

## **CHAPTER 8 - THE GOTHS**

It was no false rumour that had driven the populace of the suburbs to fly to the security of the city walls. It was no ill-founded cry of terror that struck the ear of Ulpius, as he stood at Numerian's window. The name of Rome had really lost its pristine terrors; the walls of Rome, those walls which had morally guarded the Empire by their renown, as they had actually guarded its capital by their strength, were deprived at length of their ancient inviolability. An army of barbarians had indeed penetrated for conquest and for vengeance to the City of the World! The achievement which the invasions of six hundred years had hitherto attempted in vain, was now accomplished, and accomplished by the men whose forefathers had once fled like hunted beasts to their native fastnesses, before the legions of the Caesars--'The Goths were at the gates of Rome!'

And now, as his warriors encamped around him, as he saw the arrayed hosts whom his summons had gathered together, and his energy led on, threatening at their doors the corrupt senate who had deceived, and the boastful populace who had despised him, what emotions stirred within the heart of Alaric! As the words of martial command fell from his lips, and his eyes watched the movements of the multitudes around him, what exalted aspirations, what daring resolves, grew and strengthened in the mind of the man who was the pioneer of that mighty revolution, which swept from one quarter of the world the sway, the civilisation, the very life and spirit of centuries of ancient rule! High thoughts gathered fast in his mind; a daring ambition expanded within him--the ambition, not of the barbarian plunderer, but of the avenger who had come to punish; not of the warrior who combated for combat's sake, but of the hero who was vowed to conquer and to sway. From the far-distant days when Odin was driven from his territories by the romans, to the night polluted by the massacre of the hostages in Aquileia, the hour of just and terrible retribution for Gothic wrongs had been delayed through the weary lapse of years, and the warning convulsion of bitter strifes, to approach at last under him. He looked on the towering walls before him, the only invader since Hannibal by whom they had been beheld; and he felt as he looked, that his new aspirations did not deceive him, that his dreams of dominion were brightening into proud reality, that his destiny was gloriously linked with the overthrow of Imperial Rome!

But even in the moment of approaching triumph, the leader of the Goths was still wily in purpose and moderate in action. His impatient warriors waited but the word to commence the assault, to pillage the city, and to slaughter the inhabitants; but he withheld it. Scarcely had the army halted

before the gates of Rome, when the news was promulgated among their ranks, that Alaric, for purposes of his own, had determined to reduce the city by a blockade.

The numbers of his forces, increased during his march by the accession of thirty thousand auxiliaries, were now divided into battalions, varying in strength according to the service that was required of them. These divisions stretched round the city walls, and though occupying separate posts, and devoted to separate duties, were so arranged as to be capable of uniting at a signal in any numbers, on any given point. Each body of men was commanded by a tried and veteran warrior, in whose fidelity Alaric could place the most implicit trust, and to whom he committed the duty of enforcing the strictest military discipline that had ever prevailed among the Gothic ranks. Before each of the twelve principal gates a separate encampment was raised. Multitudes watched the navigation of the Tiber in every possible direction, with untiring vigilance; and not one of the ordinary inlets to Rome, however apparently unimportant, was overlooked. By these means, every mode of communication between the beleaguered city and the wide and fertile tracts of land around it, was effectually prevented. When it is remembered that this elaborate plan of blockade was enforced against a place containing, at the lowest possible computation, twelve hundred thousand inhabitants, destitute of magazines for food within its walls, dependent for supplies on its regular contributions from the country without, governed by an irresolute senate, and defended by an enervated army, the horrors that now impended over the besieged Romans are as easily imagined as described.

Among the ranks of the army that now surrounded the doomed city, the division appointed to guard the Pincian Gate will be found, at this juncture, most worthy of the reader's attention: for one of the warriors appointed to its subordinate command was the young chieftain Hermanric, who had been accompanied by Goisvintha through all the toils and dangers of the march, since the time when we left him at the Italian Alps.

The watch had been set, the tents had been pitched, the defences had been raised on the portion of ground selected to occupy every possible approach to the Pincian Gate, as Hermanric retired to await by Goisvintha's side, whatever further commands he might yet be entrusted with, by his superiors in the Gothic camp. The spot occupied by the young warrior's simple tent was on a slight eminence, apart from the positions chosen by his comrades, eastward of the city gate, and overlooking at some distance the deserted gardens of the suburbs, and the stately palaces of the Pincian Hill. Behind his temporary dwelling was the open country, reduced to a fertile

solitude by the flight of its terrified inhabitants; and at each side lay one unvarying prospect of military strength and preparation, stretching out its animated confusion of soldiers, tents, and engines of warfare, as far as the sight could reach. It was now evening. The walls of Rome, enshrouded in a rising mist, showed dim and majestic to the eyes of the Goths. The noises in the beleaguered city softened and deepened, seeming to be muffled in the growing darkness of the autumn night, and becoming less and less audible as the vigilant besiegers listened to them from their respective posts. One by one, lights broke wildly forth at irregular distances, in the Gothic camp. Harshly and fitfully the shrill call of the signal trumpets rang from rank to rank; and through the dim thick air rose, in the intervals of the more important noises, the clash of heavy hammers and the shout of martial command. Wherever the preparations for the blockade were still incomplete, neither the approach of night nor the pretext of weariness were suffered for an instant to hinder their continued progress. Alaric's indomitable will conquered every obstacle of nature, and every deficiency of man. Darkness had no obscurity that forced him to repose, and lassitude no eloquence that lured him to delay.

