square before sunset and take farewell of disappearing Phoebus with a choral song."

And, forgetting that a moment earlier he had warned them against Libitina, he began to tell about Sicily, where he had estates and large cultivated fields which he loved. He stated also that it had come to his mind more than once to remove to Sicily, and live out his life there in quietness. "He whose head winters have whitened has bad enough of hoar frost. Leaves are not falling from the trees yet, and the sky smiles on the city lovingly; but when the grapevines grow yellow-leaved, when snow falls on the Alban hills, and the gods visit the Campania with piercing wind, who knows but I may remove with my entire household to my quiet country-seat?"

"Wouldst thou leave Rome?" inquired Vinicius, with sudden alarm.

"I have wished to do so this long time, for it is quieter in Sicily and safer."

And again he fell to praising his gardens, his herds, his house hidden in green, and the hills grown over with thyme and savory, among which were swarms of buzzing bees. But Vinicius paid no heed to that bucolic note; and from thinking only of this, that he might lose Lygia, he looked toward Petronius as if expecting salvation from him alone.

Meanwhile Petronius, sitting near Pomponia, was admiring the view of the setting sun, the garden, and the people standing near the fish-pond. Their white garments on the dark background of the myrtles gleamed like gold from the evening rays. On the sky the evening light had begun to assume purple and violet hues, and to change like an opal. A strip of the sky became lily-colored. The dark silhouettes of the cypresses grew still more pronounced than during bright daylight. In the people, in the trees, in the whole garden there reigned an evening calm.

That calm struck Petronius, and it struck him especially in the people. In the faces of Pomponia, old Aulus, their son, and Lygia there was something such as he did not see in the faces which surrounded him every day, or rather every night. There was a certain light, a certain repose, a certain serenity, flowing directly from the life which all lived there. And with a species of astonishment he thought that a beauty and sweetness might exist

which he, who chased after beauty and sweetness continually, had not known. He could not hide the thought in himself, and said, turning to Pomponia, – "I am considering in my soul how different this world of yours is from the world which our Nero rules."

She raised her delicate face toward the evening light, and said with simplicity, – "Not Nero, but God, rules the world."

A moment of silence followed. Near the triclinium were heard in the alley, the steps of the old general, Vinicius, Lygia, and little Aulus; but before they arrived, Petronius had put another question – "But believest thou in the gods, then, Pomponia?"

"I believe in God, who is one, just, and all-powerful," answered the wife of Aulus Plautius.

Chapter III

"SHE believes in God who is one, all-powerful, and just," said Petronius, when he found himself again in the litter with Vinicius. "If her God is all-powerful, He controls life and death; and if He is just, He sends death justly. Why, then, does Pomponia wear mourning for Julius? In mourning for Julius she blames her God. I must repeat this reasoning to our Bronzebeard, the monkey, since I consider that in dialectics I am the equal of Socrates. As to women, I agree that each has three or four souls, but none of them a reasoning one. Let Pomponia meditate with Seneca or Cornutus over the question of what their great Logos is. Let them summon at once the shades of Xenophanes, Parmenides, Zeno, and Plato, who are as much wearied there in Cimmerian regions as a finch in a cage. I wished to talk with her and with Plautius about something else. By the holy stomach of the Egyptian Isis! If I had told them right out directly why we came, I suppose that their virtue would have made as much noise as a bronze shield under the blow of a club. And I did not dare to tell! Wilt thou believe, Vinicius, I did not dare! Peacocks are beautiful birds, but they have too shrill a cry. I feared an outburst. But I must praise thy choice. A real 'rosy-fingered Aurora.' And knowest thou what she reminded me of too? – Spring! not our spring in Italy, where an apple-tree merely puts forth a blossom here and there, and olive groves grow gray, just as they were gray

before, but the spring which I saw once in Helvetia, – young, fresh, bright green. By that pale moon, I do not wonder at thee, Marcus; but know that thou art loving Diana, because Aulus and Pomponia are ready to tear thee to pieces, as the dogs once tore Actæon."

Vinicius was silent a time without raising his head; then he began to speak with a voice broken by passion, – "I desired her before, but now I desire her still more. When I caught her arm, flame embraced me. I must have her. Were I Zeus, I would surround her with a cloud, as he surrounded Io, or I would fall on her in rain, as he fell on Danaë; I would kiss her lips till it pained! I would hear her scream in my arms. I would kill Aulus and Pomponia, and bear her home in my arms. I will not sleep to-night. I will give command to flog one of my slaves, and listen to his groans – "

"Calm thyself," said Petronius. "Thou hast the longing of a carpenter from the Subura."

"All one to me what thou sayst. I must have her. I have turned to thee for aid; but if thou wilt not find it, I shall find it myself. Aulus considers Lygia as a daughter; why should I look on her as a slave? And since there is no other way, let her ornament the door of my house, let her anoint it with wolf's fat, and let her sit at my hearth as wife."

"Calm thyself, mad descendant of consuls. We do not lead in barbarians bound behind our cars, to make wives of their daughters. Beware of extremes. Exhaust simple,

honorable methods, and give thyself and me time for meditation. Chrysothemis seemed to me too a daughter of Jove, and still I did not marry her, just as Nero did not marry Acte, though they called her a daughter of King Attalus. Calm thyself! Think that if she wishes to leave Aulus for thee, he will have no right to detain her. Know also that thou art not burning alone, for Eros has roused in her the flame too. I saw that, and it is well to believe me. Have patience. There is a way to do everything, but to-day I have thought too much already, and it tires me. But I promise that to-morrow I will think of thy love, and unless Petronius is not Petronius, he will discover some method."

They were both silent again.

"I thank thee," said Vinicius at last. "May Fortune be bountiful to thee."

"Be patient."

"Whither hast thou given command to bear us?"

"To Chrysothemis."

"Thou art happy in possessing her whom thou lovest."

"I? Dost thou know what amuses me yet in Chrysothemis? This, that she is false to me with my freedman Theokles, and thinks that I do not notice it. Once I loved her, but now she amuses me with her lying and stupidity. Come with me to her. Should she begin to flirt with thee, and write letters on the table with her fingers steeped in wine, know that I shall not be jealous."

And he gave command to bear them both to Chrysothemis.

But in the entrance Petronius put his hand on Vinicius's

shoulder, and said, – "Wait; it seems to me that I have discovered a plan."

"May all the gods reward thee!"

"I have it! I judge that this plan is infallible. Knowest what, Marcus?"

"I listen to thee, my wisdom."

"Well, in a few days the divine Lygia will partake of Demeter's grain in thy house."

"Thou art greater than Cæsar!" exclaimed Vinicius with enthusiasm.

Chapter IV

IN fact, Petronius kept his promise. He slept all the day following his visit to Chrysothemis, it is true; but in the evening he gave command to bear him to the Palatine, where he had a confidential conversation with Nero; in consequence of this, on the third day a centurion, at the head of some tens of pretorian soldiers, appeared before the house of Plautius.

The period was uncertain and terrible. Messengers of this kind were more frequently heralds of death. So when the centurion struck the hammer at Aulus's door, and when the guard of the atrium announced that there were soldiers in the anteroom, terror rose through the whole house. The family surrounded the old general at once, for no one doubted that danger hung over him above all. Pomponia, embracing his neck with her arms, clung to him with all her strength, and her blue lips moved quickly while uttering some whispered phrase. Lygia, with a face pale as linen, kissed his hand; little Aulus clung to his toga. From the corridor, from chambers in the lower story intended for servant-women and attendants, from the bath, from the arches of lower dwellings, from the whole house, crowds of slaves began to hurry out, and the cries of "Heu! heu, me miserum!" were heard. The women broke into great weeping; some scratched their cheeks, or covered their heads with kerchiefs.

Only the old general himself, accustomed for years to look

death straight in the eye, remained calm, and his short eagle face became as rigid as if chiselled from stone. After a while, when he had silenced the uproar, and commanded the attendants to disappear, he said, – "Let me go, Pomponia. If my end has come, we shall have time to take leave."

And he pushed her aside gently; but she said, – "God grant thy fate and mine to be one, O Aulus!"

Then, failing on her knees, she began to pray with that force which fear for some dear one alone can give.

Aulus passed out to the atrium, where the centurion was waiting for him. It was old Caius Hasta, his former subordinate and companion in British wars.

"I greet thee, general," said he. "I bring a command, and the greeting of Cæsar; here are the tablets and the signet to show that I come in his name."

"I am thankful to Cæsar for the greeting, and I shall obey the command," answered Aulus. "Be welcome, Hasta, and say what command thou hast brought."

"Aulus Plautius," began Hasta, "Cæsar has learned that in thy house is dwelling the daughter of the king of the Lygians, whom that king during the life of the divine Claudius gave into the hands of the Romans as a pledge that the boundaries of the empire would never be violated by the Lygians. The divine Nero is grateful to thee, O general, because thou hast given her hospitality in thy house for so many years; but, not wishing to burden thee longer, and considering also that the maiden as

a hostage should be under the guardianship of Cæsar and the senate, he commands thee to give her into my hands."

Aulus was too much a soldier and too much a veteran to permit himself regret in view of an order, or vain words, or complaint. A slight wrinkle of sudden anger and pain, however, appeared on his forehead. Before that frown legions in Britain had trembled on a time, and even at that moment fear was evident on the face of Hasta. But in view of the order, Aulus Plautius felt defenceless. He looked for some time at the tablets and the signet; then raising his eyes to the old centurion, he said calmly, – "Wait, Hasta, in the atrium till the hostage is delivered to thee."

After these words he passed to the other end of the house, to the hall called oecus, where Pomponia Græcina, Lygia, and little Aulus were waiting for him in fear and alarm.

"Death threatens no one, nor banishment to distant islands," said he; "still Cæsar's messenger is a herald of misfortune. It is a question of thee, Lygia."

"Of Lygia?" exclaimed Pomponia, with astonishment.

"Yes," answered Aulus.

And turning to the maiden, he began: "Lygia, thou wert reared in our house as our own child; I and Pomponia love thee as our daughter. But know this, that thou art not our daughter. Thou art a hostage, given by thy people to Rome, and guardianship over thee belongs to Cæsar. Now Cæsar takes thee from our house."

The general spoke calmly, but with a certain strange, unusual voice. Lygia listened to his words, blinking, as if

not understanding what the question was. Pomponia's cheeks became pallid. In the doors leading from the corridor to the oecus, terrified faces of slaves began to show themselves a second time.

"The will of Cæsar must be accomplished," said Aulus.

"Aulus!" exclaimed Pomponia, embracing the maiden with her arms, as if wishing to defend her, "it would be better for her to die."

Lygia, nestling up to her breast, repeated, "Mother, mother!" unable in her sobbing to find other words.

On Aulus's face anger and pain were reflected again. "If I were alone in the world," said he, gloomily, "I would not surrender her alive, and my relatives might give offerings this day to 'Jupiter Liberator.' But I have not the right to kill thee and our child, who may live to happier times. I will go to Cæsar this day, and implore him to change his command. Whether he will hear me, I know not. Meanwhile, farewell, Lygia, and know that I and Pomponia ever bless the day in which thou didst take thy seat at our hearth."

Thus speaking, he placed his hand on her head; but though he strove to preserve his calmness, when Lygia turned to him eyes filled with tears, and seizing his hand pressed it to her lips, his voice was filled with deep fatherly sorrow.

"Farewell, our joy, and the light of our eyes," said he.

And he went to the atrium quickly, so as not to let himself be conquered by emotion unworthy of a Roman and a general.

Meanwhile Pomponia, when she had conducted Lygia to

the cubiculum, began to comfort, console, and encourage her, uttering words meanwhile which sounded strangely in that house, where near them in an adjoining chamber the lararium remained yet, and where the hearth was on which Aulus Plautius, faithful to ancient usage, made offerings to the household divinities. Now the hour of trial had come. On a time Virginius had pierced the bosom of his own daughter to save her from the hands of Appius; still earlier Lucretia had redeemed her shame with her life. The house of Cæsar is a den of infamy, of evil, of crime. But we, Lygia, know why we have not the right to raise hands on ourselves! Yes! The law under which we both live is another, a greater, a holier, but it gives permission to defend oneself from evil and shame even should it happen to pay for that defence with life and torment. Whoso goes forth pure from the dwelling of corruption has the greater merit thereby. The earth is that dwelling; but fortunately life is one twinkle of the eye, and resurrection is only from the grave; beyond that not Nero, but Mercy bears rule, and there instead of pain is delight, there instead of tears is rejoicing.

Next she began to speak of herself. Yes! she was calm; but in her breast there was no lack of painful wounds. For example, Aulus was a cataract on her eye; the fountain of light had not flowed to him yet. Neither was it permitted her to rear her son in Truth. When she thought, therefore, that it might be thus to the end of her life, and that for them a moment of separation might come which would be a hundred times more grievous and terrible

than that temporary one over which they were both suffering then, she could not so much as understand how she might be happy even in heaven without them. And she had wept many nights through already, she had passed many nights in prayer, imploring grace and mercy. But she offered her suffering to God, and waited and trusted. And now, when a new blow struck her, when the tyrant's command took from her a dear one, – the one whom Aulus had called the light of their eyes, – she trusted yet, believing that there was a power greater than Nero's and a mercy mightier than his anger.

And she pressed the maiden's head to her bosom still more firmly. Lygia dropped to her knees after a while, and, covering her eyes in the folds of Pomponia's peplus, she remained thus a long time in silence; but when she stood up again, some calmness was evident on her face.

"I grieve for thee, mother, and for father and for my brother; but I know that resistance is useless, and would destroy all of us. I promise thee that in the house of Cæsar I will never forget thy words."

Once more she threw her arms around Pomponia's neck; then both went out to the oecus, and she took farewell of little Aulus, of the old Greek their teacher, of the dressing-maid who had been her nurse, and of all the slaves. One of these, a tall and broad-shouldered Lygian, called Ursus in the house, who with other servants had in his time gone with Lygia's mother and her to the camp of the Romans, fell now at her feet, and then bent

down to the knees of Pomponia, saying, – "O domina! permit me to go with my lady, to serve her and watch over her in the house of Cæsar."

"Thou art not our servant, but Lygia's," answered Pomponia; "but if they admit thee through Cæsar's doors, in what way wilt thou be able to watch over her?"

"I know not, domina; I know only that iron breaks in my hands just as wood does."

When Aulus, who came up at that moment, had heard what the question was, not only did he not oppose the wishes of Ursus, but he declared that he had not even the right to detain him. They were sending away Lygia as a hostage whom Cæsar had claimed, and they were obliged in the same way to send her retinue, which passed with her to the control of Cæsar. Here he whispered to Pomponia that under the form of an escort she could add as many slaves as she thought proper, for the centurion could not refuse to receive them.

There was a certain comfort for Lygia in this. Pomponia also was glad that she could surround her with servants of her own choice. Therefore, besides Ursus, she appointed to her the old tire-woman, two maidens from Cyprus well skilled in hair-dressing, and two German maidens for the bath. Her choice fell exclusively on adherents of the new faith; Ursus, too, had professed it for a number of years. Pomponia could count on the faithfulness of those servants, and at the same time consoled herself with the thought that soon grains of truth would be in

Cæsar's house.

She wrote a few words also, committing care over Lygia to Nero's freedwoman, Acte. Pomponia had not seen her, it is true, at meetings of confessors of the new faith; but she had heard from them that Acte had never refused them a service, and that she read the letters of Paul of Tarsus eagerly. It was known to her also that the young freedwoman lived in melancholy, that she was a person different from all other women of Nero's house, and that in general she was the good spirit of the palace.

Hasta engaged to deliver the letter himself to Acte. Considering it natural that the daughter of a king should have a retinue of her own servants, he did not raise the least difficulty in taking them to the palace, but wondered rather that there should be so few. He begged haste, however, fearing lest he might be suspected of want of zeal in carrying out orders.

The moment of parting came. The eyes of Pomponia and Lygia were filled with fresh tears; Aulus placed his hand on her head again, and after a while the soldiers, followed by the cry of little Aulus, who in defence of his sister threatened the centurion with his small fists, conducted Lygia to Cæsar's house.

The old general gave command to prepare his litter at once; meanwhile, shutting himself up with Pomponia in the pinacotheca adjoining the oecus, he said to her, – "Listen to me, Pomponia. I will go to Cæsar, though I judge that my visit will be useless; and though Seneca's word means nothing with Nero now, I will go also to Seneca. To-day Sophonius, Tigellinus, Petronius,

or Vatinius have more influence. As to Cæsar, perhaps he has never even heard of the Lygian people; and if he has demanded the delivery of Lygia, the hostage, he has done so because some one persuaded him to it, – it is easy to guess who could do that."

She raised her eyes to him quickly.

"Is it Petronius?"

"It is."

A moment of silence followed; then the general continued, – "See what it is to admit over the threshold any of those people without conscience or honor. Cursed be the moment in which Vinicius entered our house, for he brought Petronius. Woe to Lygia, since those men are not seeking a hostage, but a concubine."

And his speech became more hissing than usual, because of helpless rage and of sorrow for his adopted daughter. He struggled with himself some time, and only his clenched fists showed how severe was the struggle within him.

"I have revered the gods so far," said he; "but at this moment I think that not they are over the world, but one mad, malicious monster named Nero."

"Aulus," said Pomponia. "Nero is only a handful of rotten dust before God."

But Aulus began to walk with long steps over the mosaic of the pinacotheca. In his life there had been great deeds, but no great misfortunes; hence he was unused to them. The old soldier had grown more attached to Lygia than he himself had been aware

of, and now he could not be reconciled to the thought that he had lost her. Besides, he felt humiliated. A hand was weighing on him which he despised, and at the same time he felt that before its power his power was as nothing.

But when at last he stifled in himself the anger which disturbed his thoughts, he said, – "I judge that Petronius has not taken her from us for Cæsar, since he would not offend Poppæa. Therefore he took her either for himself or Vinicius. Today I will discover this."

And after a while the litter bore him in the direction of the Palatine. Pomponia, when left alone, went to little Aulus, who did not cease crying for his sister, or threatening Cæsar.

Chapter V

AULUS had judged rightly that he would not be admitted to Nero's presence. They told him that Cæsar was occupied in singing with the lute-player, Terpnos, and that in general he did not receive those whom he himself had not summoned. In other words, that Aulus must not attempt in future to see him.

Seneca, though ill with a fever, received the old general with due honor; but when he had heard what the question was, he laughed bitterly, and said, – "I can render thee only one service, noble Plautius, not to show Cæsar at any time that my heart feels thy pain, or that I should like to aid thee; for should Cæsar have the least suspicion on this head, know that he would not give thee back Lygia, though for no other reason than to spite me."

He did not advise him, either, to go to Tigellinus or Vatinius or Vitelius. It might be possible to do something with them through money; perhaps, also, they would like to do evil to Petronius, whose influence they were trying to undermine, but most likely they would disclose before Nero how dear Lygia was to Plautius, and then Nero would all the more resolve not to yield her to him. Here the old sage began to speak with a biting irony, which he turned against himself: "Thou hast been silent, Plautius, thou hast been silent for whole years, and Cæsar does not like those who are silent. How couldst thou help being carried away by his beauty, his virtue, his singing, his declamation, his chariot-

driving, and his verses? Why didst thou not glorify the death of Britannicus, and repeat panegyrics in honor of the mother-slayer, and not offer congratulations after the stifling of Octavia? Thou art lacking in foresight, Aulus, which we who live happily at the court possess in proper measure."

Thus speaking, he raised a goblet which he carried at his belt, took water from a fountain at the impluvium, freshened his burning lips, and continued, – "Ah, Nero has a grateful heart. He loves thee because thou hast served Rome and glorified its name at the ends of the earth; he loves me because I was his master in youth. Therefore, seest thou, I know that this water is not poisoned, and I drink it in peace. Wine in my own house would be less reliable. If thou art thirsty, drink boldly of this water. The aqueducts bring it from beyond the Alban hills, and any one wishing to poison it would have to poison every fountain in Rome. As thou seest, it is possible yet to be safe in this world and to have a quiet old age. I am sick, it is true, but rather in soul than in body."

This was true. Seneca lacked the strength of soul which Cornutus possessed, for example, or Thrasea; hence his life was a series of concessions to crime. He felt this himself; he understood that an adherent of the principles of Zeno, of Citium, should go by another road, and he suffered more from that cause than from the fear of death itself.

But the general interrupted these reflections full of grief.

"Noble Annæus," said he, "I know how Cæsar rewarded thee

for the care with which thou didst surround his years of youth. But the author of the removal of Lygia is Petronius. Indicate to me a method against him, indicate the influences to which he yields, and use besides with him all the eloquence with which friendship for me of long standing can inspire thee."

"Petronius and I," answered Seneca, "are men of two opposite camps; I know of no method against him, he yields to no man's influence. Perhaps with all his corruption he is worthier than those scoundrels with whom Nero surrounds himself at present. But to show him that he has done an evil deed is to lose time simply. Petronius has lost long since that faculty which distinguishes good from evil. Show him that his act is ugly, he will be ashamed of it. When I see him, I will say, 'Thy act is worthy of a freedman.' If that will not help thee, nothing can."

"Thanks for that, even," answered the general.

Then he gave command to carry him to the house of Vinicius, whom he found at sword practice with his domestic trainer. Aulus was borne away by terrible anger at sight of the young man occupied calmly with fencing during the attack on Lygia; and barely had the curtain dropped behind the trainer when this anger burst forth in a torrent of bitter reproaches and injuries. But Vinicius, when he learned that Lygia had been carried away, grew so terribly pale that Aulus could not for even an instant suspect him of sharing in the deed. The young man's forehead was covered with sweat; the blood, which had rushed to his heart for a moment, returned to his face in a burning wave; his eyes

began to shoot sparks, his mouth to hurl disconnected questions. Jealousy and rage tossed him in turn, like a tempest. It seemed to him that Lygia, once she had crossed the threshold of Cæsar's house, was lost to him absolutely. When Aulus pronounced the name of Petronius, suspicion flew like a lightning flash through the young soldier's mind, that Petronius had made sport of him, and either wanted to win new favor from Nero by the gift of Lygia, or keep her for himself. That any one who had seen Lygia would not desire her at once, did not find a place in his head. Impetuousness, inherited in his family, carried him away like a wild horse, and took from him presence of mind.

"General," said he, with a broken voice, "return home and wait for me. Know that if Petronius were my own father, I would avenge on him the wrong done to Lygia. Return home and wait for me. Neither Petronius nor Cæsar will have her."