In no part of the army had the commands of the Gothic king been so quickly and intelligently executed, as in that appointed to watch the Pincian Gate. The interview of Hermanric and Goisvintha in the young chieftain's tent, was, consequently, uninterrupted for a considerable space of time by any fresh mandate from the head-quarters of the camp.

In outward appearance, both the brother and sister had undergone a change remarkable enough to be visible, even by the uncertain light of the torch which now shone on them as they stood together at the door of the tent. The features of Goisvintha--which at the period when we first beheld her on the shores of the mountain lake, retained, in spite of her poignant sufferings, much of the lofty and imposing beauty that had been their natural characteristic in her happier days--now preserved not the slightest traces of their former attractions. Its freshness had withered from her complexion, its fulness had departed from her form. Her eyes had contracted an unvarying sinister expression of malignant despair, and her manner had become sullen, repulsive, and distrustful. This alteration in her outward aspect, was but the result of a more perilous change in the disposition of her heart. The death of her last child at the very moment when her flight had successfully directed her to the protection of her people, had affected her more fatally than all the losses she had previously sustained. The difficulties and dangers that she had encountered in saving her offspring from the massacre; the dismal certainty that the child was the only one, out of all the former objects of her affection, left to her to love; the

wild sense of triumph that she experienced in remembering, that in this single instance her solitary efforts had thwarted the savage treachery of the Court of Rome, had inspired her with feelings of devotion towards the last of her household which almost bordered on insanity. And, now that her beloved charge, her innocent victim, her future warrior, had, after all her struggles for his preservation, pined and died; now that she was childless indeed; now that Roman cruelty had won its end in spite of all her patience, all her courage, all her endurance; every noble feeling within her sunk, annihilated at the shock. Her sorrow took the fatal form which irretrievable destroys, in women, all the softer and better emotions;--it changed to the despair that asks no sympathy, to the grief that holds no communion with tears.

Less elevated in intellect and less susceptible in disposition, the change to sullenness of expression and abruptness of manner now visible in Hermanric, resulted rather from his constant contemplation of Goisvintha's gloomy despair, than from any actual revolution in his own character. In truth, however many might be the points of outward resemblance now discernible between the brother and sister, the difference in degree of their moral positions, implied of itself the difference in degree of the inward sorrow of each. Whatever the trials and afflictions that might assail him, Hermanric possessed the healthful elasticity of youth and the martial occupations of manhood to support them. Goisvintha could repose on neither. With no employment but bitter remembrance to engage her thoughts, with no kindly aspiration, no soothing hope to fill her heart, she was abandoned irrevocably to the influence of unpartaken sorrow and vindictive despair.

Both the woman and the warrior stood together in silence for some time. At length, without taking his eyes from the dusky, irregular mass before him, which was all that night now left visible of the ill-fated city, Hermanric addressed Goisvintha thus:--

'Have you no words of triumph, as you look on the ramparts that your people have fought for generations to behold at their mercy, as we now behold them? Can a woman of the Goths be silent when she stands before the city of Rome?'

'I came hither to behold Rome pillaged, and Romans slaughtered; what is Rome blockaded to me?' replied Goisvintha fiercely. 'The treasures within that city will buy its safety from our King, as soon as the tremblers on the ramparts gain heart enough to penetrate a Gothic camp. Where is the vengeance that you promised me among those distant palaces? Do I behold

you carrying that destruction through the dwellings of Rome, which the soldiers of yonder city carried through the dwellings of the Goths? Is it for plunder or for glory that the army is here? I thought, in my woman's delusion, that it was for revenge!

'Dishonour will avenge you--Famine will avenge you--Pestilence will avenge you!'

'They will avenge my nation; they will not avenge me. I have seen the blood of Gothic women spilt around me--I have looked on my children's corpses bleeding at my feet! Will a famine that I cannot see, and a pestilence that I cannot watch, give me vengeance for this? Look! Here is the helmet-crest of my husband and your brother--the helmet-crest that was flung to me as a witness that the Romans had slain him! Since the massacre of Aquileia it has never quitted my bosom. I have sworn that the blood which stains and darkens it, shall be washed off in the blood of the people of Rome. Though I should perish under those accursed walls; though you in your soulless patience should refuse me protection and aid; I, widowed, weakened, forsaken as I am, will hold to the fulfilment of my oath!'

As she ceased she folded the crest in her mantle, and turned abruptly from Hermanric in bitter and undissembled scorn. All the attributes of her sex, in thought, expression, and manner, seemed to have deserted her. The very tones she spoke in were harsh and unwomanly.