Then he went with clinched fists to the waxed masks standing clothed in the atrium, and burst out, – "By those mortal masks! I would rather kill her and myself." When he had said this, he sent another "Wait for me" after Aulus, then ran forth like a madman from the atrium, and flew to Petronius's house, thrusting pedestrians aside on the way.

Aulus returned home with a certain encouragement. He judged that if Petronius had persuaded Cæsar to take Lygia to give her to Vinicius, Vinicius would bring her to their house. Finally, the thought was no little consolation to him, that should Lygia not be rescued she would be avenged and protected

by death from disgrace. He believed that Vinicius would do everything that he had promised. He had seen his rage, and he knew the excitability innate in the whole family. He himself, though he loved Lygia as her own father, would rather kill her than give her to Cæsar; and had he not regarded his son, the last descendant of his stock, he would doubtless have done so. Aulus was a soldier; he had hardly heard of the Stoics, but in character he was not far from their ideas, – death was more acceptable to his pride than disgrace.

When he returned home, he pacified Pomponia, gave her the consolation that he had, and both began to await news from Vinicius. At moments when the steps of some of the slaves were heard in the atrium, they thought that perhaps Vinicius was bringing their beloved child to them, and they were ready in the depth of their souls to bless both. Time passed, however, and no news came. Only in the evening was the hammer heard on the gate.

After a while a slave entered and handed Aulus a letter. The old general, though he liked to show command over himself, took it with a somewhat trembling hand, and began to read as hastily as if it were a question of his whole house.

All at once his face darkened, as if a shadow from a passing cloud had fallen on it.

"Read," said he, turning to Pomponia.

Pomponia took the letter and read as follows: —

"Marcus Vinicius to Aulus Plautius greeting. What has

happened, has happened by the will of Cæsar, before which incline your heads, as I and Petronius incline ours."

A long silence followed.

Chapter VI

PETRONIUS was at home. The doorkeeper did not dare to stop Vinicius, who burst into the atrium like a storm, and, learning that the master of the house was in the library, he rushed into the library with the same impetus. Finding Petronius writing, he snatched the reed from his hand, broke it, trampled the reed on the floor, then fixed his fingers into his shoulder, and, approaching his face to that of his uncle, asked, with a hoarse voice, – "What hast thou done with her? Where is she?"

Suddenly an amazing thing happened. That slender and effeminate Petronius seized the hand of the youthful athlete, which was grasping his shoulder, then seized the other, and, holding them both in his one hand with the grip of an iron vice, he said, – "I am incapable only in the morning; in the evening I regain my former strength. Try to escape. A weaver must have taught thee gymnastics, and a blacksmith thy manners."

On his face not even anger was evident, but in his eyes there was a certain pale reflection of energy and daring. After a while he let the hands of Vinicius drop. Vinicius stood before him shamefaced and enraged.

"Thou hast a steel hand," said he; "but if thou hast betrayed me, I swear, by all the infernal gods, that I will thrust a knife into thy body, though thou be in the chambers of Cæsar."

"Let us talk calmly," said Petronius. "Steel is stronger, as thou

seest, than iron; hence, though out of one of thy arms two as large as mine might be made, I have no need to fear thee. On the contrary, I grieve over thy rudeness, and if the ingratitude of men could astonish me yet, I should be astonished at thy ingratitude."

"Where is Lygia?"

"In a brothel, – that is, in the house of Cæsar."

"Petronius!"

"Calm thyself, and be seated. I asked Cæsar for two things, which he promised me, – first, to take Lygia from the house of Aulus, and second to give her to thee. Hast thou not a knife there under the folds of thy toga? Perhaps thou wilt stab me! But I advise thee to wait a couple of days, for thou wouldst be taken to prison, and meanwhile Lygia would be wearied in thy house."

Silence followed. Vinicius looked for some time with astonished eyes on Petronius; then he said, – "Pardon me; I love her, and love is disturbing my faculties."

"Look at me, Marcus. The day before yesterday I spoke to Cæsar as follows: 'My sister's son, Vinicius, has so fallen in love with a lean little girl who is being reared with the Auluses that his house is turned into a steambath from sighs. Neither thou, O Cæsar, nor I – we who know, each of us, what true beauty is – would give a thousand sesterces for her; but that lad has ever been as dull as a tripod, and now he has lost all the wit that was in him.'"

"Petronius!"

"If thou understand not that I said this to insure Lygia's

safety, I am ready to believe that I told the truth. I persuaded Bronzebeard that a man of his æsthetic nature could not consider such a girl beautiful; and Nero, who so far has not dared to look otherwise than through my eyes, will not find in her beauty, and, not finding it, will not desire her. It was necessary to insure ourselves against the monkey and take him on a rope. Not he, but Poppæa, will value Lygia now; and Poppæa will strive, of course, to send the girl out of the palace at the earliest. I said further to Bronzebeard, in passing: 'Take Lygia and give her to Vinicius! Thou hast the right to do so, for she is a hostage; and if thou take her, thou wilt inflict pain on Aulus.' He agreed; he had not the least reason not to agree, all the more since I gave him a chance to annoy decent people. They will make thee official guardian of the hostage, and give into thy hands that Lygian treasure; thou, as a friend of the valiant Lygians, and also a faithful servant of Cæsar, wilt not waste any of the treasure, but wilt strive to increase it. Cæsar, to preserve appearances, will keep her a few days in his house, and then send her to thy insula. Lucky man!"

"Is this true? Does nothing threaten her there in Cæsar's house?"

"If she had to live there permanently, Poppæa would talk about her to Locusta, but for a few days there is no danger. Ten thousand people live in it. Nero will not see her, perhaps, all the more since he left everything to me, to the degree that just now the centurion was here with information that he had conducted the maiden to the palace and committed her to Acte. She is a

good soul, that Acte; hence I gave command to deliver Lygia to her. Clearly Pomponia Græcina is of that opinion too, for she wrote to Acte. To-morrow there is a feast at Nero's. I have requested a place for thee at the side of Lygia."

"Pardon me, Caius, my hastiness. I judged that thou hadst given command to take her for thyself or for Cæsar."

"I can forgive thy hastiness; but it is more difficult to forgive rude gestures, vulgar shouts, and a voice reminding one of players at mora. I do not like that style, Marcus, and do thou guard against it. Know that Tigellinus is Cæsar's pander; but know also that if I wanted the girl for myself now, looking thee straight in the eyes, I would say, 'Vinicius! I take Lygia from thee and I will keep her till I am tired of her."

Thus speaking, he began to look with his hazel eyes straight into the eyes of Vinicius with a cold and insolent stare. The young man lost himself completely.

"The fault is mine," said he. "Thou art kind and worthy. I thank thee from my whole soul. Permit me only to put one more question: Why didst thou not have Lygia sent directly to my house?"

"Because Cæsar wishes to preserve appearances. People in Rome will talk about this, – that we removed Lygia as a hostage. While they are talking, she will remain in Cæsar's palace. Afterward she will be removed quietly to thy house, and that will be the end. Bronzebeard is a cowardly cur. He knows that his power is unlimited, and still he tries to give specious appearances

to every act. Hast thou recovered to the degree of being able to philosophize a little? More than once have I thought, Why does crime, even when as powerful as Cæsar, and assured of being beyond punishment, strive always for the appearances of truth, justice, and virtue? Why does it take the trouble? I consider that to murder a brother, a mother, a wife, is a thing worthy of some petty Asiatic king, not a Roman Cæsar; but if that position were mine, I should not write justifying letters to the Senate. But Nero writes. Nero is looking for appearances, for Nero is a coward. But Tiberius was not a coward; still he justified every step he took. Why is this? What a marvellous, involuntary homage paid to virtue by evil! And knowest thou what strikes me? This, that it is done because transgression is ugly and virtue is beautiful. Therefore a man of genuine æsthetic feeling is also a virtuous man. Hence I am virtuous. To-day I must pour out a little wine to the shades of Protagoras, Prodicus, and Gorgias. It seems that sophists too can be of service. Listen, for I am speaking yet. I took Lygia from Aulus to give her to thee. Well. But Lysippus would have made wonderful groups of her and thee. Ye are both beautiful; therefore my act is beautiful, and being beautiful it cannot be bad. Marcus, here sitting before thee is virtue incarnate in Caius Petronius! If Aristides were living, it would be his duty to come to me and offer a hundred minæ for a short treatise on virtue."

But Vinicius, as a man more concerned with reality than with treatises on virtue, replied, – "To-morrow I shall see Lygia, and

then have her in my house daily, always, and till death."

"Thou wilt have Lygia, and I shall have Aulus on my head. He will summon the vengeance of all the infernal gods against me. And if the beast would take at least a preliminary lesson in good declamation! He will blame me, however, as my former doorkeeper blamed my clients but him I sent to prison in the country."

"Aulus has been at my house. I promised to give him news of Lygia."

"Write to him that the will of the 'divine' Cæsar is the highest law, and that thy first son will bear the name Aulus. It is necessary that the old man should have some consolation. I am ready to pray Bronzebeard to invite him to-morrow to the feast. Let him see thee in the triclinium next to Lygia."

"Do not do that. I am sorry for them, especially for Pomponia."

And he sat down to write that letter which took from the old general the remnant of his hope.

Chapter VII

ONCE the highest heads in Rome inclined before Acte, the former favorite of Nero. But even at that period she showed no desire to interfere in public questions, and if on any occasion she used her influence over the young ruler, it was only to implore mercy for some one. Quiet and unassuming, she won the gratitude of many, and made no one her enemy. Even Octavia was unable to hate her. To those who envied her she seemed exceedingly harmless. It was known that she continued to love Nero with a sad and pained love, which lived not in hope, but only in memories of the time in which that Nero was not only younger and loving, but better. It was known that she could not tear her thoughts and soul from those memories, but expected nothing; since there was no real fear that Nero would return to her, she was looked upon as a person wholly inoffensive, and hence was left in peace. Poppæa considered her merely as a quiet servant, so harmless that she did not even try to drive her from the palace.

But since Cæsar had loved her once and dropped her without offence in a quiet and to some extent friendly manner, a certain respect was retained for her. Nero, when he had freed her, let her live in the palace, and gave her special apartments with a few servants. And as in their time Pallas and Narcissus, though freedmen of Claudius, not only sat at feasts with Claudius, but also held places of honor as powerful ministers, so she too was

invited at times to Cæsar's table. This was done perhaps because her beautiful form was a real ornament to a feast. Cæsar for that matter had long since ceased to count with any appearances in his choice of company. At his table the most varied medley of people of every position and calling found places. Among them were senators, but mainly those who were content to be jesters as well. There were patricians, old and young, eager for luxury, excess, and enjoyment. There were women with great names, who did not hesitate to put on a yellow wig of an evening and seek adventures on dark streets for amusement's sake. There were also high officials, and priests who at full goblets were willing to jeer at their own gods. At the side of these was a rabble of every sort: singers, mimes, musicians, dancers of both sexes; poets who, while declaiming, were thinking of the sesterces which might fall to them for praise of Cæsar's verses; hungry philosophers following the dishes with eager eyes; finally, noted charioteers, tricksters, miracle-wrights, tale-tellers, jesters, and the most varied adventurers brought through fashion or folly to a few days' notoriety. Among these were not lacking even men who covered with long hair their ears pierced in sign of slavery.

The most noted sat directly at the tables; the lesser served to amuse in time of eating, and waited for the moment in which the servants would permit them to rush at the remnants of food and drink. Guests of this sort were furnished by Tigellinus, Vatinius, and Vitelius; for these guests they were forced more than once to find clothing befitting the chambers of Cæsar, who, however,

liked their society, through feeling most free in it. The luxury of the court gilded everything, and covered all things with glitter. High and low, the descendants of great families, and the needy from the pavements of the city, great artists, and vile scrapings of talent, thronged to the palace to sate their dazzled eyes with a splendor almost surpassing human estimate, and to approach the giver of every favor, wealth, and property, – whose single glance might abase, it is true, but might also exalt beyond measure.

That day Lygia too had to take part in such a feast. Fear, uncertainty, and a dazed feeling, not to be wondered at after the sudden change, were struggling in her with a wish to resist. She feared Nero; she feared the people and the palace whose uproar deprived her of presence of mind; she feared the feasts of whose shamelessness she had heard from Aulus, Pomponia Græcina, and their friends. Though young, she was not without knowledge, for knowledge of evil in those times reached even children's ears early. She knew, therefore, that ruin was threatening her in the palace. Pomponia, moreover, had warned her of this at the moment of parting. But having a youthful spirit, unacquainted with corruption, and confessing a lofty faith, implanted in her by her foster mother, she had promised to defend herself against that ruin; she had promised her mother, herself and also that Divine Teacher in whom she not only believed, but whom she had come to love with her half-childlike heart for the sweetness of his doctrine, the bitterness of his death, and the glory of his resurrection.

She was confident too that now neither Aulus nor Pomponia would be answerable for her actions; she was thinking therefore whether it would not be better to resist and not go to the feast. On the one hand fear and alarm spoke audibly in her soul; on the other the wish rose in her to show courage in suffering, in exposure to torture and death. The Divine Teacher had commanded to act thus. He had given the example himself. Pomponia had told her that the most earnest among the adherents desire with all their souls such a test, and pray for it. And Lygia, when still in the house of Aulus, had been mastered at moments by a similar desire. She had seen herself as a martyr, with wounds on her feet and hands, white as snow, beautiful with a beauty not of earth, and borne by equally white angels into the azure sky; and her imagination admired such a vision. There was in it much childish brooding, but there was in it also something of delight in herself, which Pomponia had reprimanded. But now, when opposition to Cæsar's will might draw after it some terrible punishment, and the martyrdom scene of imagination become a reality, there was added to the beautiful visions and to the delight a kind of curiosity mingled with dread, as to how they would punish her, and what kind of torments they would provide. And her soul, half childish yet, was hesitating on two sides. But Acte, hearing of these hesitations, looked at her with astonishment as if the maiden were talking in a fever. To oppose Cæsar's will, expose oneself from the first moment to his anger? To act thus one would need to be a child that knows not what it says. From

Lygia's own words it appears that she is, properly speaking, not really a hostage, but a maiden forgotten by her own people. No law of nations protects her; and even if it did, Cæsar is powerful enough to trample on it in a moment of anger. It has pleased Cæsar to take her, and he will dispose of her. Thenceforth she is at his will, above which there is not another on earth.

"So it is," continued Acte. "I too have read the letters of Paul of Tarsus, and I know that above the earth is God, and the Son of God, who rose from the dead; but on the earth there is only Cæsar. Think of this, Lygia. I know too that thy doctrine does not permit thee to be what I was, and that to you as to the Stoics, – of whom Epictetus has told me, – when it comes to a choice between shame and death, it is permitted to choose only death. But canst thou say that death awaits thee and not shame too? Hast thou heard of the daughter of Sejanus, a young maiden, who at command of Tiberius had to pass through shame before her death, so as to respect a law which prohibits the punishment of virgins with death? Lygia, Lygia, do not irritate Cæsar. If the decisive moment comes when thou must choose between disgrace and death, thou wilt act as thy faith commands; but seek not destruction thyself, and do not irritate for a trivial cause an earthly and at the same time a cruel divinity."

Acte spoke with great compassion, and even with enthusiasm; and being a little short-sighted, she pushed her sweet face up to Lygia's as if wishing to see surely the effect of her words.

But Lygia threw her arms around Acte's neck with childish

trustfulness and said, – "Thou art kind, Acte."

Acte, pleased by the praise and confidence, pressed her to her heart; and then disengaging herself from the arms of the maiden, answered, – "My happiness has passed and my joy is gone, but I am not wicked." Then she began to walk with quick steps through the room and to speak to herself, as if in despair.

"No! And he was not wicked. He thought himself good at that time, and he wished to be good. I know that best. All his change came later, when he ceased to love. Others made him what he is – yes, others – and Poppæa."

Here her eyelids filled with tears. Lygia followed her for some time with her blue eyes, and asked at last, – "Art thou sorry for him, Acte?"

"I am sorry for him!" answered the Grecian, with a low voice. And again she began to walk, her hands clinched as if in pain, and her face without hope.

"Dost thou love him yet, Acte?" asked Lygia, timidly.

"I love him."

And after a while she added, – "No one loves him but me."

Silence followed, during which Acte strove to recover her calmness, disturbed by memories; and when at length her face resumed its usual look of calm sorrow, she said, —

"Let us speak of thee, Lygia. Do not even think of opposing Cæsar; that would be madness. And be calm. I know this house well, and I judge that on Cæsar's part nothing threatens thee. If Nero had given command to take thee away for himself, he

would not have brought thee to the Palatine. Here Poppæa rules; and Nero, since she bore him a daughter, is more than ever under her influence. No, Nero gave command, it is true, that thou shouldst be at the feast, but he has not seen thee yet; he has not inquired about thee, hence he does not care about thee. Maybe he took thee from Aulus and Pomponia only through anger at them. Petronius wrote me to have care of thee; and since Pomponia too wrote, as thou knowest, maybe they had an understanding. Maybe he did that at her request. If this be true, if he at the request of Pomponia will occupy himself with thee, nothing threatens thee; and who knows if Nero may not send thee back to Aulus at his persuasion? I know not whether Nero loves him over much, but I know that rarely has he the courage to be of an opinion opposite to his."

"Ah, Acte!" answered Lygia; "Petronius was with us before they took me, and my mother was convinced that Nero demanded my surrender at his instigation."

"That would be bad," said Acte. But she stopped for a while, and then said, – "Perhaps Petronius only said, in Nero's presence at some supper, that he saw a hostage of the Lygians at Aulus's, and Nero, who is jealous of his own power, demanded thee only because hostages belong to Cæsar. But he does not like Aulus and Pomponia. No! it does not seem to me that if Petronius wished to take thee from Aulus he would use such a method. I do not know whether Petronius is better than others of Cæsar's court, but he is different. Maybe too thou wilt find some one else who would be

willing to intercede for thee. Hast thou not seen at Aulus's some one who is near Cæsar?"

"I have seen Vespasian and Titus."

"Cæsar does not like them."

"And Seneca."

"If Seneca advised something, that would be enough to make Nero act otherwise."

The bright face of Lygia was covered with a blush. "And Vinicius-"

"I do not know him."

"He is a relative of Petronius, and returned not long since from Armenia."

"Dost thou think that Nero likes him?"

"All like Vinicius."

"And would he intercede for thee?"

"He would."

Acte smiled tenderly, and said, "Then thou wilt see him surely at the feast. Thou must be there, first, because thou must, – only such a child as thou could think otherwise. Second, if thou wish to return to the house of Aulus, thou wilt find means of beseeching Petronius and Vinicius to gain for thee by their influence the right to return. If they were here, both would tell thee as I do, that it would be madness and ruin to try resistance. Cæsar might not notice thy absence, it is true; but if he noticed it and thought that thou hadst the daring to oppose his will, here would be no salvation for thee. Go, Lygia! Dost thou hear the

noise in the palace? The sun is near setting; guests will begin to arrive soon."

"Thou art right," answered Lygia, "and I will follow thy advice."

How much desire to see Vinicius and Petronius there was in this resolve, how much of woman's curiosity there was to see such a feast once in life, and to see at it Cæsar, the court, the renowned Poppæa and other beauties, and all that unheard-of splendor, of which wonders were narrated in Rome, Lygia could not give account to herself of a certainty. But Acte was right, and Lygia felt this distinctly. There was need to go; therefore, when necessity and simple reason supported the hidden temptation, she ceased to hesitate.

Acte conducted her to her own unctorium to anoint and dress her; and though there was no lack of slave women in Cæsar's house, and Acte had enough of them for her personal service, still, through sympathy for the maiden whose beauty and innocence had caught her heart, she resolved to dress her herself. It became clear at once that in the young Grecian, in spite of her sadness and her perusal of the letters of Paul of Tarsus, there was yet much of the ancient Hellenic spirit, to which physical beauty spoke with more eloquence than aught else on earth. When she had undressed Lygia, she could not restrain an exclamation of wonder at sight of her form, at once slender and full, created, as it were, from pearl and roses; and stepping back a few paces, she looked with delight on that matchless, spring-like form.

"Lygia," exclaimed she at last, "thou art a hundred times more beautiful than Poppæa!"

But, reared in the strict house of Pomponia, where modesty was observed, even when women were by themselves, the maiden, wonderful as a wonderful dream, harmonious as a work of Praxiteles or as a song, stood alarmed, blushing from modesty, with knees pressed together, with her hands on her bosom, and downcast eyes. At last, raising her arms with sudden movement, she removed the pins which held her hair, and in one moment, with one shake of her head, she covered herself with it as with a mantle.

Acte, approaching her and touching her dark tresses, said, —

"Oh, what hair thou hast! I will not sprinkle golden powder on it; it gleams of itself in one place and another with gold, where it waves. I will add, perhaps, barely a sprinkle here and there; but lightly, lightly, as if a sun ray had freshened it. Wonderful must thy Lygian country be where such maidens are born!

"I do not remember it," answered Lygia; "but Ursus has told me that with us it is forests, forests, and forests."

"But flowers bloom in those forests," said Acte, dipping her hand in a vase filled with verbena, and moistening Lygia's hair with it. When she had finished this work, Acte anointed her body lightly with odoriferous oils from Arabia, and then dressed her in a soft gold-colored tunic without sleeves, over which was to be put a snow-white peplus. But since she had to dress Lygia's hair first, she put on her meanwhile a kind of roomy dress called

synthesis, and, seating her in an armchair, gave her for a time into the hands of slave women, so as to stand at a distance herself and follow the hairdressing. Two other slave women put on Lygia's feet white sandals, embroidered with purple, fastening them to her alabaster ankles with golden lacings drawn crosswise. When at last the hair-dressing was finished, they put a peplus on her in very beautiful, light folds; then Acte fastened pearls to her neck, and touching her hair at the folds with gold dust, gave command to the women to dress her, following Lygia with delighted eyes meanwhile.

But she was ready soon; and when the first litters began to appear before the main gate, both entered the side portico from which were visible the chief entrance, the interior galleries, and the courtyard surrounded by a colonnade of Numidian marble.