Every word she had uttered, every action she had displayed, had sunk into the inmost heart, had stirred the fiercest passions of the young warrior whom she addressed. The first national sentiment discoverable in the day-spring of the ages of Gothic history, is the love of war; but the second is the reverence of woman. This latter feeling--especially remarkable among so fierce and unsusceptible a people as the ancient Scandinavians--was entirely unconnected with those strong attaching ties, which are the natural consequence of the warm temperaments of more southern nations; for love was numbered with the base inferior passions, in the frigid and hardy composition of the warrior of the north. It was the offspring of reasoning and observation, not of instinctive sentiment and momentary impulse. In the wild, poetical code of the old Gothic superstition was one axiom, closely and strangely approximating to an important theory in the Christian scheme--the watchfulness of an omnipotent Creator over a finite creature. Every action of the body, every impulse of the mind, was the immediate result, in the system of worship among the Goths of the direct, though invisible interference of the divinities they adored. When, therefore, they observed that women were more submitted in body to the mysterious laws of

nature and temperament, and more swayed in mind by the native and universal instincts of humanity than themselves, they inferred as an inevitable conclusion, that the female sex was more incessantly regarded, and more constantly and remarkably influenced by the gods of their worship, than the male. Acting under this persuasion, they committed the study of medicine, the interpretation of dreams, and in many instances, the mysteries of communication with the invisible world, to the care of their women. The gentler sex became their counsellors in difficulty, and their physicians in sickness--their companions rather than their mistresses,--the objects of their veneration rather than the purveyors of their pleasures. Although in after years, the national migrations of the Goths changed the national temperament, although their ancient mythology was exchanged for the worship of Christ, this prevailing sentiment of their earliest existence as a people never entirely deserted them; but, with different modifications and in different forms, maintained much of its old supremacy through all changes of manners and varieties of customs, descending finally to their posterity among the present nations of Europe, in the shape of that established code of universal courtesy to women, which is admitted to be one great distinguishing mark between the social systems of the inhabitants of civilised and uncivilised lands.

This powerful and remarkable ascendancy of the woman over the man, among the Goths, could hardly be more strikingly displayed than in the instance of Hermanric. It appeared, not only in the deteriorating effect of the constant companionship of Goisvintha on his naturally manly character, but also in the strong influence over his mind of the last words of fury and disdain that she had spoken. His eyes gleamed with anger, his cheeks flushed with shame, as he listened to those passages in her wrathful remonstrance which reflected most bitterly on himself. She had scarcely ceased, and turned to retire into the tent, when he arrested her progress, and replied, in heightened and accusing tones:--

'You wrong me by your words! When I saw you among the Alps, did I refuse you protection? When the child was wounded, did I leave him to suffer unaided? When he died, did I forsake him to rot upon the earth, or abandon to his mother the digging of his grave? When we approached Aquileia, and marched past Ravenna, did I forget that the sword hung at my shoulder? Was it at my will that it remained sheathed, or that I entered not the gates of the Roman towns, but passed by them in haste? Was it not the command of the king that withheld me? and could I, his warrior, disobey? I swear it to you, the vengeance that I promised, I yearn to perform,--but is it for me to alter the counsels of Alaric? Can I alone assault the city which it is his command that we should blockade? What would you have of me?'

'I would have you remember,' retorted Goisvintha, indignantly, 'that Romans slew your brother, and made me childless! I would have you remember that a public warfare of years on years, is powerless to stay one hour's craving of private vengeance! I would have you less submitted to your general's wisdom, and more devoted to your own wrongs! I would have you--like me--thirst for the blood of the first inhabitant of yonder den of traitors, who--whether for peace or for war--passes the precincts of its sheltering walls!'

She paused abruptly for an answer, but Hermanric uttered not a word. The courageous heart of the young chieftain recoiled at the deliberate act of assassination, pressed upon him in Goisvintha's veiled yet expressive speech. To act with his comrades in taking the city by assault, to outdo in the heat of battle the worst horrors of the massacre of Aquileia, would have been achievements in harmony with his wild disposition and warlike education; but, to submit himself to Goisvintha's projects, was a sacrifice, that the very peculiarities of his martial character made repugnant to his thoughts. Emotions such as these he would have communicated to his companion, as they passed through his mind; but there was something in the fearful and ominous change that had occurred in her disposition since he had met her among the Alps,--in her frantic, unnatural craving for bloodshed and revenge, that gave her a mysterious and powerful influence over his thoughts, his words, and even his actions. He hesitated and was silent.

'Have I not been patient?' continued Goisvintha, lowering her voice to tones of earnest, agitated entreaty, which jarred upon Hermanric's ear, as he thought who was the petitioner, and what would be the object of the petition,--' Have I not been patient throughout the weary journey from the Alps? Have I not waited for the hour of retribution, even before the defenceless cities that we passed on the march? Have I not at your instigation governed my yearning for vengeance, until the day that should see you mounting those walls with the warriors of the Goths, to scourge with fire and sword the haughty traitors of Rome? Has that day come? Is it by this blockade that the requital you promised me over the corpse of my murdered child, is to be performed? Remember the perils I dared, to preserve the life of that last one of my household,--and will you risk nothing to avenge his death? His sepulchre is untended and solitary. Far from the dwellings of his people, lost in the dawn of his beauty, slaughtered in the beginning of his strength, lies the offspring of your brother's blood. And the rest--the two children, who were yet infants; the father, who was brave in battle and wise in council--where are they? Their bones whiten on the shelterless plain, or rot unburied by the ocean shore! Think--had they lived--

-how happily your days would have passed with them in the time of peace! how gladly your brother would have gone forth with you to the chase! how joyfully his boys would have nestled at your knees, to gather from your lips the first lessons that should form them for the warrior's life! Think of such enjoyments as these, and then think that Roman swords have deprived you of them all!

Her voice trembled, she ceased for a moment, and looked mournfully up into Hermanric's averted face. Every feature in the young chieftain's countenance expressed the tumult that her words had aroused within him. He attempted to reply, but his voice was powerless in that trying moment. His head drooped upon his heaving breast, and he sighed heavily as, without speaking, he grasped Goisvintha by the hand. The object she had pleaded for was nearly attained;--he was fast sinking beneath the tempter's well-spread toils!