Gradually people passed in greater and greater numbers under the lofty arch of the entrance, over which the splendid quadrigæ of Lysias seemed to bear Apollo and Diana into space. Lygia's eyes were struck by that magnificence, of which the modest house of Aulus could not have given her the slightest idea. It was sunset; the last rays were falling on the yellow Numidian marble of the columns, which shone like gold in those gleams and changed into rose color also. Among the columns, at the side of white statues of the Danaides and others, representing gods or heroes, crowds of people flowed past, – men and women; resembling statues also, for they were draped in togas, pepluses, and robes, falling with grace and beauty toward the earth in

soft folds, on which the rays of the setting sun were expiring. A gigantic Hercules, with head in the light yet, from the breast down sunk in shadow cast by the columns, looked from above on that throng. Acte showed Lygia senators in wide-bordered togas, in colored tunics, in sandals with crescents on them, and knights, and famed artists; she showed her Roman ladies, in Roman, in Grecian, in fantastic Oriental costume, with hair dressed in towers or pyramids, or dressed like that of the statues of goddesses, low on the head, and adorned with flowers. Many men and women did Acte call by name, adding to their names histories, brief and sometimes terrible, which pierced Lygia with fear, amazement, and wonder. For her this was a strange world, whose beauty intoxicated her eyes, but whose contrasts her girlish understanding could not grasp. In those twilights of the sky, in those rows of motionless columns vanishing in the distance, and in those statuesque people, there was a certain lofty repose. It seemed that in the midst of those marbles of simple lines demigods might live free of care, at peace and in happiness. Meanwhile the low voice of Acte disclosed, time after time, a new and dreadful secret of that palace and those people. See, there at a distance is the covered portico on whose columns and floor are still visible red stains from the blood with which Caligula sprinkled the white marble when he fell beneath the knife of Cassius Chærea; there his wife was slain; there his child was dashed against a stone; under that wing is the dungeon in which the younger Drusus gnawed his hands from hunger;

there the elder Drusus was poisoned; there Gemellus quivered in terror, and Claudius in convulsions; there Germanicus suffered, – everywhere those walls had heard the groans and death-rattle of the dying; and those people hurrying now to the feast in togas, in colored tunics, in flowers, and in jewels, may be the condemned of to-morrow; on more than one face, perhaps, a smile conceals terror, alarm, the uncertainty of the next day; perhaps feverishness, greed, envy are gnawing at this moment into the hearts of those crowned demigods, who in appearance are free of care. Lygia's frightened thoughts could not keep pace with Acte's words; and when that wonderful world attracted her eyes with increasing force, her heart contracted within her from fear, and in her soul she struggled with an immense, inexpressible yearning for the beloved Pomponia Græcina, and the calm house of Aulus, in which love, and not crime, was the ruling power.

Meanwhile new waves of guests were flowing in from the Vicus Apollinis. From beyond the gates came the uproar and shouts of clients, escorting their patrons. The courtyard and the colonnades were swarming with the multitude of Cæsar's slaves, of both sexes, small boys, and pretorian soldiers, who kept guard in the palace. Here and there among dark or swarthy visages was the black face of a Numidian, in a feathered helmet, and with large gold rings in his ears. Some were bearing lutes and citharas, hand lamps of gold, silver, and bronze, and bunches of flowers, reared artificially despite the late autumn season. Louder and louder the sound of conversation was mingled with the splashing

of the fountain, the rosy streams of which fell from above on the marble and were broken, as if in sobs.

Acte had stopped her narration; but Lygia gazed at the throng, as if searching for some one. All at once her face was covered with a blush, and from among the columns came forth Vinicius with Petronius. They went to the great triclinium, beautiful, calm, like white gods, in their togas. It seemed to Lygia, when she saw those two known and friendly faces among strange people, and especially when she saw Vinicius, that a great weight had fallen from her heart. She felt less alone. That measureless yearning for Pomponia and the house of Aulus, which had broken out in her a little while before, ceased at once to be painful. The desire to see Vinicius and to talk with him drowned in her other voices. In vain did she remember all the evil which she had heard of the house of Cæsar, the words of Acte, the warnings of Pomponia; in spite of those words and warnings, she felt all at once that not only must she be at that feast, but that she wished to be there. At the thought that soon she would hear that dear and pleasant voice, which had spoken of love to her and of happiness worthy of the gods, and which was sounding like a song in her ears yet, delight seized her straightway.

But the next moment she feared that delight. It seemed to her that she would be false to the pure teaching in which she had been reared, false to Pomponia, and false to herself. It is one thing to go by constraint, and another to delight in such a necessity. She felt guilty, unworthy, and ruined.

Despair swept her away, and she wanted to weep. Had she been alone, she would have knelt down and beaten her breast, saying, "Mea culpa! mea culpa!" Acte, taking her hand at that moment, led her through the interior apartments to the grand triclinium, where the feast was to be. Darkness was in her eyes, and a roaring in her ears from internal emotion; the beating of her heart stopped her breath. As in a dream, she saw thousands of lamps gleaming on the tables and on the walls; as in a dream, she heard the shout with which the guests greeted Cæsar; as through a mist, she saw Cæsar himself. The shout deafened her, the glitter dazzled, the odors intoxicated; and, losing the remnant of her consciousness, she was barely able to recognize Acte, who seated her at the table and took a place at her side.

But after a while a low and known voice was heard at the other side, – "A greeting, most beautiful of maidens on earth and of stars in heaven. A greeting to thee, divine Callina!"

Lygia, having recovered somewhat, looked up; at her side was Vinicius. He was without a toga, for convenience and custom had enjoined to cast aside the toga at feasts. His body was covered with only a sleeveless scarlet tunic embroidered in silver palms. His bare arms were ornamented in Eastern fashion with two broad golden bands fastened above the elbow; below they were carefully stripped of hair. They were smooth, but too muscular, – real arms of a soldier, they were made for the sword and the shield. On his head was a garland of roses. With brows joining above the nose, with splendid eyes and a dark complexion, he was

the impersonation of youth and strength, as it were. To Lygia he seemed so beautiful that though her first amazement had passed, she was barely able to answer, – "A greeting, Marcus."

"Happy," said he, "are my eyes, which see thee; happy my ears, which hear thy voice, dearer to me than the sound of lutes or citharas. Were it commanded me to choose who was to rest here by my side at this feast, thou, Lygia, or Venus, I would choose thee, divine one!"

And he looked at the maiden as if he wished to sate himself with the sight of her, to burn her eyes with his eyes. His glance slipped from her face to her neck and bare arms, fondled her shapely outlines, admired her, embraced her, devoured her; but besides desire, there was gleaming in him happiness, admiration, and ecstasy beyond limit.

"I knew that I should see thee in Cæsar's house," continued he; "but still, when I saw thee, such delight shook my whole soul, as if a happiness entirely unexpected had met me."

Lygia, having recovered herself and feeling that in that throng and in that house he was the only being who was near to her, began to converse with him, and ask about everything which she did not understand and which filled her with fear. Whence did he know that he would find her in Cæsar's house? Why is she there? Why did Cæsar take her from Pomponia? She is full of fear where she is, and wishes to return to Pomponia. She would die from alarm and grief were it not for the hope that Petronius and he will intercede for her before Cæsar.

Vinicius explained that he learned from Aulus himself that she had been taken. Why she is there, he knows not. Cæsar gives account to no one of his orders and commands. But let her not fear. He, Vinicius, is near her and will stay near her. He would rather lose his eyes than not see her; he would rather lose his life than desert her. She is his soul, and hence he will guard her as his soul. In his house he will build to her, as to a divinity, an altar on which he will offer myrrh and aloes, and in spring saffron and apple-blossoms; and since she has a dread of Cæsar's house, he promises that she shall not stay in it.

And though he spoke evasively and at times invented, truth was to be felt in his voice, because his feelings were real. Genuine pity possessed him, too, and her words went to his soul so thoroughly that when she began to thank him and assure him that Pomponia would love him for his goodness, and that she herself would be grateful to him all her life, he could not master his emotion, and it seemed to him that he would never be able in life to resist her prayer. The heart began to melt in him. Her beauty intoxicated his senses, and he desired her; but at the same time he felt that she was very dear to him, and that in truth he might do homage to her, as to a divinity; he felt also irresistible need of speaking of her beauty and of his own homage. As the noise at the feast increased, he drew nearer to her, whispered kind, sweet words flowing from the depth of his soul, words as resonant as music and intoxicating as wine.

And he intoxicated her. Amid those strange people he seemed

to her ever nearer, ever dearer, altogether true, and devoted with his whole soul. He pacified her; he promised to rescue her from the house of Cæsar; he promised not to desert her, and said that he would serve her. Besides, he had spoken before at Aulus's only in general about love and the happiness which it can give; but now he said directly that he loved her, and that she was dear and most precious to him. Lygia heard such words from a man's lips for the first time; and as she heard them it seemed to her that something was wakening in her as from a sleep, that some species of happiness was embracing her in which immense delight was mingled with immense alarm. Her cheeks began to burn, her heart to beat, her mouth opened as in wonder. She was seized with fear because she was listening to such things, still she did not wish for any cause on earth to lose one word. At moments she dropped her eyes; then again she raised her clear glance to Vinicius, timid and also inquiring, as if she wished to say to him, "Speak on!" The sound of the music, the odor of flowers and of Arabian perfumes, began to daze her. In Rome it was the custom to recline at banquets, but at home Lygia occupied a place between Pomponia and little Aulus. Now Vinicius was reclining near her, youthful, immense, in love, burning; and she, feeling the heat that issued from him, felt both delight and shame. A kind of sweet weakness, a kind of faintness and forgetfulness seized her; it was as if drowsiness tortured her.

But her nearness to him began to act on Vinicius also. His nostrils dilated, like those of an Eastern steed. The beating of

his heart with unusual throb was evident under his scarlet tunic; his breathing grew short, and the expressions that fell from his lips were broken. For the first time, too, he was so near her. His thoughts grew disturbed; he felt a flame in his veins which he tried in vain to quench with wine. Not wine, but her marvellous face, her bare arms, her maiden breast heaving under the golden tunic, and her form hidden in the white folds of the peplus, intoxicated him more and more. Finally, he seized her arm above the wrist, as he had done once at Aulus's, and drawing her toward him whispered, with trembling lips, – "I love thee, Callina, – divine one."

"Let me go, Marcus," said Lygia.

But he continued, his eyes mist-covered, "Love me, my goddess!"

But at that moment was heard the voice of Acte, who was reclining on the other side of Lygia.

"Cæsar is looking at you both."

Vinicius was carried away by sudden anger at Cæsar and at Acte. Her words had broken the charm of his intoxication. To the young man even a friendly voice would have seemed repulsive at such a moment, but he judged that Acte wished purposely to interrupt his conversation with Lygia. So, raising his head and looking over the shoulder of Lygia at the young freedwoman, he said with malice:

"The hour has passed, Acte, when thou didst recline near Cæsar's side at banquets, and they say that blindness is

threatening thee; how then canst thou see him?"

But she answered as if in sadness: "Still I see him. He, too, has short sight, and is looking at thee through an emerald."

Everything that Nero did roused attention, even in those nearest him; hence Vinicius was alarmed. He regained self-control, and began imperceptibly to look toward Cæsar. Lygia, who, embarrassed at the beginning of the banquet, had seen Nero as in a mist, and afterward, occupied by the presence and conversation of Vinicius, had not looked at him at all, turned to him eyes at once curious and terrified.

Acte spoke truly. Cæsar had bent over the table, half-closed one eye, and holding before the other a round polished emerald, which he used, was looking at them. For a moment his glance met Lygia's eyes, and the heart of the maiden was straitened with terror. When still a child on Aulus's Sicilian estate, an old Egyptian slave had told her of dragons which occupied dens in the mountains, and it seemed to her now that all at once the greenish eye of such a monster was gazing at her. She caught at Vinicius's hand as a frightened child would, and disconnected, quick impressions pressed into her head: Was not that he, the terrible, the all-powerful? She had not seen him hitherto, and she thought that he looked differently. She had imagined some kind of ghastly face, with malignity petrified in its features; now she saw a great head, fixed on a thick neck, terrible, it is true, but almost ridiculous, for from a distance it resembled the head of a child. A tunic of amethyst color, forbidden to ordinary mortals,

cast a bluish tinge on his broad and short face. He had dark hair, dressed, in the fashion introduced by Otho, in four curls.

He had no beard, because he had sacrificed it recently to Jove, – for which all Rome gave him thanks, though people whispered to each other that he had sacrificed it because his beard, like that of his whole family, was red. In his forehead, projecting strongly above his brows, there remained something Olympian. In his contracted brows the consciousness of supreme power was evident; but under that forehead of a demigod was the face of a monkey, a drunkard, and a comedian, – vain, full of changing desires, swollen with fat, notwithstanding his youth; besides, it was sickly and foul. To Lygia he seemed ominous, but above all repulsive.

After a while he laid down the emerald and ceased to look at her. Then she saw his prominent blue eyes, blinking before the excess of light, glassy, without thought, resembling the eyes of the dead.

"Is that the hostage with whom Vinicius is in love?" asked he, turning to Petronius.

"That is she," answered Petronius.

"What are her people called?"

"The Lygians."

"Does Vinicius think her beautiful?"

"Array a rotten olive trunk in the peplus of a woman, and Vinicius will declare it beautiful. But on thy countenance, incomparable judge, I read her sentence already. Thou hast no

need to pronounce it! The sentence is true: she is too dry, thin, a mere blossom on a slender stalk; and thou, O divine æsthete, esteemest the stalk in a woman. Thrice and four times art thou right! The face alone does not signify. I have learned much in thy company, but even now I have not a perfect cast of the eye. But I am ready to lay a wager with Tullius Senecio concerning his mistress, that, although at a feast, when all are reclining, it is difficult to judge the whole form, thou hast said in thy mind already, 'Too narrow in the hips.'"

"Too narrow in the hips," answered Nero, blinking.

On Petronius's lips appeared a scarcely perceptible smile; but Tullius Senecio, who till that moment was occupied in conversing with Vestinius, or rather in reviling dreams, while Vestinius believed in them, turned to Petronius, and though he had not the least idea touching that of which they were talking, he said, – "Thou art mistaken! I hold with Cæsar."

"Very well," answered Petronius. "I have just maintained that thou hast a glimmer of understanding, but Cæsar insists that thou art an ass pure and simple."

"Habet!" said Cæsar, laughing, and turning down the thumb, as was done in the Circus, in sign that the gladiator had received a blow and was to be finished.

But Vestinius, thinking that the question was of dreams, exclaimed, – "But I believe in dreams, and Seneca told me on a time that he believes too."

"Last night I dreamt that I had become a vestal virgin," said

Calvia Crispinilla, bending over the table.

At this Nero clapped his hands, other followed, and in a moment clapping of hands was heard all around, – for Crispinilla had been divorced a number of times, and was known throughout Rome for her fabulous debauchery.

But she, not disconcerted in the least, said, – "Well! They are all old and ugly. Rubria alone has a human semblance, and so there would be two of us, though Rubria gets freckles in summer."

"But admit, purest Calvia," said Petronius, "that thou couldst become a vestal only in dreams."

"But if Cæsar commanded?"

"I should believe that even the most impossible dreams might come true."

"But they do come true," said Vestinius. "I understand those who do not believe in the gods, but how is it possible not to believe in dreams?"

"But predictions?" inquired Nero. "It was predicted once to me, that Rome would cease to exist, and that I should rule the whole Orient."

"Predictions and dreams are connected," said Vestinius. "Once a certain proconsul, a great disbeliever, sent a slave to the temple of Mopsus with a sealed letter which he would not let any one open; he did this to try if the god could answer the question contained in the letter. The slave slept a night in the temple to have a prophetic dream; he returned then and said: 'I

saw a youth in my dreams; he was as bright as the sun, and spoke only one word, "Black."' The proconsul, when he heard this, grew pale, and turning to his guests, disbelievers like himself, said: 'Do ye know what was in the letter?'" Here Vestinius stopped, and, raising his goblet with wine, began to drink.

"What was in the letter?" asked Senecio.

"In the letter was the question: 'What is the color of the bull which I am to sacrifice: white or black?'"

But the interest roused by the narrative was interrupted by Vitelius, who, drunk when he came to the feast, burst forth on a sudden and without cause in senseless laughter.

"What is that keg of tallow laughing at?" asked Nero.

"Laughter distinguishes men from animals," said Petronius, "and he has no other proof that he is not a wild boar."

Vitelius stopped half-way in his laughter, and smacking his lips, shining from fat and sauces, looked at those present with as much astonishment as if he had never seen them before; then he raised his two hands, which were like cushions, and said in a hoarse voice, – "The ring of a knight has fallen from my finger, and it was inherited from my father."

"Who was a tailor," added Nero.

But Vitelius burst forth again in unexpected laughter, and began to search for his ring in the peplus of Calvia Crispinilla.

Hereupon Vestinius fell to imitating the cries of a frightened woman. Nigidia, a friend of Calvia, – a young widow with the face of a child and the eyes of a wanton, – said aloud, – "He is

seeking what he has not lost."

"And which will be useless to him if he finds it," finished the poet Lucan.

The feast grew more animated. Crowds of slaves bore around successive courses; from great vases filled with snow and garlanded with ivy, smaller vessels with various kinds of wine were brought forth unceasingly. All drank freely. On the guests, roses fell from the ceiling at intervals.

Petronius entreated Nero to dignify the feast with his song before the guests drank too deeply. A chorus of voices supported his words, but Nero refused at first. It was not a question of courage alone, he said, though that failed him always. The gods knew what efforts every success cost him. He did not avoid them, however, for it was needful to do something for art; and besides, if Apollo had gifted him with a certain voice, it was not proper to let divine gifts be wasted. He understood, even, that it was his duty to the State not to let them be wasted. But that day he was really hoarse. In the night he had placed leaden weights on his chest, but that had not helped in any way. He was thinking even to go to Antium, to breathe the sea air.

Lucan implored him in the name of art and humanity. All knew that the divine poet and singer had composed a new hymn to Venus, compared with which Lucretius's hymn was as the howl of a yearling wolf. Let that feast be a genuine feast. So kind a ruler should not cause such tortures to his subjects. "Be not cruel, O Cæsar!"

"Be not cruel!" repeated all who were sitting near.

Nero spread his hands in sign that he had to yield. All faces assumed then an expression of gratitude, and all eyes were turned to him; but he gave command first to announce to Poppæa that he would sing; he informed those present that she had not come to the feast, because she did not feel in good health; but since no medicine gave her such relief as his singing, he would be sorry to deprive her of this opportunity.

In fact, Poppæa came soon. Hitherto she had ruled Nero as if he had been her subject, but she knew that when his vanity as a singer, a charioteer, or a poet was involved, there was danger in provoking it. She came in therefore, beautiful as a divinity, arrayed, like Nero, in robes of amethyst color, and wearing a necklace of immense pearls, stolen on a time from Massinissa; she was golden-haired, sweet, and though divorced from two husbands she had the face and the look of a virgin.

She was greeted with shouts, and the appellation "Divine Augusta." Lygia had never seen any one so beautiful, and she could not believe her own eyes, for she knew that Poppæa Sabina was one of the vilest women on earth. She knew from Pomponia that she had brought Cæsar to murder his mother and his wife; she knew her from accounts given by Aulus's guests and the servants; she had heard that statues to her had been thrown down at night in the city; she had heard of inscriptions, the writers of which had been condemned to severest punishment, but which still appeared on the city walls every morning. Yet at sight of

the notorious Poppæa, considered by the confessors of Christ as crime and evil incarnate, it seemed to her that angels or spirits of heaven might look like her. She was unable simply to take her eyes from Poppæa; and from her lips was wrested involuntarily the question, – "Ah, Marcus, can it be possible?"

But he, roused by wine, and as it were impatient that so many things had scattered her attention, and taken her from him and his words, said, – "Yes, she is beautiful, but thou art a hundred times more beautiful. Thou dost not know thyself, or thou wouldst be in love with thyself, as Narcissus was; she bathes in asses' milk, but Venus bathed thee in her own milk. Thou dost not know thyself, Ocelle mi! Look not at her. Turn thy eyes to me, Ocelle mi! Touch this goblet of wine with thy lips, and I will put mine on the same place."

And he pushed up nearer and nearer, and she began to withdraw toward Acte. But at that moment silence was enjoined because Cæsar had risen. The singer Diodorus had given him a lute of the kind called delta; another singer named Terpnos, who had to accompany him in playing, approached with an instrument called the nablium. Nero, resting the delta on the table, raised his eyes; and for a moment silence reigned in the triclinium, broken only by a rustle, as roses fell from the ceiling.

Then he began to chant, or rather to declaim, singingly and rhythmically, to the accompaniment of the two lutes, his own hymn to Venus. Neither the voice, though somewhat injured, nor the verses were bad, so that reproaches of conscience took

possession of Lygia again; for the hymn, though glorifying the impure pagan Venus, seemed to her more than beautiful, and Cæsar himself, with a laurel crown on his head and uplifted eyes, nobler, much less terrible, and less repulsive than at the beginning of the feast.

The guests answered with a thunder of applause. Cries of, "Oh, heavenly voice!" were heard round about; some of the women raised their hands, and held them thus, as a sign of delight, even after the end of the hymn; others wiped their tearful eyes; the whole hall was seething as in a beehive. Poppæa, bending her golden-haired head, raised Nero's hand to her lips, and held it long in silence. Pythagoras, a young Greek of marvellous beauty, – the same to whom later the half-insane Nero commanded the flamens to marry him, with the observance of all rites, – knelt now at his feet.

But Nero looked carefully at Petronius, whose praises were desired by him always before every other, and who said, – "If it is a question of music, Orpheus must at this moment be as yellow from envy as Lucan, who is here present; and as to the verses, I am sorry that they are not worse; if they were I might find proper words to praise them."

Lucan did not take the mention of envy evil of him; on the contrary, he looked at Petronius with gratitude, and, affecting ill-humor, began to murmur, – "Cursed fate, which commanded me to live contemporary with such a poet. One might have a place in the memory of man, and on Parnassus; but now one will quench,

as a candle in sunlight."

Petronius, who had an amazing memory, began to repeat extracts from the hymn and cite single verses, exalt, and analyze the more beautiful expressions. Lucan, forgetting as it were his envy before the charm of the poetry, joined his ecstasy to Petronius's words. On Nero's face were reflected delight and fathomless vanity, not only nearing stupidity, but reaching it perfectly. He indicated to them verses which he considered the most beautiful; and finally he began to comfort Lucan, and tell him not to lose heart, for though whatever a man is born that he is, the honor which people give Jove does not exclude respect for other divinities.

Then he rose to conduct Poppæa, who, being really in ill health, wished to withdraw. But he commanded the guests who remained to occupy their places anew, and promised to return, In fact, he returned a little later, to stupefy himself with the smoke of incense, and gaze at further spectacles which he himself, Petronius, or Tigellinus had prepared for the feast.

Again verses were read or dialogues listened to in which extravagance took the place of wit. After that Paris, the celebrated mime, represented the adventures of Io, the daughter of Inachus. To the guests, and especially to Lygia, unaccustomed to such scenes, it seemed that they were gazing at miracles and enchantment. Paris, with motions of his hands and body, was able to express things apparently impossible in a dance. His hands dimmed the air, creating a cloud, bright, living, quivering,

voluptuous, surrounding the half-fainting form of a maiden shaken by a spasm of delight. That was a picture, not a dance; an expressive picture, disclosing the secrets of love, bewitching and shameless; and when at the end of it Corybantes rushed in and began a bacchic dance with girls of Syria to the sounds of cithara, lutes, drums, and cymbals, – a dance filled with wild shouts and still wilder license, – it seemed to Lygia that living fire was burning her, and that a thunderbolt ought to strike that house, or the ceiling fall on the heads of those feasting there.

But from the golden net fastened to the ceiling only roses fell, and the now half-drunken Vinicius said to her, – "I saw thee in the house of Aulus, at the fountain. It was daylight, and thou didst think that no one saw thee; but I saw thee. And I see thee thus yet, though that peplus hides thee. Cast aside the peplus, like Crispinilla. See, gods and men seek love. There is nothing in the world but love. Lay thy head on my breast and close thy eyes."

The pulse beat oppressively in Lygia's hands and temples. A feeling seized her that she was flying into some abyss, and that Vinicius, who before had seemed so near and so trustworthy, instead of saving was drawing her toward it. And she felt sorry for him. She began again to dread the feast and him and herself. Some voice, like that of Pomponia, was calling yet in her soul, "O Lygia, save thyself!" But something told her also that it was too late; that the one whom such a flame had embraced as that which had embraced her, the one who had seen what was done at that feast and whose heart had beaten as hers had on hearing

the words of Vinicius, the one through whom such a shiver had passed as had passed through her when he approached, was lost beyond recovery. She grew weak. It seemed at moments to her that she would faint, and then something terrible would happen. She knew that, under penalty of Cæsar's anger, it was not permitted any one to rise till Cæsar rose; but even were that not the case, she had not strength now to rise.

Meanwhile it was far to the end of the feast yet. Slaves brought new courses, and filled the goblets unceasingly with wine; before the table, on a platform open at one side, appeared two athletes to give the guests a spectacle of wrestling.

They began the struggle at once, and the powerful bodies, shining from olive oil, formed one mass; bones cracked in their iron arms, and from their set jaws came an ominous gritting of teeth. At moments was heard the quick, dull thump of their feet on the platform strewn with saffron; again they were motionless, silent, and it seemed to the spectators that they had before them a group chiselled out of stone. Roman eyes followed with delight the movement of tremendously exerted backs, thighs, and arms. But the struggle was not too prolonged; for Croton, a master, and the founder of a school of gladiators, did not pass in vain for the strongest man in the empire. His opponent began to breathe more and more quickly: next a rattle was heard in his throat; then his face grew blue; finally he threw blood from his mouth and fell.

A thunder of applause greeted the end of the struggle, and Croton, resting his foot on the breast of his opponent, crossed his

gigantic arms on his breast, and cast the eyes of a victor around the hall.

Next appeared men who mimicked beasts and their voices, ball-players and buffoons. Only a few persons looked at them, however, since wine had darkened the eyes of the audience. The feast passed by degrees into a drunken revel and a dissolute orgy. The Syrian damsels, who appeared at first in the bacchic dance, mingled now with the guests. The music changed into a disordered and wild outburst of citharas, lutes, Armenian cymbals, Egyptian sistra, trumpets, and horns. As some of the guests wished to talk, they shouted at the musicians to disappear. The air, filled with the odor of flowers and the perfume of oils with which beautiful boys had sprinkled the feet of the guests during the feast, permeated with saffron and the exhalations of people, became stifling; lamps burned with a dim flame; the wreaths dropped sidewise on the heads of guests; faces grew pale and were covered with sweat. Vitelius rolled under the table. Nigidia, stripping herself to the waist, dropped her drunken childlike head on the breast of Lucan, who, drunk in like degree, fell to blowing the golden powder from her hair, and raising his eyes with immense delight. Vestinius, with the stubbornness of intoxication, repeated for the tenth time the answer of Mopsus to the sealed letter of the proconsul. Tullius, who reviled the gods, said, with a drawling voice broken by hiccoughs, – "If the spheros of Xenophanes is round, then consider, such a god might be pushed along before one with the foot, like a barrel."

But Domitius Afer, a hardened criminal and informer, was indignant at the discourse, and through indignation spilled Falernian over his whole tunic. He had always believed in the gods. People say that Rome will perish, and there are some even who contend that it is perishing already. And surely! But if that should come, it is because the youth are without faith, and without faith there can be no virtue. People have abandoned also the strict habits of former days, and it never occurs to them that Epicureans will not stand against barbarians. As for him, he – As for him, he was sorry that he had lived to such times, and that he must seek in pleasures a refuge against griefs which, if not met, would soon kill him.

When he had said this, he drew toward him a Syrian dancer, and kissed her neck and shoulders with his toothless mouth. Seeing this, the consul Memmius Regulus laughed, and, raising his bald head with wreath awry, exclaimed, – "Who says that Rome is perishing? What folly! I, a consul, know better. Videant consules! Thirty legions are guarding our pax romana!"

Here he put his fists to his temples and shouted, in a voice heard throughout the triclinium, – "Thirty legions! thirty legions! from Britain to the Parthian boundaries!" But he stopped on a sudden, and, putting a finger to his forehead, said, – "As I live, I think there are thirty-two." He rolled under the table, and began soon to send forth flamingo tongues, roast and chilled mushrooms, locusts in honey, fish, meat, and everything which he had eaten or drunk.

But the number of the legions guarding Roman peace did not pacify Domitius.

No, no! Rome must perish; for faith in the gods was lost, and so were strict habits! Rome must perish; and it was a pity, for still life was pleasant there. Cæsar was gracious, wine was good! Oh, what a pity!

And hiding his head on the arm of a Syrian bacchanal, he burst into tears. "What is a future life! Achilles was right, – better be a slave in the world beneath the sun than a king in Cimmerian regions. And still the question whether there are any gods – since it is unbelief – is destroying the youth."

Lucan meanwhile had blown all the gold powder from Nigidia's hair, and she being drunk had fallen asleep. Next he took wreaths of ivy from the vase before him, put them on the sleeping woman, and when he had finished looked at those present with a delighted and inquiring glance. He arrayed himself in ivy too, repeating, in a voice of deep conviction, "I am not a man at all, but a faun."

Petronius was not drunk; but Nero, who drank little at first, out of regard for his "heavenly" voice, emptied goblet after goblet toward the end, and was drunk. He wanted even to sing more of his verses, – this time in Greek, – but he had forgotten them, and by mistake sang an ode of Anacreon. Pythagoras, Diodorus, and Terpnos accompanied him; but failing to keep time, they stopped. Nero as a judge and an æsthete was enchanted with the beauty of Pythagoras, and fell to kissing his hands in ecstasy.

"Such beautiful hands I have seen only once, and whose were they?" Then placing his palm on his moist forehead, he tried to remember. After a while terror was reflected on his face.

Ah! His mother's – Agrippina's!

And a gloomy vision seized him forthwith.

"They say," said he, "that she wanders by moonlight on the sea around Baiæ and Bauli. She merely walks, – walks as if seeking for something. When she comes near a boat, she looks at it and goes away; but the fisherman on whom she has fixed her eye dies."

"Not a bad theme," said Petronius.

But Vestinius, stretching his neck like a stork, whispered mysteriously, – "I do not believe in the gods; but I believe in spirits – Oi!"

Nero paid no attention to their words, and continued, – "I celebrated the Lemuria, and have no wish to see her. This is the fifth year – I had to condemn her, for she sent assassins against me; and, had I not been quicker than she, ye would not be listening to-night to my song."

"Thanks be to Cæsar, in the name of the city and the world!" cried Domitius Afer.

"Wine! and let them strike the tympans!"

The uproar began anew. Lucan, all in ivy, wishing to outshout him, rose and cried, – "I am not a man, but a faun; and I dwell in the forest. Eho-o-o-oo!" Cæsar drank himself drunk at last; men were drunk, and women were drunk. Vinicius was not less

drunk than others; and in addition there was roused in him, besides desire, a wish to quarrel, which happened always when he passed the measure. His dark face became paler, and his tongue stuttered when he spoke, in a voice now loud and commanding, – "Give me thy lips! To-day, to-morrow, it is all one! Enough of this!

"Cæsar took thee from Aulus to give thee to me, dost understand? To-morrow, about dusk, I will send for thee, dost understand? Cæsar promised thee to me before he took thee. Thou must be mine! Give me thy lips! I will not wait for to-morrow, – give thy lips quickly."

And he moved to embrace her; but Acte began to defend her, and she defended herself with the remnant of her strength, for she felt that she was perishing. But in vain did she struggle with both hands to remove his hairless arm; in vain, with a voice in which terror and grief were quivering, did she implore him not to be what he was, and to have pity on her. Sated with wine, his breath blew around her nearer and nearer, and his face was there near her face. He was no longer the former kind Vinicius, almost dear to her soul; he was a drunken, wicked satyr, who filled her with repulsion and terror. But her strength deserted her more and more. In vain did she bend and turn away her face to escape his kisses. He rose to his feet, caught her in both arms, and drawing her head to his breast, began, panting, to press her pale lips with his.

But at this instant a tremendous power removed his arms from

her neck with as much ease as if they had been the arms of a child, and pushed him aside, like a dried limb or a withered leaf. What had happened? Vinicius rubbed his astonished eyes, and saw before him the gigantic figure of the Lygian, called Ursus, whom he had seen at the house of Aulus.

Ursus stood calmly, but looked at Vinicius so strangely with his blue eyes that the blood stiffened in the veins of the young man; then the giant took his queen on his arm, and walked out of the triclinium with an even, quiet step.

Acte in that moment went after him.

Vinicius sat for the twinkle of an eye as if petrified; then he sprang up and ran toward the entrance crying, – "Lygia! Lygia!"

But desire, astonishment, rage, and wine cut the legs from under him. He staggered once and a second time, seized the naked arm of one of the bacchanals, and began to inquire, with blinking eyes, what had happened. She, taking a goblet of wine, gave it to him with a smile in her mist-covered eyes.

"Drink!" said she.

Vinicius drank, and fell to the floor.

The greater number of the guests were lying under the table; others were walking with tottering tread through the triclinium, while others were sleeping on couches at the table, snoring, or giving forth the excess of wine. Meanwhile, from the golden network, roses were dropping and dropping on those drunken consuls and senators, on those drunken knights, philosophers, and poets, on those drunken dancing damsels and patrician

ladies, on that society all dominant as yet but with the soul gone from it, on that society garlanded and ungirdled but perishing.

Dawn had begun out of doors.

Chapter VIII

No one stopped Ursus, no one inquired even what he was doing. Those guests who were not under the table had not kept their own places; hence the servants, seeing a giant carrying a guest on his arm, thought him some slave bearing out his intoxicated mistress. Moreover, Acte was with them, and her presence removed all suspicion.

In this way they went from the triclinium to the adjoining chamber, and thence to the gallery leading to Acte's apartments. To such a degree had her strength deserted Lygia, that she hung as if dead on the arm of Ursus. But when the cool, pure breeze of morning beat around her, she opened her eyes. It was growing clearer and clearer in the open air. After they had passed along the colonnade awhile, they turned to a side portico, coming out, not in the courtyard, but the palace gardens, where the tops of the pines and cypresses were growing ruddy from the light of morning. That part of the building was empty, so that echoes of music and sounds of the feast came with decreasing distinctness. It seemed to Lygia that she had been rescued from hell, and borne into God's bright world outside. There was something, then, besides that disgusting triclinium. There was the sky, the dawn, light, and peace. Sudden weeping seized the maiden, and, taking shelter on the arm of the giant, she repeated, with sobbing, – "Let us go home, Ursus! home, to the house of Aulus."

"Let us go!" answered Ursus.

They found themselves now in the small atrium of Acte's apartments. Ursus placed Lygia on a marble bench at a distance from the fountain. Acte strove to pacify her; she urged her to sleep, and declared that for the moment there was no danger, – after the feast the drunken guests would sleep till evening. For a long time Lygia could not calm herself, and, pressing her temples with both hands, she repeated like a child, – "Let us go home, to the house of Aulus!"

Ursus was ready. At the gates stood pretorians, it is true, but he would pass them. The soldiers would not stop out-going people. The space before the arch was crowded with litters. Guests were beginning to go forth in throngs. No one would detain them. They would pass with the crowd and go home directly. For that matter, what does he care? As the queen commands, so must it be. He is there to carry out her orders.

"Yes, Ursus," said Lygia, "let us go."

Acte was forced to find reason for both. They would pass out, true; no one would stop them. But it is not permitted to flee from the house of Cæsar; whoso does that offends Cæsar's majesty. They may go; but in the evening a centurion at the head of soldiers will take a death sentence to Aulus and Pomponia Græcina; they will bring Lygia to the palace again, and then there will be no rescue for her. Should Aulus and his wife receive her under their roof, death awaits them to a certainty.

Lygia's arms dropped. There was no other outcome. She must

choose her own ruin or that of Plautius. In going to the feast, she had hoped that Vinicius and Petronius would win her from Cæsar, and return her to Pomponia; now she knew that it was they who had brought Cæsar to remove her from the house of Aulus. There was no help. Only a miracle could save her from the abyss, – a miracle and the might of God.

"Acte," said she, in despair, "didst thou hear Vinicius say that Cæsar had given me to him, and that he will send slaves here this evening to take me to his house?"

"I did," answered Acte; and, raising her arms from her side, she was silent. The despair with which Lygia spoke found in her no echo. She herself had been Nero's favorite. Her heart, though good, could not feel clearly the shame of such a relation. A former slave, she had grown too much inured to the law of slavery; and, besides, she loved Nero yet. If he returned to her, she would stretch her arms to him, as to happiness. Comprehending clearly that Lygia must become the mistress of the youthful and stately Vinicius, or expose Aulus and Pomponia to ruin, she failed to understand how the girl could hesitate.

"In Cæsar's house," said she, after a while, "it would not be safer for thee than in that of Vinicius."

And it did not occur to her that, though she told the truth, her words meant, "Be resigned to fate and become the concubine of Vinicius."

As to Lygia, who felt on her lips yet his kisses, burning as coals and full of beastly desire, the blood rushed to her face with

shame at the mere thought of them.

"Never," cried she, with an outburst, "will I remain here, or at the house of Vinicius, – never!"

"But," inquired Acte, "is Vinicius hateful to thee?"

Lygia was unable to answer, for weeping seized her anew. Acte gathered the maiden to her bosom, and strove to calm her excitement. Ursus breathed heavily, and balled his giant fists; for, loving his queen with the devotion of a dog, he could not bear the sight of her tears. In his half-wild Lygian heart was the wish to return to the triclinium, choke Vinicius, and, should the need come, Cæsar himself; but he feared to sacrifice thereby his mistress, and was not certain that such an act, which to him seemed very simple, would befit a confessor of the Crucified Lamb.

But Acte, while caressing Lygia, asked again, "Is he so hateful to thee?"

"No," said Lygia; "it is not permitted me to hate, for I am a Christian."

"I know, Lygia. I know also from the letters of Paul of Tarsus, that it is not permitted to defile one's self, nor to fear death more than sin; but tell me if thy teaching permits one person to cause the death of others?"

"No."

"Then how canst thou bring Cæsar's vengeance on the house of Aulus?" A moment of silence followed. A bottomless abyss yawned before Lygia again.

"I ask," continued the young freedwoman, "for I have compassion on thee – and I have compassion on the good Pomponia and Aulus, and on their child. It is long since I began to live in this house, and I know what Cæsar's anger is. No! thou art not at liberty to flee from here. One way remains to thee: implore Vinicius to return thee to Pomponia."

But Lygia dropped on her knees to implore some one else. Ursus knelt down after a while, too, and both began to pray in Cæsar's house at the morning dawn.

Acte witnessed such a prayer for the first time, and could not take her eyes from Lygia, who, seen by her in profile, with raised hands, and face turned heavenward, seemed to implore rescue. The dawn, casting light on her dark hair and white peplus, was reflected in her eyes. Entirely in the light, she seemed herself like light. In that pale face, in those parted lips, in those raised hands and eyes, a kind of superhuman exaltation was evident. Acte understood then why Lygia could not become the concubine of any man. Before the face of Nero's former favorite was drawn aside, as it were, a corner of that veil which hides a world altogether different from that to which she was accustomed. She was astonished by prayer in that abode of crime and infamy. A moment earlier it had seemed to her that there was no rescue for Lygia; now she began to think that something uncommon would happen, that some aid would come, – aid so mighty that Cæsar himself would be powerless to resist it; that some winged army would descend from the sky to help that maiden, or that

the sun would spread its rays beneath her feet and draw her up to itself. She had heard of many miracles among Christians, and she thought now that everything said of them was true, since Lygia was praying.

Lygia rose at last, with a face serene with hope. Ursus rose too, and, holding to the bench, looked at his mistress, waiting for her words.

But it grew dark in her eyes, and after a time two great tears rolled down her checks slowly.

"May God bless Pomponia and Aulus," said she. "It is not permitted me to bring ruin on them; therefore I shall never see them again."

Then turning to Ursus she said that he alone remained to her in the world; that he must be to her as a protector and a father. They could not seek refuge in the house of Aulus, for they would bring on it the anger of Cæsar. But neither could she remain in the house of Cæsar or that of Vinicius. Let Ursus take her then; let him conduct her out of the city; let him conceal her in some place where neither Vinicius nor his servants could find her. She would follow Ursus anywhere, even beyond the sea, even beyond the mountains, to the barbarians, where the Roman name was not heard, and whither the power of Cæsar did not reach. Let him take her and save her, for he alone had remained to her.

The Lygian was ready, and in sign of obedience he bent to her feet and embraced them. But on the face of Acte, who had been expecting a miracle, disappointment was evident. Had the prayer

effected only that much? To flee from the house of Cæsar is to commit an offence against majesty which must be avenged; and even if Lygia succeeded in hiding, Cæsar would avenge himself on Aulus and Pomponia. If she wishes to escape, let her escape from the house of Vinicius. Then Cæsar, who does not like to occupy himself with the affairs of others, may not wish even to aid Vinicius in the pursuit; in every case it will not be a crime against majesty.

But Lygia's thoughts were just the following: Aulus would not even know where she was; Pomponia herself would not know. She would escape not from the house of Vinicius, however, but while on the way to it. When drunk, Vinicius had said that he would send his slaves for her in the evening. Beyond doubt he had told the truth, which he would not have done had he been sober. Evidently he himself, or perhaps he and Petronius, had seen Cæsar before the feast, and won from him the promise to give her on the following evening. And if they forgot that day, they would send for her on the morrow. But Ursus will save her. He will come; he will bear her out of the litter as he bore her out of the triclinium, and they will go into the world. No one could resist Ursus, not even that terrible athlete who wrestled at the feast yesterday. But as Vinicius might send a great number of slaves, Ursus would go at once to Bishop Linus for aid and counsel. The bishop will take compassion on her, will not leave her in the hands of Vinicius; he will command Christians to go with Ursus to rescue her. They will seize her and bear her away;

then Ursus can take her out of the city and hide her from the power of Rome.

And her face began to flush and smile. Consolation entered her anew, as if the hope of rescue had turned to reality. She threw herself on Acte's neck suddenly, and, putting her beautiful lips to Acte's cheek, she whispered:

"Thou wilt not betray, Acte, wilt thou?"

"By the shade of my mother," answered the freedwoman, "I will not; but pray to thy God that Ursus be able to bear thee away."

The blue, childlike eyes of the giant were gleaming with happiness. He had not been able to frame any plan, though he had been breaking his poor head; but a thing like this he could do, – and whether in the day or in the night it was all one to him! He would go to the bishop, for the bishop can read in the sky what is needed and what is not. Besides, he could assemble Christians himself. Are his acquaintances few among slaves, gladiators, and free people, both in the Subura and beyond the bridges? He can collect a couple of thousand of them. He will rescue his lady, and take her outside the city, and he can go with her. They will go to the end of the world, even to that place from which they had come, where no one has heard of Rome.

Here he began to look forward, as if to see things in the future and very distant.

"To the forest? Ai, what a forest, what a forest!"

But after a while he shook himself out of his visions. Well, he

will go to the bishop at once, and in the evening will wait with something like a hundred men for the litter. And let not slaves, but even pretorians, take her from him! Better for any man not to come under his fist, even though in iron armor, – for is iron so strong? When he strikes iron earnestly, the head underneath will not survive.

But Lygia raised her finger with great and also childlike seriousness.

"Ursus, do not kill," said she.

Ursus put his fist, which was like a maul, to the back of his head, and, rubbing his neck with great seriousness, began to mutter. But he must rescue "his light." She herself had said that his turn had come. He will try all he can. But if something happens in spite of him? In every case he must save her. But should anything happen, he will repent, and so entreat the Innocent Lamb that the Crucified Lamb will have mercy on him, poor fellow. He has no wish to offend the Lamb; but then his hands are so heavy.

Great tenderness was expressed on his face; but wishing to hide it, he bowed and said, – "Now I will go to the holy bishop."

Acte put her arms around Lygia's neck, and began to weep. Once more the freedwoman understood that there was a world in which greater happiness existed, even in suffering, than in all the excesses and luxury of Cæsar's house. Once more a kind of door to the light was opened a little before her, but she felt at once that she was unworthy to pass through it.