'Are you silent still?' she gloomily resumed. 'Do you wonder at this longing for vengeance, at this craving for Roman blood? I tell you that my desire has arisen within me, at promptings from the voices of an unknown world. They urge me to seek requital on the nation who have widowed and bereaved me--yonder, in their vaunted city, from their pampered citizens, among their cherished homes--in the spot where their shameful counsels take root, and whence their ruthless treacheries derive their bloody source! In the book that our teachers worship, I have heard it read, that "the voice of blood crieth from the ground!" This is the voice--Hermanric, this is the voice that I have heard! I have dreamed that I walked on a shore of corpses, by a sea of blood--I have seen, arising from that sea, my husband's and my children's bodies, gashed throughout with Roman wounds! They have called to me through the vapour of carnage that was around them;--'Are we yet unavenged? Is the sword of Hermanric yet sheathed?' Night after night have I seen this vision and heard those voice, and hoped for no respite until the day that saw the army encamped beneath the walls of Rome, and raising the scaling ladders for the assault! And now, after all my endurance, how has that day arrived? Accursed be the lust of treasure! It is more to the warriors, and to you, than the justice of revenge!

'Listen! listen!' cried Hermanric entreatingly.

'I listen no longer!' interrupted Goisvintha. 'The tongue of my people is as a strange language in my ears; for it talks but of plunder and of peace, of obedience, of patience, and of hope! I listen no longer; for the kindred are gone that I loved to listen to--they are all slain by the Romans but you--and you I renounce!'



Deprived of all power of consideration by the violence of the emotions awakened in his heart by Goisvintha's wild revelations of the evil passion that consumed her, the young Goth, shuddering throughout his whole frame, and still averting his face, murmured in hoarse, unsteady accents: 'Ask of me what you will. I have no words to deny, no power to rebuke you--ask of me what you will!'

'Promise me,' cried Goisvintha, seizing the hand of Hermanric, and gazing with a look of fierce triumph on his disordered countenance, 'that this blockade of the city shall not hinder my vengeance! Promise me that the first victim of our righteous revenge, shall be the first one that appears before you--whether in war or peace--of the inhabitants of Rome!'

'I promise,' cried the Goth. And those two words sealed the destiny of his future life.

During the silence that now ensued between Goisvintha and Hermanric, and while each stood absorbed in deep meditation, the dark prospect spread around them began to brighten slowly under a soft, clear light. The moon, whose dull broad disk had risen among the evening mists arrayed in gloomy red, had now topped the highest of the exhalations of earth, and beamed in the wide heaven, adorned once more in her pale, accustomed hue. Gradually, yet perceptibly, the vapour rolled,--layer by layer,--from the lofty summits of the palaces of Rome, and the high places of the mighty city began to dawn, as it were, in the soft, peaceful, mysterious light; while the lower divisions of the walls, the desolate suburbs, and parts of the Gothic camp, lay still plunged in the dusky obscurity of the mist, in grand and gloomy contrast to the prospect of glowing brightness, that almost appeared to hover about them from above and around. Patches of ground behind the tent of Hermanric, began to grow partially visible in raised and open positions; and the song of the nightingale was now faintly audible at intervals, among the solitary and distant trees. In whatever direction it was observed, the aspect of nature gave promise of the cloudless, tranquil night, of the autumnal climate of ancient Italy.

Hermanric was the first to return to the contemplation of the outward world. Perceiving that the torch which still burnt by the side of his tent, had become useless, now that the moon had arisen and dispelled the mists, he advanced and extinguished it; pausing afterwards to look forth over the plains, as they brightened slowly before him. He had been thus occupied but a short time, when he thought he discerned a human figure moving slowly over a spot of partially lightened and hilly ground, at a short distance

from him. It was impossible that this wandering form could be one of his own people;--they were all collected at their respective posts, and his tent he knew was on the outermost boundary of the encampment before the Pincian Gate.

He looked again. The figure still advanced, but at too great a distance to allow him a chance of discovering, in the uncertain light around him, either its nation, its sex, or its age. His heart misgave him as he remembered his promise to Goisvintha, and contemplated the possibility that it was some miserable slave, abandoned by the fugitives who had quitted the suburbs in the morning, who now approached as a last resource, to ask mercy and protection from his enemies in the camp. He turned towards Goisvintha as the idea crossed his mind, and observed that she was still occupied in meditation. Assured by the sight, that she had not yet observed the fugitive figure, he again directed his attention--with an excess of anxiety which he could hardly account for--in the direction where he had first beheld it, but it was no more to be seen. It had either retired to concealment, or was now still advancing towards his tent through a clump of trees that clothed the descent of the hill.

Silently and patiently he continued to look forth over the landscape; and still no living thing was to be seen. At length, just as he began to doubt whether his senses had not deceived him, the fugitive figure suddenly appeared from the trees, hurried with wavering gait over the patch of low, damp ground that still separated it from the young Goth, gained his tent, and then with a feeble cry fell helplessly upon the earth at his feet.

That cry, faint as it was, attracted Goisvintha's attention. She turned in an instant, thrust Hermanric aside, and raised the stranger in her arms. The light, slender form, the fair hand and arm hanging motionless towards the ground, the long locks of deep black hair, heavy with the moisture of the night atmosphere, betrayed the wanderer's sex and age in an instant. The solitary fugitive was a young girl.

Signing to Hermanric to kindle the extinguished torch at a neighbouring watch-fire, Goisvintha carried the still insensible girl into the tent. As the Goth silently proceeded to obey her, a vague, horrid suspicion, that he shrunk from embodying, passed across his mind. His hand shook so that he could hardly light the torch, and bold and vigorous as he was, his limbs trembled beneath him as he slowly returned to the tent.

When he had gained the interior of his temporary abode, the light of his torch illuminated a strange and impressive scene.

Goisvintha was seated on a rude oaken chest, supporting on her knees the form of the young girl, and gazing with an expression of the most intense and enthralling interest upon her pale, wasted countenance. The tattered robe that had hitherto enveloped the fugitive had fallen back, and disclosed the white dress, which was the only other garment she wore. Her face, throat, and arms, had been turned, by exposure to the cold, to the pure whiteness of marble. Her eyes were closed, and her small, delicate features were locked in a rigid repose. But for her deep black hair, which heightened the ghastly aspect of her face, she might have been mistaken, as she lay in the woman's arms, for an exquisitely chiseled statue of youth in death!

When the figure of the young warrior, arrayed in his martial habiliments, and standing near the insensible girl with evident emotions of wonder and anxiety, was added to the group thus produced,--when Goisvintha's tall, powerful frame, clothed in dark garments, and bent over the fragile form and white dress of the fugitive, was illuminated by the wild, fitful glare of the torch,--when the heightened colour, worn features, and eager expression of the woman were beheld, here shadowed, there brightened, in close opposition to the pale, youthful, reposing countenance of the girl, such an assemblage of violent lights and deep shades was produced, as gave the whole scene a character at once mysterious and sublime. It presented an harmonious variety of solemn colours, united by the exquisite artifice of Nature to a grand, yet simple disposition of form. It was a picture executed by the hand of Rembrandt, and imagined by the mind of Raphael.

Starting abruptly from her long, earnest examination of the fugitive, Goisvintha proceeded to employ herself in restoring animation to her insensible charge. While thus occupied, she preserved unbroken silence. A breathless expectation, that absorbed all her senses in one direction, seemed to have possessed itself of her heart. She laboured at her task with the mechanical, unwavering energy of those, whose attention is occupied by their thoughts rather than their actions. Slowly and unwillingly the first faint flush of returning animation dawned, in the tenderest delicacy of hue, upon the girl's colourless cheek. Gradually and softly, her quickening respiration fluttered a thin lock of hair that had fallen over her face. A little interval more, and then the closed, peaceful eyes suddenly opened, and glance quickly round the tent with a wild expression of bewilderment and terror. Then, as Goisvintha rose, and attempted to place her on a seat, she tore herself from her grasp, looked on her for a moment with fearful intentness, and then falling on her knees, murmured, in a plaintive voice,--

'Have mercy upon me. I am forsaken by my father,--I know not why. The

gates of the city are shut against me. My habitation in Rome is closed to me for ever!

She had scarcely spoken these few words, before an ominous change appeared in Goisvintha's countenance. Its former expression of ardent curiosity changed to a look of malignant triumph. Her eyes fixed themselves on the girl's upturned face, in glaring, steady, spell-bound contemplation. She gloated over the helpless creature before her, as the wild beast gloats over the prey that it has secured. Her form dilated, a scornful smile appeared on her lips, a hot flush rose on her cheeks, and ever and anon she whispered softly to herself, 'I knew she was Roman! Aha! I knew she was Roman!'

During this space of time Hermanric was silent. His breath came short and thick, his face grew pale, and his glance, after resting for an instant on the woman and the girl, travelled slowly and anxiously round the tent. In one corner of it lay a heavy battle-axe. He looked for a moment from the weapon to Goisvintha, with a vivid expression of horror, and then moving slowly across the tent, with a firm, yet trembling grasp, he possessed himself of the arm.

As he looked up, Goisvintha approached him. In one hand she held the bloody helmet-crest, while she pointed with the other to the crouching form of the girl. Her lips were still parted with their unnatural smile, and she whispered softly to the Goth--'Remember your promise!--remember your kindred!--remember the massacre of Aquileia!'

The young warrior made no answer. He moved rapidly forward a few steps, and signed hurriedly to the young girl to fly by the door; but her terror had by this time divested her of all her ordinary powers of perception and comprehension. She looked up vacantly at Hermanric, and then shuddering violently, crept into a corner of the tent. During the short silence that now ensued, the Goth could hear her shiver and sigh, as he stood watching, with all the anxiety of apprehension, Goisvintha's darkening brow.

'She is Roman--she is the first dweller in the city who has appeared before you!--remember your promise!--remember your kindred!--remember the massacre of Aquileia!' said the woman in fierce, quick, concentrated tones.

'I remember that I am a warrior and a Goth,' replied Hermanric, disdainfully. 'I have promised to avenge you, but it must be on a man that my promise must be fulfilled--an armed man, who can come forth with weapons in his hand--a strong man of courage whom I will slay in single combat before your

eyes! The girl is too young to die, too weak to be assailed!