Chapter IX

LYGIA was grieved to lose Pomponia Græcina, whom she loved with her whole soul, and she grieved for the household of Aulus; still her despair passed away. She felt a certain delight even in the thought that she was sacrificing plenty and comfort for her Truth, and was entering on an unknown and wandering existence. Perhaps there was in this a little also of childish curiosity as to what that life would be, off somewhere in remote regions, among wild beasts and barbarians. But there was still more a deep and trusting faith, that by acting thus she was doing as the Divine Master had commanded, and that henceforth He Himself would watch over her, as over an obedient and faithful child. In such a case what harm could meet her? If sufferings come, she will endure them in His name. If sudden death comes, He will take her; and some time, when Pomponia dies, they will be together for all eternity. More than once when she was in the house of Aulus, she tortured her childish head because she, a Christian, could do nothing for that Crucified, of whom Ursus spoke with such tenderness. But now the moment had come. Lygia felt almost happy, and began to speak of her happiness to Acte, who could not understand her, however. To leave everything, – to leave house, wealth, the city, gardens, temples, porticos, everything that is beautiful; leave a sunny land and people near to one – and for what purpose? To hide from the

love of a young and stately knight. In Acte's head these things could not find place. At times she felt that Lygia's action was right, that there must be some immense mysterious happiness in it; but she could not give a clear account to herself of the matter, especially since an adventure was before Lygia which might have an evil ending, – an adventure in which she might lose her life simply. Acte was timid by nature, and she thought with dread of what the coming evening might bring. But she was loath to mention her fears to Lygia; meanwhile, as the day was clear and the sun looked into the atrium, she began to persuade her to take the rest needed after a night without sleep. Lygia did not refuse; and both went to the cubiculum, which was spacious and furnished with luxury because of Acte's former relations with Cæsar. There they lay down side by side, but in spite of her weariness Acte could not sleep. For a long time she had been sad and unhappy, but now she was seized by a certain uneasiness which she had never felt before. So far life had seemed to her simply grievous and deprived of a morrow; now all at once it seemed to her dishonorable.

Increasing chaos rose in her head. Again the door to light began to open and close. But in the moment when it opened, that light so dazzled her that she could see nothing distinctly. She divined, merely, that in that light there was happiness of some kind, happiness beyond measure, in presence of which every other was nothing, to such a degree that if Cæsar, for example, were to set aside Poppæa, and love her, Acte, again,

it would be vanity. Suddenly the thought came to her that that Cæsar whom she loved, whom she held involuntarily as a kind of demigod, was as pitiful as any slave, and that palace, with columns of Numidian marble, no better than a heap of stones. At last, however, those feelings which she had not power to define began to torment her; she wanted to sleep, but being tortured by alarm she could not. Thinking that Lygia, threatened by so many perils and uncertainties, was not sleeping either, she turned to her to speak of her flight in the evening. But Lygia was sleeping calmly. Into the dark cubiculum, past the curtain which was not closely drawn, came a few bright rays, in which golden dust-motes were playing. By the light of these rays Acte saw her delicate face, resting on her bare arm, her closed eyes, and her mouth slightly open. She was breathing regularly, but as people breathe while asleep.

"She sleeps, – she is able to sleep," thought Acte. "She is a child yet." Still, after a while it came to her mind that that child chose to flee rather than remain the beloved of Vinicius; she preferred want to shame, wandering to a lordly house, to robes, jewels, and feasts, to the sound of lutes and citharas.

"Why?"

And she gazed at Lygia, as if to find an answer in her sleeping face. She looked at her clear forehead, at the calm arch of her brows, at her dark tresses, at her parted lips, at her virgin bosom moved by calm breathing; then she thought again, – "How different from me!"

Lygia seemed to her a miracle, a sort of divine vision, something beloved of the gods, a hundred times more beautiful than all the flowers in Cæsar's garden, than all the statues in his palace. But in the Greek woman's heart there was no envy. On the contrary, at thought of the dangers which threatened the girl, great pity seized her. A certain motherly feeling rose in the woman. Lygia seemed to her not only as beautiful as a beautiful vision, but also very dear, and, putting her lips to her dark hair, she kissed it.

But Lygia slept on calmly, as if at home, under the care of Pomponia Græcina. And she slept rather long. Midday had passed when she opened her blue eyes and looked around the cubiculum in astonishment. Evidently she wondered that she was not in the house of Aulus.

"That is thou, Acte?" said she at last, seeing in the darkness the face of the Greek.

"I, Lygia."

"Is it evening?"

"No, child; but midday has passed."

"And has Ursus not returned?"

"Ursus did not say that he would return; he said that he would watch in the evening, with Christians, for the litter."

"True."

Then they left the cubiculum and went to the bath, where Acte bathed Lygia; then she took her to breakfast and afterward to the gardens of the palace, in which no dangerous meeting might

be feared, since Cæsar and his principal courtiers were sleeping yet. For the first time in her life Lygia saw those magnificent gardens, full of pines, cypresses, oaks, olives, and myrtles, among which appeared white here and there a whole population of statues. The mirror of ponds gleamed quietly; groves of roses were blooming, watered with the spray of fountains; entrances to charming grottos were encircled with a growth of ivy or woodbine; silver-colored swans were sailing on the water; amidst statues and trees wandered tame gazelles from the deserts of Africa, and rich-colored birds from all known countries on earth.

The gardens were empty; but here and there slaves were working, spade in hand, singing in an undertone; others, to whom was granted a moment of rest, were sitting by ponds or in the shade of groves, in trembling light produced by sun-rays breaking in between leaves; others were watering roses or the pale lily-colored blossoms of the saffron. Acte and Lygia walked rather long, looking at all the wonders of the gardens; and though Lygia's mind was not at rest, she was too much a child yet to resist pleasure, curiosity, and wonder. It occurred to her, even, that if Cæsar were good, he might be very happy in such a palace, in such gardens.

But at last, tired somewhat, the two women sat down on a bench hidden almost entirely by dense cypresses and began to talk of that which weighed on their hearts most, – that is, of Lygia's escape in the evening. Acte was far less at rest than Lygia touching its success. At times it seemed to her even a mad

project, which could not succeed. She felt a growing pity for Lygia. It seemed to her that it would be a hundred times safer to try to act on Vinicius. After a while she inquired of Lygia how long she had known him, and whether she did not think that he would let himself be persuaded to return her to Pomponia.

But Lygia shook her dark head in sadness. "No. In Aulus's house, Vinicius had been different, he had been very kind, but since yesterday's feast she feared him, and would rather flee to the Lygians."

"But in Aulus's house," inquired Acte, "he was dear to thee, was he not?"

"He was," answered Lygia, inclining her head.

"And thou wert not a slave, as I was," said Acte, after a moment's thought. "Vinicius might marry thee. Thou art a hostage, and a daughter of the Lygian king. Aulus and Pomponia love thee as their own child; I am sure that they are ready to adopt thee. Vinicius might marry thee, Lygia."

But Lygia answered calmly, and with still greater sadness, "I would rather flee to the Lygians."

"Lygia, dost thou wish me to go directly to Vinicius, rouse him, if he is sleeping, and tell him what I have told thee? Yes, my precious one, I will go to him and say, 'Vinicius, this is a king's daughter, and a dear child of the famous Aulus; if thou love her, return her to Aulus and Pomponia, and take her as wife from their house.'"

But the maiden answered with a voice so low that Acte could

barely hear it, —

"I would rather flee to the Lygians." And two tears were hanging on her drooping lids.

Further conversation was stopped by the rustle of approaching steps, and before Acte had time to see who was coming, Poppæa Sabina appeared in front of the bench with a small retinue of slave women. Two of them held over her head bunches of ostrich feathers fixed to golden wires; with these they fanned her lightly, and at the same time protected her from the autumn sun, which was hot yet. Before her a woman from Egypt, black as ebony, and with bosom swollen as if from milk, bore in her arms an infant wrapped in purple fringed with gold. Acte and Lygia rose, thinking that Poppæa would pass the bench without turning attention to either; but she halted before them and said, – "Acte, the bells sent by thee for the doll were badly fastened; the child tore off one and put it to her mouth; luckily Lilith saw it in season."

"Pardon, divinity," answered Acte, crossing her arms on her breast and bending her head.

But Poppæa began to gaze at Lygia.

"What slave is this?" asked she, after a pause.

"She is not a slave, divine Augusta, but a foster child of Pomponia Græcina, and a daughter of the Lygian king given by him as hostage to Rome."

"And has she come to visit thee?"

"No, Augusta. She is dwelling in the palace since the day

before yesterday."

"Was she at the feast last night?"

"She was, Augusta."

"At whose command?"

"At Cæsar's command."

Poppæa looked still more attentively at Lygia, who stood with bowed head, now raising her bright eyes to her with curiosity, now covering them with their lids. Suddenly a frown appeared between the brows of the Augusta. Jealous of her own beauty and power, she lived in continual alarm lest at some time a fortunate rival might ruin her, as she had ruined Octavia. Hence every beautiful face in the palace roused her suspicion. With the eye of a critic she took in at once every part of Lygia's form, estimated every detail of her face, and was frightened. "That is simply a nymph," thought she, "and 'twas Venus who gave birth to her." On a sudden this came to her mind which had never come before at sight of any beauty, – that she herself had grown notably older! Wounded vanity quivered in Poppæa, alarm seized her, and various fears shot through her head. "Perhaps Nero has not seen the girl, or, seeing her through the emerald, has not appreciated her. But what would happen should he meet such a marvel in the daytime, in sunlight? Moreover she is not a slave, she is the daughter of a king, – a king of barbarians, it is true, but a king. Immortal gods! she is as beautiful as I am, but younger!" The wrinkle between her brows increased, and her eyes began to shine under their golden lashes with a cold gleam.

"Hast thou spoken with Cæsar?"

"No, Augusta."

"Why dost thou choose to be here rather than in the house of Aulus?"

"I do not choose, lady. Petronius persuaded Cæsar to take me from Pomponia. I am here against my will."

"And wouldst thou return to Pomponia?"

This last question Poppæa gave with a softer and milder voice; hence a sudden hope rose in Lygia's heart.

"Lady," said she, extending her hand to her, "Cæsar promised to give me as a slave to Vinicius, but do thou intercede and return me to Pomponia."

"Then Petronius persuaded Cæsar to take thee from Aulus, and give thee to Vinicius?"

"True, lady. Vinicius is to send for me to-day, but thou art good, have compassion on me." When she had said this, she inclined, and, seizing the border of Poppæa's robe, waited for her word with beating heart. Poppæa looked at her for a while, with a face lighted by an evil smile, and said, – "Then I promise that thou wilt become the slave of Vinicius this day." And she went on, beautiful as a vision, but evil. To the ears of Lygia and Acte came only the wail of the infant, which began to cry, it was unknown for what reason.

Lygia's eyes too were filled with tears; but after a while she took Acte's hand and said, – "Let us return. Help is to be looked for only whence it can come." And they returned to the atrium,

which they did not leave till evening.

When darkness had come and slaves brought in tapers with great flames, both women were very pale. Their conversation failed every moment. Both were listening to hear if some one were coming. Lygia repeated again and again that, though grieved to leave Acte, she preferred that all should take place that day, as Ursus must be waiting in the dark for her then. But her breathing grew quicker from emotion, and louder. Acte collected feverishly such jewels as she could, and, fastening them in a corner of Lygia's peplus, implored her not to reject that gift and means of escape. At moments came a deep silence full of deceptions for the ear. It seemed to both that they heard at one time a whisper beyond the curtain, at another the distant weeping of a child, at another the barking of dogs.

Suddenly the curtain of the entrance moved without noise, and a tall, dark man, his face marked with small-pox, appeared like a spirit in the atrium. In one moment Lygia recognized Atacinus, a freedman of Vinicius, who had visited the house of Aulus.

Acte screamed; but Atacinus bent low and said, – "A greeting, divine Lygia, from Marcus Vinicius, who awaits thee with a feast in his house which is decked in green."

The lips of the maiden grew pale.

"I go," said she.

Then she threw her arms around Acte's neck in farewell.

Chapter X

THE house of Vinicius was indeed decked in the green of myrtle and ivy, which had been hung on the walls and over the doors. The columns were wreathed with grape vine. In the atrium, which was closed above by a purple woollen cloth as protection from the night cold, it was as clear as in daylight. Eight and twelve flamed lamps were burning; these were like vessels, trees, animals, birds, or statues, holding cups filled with perfumed olive oil, lamps of alabaster, marble, or gilded Corinthian bronze, not so wonderful as that famed candlestick used by Nero and taken from the temple of Apollo, but beautiful and made by famous masters. Some of the lights were shaded by Alexandrian glass, or transparent stuffs from the Indus, of red, blue, yellow, or violet color, so that the whole atrium was filled with many colored rays. Everywhere was given out the odor of nard, to which Vinicius had grown used, and which he had learned to love in the Orient. The depths of the house, in which the forms of male and female slaves were moving, gleamed also with light. In the triclinium a table was laid for four persons. At the feast were to sit, besides Vinicius and Lygia, Petronius and Chrysothemis. Vinicius had followed in everything the words of Petronius, who advised him not to go for Lygia, but to send Atacinus with the permission obtained from Cæsar, to receive her himself in the house, receive her with friendliness and even

with marks of honor.

"Thou wert drunk yesterday," said he; "I saw thee. Thou didst act with her like a quarryman from the Alban Hills. Be not over-insistent, and remember that one should drink good wine slowly. Know too that it is sweet to desire, but sweeter to be desired."

Chrysothemis had her own and a somewhat different opinion on this point; but Petronius, calling her his vestal and his dove, began to explain the difference which must exist between a trained charioteer of the Circus and the youth who sits on the quadriga for the first time. Then, turning to Vinicius, he continued, – "Win her confidence, make her joyful, be magnanimous. I have no wish to see a gloomy feast. Swear to her, by Hades even, that thou wilt return her to Pomponia, and it will be thy affair that to-morrow she prefers to stay with thee."

Then pointing to Chrysothemis, he added, – "For five years I have acted thus more or less with this timid dove, and I cannot complain of her harshness."

Chrysothemis struck him with her fan of peacock feathers, and said, – "But I did not resist, thou satyr!"

"Out of consideration for my predecessor – "

"But wert thou not at my feet?"

"Yes; to put rings on thy toes."

Chrysothemis looked involuntarily at her feet, on the toes of which diamonds were really glittering; and she and Petronius began to laugh. But Vinicius did not give ear to their bantering. His heart was beating unquietly under the robes of a Syrian priest,

in which he had arrayed himself to receive Lygia.

"They must have left the palace," said he, as if in a monologue.

"They must," answered Petronius. "Meanwhile I may mention the predictions of Apollonius of Tyana, or that history of Rufinus which I have not finished, I do not remember why."

But Vinicius cared no more for Apollonius of Tyana than for the history of Rufinus. His mind was with Lygia; and though he felt that it was more appropriate to receive her at home than to go in the rôle of a myrmidon to the palace, he was sorry at moments that he had not gone, for the single reason that he might have seen her sooner, and sat near her in the dark, in the double litter.

Meanwhile slaves brought in a tripod ornamented with rams' heads, bronze dishes with coals, on which they sprinkled bits of myrrh and nard.

"Now they are turning toward the Carinæ," said Vinicius, again.

"He cannot wait; he will run to meet the litter, and is likely to miss them!" exclaimed Chrysothemis.

Vinicius smiled without thinking, and said, – "On the contrary, I will wait."

But he distended his nostrils and panted; seeing which, Petronius shrugged his shoulders, and said, – "There is not in him a philosopher to the value of one sestertium, and I shall never make a man of that son of Mars."

"They are now in the Carinæ."

In fact, they were turning toward the Carinæ. The slaves called

lampadarii were in front; others called pedisequii, were on both sides of the litter. Atacinus was right behind, overseeing the advance. But they moved slowly, for lamps showed the way badly in a place not lighted at all. The streets near the palace were empty; here and there only some man moved forward with a lantern, but farther on the place was uncommonly crowded. From almost every alley people were pushing out in threes and fours, all without lamps, all in dark mantles. Some walked on with the procession, mingling with the slaves; others in greater numbers came from the opposite direction. Some staggered as if drunk. At moments the advance grew so difficult that the lampadarii cried, – "Give way to the noble tribune, Marcus Vinicius!"

Lygia saw those dark crowds through the curtains which were pushed aside, and trembled with emotion. She was carried away at one moment by hope, at another by fear.

"That is he! – that is Ursus and the Christians! Now it will happen quickly," said she, with trembling lips. "O Christ, aid! O Christ, save!"

Atacinus himself, who at first did not notice the uncommon animation of the street, began at last to be alarmed. There was something strange in this. The lampadarii had to cry oftener and oftener, "Give way to the litter of the noble tribune!" From the sides unknown people crowded up to the litter so much that Atacinus commanded the slaves to repulse them with clubs.

Suddenly a cry was heard in front of the procession. In one instant all the lights were extinguished. Around the litter came a

rush, an uproar, a struggle.

Atacinus saw that this was simply an attack; and when he saw it he was frightened. It was known to all that Cæsar with a crowd of attendants made attacks frequently for amusement in the Subura and in other parts of the city. It was known that even at times he brought out of these night adventures black and blue spots; but whoso defended himself went to his death, even if a senator. The house of the guards, whose duty it was to watch over the city, was not very far; but during such attacks the guards feigned to be deaf and blind.

Meanwhile there was an uproar around the litter; people struck, struggled, threw, and trampled one another. The thought flashed on Atacinus to save Lygia and himself, above all, and leave the rest to their fate. So, drawing her out of the litter, he took her in his arms and strove to escape in the darkness.

But Lygia called, "Ursus! Ursus!"

She was dressed in white; hence it was easy to see her. Atacinus, with his other arm, which was free, was throwing his own mantle over her hastily, when terrible claws seized his neck, and on his head a gigantic, crushing mass fell like a stone.

He dropped in one instant, as an ox felled by the back of an axe before the altar of Jove.

The slaves for the greater part were either lying on the ground, or had saved themselves by scattering in the thick darkness, around the turns of the walls. On the spot remained only the litter, broken in the onset. Ursus bore away Lygia to the Subura; his

comrades followed him, dispersing gradually along the way.

The slaves assembled before the house of Vinicius, and took counsel. They had not courage to enter. After a short deliberation they returned to the place of conflict, where they found a few corpses, and among them Atacinus. He was quivering yet; but, after a moment of more violent convulsion, he stretched and was motionless.

They took him then, and, returning, stopped before the gate a second time. But they must declare to their lord what had happened.

"Let Gulo declare it," whispered some voices; "blood is flowing from his face as from ours; and the master loves him; it is safer for Gulo than for others."

Gulo, a German, an old slave, who had nursed Vinicius, and was inherited by him from his mother, the sister of Petronius, said, —

"I will tell him; but do ye all come. Do not let his anger fall on my head alone."

Vinicius was growing thoroughly impatient. Petronius and Chrysothemis were laughing; but he walked with quick step up and down the atrium.

"They ought to be here! They ought to be here!"

He wished to go out to meet the litter, but Petronius and Chrysothemis detained him.

Steps were heard suddenly in the entrance; the slaves rushed into the atrium in a crowd, and, halting quickly at the wall, raised

their hands, and began to repeat with groaning, – "Aaaa! – aa!"

Vinicius sprang toward them.

"Where is Lygia?" cried he, with a terrible and changed voice.

"Aaaa!"

Then Gulo pushed forward with his bloody face, and exclaimed, in haste and pitifully, —

"See our blood, lord! We fought! See our blood! See our blood!"

But he had not finished when Vinicius seized a bronze lamp, and with one blow shattered the skull of the slave; then, seizing his own head with both hands, he drove his fingers into his hair, repeating hoarsely, – "Me miserum! me miserum!"

His face became blue, his eyes turned in his head, foam came out on his lips.

"Whips!" roared he at last, with an unearthly voice.

"Lord! Aaaa! Take pity!" groaned the slaves.

Petronius stood up with an expression of disgust on his face. "Come, Chrysothemis!" said he. "If 'tis thy wish to look on raw flesh, I will give command to open a butcher's stall on the Carinæ!"

And he walked out of the atrium. But through the whole house, ornamented in the green of ivy and prepared for a feast, were heard, from moment to moment, groans and the whistling of whips, which lasted almost till morning.

Chapter XI

VINICIUS did not lie down that night. Some time after the departure of Petronius, when the groans of his flogged slaves could allay neither his rage nor his pain, he collected a crowd of other servants, and, though the night was far advanced, rushed forth at the head of these to look for Lygia. He visited the district of the Esquiline, then the Subura, Vicus Sceleratus, and all the adjoining alleys. Passing next around the Capitol, he went to the island over the bridge of Fabricius; after that he passed through a part of the Trans-Tiber. But that was a pursuit without object, for he himself had no hope of finding Lygia, and if he sought her it was mainly to fill out with something a terrible night. In fact he returned home about daybreak, when the carts and mules of dealers in vegetables began to appear in the city, and when bakers were opening their shops.

On returning he gave command to put away Gulo's corpse, which no one had ventured to touch. The slaves from whom Lygia had been taken he sent to rural prisons, – a punishment almost more dreadful than death. Throwing himself at last on a couch in the atrium, he began to think confusedly of how he was to find and seize Lygia.

To resign her, to lose her, not to see her again, seemed to him impossible; and at this thought alone frenzy took hold of him. For the first time in life the imperious nature of the youthful

soldier met resistance, met another unbending will, and he could not understand simply how any one could have the daring to thwart his wishes. Vinicius would have chosen to see the world and the city sink in ruins rather than fail of his purpose. The cup of delight had been snatched from before his lips almost; hence it seemed to him that something unheard of had happened, something crying to divine and human laws for vengeance.

But, first of all, he was unwilling and unable to be reconciled with fate, for never in life had he so desired anything as Lygia. It seemed to him that he could not exist without her. He could not tell himself what he was to do without her on the morrow, how he was to survive the days following. At moments he was transported by a rage against her, which approached madness. He wanted to have her, to beat her, to drag her by the hair to the cubiculum, and gloat over her; then, again, he was carried away by a terrible yearning for her voice, her form, her eyes, and he felt that he would be ready to lie at her feet. He called to her, gnawed his fingers, clasped his head with his hands. He strove with all his might to think calmly about searching for her, – and was unable. A thousand methods and means flew through his head, but one wilder than another. At last the thought flashed on him that no one else had intercepted her but Aulus, that in every case Aulus must know where she was hiding. And he sprang up to run to the house of Aulus.

If they will not yield her to him, if they have no fear of his threats, he will go to Cæsar, accuse the old general of

disobedience, and obtain a sentence of death against him; but before that, he will gain from them a confession of where Lygia is. If they give her, even willingly, he will be revenged. They received him, it is true, in their house and nursed him, – but that is nothing! With this one injustice they have freed him from every debt of gratitude. Here his vengeful and stubborn soul began to take pleasure at the despair of Pomponia Græcina, when the centurion would bring the death sentence to old Aulus. He was almost certain that he would get it. Petronius would assist him. Moreover, Cæsar never denies anything to his intimates, the Augustians, unless personal dislike or desire enjoins a refusal.

Suddenly his heart almost died within him, under the influence of this terrible supposition, – "But if Cæsar himself has taken Lygia?"

All knew that Nero from tedium sought recreation in night attacks. Even Petronius took part in these amusements. Their main object was to seize women and toss each on a soldier's mantle till she fainted. Even Nero himself on occasions called these expeditions "pearl hunts," for it happened that in the depth of districts occupied by a numerous and needy population they caught a real pearl of youth and beauty sometimes. Then the "sagatio," as they termed the tossing, was changed into a genuine carrying away, and the pearl was sent either to the Palatine or to one of Cæsar's numberless villas, or finally Cæsar yielded it to one of his intimates. So might it happen also with Lygia. Cæsar had seen her during the feast; and Vinicius doubted not for

an instant that she must have seemed to him the most beautiful woman he had seen yet. How could it be otherwise? It is true that Lygia had been in Nero's own house on the Palatine, and he might have kept her openly. But, as Petronius said truly, Cæsar had no courage in crime, and, with power to act openly, he chose to act always in secret. This time fear of Poppæa might incline him also to secrecy. It occurred now to the young soldier that Aulus would not have dared, perhaps, to carry off forcibly a girl given him, Vinicius, by Cæsar. Besides, who would dare? Would that gigantic blue-eyed Lygian, who had the courage to enter the triclinium and carry her from the feast on his arm? But where could he hide with her; whither could he take her? No! a slave would not have ventured that far. Hence no one had done the deed except Cæsar.

At this thought it grew dark in his eyes, and drops of sweat covered his forehead. In that case Lygia was lost to him forever. It was possible to wrest her from the hands of any one else, but not from the hands of Cæsar. Now, with greater truth than ever, could he exclaim, "Væ misero mihi!" His imagination represented Lygia in Nero's arms, and, for the first time in life, he understood that there are thoughts which are simply beyond man's endurance. He knew then, for the first time, how he loved her. As his whole life flashes through the memory of a drowning man, so Lygia began to pass through his. He saw her, heard every word of hers, – saw her at the fountain, saw her at the house of Aulus, and at the feast; felt her near him, felt the odor of her

hair, the warmth of her body, the delight of the kisses which at the feast he had pressed on her innocent lips. She seemed to him a hundred times sweeter, more beautiful, more desired than ever, – a hundred times more the only one, the one chosen from among all mortals and divinities. And when he thought that all this which had become so fixed in his heart, which had become his blood and life, might be possessed by Nero, a pain seized him, which was purely physical, and so piercing that he wanted to beat his head against the wall of the atrium, until he should break it. He felt that he might go mad; and he would have gone mad beyond doubt, had not vengeance remained to him. But as hitherto he had thought that he could not live unless he got Lygia, he thought now that he would not die till he had avenged her. This gave him a certain kind of comfort. "I will be thy Cassius Chærea!" [The slayer of Caligula] said he to himself in thinking of Nero. After a while, seizing earth in his hands from the flower vases surrounding the impluvium, he made a dreadful vow to Erebus, Hecate, and his own household lares, that he would have vengeance.

And he received a sort of consolation. He had at least something to live for and something with which to fill his nights and days. Then, dropping his idea of visiting Aulus, he gave command to bear him to the Palatine. Along the way he concluded that if they would not admit him to Cæsar, or if they should try to find weapons on his person, it would be a proof that Cæsar had taken Lygia. He had no weapons with him.

He had lost presence of mind in general; but as is usual with persons possessed by a single idea, he preserved it in that which concerned his revenge. He did not wish his desire of revenge to fall away prematurely. He wished above all to see Acte, for he expected to learn the truth from her. At moments the hope flashed on him that he might see Lygia also, and at that thought he began to tremble. For if Cæsar had carried her away without knowledge of whom he was taking, he might return her that day. But after a while he cast aside this supposition. Had there been a wish to return her to him, she would have been sent yesterday. Acte was the only person who could explain everything, and there was need to see her before others.

Convinced of this, he commanded the slaves to hasten; and along the road he thought without order, now of Lygia, now of revenge. He had heard that Egyptian priests of the goddess Pasht could bring disease on whomever they wished, and he determined to learn the means of doing this. In the Orient they had told him, too, that Jews have certain invocations by which they cover their enemies' bodies with ulcers. He had a number of Jews among his domestic slaves; hence he promised himself to torture them on his return till they divulged the secret. He found most delight, however, in thinking of the short Roman sword which lets out a stream of blood such as had gushed from Caius Caligula and made ineffaceable stains on the columns of the portico. He was ready to exterminate all Rome; and had vengeful gods promised that all people should die except him and Lygia,

he would have accepted the promise.

In front of the arch he regained presence of mind, and thought when he saw the pretorian guard, "If they make the least difficulty in admitting me, they will prove that Lygia is in the palace by the will of Cæsar."

But the chief centurion smiled at him in a friendly manner, then advanced a number of steps, and said, – "A greeting, noble tribune. If thou desire to give an obeisance to Cæsar, thou hast found an unfortunate moment. I do not think that thou wilt be able to see him."

"What has happened?" inquired Vinicius.

"The infant Augusta fell ill yesterday on a sudden. Cæsar and the august Poppæa are attending her, with physicians whom they have summoned from the whole city."

This was an important event. When that daughter was born to him, Cæsar was simply wild from delight, and received her with extra humanum gaudium. Previously the senate had committed the womb of Poppæa to the gods with the utmost solemnity. A votive offering was made at Antium, where the delivery took place; splendid games were celebrated, and besides a temple was erected to the two Fortunes. Nero, unable to be moderate in anything, loved the infant beyond measure; to Poppæa the child was dear also, even for this, that it strengthened her position and made her influence irresistible.

The fate of the whole empire might depend on the health and life of the infant Augusta; but Vinicius was so occupied with

himself, his own case and his love, that without paying attention to the news of the centurion he answered, "I only wish to see Acte." And he passed in.

But Acte was occupied also near the child, and he had to wait a long time to see her. She came only about midday, with a face pale and wearied, which grew paler still at sight of Vinicius.

"Acte!" cried Vinicius, seizing her hand and drawing her to the middle of the atrium, "where is Lygia?"

"I wanted to ask thee touching that," answered she, looking him in the eyes with reproach.

But though he had promised himself to inquire of her calmly, he pressed his head with his hands again, and said, with a face distorted by pain and anger, – "She is gone. She was taken from me on the way!"

After a while, however, he recovered, and thrusting his face up to Acte's, said through his set teeth, – "Acte! If life be dear to thee, if thou wish not to cause misfortunes which thou are unable even to imagine, answer me truly. Did Cæsar take her?"

"Cæsar did not leave the palace yesterday."

"By the shade of thy mother, by all the gods, is she not in the palace?"

"By the shade of my mother, Marcus, she is not in the palace, and Cæsar did not intercept her. The infant Augusta is ill since yesterday, and Nero has not left her cradle."

Vinicius drew breath. That which had seemed the most terrible ceased to threaten him.

"Ah, then," said he, sitting on the bench and clinching his fists, "Aulus intercepted her, and in that case woe to him!"

"Aulus Plautius was here this morning. He could not see me, for I was occupied with the child; but he inquired of Epaphroditus, and others of Cæsar's servants, touching Lygia, and told them that he would come again to see me."

"He wished to turn suspicion from himself. If he knew not what happened, he would have come to seek Lygia in my house."

"He left a few words on a tablet, from which thou wilt see that, knowing Lygia to have been taken from his house by Cæsar, at thy request and that of Petronius, he expected that she would be sent to thee, and this morning early he was at thy house, where they told him what had happened."

When she had said this, she went to the cubiculum and returned soon with the tablet which Aulus had left.

Vinicius read the tablet, and was silent; Acte seemed to read the thoughts on his gloomy face, for she said after a while, – "No, Marcus. That has happened which Lygia herself wished."

"It was known to thee that she wished to flee!" burst out Vinicius.

"I knew that she would not become thy concubine." And she looked at him with her misty eyes almost sternly.

"And thou, – what hast thou been all thy life?"

"I was a slave, first of all."

But Vinicius did not cease to be enraged. Cæsar had given him Lygia; hence he had no need to inquire what she had been

before. He would find her, even under the earth, and he would do what he liked with her. He would indeed! She should be his concubine. He would give command to flog her as often as he pleased. If she grew distasteful to him, he would give her to the lowest of his slaves, or he would command her to turn a handmill on his lands in Africa. He would seek her out now, and find her only to bend her, to trample on her, and conquer her.

And, growing more and more excited, he lost every sense of measure, to the degree that even Acte saw that he was promising more than he could execute; that he was talking because of pain and anger. She might have had even compassion on him, but his extravagance exhausted her patience, and at last she inquired why he had come to her.

Vinicius did not find an answer immediately. He had come to her because he wished to come, because he judged that she would give him information; but really he had come to Cæsar, and, not being able to see him, he came to her. Lygia, by fleeing, opposed the will of Cæsar; hence he would implore him to give an order to search for her throughout the city and the empire, even if it came to using for that purpose all the legions, and to ransacking in turn every house within Roman dominion. Petronius would support his prayer, and the search would begin from that day.

"Have a care," answered Acte, "lest thou lose her forever the moment she is found, at command of Cæsar."

Vinicius wrinkled his brows. "What does that mean?" inquired he.

"Listen to me, Marcus. Yesterday Lygia and I were in the gardens here, and we met Poppæa, with the infant Augusta, borne by an African woman, Lilith. In the evening the child fell ill, and Lilith insists that she was bewitched; that that foreign woman whom they met in the garden bewitched her. Should the child recover, they will forget this, but in the opposite case Poppæa will be the first to accuse Lygia of witchcraft, and wherever she is found there will be no rescue for her."

A moment of silence followed; then Vinicius said, – "But perhaps she did bewitch her, and has bewitched me."

"Lilith repeats that the child began to cry the moment she carried her past us. And really the child did begin to cry. It is certain that she was sick when they took her out of the garden. Marcus, seek for Lygia whenever it may please thee, but till the infant Augusta recovers, speak not of her to Cæsar, or thou wilt bring on her Poppæa's vengeance. Her eyes have wept enough because of thee already, and may all the gods guard her poor head."

"Dost thou love her, Acte?" inquired Vinicius, gloomily.

"Yes, I love her." And tears glittered in the eyes of the freedwoman.

"Thou lovest her because she has not repaid thee with hatred, as she has me."

Acte looked at him for a time as if hesitating, or as if wishing to learn if he spoke sincerely; then she said, – "O blind and passionate man – she loved thee."

Vinicius sprang up under the influence of those words, as if possessed. “It is not true.”

She hated him. How could Acte know? Would Lygia make a confession to her after one day’s acquaintance? What love is that which prefers wandering, the disgrace of poverty, the uncertainty of to-morrow, or a shameful death even, to a wreath-bedecked house, in which a lover is waiting with a feast? It is better for him not to hear such things, for he is ready to go mad. He would not have given that girl for all Cæsar’s treasures, and she fled. What kind of love is that which dreads delight and gives pain? Who can understand it? Who can fathom it? Were it not for the hope that he should find her, he would sink a sword in himself. Love surrenders; it does not take away. There were moments at the house of Aulus when he himself believed in near happiness, but now he knows that she hated him, that she hates him, and will die with hatred in her heart.

But Acte, usually mild and timid, burst forth in her turn with indignation. How had he tried to win Lygia? Instead of bowing before Aulus and Pomponia to get her, he took the child away from her parents by stratagem. He wanted to make, not a wife, but a concubine of her, the foster daughter of an honorable house, and the daughter of a king. He had her brought to this abode of crime and infamy; he defiled her innocent eyes with the sight of a shameful feast; he acted with her as with a wanton. Had he forgotten the house of Aulus and Pomponia Græcina, who had reared Lygia? Had he not sense enough to understand that

there are women different from Nigidia or Calvia Crispinilla or Poppæa, and from all those whom he meets in Cæsar's house? Did he not understand at once on seeing Lygia that she is an honest maiden, who prefers death to infamy? Whence does he know what kind of gods she worships, and whether they are not purer and better than the wanton Venus, or than Isis, worshipped by the profligate women of Rome? No! Lygia had made no confession to her, but she had said that she looked for rescue to him, to Vinicius: she had hoped that he would obtain for her permission from Cæsar to return home, that he would restore her to Pomponia. And while speaking of this, Lygia blushed like a maiden who loves and trusts. Lygia's heart beat for him; but he, Vinicius, had terrified and offended her; had made her indignant; let him seek her now with the aid of Cæsar's soldiers, but let him know that should Poppæa's child die, suspicion will fall on Lygia, whose destruction will then be inevitable.

Emotion began to force its way through the anger and pain of Vinicius. The information that he was loved by Lygia shook him to the depth of his soul. He remembered her in Aulus's garden, when she was listening to his words with blushes on her face and her eyes full of light. It seemed to him then that she had begun to love him; and all at once, at that thought, a feeling of certain happiness embraced him, a hundred times greater than that which he desired. He thought that he might have won her gradually, and besides as one loving him. She would have wreathed his door, rubbed it with wolf's fat, and then sat as his

wife by his hearth on the sheepskin. He would have heard from her mouth the sacramental: "Where thou art, Caius, there am I, Caia." And she would have been his forever. Why did he not act thus? True, he had been ready so to act. But now she is gone, and it may be impossible to find her; and should he find her, perhaps he will cause her death, and should he not cause her death, neither she nor Aulus nor Pomponia Græcina will favor him. Here anger raised the hair on his head again; but his anger turned now, not against the house of Aulus, or Lygia, but against Petronius. Petronius was to blame for everything. Had it not been for him Lygia would not have been forced to wander; she would be his betrothed, and no danger would be hanging over her dear head. But now all is past, and it is too late to correct the evil which will not yield to correction.

"Too late!" And it seemed to him that a gulf had opened before his feet. He did not know what to begin, how to proceed, whither to betake himself. Acte repeated as an echo the words, "Too late," which from another's mouth sounded like a death sentence. He understood one thing, however, that he must find Lygia, or something evil would happen to him.

And wrapping himself mechanically in his toga, he was about to depart without taking farewell even of Acte, when suddenly the curtain separating the entrance from the atrium was pushed aside, and he saw before him the pensive figure of Pomponia Græcina.

Evidently she too had heard of the disappearance of Lygia,

and, judging that she could see Acte more easily than Aulus, had come for news to her.

But, seeing Vinicius, she turned her pale, delicate face to him, and said, after a pause, – "May God forgive thee the wrong, Marcus, which thou hast done to us and to Lygia."

He stood with drooping head, with a feeling of misfortune and guilt, not understanding what God was to forgive him or could forgive him. Pomponia had no cause to mention forgiveness; she ought to have spoken of revenge.

At last he went out with a head devoid of counsel, full of grievous thoughts, immense care, and amazement.

In the court and under the gallery were crowds of anxious people. Among slaves of the palace were knights and senators who had come to inquire about the health of the infant, and at the same time to show themselves in the palace, and exhibit a proof of their anxiety, even in presence of Nero's slaves. News of the illness of the "divine" had spread quickly it was evident, for new forms appeared in the gateway every moment, and through the opening of the arcade whole crowds were visible. Some of the newly arrived, seeing that Vinicius was coming from the palace, attacked him for news; but he hurried on without answering their questions, till Petronius, who had come for news too, almost struck his breast and stopped him.

Beyond doubt Vinicius would have become enraged at sight of Petronius, and let himself do some lawless act in Cæsar's palace, had it not been that when he had left Acte he was so crushed,

so weighed down and exhausted, that for the moment even his innate irascibility had left him. He pushed Petronius aside and wished to pass; but the other detained him, by force almost.

"How is the divine infant?" asked he.

But this constraint angered Vinicius a second time, and roused his indignation in an instant.

"May Hades swallow her and all this house!" said he, gritting his teeth.

"Silence, hapless man!" said Petronius, and looking around he added hurriedly, – "If thou wish to know something of Lygia, come with me; I will tell nothing here! Come with me; I will tell my thoughts in the litter."

And putting his arm around the young tribune, he conducted him from the palace as quickly as possible. That was his main concern, for he had no news whatever; but being a man of resources, and having, in spite of his indignation of yesterday, much sympathy for Vinicius, and finally feeling responsible for all that had happened, he had undertaken something already, and when they entered the litter he said, – "I have commanded my slaves to watch at every gate. I gave them an accurate description of the girl, and that giant who bore her from the feast at Cæsar's, – for he is the man, beyond doubt, who intercepted her. Listen to me: Perhaps Aulus and Pomponia wish to secrete her in some estate of theirs; in that case we shall learn the direction in which they took her. If my slaves do not see her at some gate, we shall know that she is in the city yet, and shall begin this very day to

search in Rome for her."

"Aulus does not know where she is," answered Vinicius.

"Art thou sure of that?"

"I saw Pomponia. She too is looking for her."

"She could not leave the city yesterday, for the gates are closed at night. Two of my people are watching at each gate. One is to follow Lygia and the giant, the other to return at once and inform me. If she is in the city, we shall find her, for that Lygian is easily recognized, even by his stature and his shoulders. Thou art lucky that it was not Cæsar who took her, and I can assure thee that he did not, for there are no secrets from me on the Palatine."

But Vinicius burst forth in sorrow still more than in anger, and in a voice broken by emotion told Petronius what he had heard from Acte, and what new dangers were threatening Lygia, – dangers so dreadful that because of them there would be need to hide her from Poppæa most carefully, in case they discovered her. Then he reproached Petronius bitterly for his counsel. Had it not been for him, everything would have gone differently. Lygia would have been at the house of Aulus, and he, Vinicius, might have seen her every day, and he would have been happier at that moment than Cæsar. And carried away as he went on with his narrative, he yielded more and more to emotion, till at last tears of sorrow and rage began to fall from his eyes.

Petronius, who had not even thought that the young man could love and desire to such a degree, when he saw the tears of despair said to himself, with a certain astonishment, – "O mighty Lady

of Cyprus, thou alone art ruler of gods and men!”

Chapter XII

WHEN they alighted in front of the arbiter's house, the chief of the atrium answered them that of slaves sent to the gates none had returned yet. The atriensis had given orders to take food to them, and a new command, that under penalty of rods they were to watch carefully all who left the city.

"Thou seest," said Petronius, "that they are in Rome, beyond doubt, and in that case we shall find them. But command thy people also to watch at the gates, – those, namely, who were sent for Lygia, as they will recognize her easily."

"I have given orders to send them to rural prisons," said Vinicius, "but I will recall the orders at once, and let them go to the gates."

And writing a few words on a wax-covered tablet, he handed it to Petronius, who gave directions to send it at once to the house of Vinicius. Then they passed into the interior portico, and, sitting on a marble bench, began to talk. The golden-haired Eunice and Iras pushed bronze footstools under their feet, and poured wine for them into goblets, out of wonderful narrow-necked pitchers from Volaterræ and Cæcina.

"Hast thou among thy people any one who knows that giant Lygian?" asked Petronius.

"Atacinus and Gulo knew him; but Atacinus fell yesterday at the litter, and Gulo I killed."

"I am sorry for him," said Petronius. "He carried not only thee, but me, in his arms."

"I intended to free him," answered Vinicius; "but do not mention him. Let us speak of Lygia. Rome is a sea-"

"A sea is just the place where men fish for pearls. Of course we shall not find her to-day, or to-morrow, but we shall find her surely. Thou hast accused me just now of giving thee this method; but the method was good in itself, and became bad only when turned to bad. Thou hast heard from Aulus himself, that he intends to go to Sicily with his whole family. In that case the girl would be far from thee."

"I should follow them," said Vinicius, "and in every case she would be out of danger; but now, if that child dies, Poppæa will believe, and will persuade Cæsar, that she died because of Lygia."

"True; that alarmed me, too. But that little doll may recover. Should she die, we shall find some way of escape."

Here Petronius meditated a while and added, – "Poppæa, it is said, follows the religion of the Jews, and believes in evil spirits. Cæsar is superstitious. If we spread the report that evil spirits carried off Lygia, the news will find belief, especially as neither Cæsar nor Aulus Plautius intercepted her; her escape was really mysterious. The Lygian could not have effected it alone; he must have had help. And where could a slave find so many people in the course of one day?"

"Slaves help one another in Rome."

"Some person pays for that with blood at times. True, they support one another, but not some against others. In this case it was known that responsibility and punishment would fall on thy people. If thou give thy people the idea of evil spirits, they will say at once that they saw such with their own eyes, because that will justify them in thy sight. Ask one of them, as a test, if he did not see spirits carrying off Lygia through the air, he will swear at once by the ægis of Zeus that he saw them."

Vinicius, who was superstitious also, looked at Petronius with sudden and great fear.

"If Ursus could not have men to help him, and was not able to take her alone, who could take her?"

Petronius began to laugh.

"See," said he, "they will believe, since thou art half a believer thyself. Such is our society, which ridicules the gods. They, too, will believe, and they will not look for her. Meanwhile we shall put her away somewhere far off from the city, in some villa of mine or thine."

"But who could help her?"

"Her co-religionists," answered Petronius.

"Who are they? What deity does she worship? I ought to know that better than thou."

"Nearly every woman in Rome honors a different one. It is almost beyond doubt that Pomponia reared her in the religion of that deity which she herself worships; what one she worships I know not. One thing is certain, that no person has seen her make

an offering to our gods in any temple. They have accused her even of being a Christian; but that is not possible; a domestic tribunal cleared her of the charge. They say that Christians not only worship an ass's head, but are enemies of the human race, and permit the foulest crimes. Pomponia cannot be a Christian, as her virtue is known, and an enemy of the human race could not treat slaves as she does."

"In no house are they treated as at Aulus's," interrupted Vinicius.

"Ah! Pomponia mentioned to me some god, who must be one powerful and merciful. Where she has put away all the others is her affair; it is enough that that Logos of hers cannot be very mighty, or rather he must be a very weak god, since he has had only two adherents, – Pomponia and Lygia, – and Ursus in addition. It must be that there are more of those adherents, and that they assisted Lygia."

"That faith commands forgiveness," said Vinicius. "At Acte's I met Pomponia, who said to me: 'May God forgive thee the evil which thou hast done to us and to Lygia.'"

"Evidently their God is some curator who is very mild. Ha! let him forgive thee, and in sign of forgiveness return thee the maiden."

"I would offer him a hecatomb to-morrow! I have no wish for food, or the bath, or sleep. I will take a dark lantern and wander through the city. Perhaps I shall find her in disguise. I am sick."

Petronius looked at him with commiseration. In fact, there

was blue under his eyes, his pupils were gleaming with fever, his unshaven beard indicated a dark strip on his firmly outlined jaws, his hair was in disorder, and he was really like a sick man. Iras and the golden-haired Eunice looked at him also with sympathy; but he seemed not to see them, and he and Petronius took no notice whatever of the slave women, just as they would not have noticed dogs moving around them.