Not a syllable that he had spoken had passed unheeded by the fugitive, every word seemed to revive her torpid faculties. As he ceased she arose, and with the quick instinct of terror, ran up to the side of the young Goth. Then seizing his hand--the hand that still grasped the battle-axe--she knelt down and kissed it, uttering hurried broken ejaculations, as she clasped it to her bosom, which the tremulousness of her voice rendered completely unintelligible.

'Did the Romans think my children too young to die, or too weak to be assailed?' cried Goisvintha. 'By the Lord God of Heaven, they murdered them the more willingly because they were young, and wounded them the more fiercely because they were weak! My heart leaps within me as I look on the girl! I am doubly avenged, if I am avenged on the innocent and the youthful! Her bones shall rot on the plains of Rome, as the bones of my offspring rot on the plains of Aquileia! Shed me her blood!--Remember your promise!--Shed me her blood!'

She advanced with extended arms and gleaming eyes towards the fugitive. She gasped for breath, her face turned suddenly to a livid paleness, the torchlight fell upon her distorted features, she looked unearthly at that fearful moment; but the divinity of mercy had now braced the determination of the young Goth to meet all emergencies. His bright steady eye quailed not for an instant, as he encountered the frantic glance of the fury before him. With one hand he barred Goisvintha from advancing another step; the other, he could not disengage from the girl, who now clasped and kissed it more eagerly than before.

'You do this but to tempt me to anger,' said Goisvintha, altering her manner with sudden and palpable cunning, more ominous of peril to the fugitive than the fury she had hitherto displayed. 'You jest at me, because I have failed in patience, like a child! But you will shed her blood--you are honourable and will hold to your promise--you will shed her blood! And I,' she continued, exultingly, seating herself on the oaken chest that she had previously occupied, and resting her clenched hands on her knees; 'I will wait to see it!'

At this moment voices and steps were heard outside the tent. Hermanric instantly raised the trembling girl from the ground, and supporting her by his arm, advanced to ascertain the cause of the disturbance. He was confronted the next instant by an old warrior of superior rank, attached to the person of Alaric, who was followed by a small party of the ordinary

soldiery of the camp.

'Among the women appointed by the king to the office of tending, for this night, those sick and wounded on the march, is Goisvintha, sister of Hermanric. If she is here, let her approach and follow me;' said the chief of the party in authoritative tones, pausing at the door of the tent.

Goisvintha rose. For an instant she stood irresolute. To quit Hermanric at such a time as this, was a sacrifice that wrung her savage heart;--but she remembered the severity of Alaric's discipline, she saw the armed men awaiting her, and yielded after a struggle to the imperious necessity of obedience to the king's commands. Trembling with suppressed anger and bitter disappointment, she whispered to Hermanric as she passed him:--

'You cannot save her if you would! You dare not commit her to the charge of your companions, she is too young and too fair to be abandoned to their doubtful protection. You cannot escape with her, for you must remain here on the watch at your post. You will not let her depart by herself, for you know that she would perish with cold and privation before the morning rises. When I return on the morrow I shall see her in the tent. You cannot escape from your promise;--you cannot forget it,--you must shed her blood!'

'The commands of the king,' said the old warrior, signing to his party to depart with Goisvintha, who now stood with forced calmness awaiting their guidance: 'will be communicated to the chieftain Hermanric on the morrow. Remember,' he continued in a lower tone, pointing contemptuously to the trembling girl; 'that the vigilance you have shown in setting the watch before yonder gate, will not excuse any negligence your prize there may now cause you to commit! Consult your youthful pleasures as you please, but remember your duties! Farewell!'

Uttering these words in a stern, serious tone, the veteran departed. Soon the last sound of the footsteps of his escort died away, and Hermanric and the fugitive were left alone in the tent.

During the address of the old warrior to the chieftain, the girl had silently detached herself from her protector's support, and retired hastily to the interior of the tent. When she saw that they were left together again, she advanced hesitatingly towards the young Goth, and looked up with an expression of mute inquiry into his face.

'I am very miserable,' said she, after an interval of silence, in soft, clear, melancholy accents. 'If you forsake me now, I must die--and I have lived so

short a time on the earth, I have known so little happiness and so little love, that I am not fit to die! But you will protect me! You are good and brave, strong with weapons in your hands, and full of pity. You have defended me, and spoken kindly of me--I love you for the compassion you have shown me.'

Her language and actions, simple as they were, were yet so new to Hermanric, whose experience of her sex had been almost entirely limited to the women of his own stern impassive nation, that he could only reply by a brief assurance of protection, when the suppliant awaited his answer. A new page in the history of humanity was opening before his eyes, and he scanned it in wondering silence.

'If that woman should return,' pursued the girl, fixing her dark, eloquent eyes intently upon the Goth's countenance, 'take me quickly where she cannot come. My heart grows cold as I look on her! She will kill me if she can approach me again! My father's anger is very fearful, but hers is horrible--horrible--horrible! Hush! already I hear her coming back--let us go--I will follow you wherever you please--but let us not delay while there is time to depart! She will destroy me if she sees me now, and I cannot die yet! Oh my preserver, my compassionate defender, I cannot die yet!'

'No one shall harm you--no one shall approach you to-night--you are secure from all dangers in this tent,' said the Goth, gazing on her with undissembled astonishment and admiration.