"Fever is tormenting thee," said Petronius.

"It is."

"Then listen to me. I know not what the doctor has prescribed to thee, but I know how I should act in thy place. Till this lost one is found I should seek in another that which for the moment has gone from me with her. I saw splendid forms at thy villa. Do not contradict me. I know what love is; and I know that when one is desired another cannot take her place. But in a beautiful slave it is possible to find even momentary distraction."

"I do not need it," said Vinicius.

But Petronius, who had for him a real weakness, and who wished to soften his pain, began to meditate how he might do so.

"Perhaps thine have not for thee the charm of novelty," said he, after a while (and here he began to look in turn at Iras and Eunice, and finally he placed his palm on the hip of the golden-haired Eunice). "Look at this grace! for whom some days since Fonteius Capiton the younger offered three wonderful boys from Clazomene. A more beautiful figure than hers even Skopas himself has not chiselled. I myself cannot tell why I

have remained indifferent to her thus far, since thoughts of Chrysothemis have not restrained me. Well, I give her to thee; take her for thyself!"

When the golden-haired Eunice heard this, she grew pale in one moment, and, looking with frightened eyes on Vinicius, seemed to wait for his answer without breath in her breast.

But he sprang up suddenly, and, pressing his temples with his hands, said quickly, like a man who is tortured by disease, and will not hear anything, – "No, no! I care not for her! I care not for others! I thank thee, but I do not want her. I will seek that one through the city. Give command to bring me a Gallic cloak with a hood. I will go beyond the Tiber – if I could see even Ursus."

And he hurried away. Petronius, seeing that he could not remain in one place, did not try to detain him. Taking, however, his refusal as a temporary dislike for all women save Lygia, and not wishing his own magnanimity to go for naught, he said, turning to the slave, – "Eunice, thou wilt bathe and anoint thyself, then dress: after that thou wilt go to the house of Vinicius."

But she dropped before him on her knees, and with joined palms implored him not to remove her from the house. She would not go to Vinicius, she said. She would rather carry fuel to the hypocaustum in his house than be chief servant in that of Vinicius. She would not, she could not go; and she begged him to have pity on her. Let him give command to flog her daily, only not send her away.

And trembling like a leaf with fear and excitement, she

stretched her hands to him, while he listened with amazement. A slave who ventured to beg relief from the fulfilment of a command, who said "I will not and I cannot," was something so unheard-of in Rome that Petronius could not believe his own ears at first. Finally he frowned. He was too refined to be cruel. His slaves, especially in the department of pleasure, were freer than others, on condition of performing their service in an exemplary manner, and honoring the will of their master, like that of a god. In case they failed in these two respects, he was able not to spare punishment, to which, according to general custom, they were subject. Since, besides this, he could not endure opposition, nor anything which ruffled his calmness, he looked for a while at the kneeling girl, and then said, – "Call Tiresias, and return with him."

Eunice rose, trembling, with tears in her eyes, and went out; after a time she returned with the chief of the atrium, Tiresias, a Cretan.

"Thou wilt take Eunice," said Petronius, "and give her five-and-twenty lashes, in such fashion, however, as not to harm her skin."

When he had said this, he passed into the library, and, sitting down at a table of rose-colored marble, began to work on his "Feast of Trimalchion." But the flight of Lygia and the illness of the infant Augusta had disturbed his mind so much that he could not work long. That illness, above all, was important. It occurred to Petronius that were Cæsar to believe that Lygia had cast spells

on the infant, the responsibility might fall on him also, for the girl had been brought at his request to the palace. But he could reckon on this, that at the first interview with Cæsar he would be able in some way to show the utter absurdity of such an idea; he counted a little, too, on a certain weakness which Poppæa had for him, – a weakness hidden carefully, it is true, but not so carefully that he could not divine it. After a while he shrugged his shoulders at these fears, and decided to go to the triclinium to strengthen himself, and then order the litter to bear him once more to the palace, after that to the Campus Martius, and then to Chrysothemis.

But on the way to the triclinium at the entrance to the corridor assigned to servants, he saw unexpectedly the slender form of Eunice standing, among other slaves, at the wall; and forgetting that he had given Tiresias no order beyond flogging her, he wrinkled his brow again, and looked around for the atriensis. Not seeing him among the servants, he turned to Eunice.

"Hast thou received the lashes?"

She cast herself at his feet a second time, pressed the border of his toga to her lips, and said, – "Oh, yes, lord, I have received them! Oh, yes, lord!" In her voice were heard, as it were, joy and gratitude. It was clear that she looked on the lashes as a substitute for her removal from the house, and that now she might stay there. Petronius, who understood this, wondered at the passionate resistance of the girl; but he was too deeply versed in human nature not to know that love alone could call forth such

resistance.

"Dost thou love some one in this house?" asked he.

She raised her blue, tearful eyes to him, and answered, in a voice so low that it was hardly possible to hear her, – "Yes, lord."

And with those eyes, with that golden hair thrown back, with fear and hope in her face, she was so beautiful, she looked at him so entreatingly, that Petronius, who, as a philosopher, had proclaimed the might of love, and who, as a man of æsthetic nature, had given homage to all beauty, felt for her a certain species of compassion.

"Whom of those dost thou love?" inquired he, indicating the servants with his head.

There was no answer to that question. Eunice inclined her head to his feet and remained motionless.

Petronius looked at the slaves, among whom were beautiful and stately youths. He could read nothing on any face; on the contrary, all had certain strange smiles. He looked then for a while on Eunice lying at his feet, and went in silence to the triclinium.

After he had eaten, he gave command to bear him to the palace, and then to Chrysothemis, with whom he remained till late at night. But when he returned, he gave command to call Tiresias.

"Did Eunice receive the flogging?" inquired he.

"She did, lord. Thou didst not let the skin be cut, however."

"Did I give no other command touching her?"

"No, lord," answered the atriensis with alarm.

"That is well. Whom of the slaves does she love?"

"No one, lord."

"What dost thou know of her?"

Tiresias began to speak in a somewhat uncertain voice:

"At night Eunice never leaves the cubiculum in which she lives with old Acrisiona and Ifida; after thou art dressed she never goes to the bath-rooms. Other slaves ridicule her, and call her Diana."

"Enough," said Petronius. "My relative, Vinicius, to whom I offered her to-day, did not accept her; hence she may stay in the house. Thou art free to go."

"Is it permitted me to speak more of Eunice, lord?"

"I have commanded thee to say all thou knowest."

"The whole familia are speaking of the flight of the maiden who was to dwell in the house of the noble Vinicius. After thy departure, Eunice came to me and said that she knew a man who could find her."

"Ah! What kind of man is he?"

"I know not, lord; but I thought that I ought to inform thee of this matter."

"That is well. Let that man wait to-morrow in my house for the arrival of the tribune, whom thou wilt request in my name to meet me here."

The atriensis bowed and went out. But Petronius began to think of Eunice. At first it seemed clear to him that the young slave wished Vinicius to find Lygia for this reason only, that

she would not be forced from his house. Afterward, however, it occurred to him that the man whom Eunice was pushing forward might be her lover, and all at once that thought seemed to him disagreeable. There was, it is true, a simple way of learning the truth, for it was enough to summon Eunice; but the hour was late, Petronius felt tired after his long visit with Chrysothemis, and was in a hurry to sleep. But on the way to the cubiculum he remembered – it is unknown why – that he had noticed wrinkles, that day, in the corners of Chrysothemis's eyes. He thought, also, that her beauty was more celebrated in Rome than it deserved; and that Fonteius Capiton, who had offered him three boys from Clazomene for Eunice, wanted to buy her too cheaply.

Chapter XIII

NEXT morning, Petronius had barely finished dressing in the unctorium when Vinicius came, called by Tiresias. He knew that no news had come from the gates. This information, instead of comforting him, as a proof that Lygia was still in Rome, weighed him down still more, for he began to think that Ursus might have conducted her out of the city immediately after her seizure, and hence before Petronius's slaves had begun to keep watch at the gates. It is true that in autumn, when the days become shorter, the gates are closed rather early; but it is true, also, that they are opened for persons going out, and the number of these is considerable. It was possible, also, to pass the walls by other ways, well known, for instance, to slaves who wish to escape from the city. Vinicius had sent out his people to all roads leading to the provinces, to watchmen in the smaller towns, proclaiming a pair of fugitive slaves, with a detailed description of Ursus and Lygia, coupled with the offer of a reward for seizing them. But it was doubtful whether that pursuit would reach the fugitives; and even should it reach them, whether the local authorities would feel justified in making the arrest at the private instance of Vinicius, without the support of a pretor. Indeed, there had not been time to obtain such support. Vinicius himself, disguised as a slave, had sought Lygia the whole day before, through every corner of the city, but had been unable to find the least indication

or trace of her. He had seen Aulus's servants, it is true; but they seemed to be seeking something also, and that confirmed him in the belief that it was not Aulus who had intercepted the maiden, and that the old general did not know what had happened to her.

When Tiresias announced to him, then, that there was a man who would undertake to find Lygia, he hurried with all speed to the house of Petronius; and barely had he finished saluting his uncle, when he inquired for the man.

"We shall see him at once, Eunice knows him," said Petronius. "She will come this moment to arrange the folds of my toga, and will give nearer information concerning him."

"Oh! she whom thou hadst the wish to bestow on me yesterday?"

"The one whom thou didst reject; for which I am grateful, for she is the best vestiplica in the whole city."

In fact, the vestiplica came in before he had finished speaking, and taking the toga, laid on a chair inlaid with pearl, she opened the garment to throw it on Petronius's shoulder. Her face was clear and calm; joy was in her eyes.

Petronius looked at her. She seemed to him very beautiful. After a while, when she had covered him with the toga, she began to arrange it, bending at times to lengthen the folds. He noticed that her arms had a marvellous pale rose-color, and her bosom and shoulders the transparent reflections of pearl or alabaster.

"Eunice," said he, "has the man come to Tiresias whom thou didst mention yesterday?"

"He has, lord."

"What is his name?"

"Chilo Chilonides."

"Who is he?"

"A physician, a sage, a soothsayer, who knows how to read people's fates and predict the future."

"Has he predicted the future to thee?"

Eunice was covered with a blush which gave a rosy color to her ears and her neck even.

"Yes, lord."

"What has he predicted?"

"That pain and happiness would meet me."

"Pain met thee yesterday at the hands of Tiresias; hence happiness also should come."

"It has come, lord, already."

"What?"

"I remain," said she in a whisper.

Petronius put his hand on her golden head.

"Thou hast arranged the folds well to-day, and I am satisfied with thee, Eunice."

Under that touch her eyes were mist-covered in one instant from happiness, and her bosom began to heave quickly.

Petronius and Vinicius passed into the atrium, where Chilo Chilonides was waiting. When he saw them, he made a low bow. A smile came to the lips of Petronius at thought of his suspicion of yesterday, that this man might be Eunice's lover.

The man who was standing before him could not be any one's lover. In that marvellous figure there was something both foul and ridiculous. He was not old; in his dirty beard and curly locks a gray hair shone here and there. He had a lank stomach and stooping shoulders, so that at the first cast of the eye he appeared to be hunchbacked; above that hump rose a large head, with the face of a monkey and also of a fox; the eye was penetrating. His yellowish complexion was varied with pimples; and his nose, covered with them completely, might indicate too great a love for the bottle. His neglected apparel, composed of a dark tunic of goat's wool and a mantle of similar material with holes in it, showed real or simulated poverty. At sight of him, Homer's Thersites came to the mind of Petronius. Hence, answering with a wave of the hand to his bow, he said, —

"A greeting, divine Thersites! How are the lumps which Ulysses gave thee at Troy, and what is he doing himself in the Elysian Fields?"

"Noble lord," answered Chilo Chilonides, "Ulysses, the wisest of the dead, sends a greeting through me to Petronius, the wisest of the living, and the request to cover my lumps with a new mantle."

"By Hecate Triformis!" exclaimed Petronius, "the answer deserves a new mantle."

But further conversation was interrupted by the impatient Vinicius, who inquired directly, – "Dost thou know clearly what thou art undertaking?"

"When two households in two lordly mansions speak of naught else, and when half Rome is repeating the news, it is not difficult to know," answered Chilo. "The night before last a maiden named Lygia, but specially Callina, and reared in the house of Aulus Plautius, was intercepted. Thy slaves were conducting her, O lord, from Cæsar's palace to thy 'insula,' and I undertake to find her in the city, or, if she has left the city – which is little likely – to indicate to thee, noble tribune, whither she has fled and where she has hidden."

"That is well," said Vinicius, who was pleased with the precision of the answer. "What means hast thou to do this?"

Chilo smiled cunningly. "Thou hast the means, lord; I have the wit only."

Petronius smiled also, for he was perfectly satisfied with his guest.

"That man can find the maiden," thought he. Meanwhile Vinicius wrinkled his joined brows, and said, – "Wretch, in case thou deceive me for gain, I will give command to beat thee with clubs."

"I am a philosopher, lord, and a philosopher cannot be greedy of gain, especially of such as thou hast just offered magnanimously."

"Oh, art thou a philosopher?" inquired Petronius. "Eunice told me that thou art a physician and a soothsayer. Whence knowest thou Eunice?"

"She came to me for aid, for my fame struck her ears."

"What aid did she want?"

"Aid in love, lord. She wanted to be cured of unrequited love."

"Didst thou cure her?"

"I did more, lord. I gave her an amulet which secures mutuality. In Paphos, on the island of Cyprus, is a temple, O lord, in which is preserved a zone of Venus. I gave her two threads from that zone, enclosed in an almond shell."

"And didst thou make her pay well for them?"

"One can never pay enough for mutuality, and I, who lack two fingers on my right hand, am collecting money to buy a slave copyist to write down my thoughts, and preserve my wisdom for mankind."

"Of what school art thou, divine sage?"

"I am a Cynic, lord, because I wear a tattered mantle; I am a Stoic, because I bear poverty patiently; I am a Peripatetic, for, not owning a litter, I go on foot from one wine-shop to another, and on the way teach those who promise to pay for a pitcher of wine."

"And at the pitcher thou dost become a rhetor?"

"Heraclitus declares that 'all is fluid,' and canst thou deny, lord, that wine is fluid?"

"And he declared that fire is a divinity; divinity, therefore, is blushing in thy nose."

"But the divine Diogenes from Apollonia declared that air is the essence of things, and the warmer the air the more perfect the beings it makes, and from the warmest come the souls of sages.

And since the autumns are cold, a genuine sage should warm his soul with wine; and wouldst thou hinder, O lord, a pitcher of even the stuff produced in Capua or Telesia from bearing heat to all the bones of a perishable human body?"

"Chilo Chilonides, where is thy birthplace?"

"On the Euxine Pontus. I come from Mesembria."

"Oh, Chilo, thou art great!"

"And unrecognized," said the sage, pensively.

But Vinicius was impatient again. In view of the hope which had gleamed before him, he wished Chilo to set out at once on his work; hence the whole conversation seemed to him simply a vain loss of time, and he was angry at Petronius.

"When wilt thou begin the search?" asked he, turning to the Greek.

"I have begun it already," answered Chilo. "And since I am here, and answering thy affable question, I am searching yet. Only have confidence, honored tribune, and know that if thou wert to lose the string of thy sandal I should find it, or him who picked it up on the street."

"Hast thou been employed in similar services?" asked Petronius.

The Greek raised his eyes. "To-day men esteem virtue and wisdom too low, for a philosopher not to be forced to seek other means of living."

"What are thy means?"

"To know everything, and to serve those with news who are

in need of it."

"And who pay for it?"

"Ah, lord, I need to buy a copyist. Otherwise my wisdom will perish with me."

"If thou hast not collected enough yet to buy a sound mantle, thy services cannot be very famous."

"Modesty hinders me. But remember, lord, that to-day there are not such benefactors as were numerous formerly; and for whom it was as pleasant to cover service with gold as to swallow an oyster from Puteoli. No; my services are not small, but the gratitude of mankind is small. At times, when a valued slave escapes, who will find him, if not the only son of my father? When on the walls there are inscriptions against the divine Poppæa, who will indicate those who composed them? Who will discover at the book-stalls verses against Cæsar? Who will declare what is said in the houses of knights and senators? Who will carry letters which the writers will not intrust to slaves? Who will listen to news at the doors of barbers? For whom have wine-shops and bake-shops no secret? In whom do slaves trust? Who can see through every house, from the atrium to the garden? Who knows every street, every alley and hiding-place? Who knows what they say in the baths, in the Circus, in the markets, in the fencing-schools, in slave-dealers' sheds, and even in the arenas?"

"By the gods! enough, noble sage!" cried Petronius; "we are drowning in thy services, thy virtue, thy wisdom, and thy eloquence. Enough! We wanted to know who thou art, and we

know!"

But Vinicius was glad, for he thought that this man, like a hound, once put on the trail, would not stop till he had found out the hiding-place.

"Well," said he, "dost thou need indications?"

"I need arms."

"Of what kind?" asked Vinicius, with astonishment.

The Greek stretched out one hand; with the other he made the gesture of counting money.

"Such are the times, lord," said he, with a sigh.

"Thou wilt be the ass, then," said Petronius, "to win the fortress with bags of gold?"

"I am only a poor philosopher," answered Chilo, with humility; "ye have the gold."

Vinicius tossed him a purse, which the Greek caught in the air, though two fingers were lacking on his right hand.

He raised his head then, and said: "I know more than thou thinkest. I have not come empty-handed. I know that Aulus did not intercept the maiden, for I have spoken with his slaves. I know that she is not on the Palatine, for all are occupied with the infant Augusta; and perhaps I may even divine why ye prefer to search for the maiden with my help rather than that of the city guards and Cæsar's soldiers. I know that her escape was effected by a servant, – a slave coming from the same country as she. He could not find assistance among slaves, for slaves all stand together, and would not act against thy slaves. Only a co-religionist would

help him."

"Dost hear, Vinicius?" broke in Petronius. "Have I not said the same, word for word, to thee?"

"That is an honor for me," said Chilo. "The maiden, lord," continued he, turning again to Vinicius, "worships beyond a doubt the same divinity as that most virtuous of Roman ladies, that genuine matron, Pomponia. I have heard this, too, that Pomponia was tried in her own house for worshipping some kind of foreign god, but I could not learn from her slaves what god that is, or what his worshippers are called. If I could learn that, I should go to them, become the most devoted among them, and gain their confidence. But thou, lord, who hast passed, as I know too, a number of days in the house of the noble Aulus, canst thou not give me some information thereon?"

"I cannot," said Vinicius.

"Ye have asked me long about various things, noble lords, and I have answered the questions; permit me now to give one. Hast thou not seen, honored tribune, some statuette, some offering, some token, some amulet on Pomponia or thy divine Lygia? Hast thou not seen them making signs to each other, intelligible to them alone?"

"Signs? Wait! Yes; I saw once that Lygia made a fish on the sand."

"A fish? A-a! O-o-o! Did she do that once, or a number of times?"

"Only once."

"And art thou certain, lord, that she outlined a fish? O-o?"

"Yes," answered Vinicius, with roused curiosity. "Dost thou divine what that means?"

"Do I divine!" exclaimed Chilo. And bowing in sign of farewell, he added: "May Fortune scatter on you both equally all gifts, worthy lords!"

"Give command to bring thee a mantle," said Petronius to him at parting.

"Ulysses gives thee thanks for Thersites," said the Greek; and bowing a second time, he walked out.

"What wilt thou say of that noble sage?" inquired Petronius.

"This, that he will find Lygia," answered Vinicius, with delight; "but I will say, too, that were there a kingdom of rogues he might be the king of it."

"Most certainly. I shall make a nearer acquaintance with this stoic; meanwhile I must give command to perfume the atrium."

But Chilo Chilonides, wrapping his new mantle about him, threw up on his palm, under its folds, the purse received from Vinicius, and admired both its weight and its jingle. Walking on slowly, and looking around to see if they were not looking at him from the house, he passed the portico of Livia, and, reaching the corner of the Clivus Virbius, turned toward the Subura.

"I must go to Sporus," said he to himself, "and pour out a little wine to Fortuna. I have found at last what I have been seeking this long time. He is young, irascible, bounteous as mines in Cyprus, and ready to give half his fortune for that Lygian linnet. Just such

a man have I been seeking this long time. It is needful, however, to be on one's guard with him, for the wrinkling of his brow forebodes no good. Ah! the wolf-whelps lord it over the world to-day! I should fear that Petronius less. O gods! but the trade of procurer pays better at present than virtue. Ah! she drew a fish on the sand! If I know what that means, may I choke myself with a piece of goat's cheese! But I shall know. Fish live under water, and searching under water is more difficult than on land, ergo he will pay me separately for this fish. Another such purse and I might cast aside the beggar's wallet and buy myself a slave. But what wouldst thou say, Chilo, were I to advise thee to buy not a male but a female slave? I know thee; I know that thou wouldst consent. If she were beautiful, like Eunice, for instance, thou thyself wouldst grow young near her, and at the same time wouldst have from her a good and certain income. I sold to that poor Eunice two threads from my old mantle. She is dull; but if Petronius were to give her to me, I would take her. Yes, yes, Chilo Chilonides, thou hast lost father and mother, thou art an orphan; therefore buy to console thee even a female slave. She must indeed live somewhere, therefore Vinicius will hire her a dwelling, in which thou too mayest find shelter; she must dress, hence Vinicius will pay for the dress; and must eat, hence he will support her. Och! what a hard life! Where are the times in which for an obolus a man could buy as much pork and beans as he could hold in both hands, or a piece of goat's entrails as long as the arm of a boy twelve years old, and filled with blood? But

here is that villain Sporus! In the wine-shop it will be easier to learn something."

Thus conversing, he entered the wine-shop and ordered a pitcher of "dark" for himself. Seeing the sceptical look of the shopkeeper, he took a gold coin from his purse, and, putting it on the table, said, – "Sporus, I toiled to-day with Seneca from dawn till midday, and this is what my friend gave me at parting."

The plump eyes of Sporus became plumper still at this sight, and the wine was soon before Chilo. Moistening his fingers in it, he drew a fish on the table, and said, – "Knowest what that means?"

"A fish? Well, a fish, – yes, that's a fish."

"Thou art dull; though thou dost add so much water to the wine that thou mightst find a fish in it. This is a symbol which, in the language of philosophers, means 'the smile of fortune.' If thou hadst divined it, thou too mightst have made a fortune. Honor philosophy, I tell thee, or I shall change my wine-shop, – an act to which Petronius, my personal friend, has been urging me this long time."