'I will tell you why death is so dreadful to me,' she continued, and her voice deepened as she spoke, to tones of mournful solemnity, strangely impressive in a creature so young. 'I have lived much alone, and have had no companions but my thoughts, and the sky that I could look up to, and the things on the earth that I could watch. As I have seen the clear heaven and the soft fields, and smelt the perfume of flowers, and heard the voices of singing-birds afar off, I have wondered why the same God who made all this, and made me, should have made grief and pain and hell--the dread eternal hell that my father speaks of in his church. I never looked at the sun-light, or woke from my sleep to look on and to think of the distant stars, but I longed to love something that might listen to my joy. But my father forbade me to be happy! He frowned even when he gave me my flower-garden--though God made flowers. He destroyed my lute--though God made music. My life has been a longing in loneliness for the voices of friends! My heart has swelled and trembled within me, because when I walked in the garden and looked on the plains and woods and high, bright mountains that were round me, I knew that I loved them alone! Do you know now why I dare not

die? It is because I must find first the happiness which I feel God has made for me. It is because I must live to praise this wonderful, beautiful world with others who enjoy it as I could! It is because my home has been among those who sigh, and never among those who smile! It is for this that I fear to die! I must find companions whose prayers are in singing and in happiness, before I go to the terrible hereafter that all dread. I dare not die! I dare not die!

As she uttered these last words she began to weep bitterly. Between amazement and compassion the young Goth was speechless. He looked down upon the small, soft hand that she had placed on his arm while she spoke, and saw that it trembled; he pressed it, and felt that it was cold; and in the first impulse of pity produced by the action, he found the readiness of speech which he had hitherto striven for in vain.

'You shiver and look pale,' said he; 'a fire shall be kindled at the door of the tent. I will bring you garments that will warm you, and food that will give you strength; you shall sleep, and I will watch that no one harms you.'

The girl hastily looked up. An expression of ineffable gratitude overspread her sorrowful countenance. She murmured in a broken voice, 'Oh, how merciful, how merciful you are!' And then, after an evident struggle with herself, she covered her face with her hands, and again burst into tears.

More and more embarrassed, Hermanric mechanically busied himself in procuring from such of his attendants as the necessities of the blockade left free, the supplies of fire, food and raiment, which he had promised. She received the coverings, approached the blazing fuel, and partook of the simple refreshment, which the young warrior offered her, with eagerness. After that she sat for some time silent, absorbed in deep meditation, and cowering over the fire, apparently unconscious of the curiosity with which she was still regarded by the Goth. At length she suddenly looked up, and observing his eyes fixed on her, arose and beckoned him to the seat that she occupied.

'Did you know how utterly forsaken I am,' said she, 'you would not wonder as you do, that I, a stranger and a Roman, have sought you thus. I have told you how lonely was my home; but yet that home was a refuge and a protection to me until the morning of this long day that is past, when I was expelled from it for ever! I was suddenly awakened in my bed by--my father entered in anger--he called me--'

She hesitated, blushed, and then paused at the very outset of her narrative.



Innocent as she was, the natural instincts of her sex spoke, though in a mysterious yet in a warning tone, within her heart, abruptly imposing on her motives for silence that she could neither penetrate nor explain. She clasped her trembling hands over her bosom as if to repress its heaving, and casting down her eyes, continued in a lower tone:--

'I cannot tell you why my father drove me from his doors. He has always been silent and sorrowful to me; setting me long tasks in mournful books; commanding that I should not quit the precincts of his abode, and forbidding me to speak to him when I have sometimes asked him to tell me of my mother whom I have lost. Yet he never threatened me or drove me from his side, until the morning of which I have told you. Then his wrath was terrible; his eyes were fierce; his voice was threatening! He bade me begone, and I obeyed him in affright, for I thought he would have slain me if I stayed! I fled from the house, knowing not where I went, and ran through yonder gate, which is hard by our abode. As I entered the suburbs, I met great crowds, all hurrying into Rome. I was bewildered by my fears and the confusion all around, yet I remember that they called loudly to me to fly to the city, ere the gates were closed against the assault of the Goths. And others jostled and scoffed at me, as they passed by and saw me in the thin night garments in which I was banished from my home!'

Here she paused and listened intently for a few moments. Every accidental noise that she heard still awakened in her the apprehension of Goisvintha's return. Reassured by Hermanric and by her own observation of all that was passing outside the tent, she resumed her narrative after an interval, speaking now in a steadier voice.

'I thought my heart would burst within me,' she continued, 'as I tried to escape them. All things whirled before my eyes. I could not speak--I could not stop--I could not weep. I fled and fled I knew not whither, until I sank down exhausted at the door of a small house on the outskirts of the suburbs. Then I called for aid, but no one was by to hear me. I crept--for I could stand no longer--into the house. It was empty. I looked from the windows: no human figure passed through the silent streets. The roar of a mighty confusion still rose from the walls of the city, but I was left to listen to it alone. In the house I saw scattered on the floor some fragments of bread and an old garment. I took them both, and then rose and departed; for the silence of the place was horrible to me, and I remembered the fields and the plains that I had once loved to look on, and I thought that I might find there the refuge that had been denied to me at Rome! So I set forth once more; and when I gained the soft grass, and sat down beside the shady trees, and saw the sunlight brightening over the earth, my heart grew sad,

and I wept as I thought on my loneliness and remembered my father's anger.