Chapter XIV

FOR a number of days after the interview, Chilo did not show himself anywhere. Vinicius, since he had learned from Acte that Lygia loved him, was a hundred times more eager to find her, and began himself to search. He was unwilling, and also unable, to ask aid of Cæsar, who was in great fear because of the illness of the infant Augusta.

Sacrifices in the temples did not help, neither did prayers and offerings, nor the art of physicians, nor all the means of enchantment to which they turned finally. In a week the child died. Mourning fell upon the court and Rome. Cæsar, who at the birth of the infant was wild with delight, was wild now from despair, and, confining himself in his apartments, refused food for two days; and though the palace was swarming with senators and Augustians, who hastened with marks of sorrow and sympathy, he denied audience to every one. The senate assembled in an extraordinary session, at which the dead child was pronounced divine. It was decided to rear to her a temple and appoint a special priest to her service. New sacrifices were offered in other temples in honor of the deceased; statues of her were cast from precious metals; and her funeral was one immense solemnity, during which the people wondered at the unrestrained marks of grief which Cæsar exhibited; they wept with him, stretched out their hands for gifts, and above all

amused themselves with the unparalleled spectacle.

That death alarmed Petronius. All knew in Rome that Poppæa ascribed it to enchantment. The physicians, who were thus enabled to explain the vanity of their efforts, supported her; the priests, whose sacrifices proved powerless, did the same, as well as the sorcerers, who were trembling for their lives, and also the people. Petronius was glad now that Lygia had fled; for he wished no evil to Aulus and Pomponia, and he wished good to himself and Vinicius; therefore when the cypress, set out before the Palatine as a sign of mourning, was removed, he went to the reception appointed for the senators and Augustians to learn how far Nero had lent ear to reports of spells, and to neutralize results which might come from his belief.

Knowing Nero, he thought, too, that though he did not believe in charms, he would feign belief, so as to magnify his own suffering, and take vengeance on some one, finally, to escape the suspicion that the gods had begun to punish him for crimes. Petronius did not think that Cæsar could love really and deeply even his own child; though he loved her passionately, he felt certain, however, that he would exaggerate his suffering. He was not mistaken. Nero listened, with stony face and fixed eyes, to the consolation offered by knights and senators. It was evident that, even if he suffered, he was thinking of this: What impression would his suffering make upon others? He was posing as a Niobe, and giving an exhibition of parental sorrow, as an actor would give it on the stage. He had not the power even then to endure in

his silent and as it were petrified sorrow, for at moments he made a gesture as if to cast the dust of the earth on his head, and at moments he groaned deeply; but seeing Petronius, he sprang up and cried in a tragic voice, so that all present could hear him, – "Eheu! And thou art guilty of her death! At thy advice the evil spirit entered these walls, – the evil spirit which, with one look, drew the life from her breast! Woe is me! Would that my eyes had not seen the light of Helios! Woe is me! Eheu! eheu!"

And raising his voice still more, he passed into a despairing shout; but Petronius resolved at that moment to put everything on one cast of the dice; hence, stretching out his hand, he seized the silk kerchief which Nero wore around his neck always, and, placing it on the mouth of the Imperator, said solemnly, – "Lord, Rome and the world are benumbed with pain; but do thou preserve thy voice for us!"

Those present were amazed; Nero himself was amazed for a moment. Petronius alone was unmoved; he knew too well what he was doing. He remembered, besides, that Terpnos and Diodorus had a direct order to close Cæsar's mouth whenever he raised his voice too much and exposed it to danger.

"O Cæsar!" continued he, with the same seriousness and sorrow, "we have suffered an immeasurable loss; let even this treasure of consolation remain to us!"

Nero's face quivered, and after a while tears came from his eyes. All at once he rested his hands on Petronius's shoulders, and, dropping his head on his breast, began to repeat, amid sobs,

"Thou alone of all thought of this, – thou alone, O Petronius! thou alone!"

Tigellinus grew yellow from envy; but Petronius continued, —

"Go to Antium! there she came to the world, there joy flowed in on thee, there solace will come to thee. Let the sea air freshen thy divine throat; let thy breast breathe the salt dampness. We, thy devoted ones, will follow thee everywhere; and when we assuage thy pain with friendship, thou wilt comfort us with song.

"True!" answered Nero, sadly, "I will write a hymn in her honor, and compose music for it."

"And then thou wilt find the warm sun in Baiæ."

"And afterward – forgetfulness in Greece."

"In the birthplace of poetry and song."

And his stony, gloomy state of mind passed away gradually, as clouds pass that are covering the sun; and then a conversation began which, though full of sadness, yet was full of plans for the future, – touching a journey, artistic exhibitions, and even the receptions required at the promised coming of Tiridates, King of Armenia. Tigellinus tried, it is true, to bring forward again the enchantment; but Petronius, sure now of victory, took up the challenge directly.

"Tigellinus," said he, "dost thou think that enchantments can injure the gods?"

"Cæsar himself has mentioned them," answered the courtier.

"Pain was speaking, not Cæsar; but thou – what is thy opinion of the matter?"

"The gods are too mighty to be subject to charms."

"Then wouldst thou deny divinity to Cæsar and his family?"

"Peractum est!" muttered Eprius Marcellus, standing near, repeating that shout which the people gave always when a gladiator in the arena received such a blow that he needed no other.

Tigellinus gnawed his own anger. Between him and Petronius there had long existed a rivalry touching Nero. Tigellinus had this superiority, that Nero acted with less ceremony, or rather with none whatever in his presence; while thus far Petronius overcame Tigellinus at every encounter with wit and intellect.

So it happened now. Tigellinus was silent, and simply recorded in his memory those senators and knights who, when Petronius withdrew to the depth of the chamber, surrounded him straightway, supposing that after this incident he would surely be Cæsar's first favorite.

Petronius, on leaving the palace, betook himself to Vinicius, and described his encounter with Cæsar and Tigellinus.

"Not only have I turned away danger," said he, "from Aulus Plautius, Pomponia, and us, but even from Lygia, whom they will not seek, even for this reason, that I have persuaded Bronzebeard, the monkey, to go to Antium, and thence to Naples or Baiæ and he will go. I know that he has not ventured yet to appear in the theatre publicly; I have known this long time that he intends to do so at Naples. He is dreaming, moreover, of Greece, where he wants to sing in all the more prominent cities, and then make

a triumphal entry into Rome, with all the crowns which the 'Græculi' will bestow on him. During that time we shall be able to seek Lygia unhindered and secrete her in safety. But has not our noble philosopher been here yet?"

"Thy noble philosopher is a cheat. No; he has not shown himself, and he will not show himself again!"

"But I have a better understanding, if not of his honesty, of his wit. He has drawn blood once from thy purse, and will come even for this, to draw it a second time."

"Let him beware lest I draw his own blood."

"Draw it not; have patience till thou art convinced surely of his deceit. Do not give him more money, but promise a liberal reward if he brings thee certain information. Wilt thou thyself undertake something?"

"My two freedmen, Nymphidius and Demas, are searching for her with sixty men. Freedom is promised the slave who finds her. Besides I have sent out special persons by all roads leading from Rome to inquire at every inn for the Lygian and the maiden. I course through the city myself day and night, counting on a chance meeting."

"Whenever thou hast tidings let me know, for I must go to Antium."

"I will do so."

"And if thou wake up some morning and say, 'It is not worth while to torment myself for one girl, and take so much trouble because of her,' come to Antium. There will be no lack of women

there, or amusement."

Vinicius began to walk with quick steps. Petronius looked for some time at him, and said at last, – "Tell me sincerely, not as a mad head, who talks something into his brain and excites himself, but as a man of judgment who is answering a friend: Art thou concerned as much as ever about this Lygia?"

Vinicius stopped a moment, and looked at Petronius as if he had not seen him before; then he began to walk again. It was evident that he was restraining an outburst. At last, from a feeling of helplessness, sorrow, anger, and invincible yearning, two tears gathered in his eyes, which spoke with greater power to Petronius than the most eloquent words.

Then, meditating for a moment, he said, – "It is not Atlas who carries the world on his shoulders, but woman; and sometimes she plays with it as with a ball."

"True," said Vinicius.

And they began to take farewell of each other. But at that moment a slave announced that Chilo Chilonides was waiting in the antechamber, and begged to be admitted to the presence of the lord.

Vinicius gave command to admit him immediately, and Petronius said, – "Ha! have I not told thee? By Hercules! keep thy calmness; or he will command thee, not thou him."

"A greeting and honor to the noble tribune of the army, and to thee, lord," said Chilo, entering. "May your happiness be equal to your fame, and may your fame course through the world from

the pillars of Hercules to the boundaries of the Arsacidæ."

"A greeting, O lawgiver of virtue and wisdom," answered Petronius.

But Vinicius inquired with affected calmness, "What dost thou bring?"

"The first time I came I brought thee hope, O lord; at present, I bring certainty that the maiden will be found."

"That means that thou hast not found her yet?"

"Yes, lord; but I have found what that sign means which she made. I know who the people are who rescued her, and I know the God among whose worshippers to seek her."

Vinicius wished to spring from the chair in which he was sitting; but Petronius placed his hand on his shoulder, and turning to Chilo said, – "Speak on!"

"Art thou perfectly certain, lord, that she drew a fish on the sand?"

"Yes," burst out Vinicius.

"Then she is a Christian and Christians carried her away." A moment of silence followed.

"Listen, Chilo," said Petronius. "My relative has predestined to thee a considerable sum of money for finding the girl, but a no less considerable number of rods if thou deceive him. In the first case thou wilt purchase not one, but three scribes; in the second, the philosophy of all the seven sages, with the addition of thy own, will not suffice to get thee ointment."

"The maiden is a Christian, lord," cried the Greek.

"Stop, Chilo. Thou art not a dull man. We know that Junia and Calvia Crispinilla accused Pomponia Græcina of confessing the Christian superstition; but we know too, that a domestic court acquitted her. Wouldst thou raise this again? Wouldst thou persuade us that Pomponia, and with her Lygia, could belong to the enemies of the human race, to the poisoners of wells and fountains, to the worshippers of an ass's head, to people who murder infants and give themselves up to the foulest license? Think, Chilo, if that thesis which thou art announcing to us will not rebound as an antithesis on thy own back."

Chilo spread out his arms in sign that that was not his fault, and then said, – "Lord, utter in Greek the following sentence: Jesus Christ, Son of God, Saviour." [Iesous Christos, Theou Uios, Soter.]

"Well, I have uttered it. What comes of that?"

"Now take the first letters of each of those words and put them into one word."

"Fish!" said Petronius with astonishment. [Ichthus, the Greek word for "fish."]

"There, that is why fish has become the watchword of the Christians," answered Chilo, proudly.

A moment of silence followed. But there was something so striking in the conclusions of the Greek that the two friends could not guard themselves from amazement.

"Vinicius, art thou not mistaken?" asked Petronius. "Did Lygia really draw a fish for thee?"

"By all the infernal gods, one might go mad!" cried the young man, with excitement. "If she had drawn a bird for me, I should have said a bird."

"Therefore she is a Christian," repeated Chilo.

"This signifies," said Petronius, "that Pomponia and Lygia poison wells, murder children caught on the street, and give themselves up to dissoluteness! Folly! Thou, Vinicius, wert at their house for a time, I was there a little while; but I know Pomponia and Aulus enough, I know even Lygia enough, to say monstrous and foolish! If a fish is the symbol of the Christians, which it is difficult really to deny, and if those women are Christians, then, by Proserpina! evidently Christians are not what we hold them to be."

"Thou speakest like Socrates, lord," answered Chilo. "Who has ever examined a Christian? Who has learned their religion? When I was travelling three years ago from Naples hither to Rome (oh, why did I not stay in Naples!), a man joined me, whose name was Glaucus, of whom people said that he was a Christian; but in spite of that I convinced myself that he was a good and virtuous man."

"Was it not from that virtuous man that thou hast learned now what the fish means?"

"Unfortunately, lord, on the way, at an inn, some one thrust a knife into that honorable old man; and his wife and child were carried away by slave-dealers. I lost in their defence these two fingers; since, as people say, there is no lack among Christians of

miracles, I hope that the fingers will grow out on my hand again."

"How is that? Hast thou become a Christian?"

"Since yesterday, lord, since yesterday! The fish made me a Christian. But see what a power there is in it. For some days I shall be the most zealous of the zealous, so that they may admit me to all their secrets; and when they admit me to their secrets, I shall know where the maiden is hiding. Perhaps then my Christianity will pay me better than my philosophy. I have made a vow also to Mercury, that if he helps me to find the maiden, I will sacrifice to him two heifers of the same size and color and will gild their horns."

"Then thy Christianity of yesterday and thy philosophy of long standing permit thee to believe in Mercury?"

"I believe always in that in which I need to believe; that is my philosophy, which ought to please Mercury. Unfortunately (ye know, worthy lords, what a suspicious god he is), he does not trust the promises even of blameless philosophers, and prefers the heifers in advance; meanwhile this outlay is immense. Not every one is a Seneca, and I cannot afford the sacrifice; should the noble Vinicius, however, wish to give something, on account of that sum which he promised – "

"Not an obolus, Chilo!" said Petronius, "not an obolus. The bounty of Vinicius will surpass thy expectations, but only when Lygia is found, – that is, when thou shalt indicate to us her hiding-place. Mercury must trust thee for the two heifers, though I am not astonished at him for not wishing to do so; in this I recognize

his acuteness."

"Listen to me, worthy lords. The discovery which I have made is great; for though I have not found the maiden yet, I have found the way in which I must seek her. Ye have sent freedmen and slaves throughout the city and into the country; has any one given you a clew? No! I alone have given one. I tell you more. Among your slaves there may be Christians, of whom ye have no knowledge, for this superstition has spread everywhere; and they, instead of aiding, will betray you. It is unfortunate that they see me here; do thou therefore, noble Petronius, enjoin silence on Eunice; and thou too, noble Vinicius, spread a report that I sell thee an ointment which insures victory in the Circus to horses rubbed with it. I alone will search for her, and single-handed I will find the fugitives; and do ye trust in me, and know that whatever I receive in advance will be for me simply an encouragement, for I shall hope always for more, and shall feel the greater certainty that the promised reward will not fail me. Ah, it is true! As a philosopher I despise money, though neither Seneca, nor even Musonius, nor Cornutus despises it, though they have not lost fingers in any one's defence, and are able themselves to write and leave their names to posterity. But, aside from the slave, whom I intend to buy, and besides Mercury, to whom I have promised the heifers, – and ye know how dear cattle have become in these times, – the searching itself involves much outlay. Only listen to me patiently. Well, for the last few days my feet are wounded from continual walking. I have gone to wine-shops to talk with

people, to bakeries, to butcher-shops, to dealers in olive oil, and to fishermen. I have run through every street and alley; I have been in the hiding places of fugitive slaves; I have lost money, nearly a hundred ases, in playing mora; I have been in laundries, in drying-sheds, in cheap kitchens; I have seen mule-drivers and carvers; I have seen people who cure bladder complaints and pull teeth; I have talked with dealers in dried figs; I have been at cemeteries; and do ye know why? This is why; so as to outline a fish everywhere, look people in the eyes, and hear what they would say of that sign. For a long time I was unable to learn anything, till at last I saw an old slave at a fountain. He was drawing water with a bucket, and weeping. Approaching him, I asked the cause of his tears. When we had sat down on the steps of the fountain, he answered that all his life he had been collecting sestertium after sestertium, to redeem his beloved son; but his master, a certain Pansa, when the money was delivered to him, took it, but kept the son in slavery. 'And so I am weeping,' said the old man, 'for though I repeat, Let the will of God be done, I, poor sinner, am not able to keep down my tears.' Then, as if penetrated by a forewarning, I moistened my finger in the water and drew a fish for him. To this he answered, 'My hope, too, is in Christ.' I asked him then, 'Hast thou confessed to me by that sign?' 'I have,' said he; 'and peace be with thee.' I began then to draw him out, and the honest old man told me everything. His master, that Pansa, is himself a freedman of the great Pansa; and he brings stones by the Tiber to Rome, where slaves and

hired persons unload them from the boats, and carry them to buildings in the night time, so as not to obstruct movement in the streets during daylight. Among these people many Christians work, and also his son; as the work is beyond his son's strength, he wished to redeem him. But Pansa preferred to keep both the money and the slave. While telling me this, he began again to weep; and I mingled my tears with his, – tears came to me easily because of my kind heart, and the pain in my feet, which I got from walking excessively. I began also to lament that as I had come from Naples only a few days since, I knew no one of the brotherhood, and did not know where they assembled for prayer. He wondered that Christians in Naples had not given me letters to their brethren in Rome; but I explained to him that the letters were stolen from me on the road. Then he told me to come to the river at night, and he would acquaint me with brethren who would conduct me to houses of prayer and to elders who govern the Christian community. When I heard this, I was so delighted that I gave him the sum needed to redeem his son, in the hope that the lordly Vinicius would return it to me twofold."

"Chilo," interrupted Petronius, "in thy narrative falsehood appears on the surface of truth, as oil does on water. Thou hast brought important information; I do not deny that. I assert, even, that a great step is made toward finding Lygia; but do not cover thy news with falsehood. What is the name of that old man from whom thou hast learned that the Christians recognize each other through the sign of a fish?"

"Euricius. A poor, unfortunate old man! He reminded me of Glaucus, whom I defended from murderers, and he touched me mainly by this."

"I believe that thou didst discover him, and wilt be able to make use of the acquaintance; but thou hast given him no money. Thou hast not given him an as; dost understand me? Thou hast not given anything."

"But I helped him to lift the bucket, and I spoke of his son with the greatest sympathy. Yes, lord, what can hide before the penetration of Petronius? Well, I did not give him money, or rather, I gave it to him, but only in spirit, in intention, which, had he been a real philosopher, should have sufficed him. I gave it to him because I saw that such an act was indispensable and useful; for think, lord, how this act has won all the Christians at once to me, what access to them it has opened, and what confidence it has roused in them."

"True," said Petronius, "and it was thy duty to do it."

"For this very reason I have come to get the means to do it."

Petronius turned to Vinicius, – "Give command to count out to him five thousand sestertia, but in spirit, in intention."

"I will give thee a young man," said Vinicius, "who will take the sum necessary; thou wilt say to Euricius that the youth is thy slave, and thou wilt count out to the old man, in the youth's presence, this money. Since thou hast brought important tidings, thou wilt receive the same amount for thyself. Come for the youth and the money this evening."

“Thou art a real Cæsar!” said Chilo. “Permit me, lord, to dedicate my work to thee; but permit also that this evening I come only for the money, since Euricius told me that all the boats had been unloaded, and that new ones would come from Ostia only after some days. Peace be with you! Thus do Christians take farewell of one another. I will buy myself a slave woman, – that is, I wanted to say a slave man. Fish are caught with a bait, and Christians with fish. Fax vobiscum! pax! pax! pax!”

Chapter XV

PETRONIUS to VINICIUS:

"I send to thee from Antium, by a trusty slave, this letter, to which, though thy hand is more accustomed to the sword and the javelin than the pen, I think that thou wilt answer through the same messenger without needless delay. I left thee on a good trail, and full of hope; hence I trust that thou hast either satisfied thy pleasant desires in the embraces of Lygia, or wilt satisfy them before the real wintry wind from the summits of Soracte shall blow on the Campania. Oh, my Vinicius! may thy preceptress be the golden goddess of Cyprus; be thou, on thy part, the preceptor of that Lygian Aurora, who is fleeing before the sun of love. And remember always that marble, though most precious, is nothing of itself, and acquires real value only when the sculptor's hand turns it into a masterpiece. Be thou such a sculptor, carissime! To love is not sufficient; one must know how to love; one must know how to teach love. Though the plebs, too, and even animals, experience pleasure, a genuine man differs from them in this especially, that he makes love in some way a noble art, and, admiring it, knows all its divine value, makes it present in his mind, thus satisfying not his body merely, but his soul. More than

once, when I think here of the emptiness, the uncertainty, the dreariness of life, it occurs to me that perhaps thou hast chosen better, and that not Cæsar's court, but war and love, are the only objects for which it is worth while to be born and to live.

"Thou wert fortunate in war, be fortunate also in love; and if thou art curious as to what men are doing at the court of Cæsar, I will inform thee from time to time. We are living here at Antium, and nursing our heavenly voice; we continue to cherish the same hatred of Rome, and think of betaking ourselves to Baiæ for the winter, to appear in public at Naples, whose inhabitants, being Greeks, will appreciate us better than that wolf brood on the banks of the Tiber. People will hasten thither from Baiæ, from Pompeii, Puteoli, Cumæ, and Stabia; neither applause nor crowns will be lacking, and that will be an encouragement for the proposed expedition to Achæa.

"But the memory of the infant Augusta? Yes! we are bewailing her yet. We are singing hymns of our own composition, so wonderful that the sirens have been hiding from envy in Amphitrite's deepest caves. But the dolphins would listen to us, were they not prevented by the sound of the sea. Our suffering is not allayed yet; hence we will exhibit it to the world in every form which sculpture can employ, and observe carefully if we are beautiful in our suffering and if people recognize this beauty. Oh, my dear! we shall die buffoons and comedians!

"All the Augustians are here, male and female, not counting ten thousand servants, and five hundred she asses, in whose

milk Poppæa bathes. At times even it is cheerful here. Calvia Crispinilla is growing old. It is said that she has begged Poppæa to let her take the bath immediately after herself. Lucan slapped Nigidia on the face, because he suspected her of relations with a gladiator. Sporus lost his wife at dice to Senecio. Torquatus Silanus has offered me for Eunice four chestnut horses, which this year will win the prize beyond doubt. I would not accept! Thanks to thee, also, that thou didst not take her. As to Torquatus Silanus, the poor man does not even suspect that he is already more a shade than a man. His death is decided. And knowest what his crime is? He is the great-grandson of the deified Augustus. There is no rescue for him. Such is our world.

"As is known to thee, we have been expecting Tiridates here; meanwhile Vologeses has written an offensive letter. Because he has conquered Armenia, he asks that it be left to him for Tiridates; if not, he will not yield it in any case. Pure comedy! So we have decided on war. Corbulo will receive power such as Pompeius Magnus received in the war with pirates. There was a moment, however, when Nero hesitated. He seems afraid of the glory which Corbulo will win in case of victory. It was even thought to offer the chief command to our Aulus. This was opposed by Poppæa, for whom evidently Pomponia's virtue is as salt in the eye.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.