'I had not long remained in my resting-place, when I heard a sound of trumpets in the distance, and looking forth, I saw far off, advancing over the plains, a mighty multitude with arms that glittered in the sun. I strove, as I beheld them, to arise and return even to those suburbs whose solitude had affrighted me. But my limbs failed me. I saw a little hollow hidden among the trees around. I entered it, and there throughout the lonely day I lay concealed. I heard the long tramp of footsteps, as your army passed me on the roads beneath; and then, after those hours of fear came the weary hours of solitude!

'Oh, those--lonely--lonely--lonely hours! I have lived without companions, but those hours were more terrible to me than all the years of my former life! I dared not venture to leave my hiding-place--I dared not call! Alone in the world, I crouched in my refuge till the sun went down! Then came the mist, and the darkness, and the cold. The bitter winds of night thrilled through and through me! The lonely obscurity around me seemed filled with phantoms whom I could not behold, who touched me and rustled over the surface of my skin! They half maddened me! I rose to depart; to meet my wrathful father, or the army that had passed me, or solitude in the cold, bright meadows--I cared not which!--when I discerned the light of your torch, the moment ere it was extinguished. Dark though it then was, I found your tent. And now I know that I have found yet more--a companion and a friend!

She looked up at the young Goth as she pronounced these words with the same grateful expression that had appeared on her countenance before; but this time her eyes were not dimmed by tears. Already her disposition--poor as was the prospect of happiness which now lay before it--had begun to return, with an almost infantine facility of change, to the restoring influences of the brighter emotions. Already the short tranquilities of the present began to exert for her their effacing charm over the long agitations of the past. Despair was unnumbered among the emotions that grew round that child-like heart; shame, fear, and grief, however they might overshadow it for a time, left no taint of their presence on its bright, fine surface. Tender, perilously alive to sensation, strangely retentive of kindness as she was by nature, the very solitude to which she had been condemned had gifted her, young as she was, with a martyr's endurance of ill, and with a stoic's patience under pain.

'Do not mourn for me now,' she pursued, gently interrupting some broken

expressions of compassion which fell from the lips of the young Goth. 'If you are merciful to me, I shall forget all that I have suffered! Though your nation is at enmity with mine, while you remain my friend, I fear nothing! I can look on your great stature, and heavy sword, and bright armour now without trembling! You are not like the soldiers of Rome;--you are taller, stronger, more gloriously arrayed! You are like a statue I once saw by chance of a warrior of the Greeks! You have a look of conquest and a presence of command!'

She gazed on the manly and powerful frame of the young warrior, clothed as it was in the accoutrements of his warlike nation, with an expression of childish interest and astonishment, asking him the appellation and use of each part of his equipment, as it attracted her attention, and ending her inquiries by eagerly demanding his name.

'Hermanric,' she repeated, as he answered her, pronouncing with some difficulty the harsh Gothic syllables--'Hermanric!--that is a stern, solemn name--a name fit for a warrior and a man! Mine sounds worthless, after such a name as that! It is only Antonina!'

Deeply as he was interested in every word uttered by the girl, Hermanric could no longer fail to perceive the evident traces of exhaustion that now appeared in the slightest of her actions. Producing some furs from a corner of the tent, he made a sort of rude couch by the side of the fire, heaped fresh fuel on the flames, and then gently counselled her to recruit her wasted energies by repose. There was something so candid in his manner, so sincere in the tones of his voice, as he made his simple offer of hospitality to the stranger who had taken refuge with him, that the most distrustful woman would have accepted with as little hesitation as Antonina; who, gratefully and unhesitatingly, laid down on the bed that he had been spreading for her at her feet.

As soon as he had carefully covered her with a cloak, and rearranged her couch in the position best calculated to insure her all the warmth of the burning fuel, Hermanric retired to the other side of the fire; and, leaning on his sword, abandoned himself to the new and absorbing reflections which the presence of the girl naturally aroused.

He thought not on the duties demanded of him by the blockade; he remembered neither the scene of rage and ferocity that had followed his evasion of his reckless promise; nor the fierce determination that Goisvintha had expressed as she quitted him for the night. The cares and toils to come with the new morning, which would oblige him to expose the fugitive to the

malignity of her revengeful enemy; the thousand contingencies that the difference of their sexes, their nations, and their lives, might create to oppose the continuance of the permanent protection that he had promised to her, caused him no forebodings. Antonina, and Antonina alone, occupied every faculty of his mind, and every feeling of his heart. There was a softness and a melody to his ear in her very name!

His early life had made him well acquainted with the Latin tongue, but he had never discovered all its native smoothness of sound, and elegance of structure, until he had heard it spoken by Antonina. Word by word, he passed over in his mind her varied, natural, and happy turns of expression; recalling, as he was thus employed, the eloquent looks, the rapid gesticulations, the changing tones which had accompanied those words, and thinking how wide was the difference between this young daughter of Rome, and the cold and taciturn women of his own nation. The very mystery enveloping her story, which would have excited the suspicion or contempt of more civilised men, aroused in him no other emotions than those of wonder and compassion. No feelings of a lower nature than these entered his heart towards the girl. She was safe under the protection of the enemy and the barbarian, after having been lost through the interference of the Roman and the senator.

To the simple perceptions of the Goth, the discovery of so much intelligence united to such extreme youth, of so much beauty doomed to such utter loneliness, was the discovery of an apparition that dazzled, and not of a woman who charmed him. He could not even have touched the hand of the helpless creature, who now reposed under his tent, unless she had extended it to him of her own accord. He could only think--with a delight whose excess he was far from estimating himself--on this solitary mysterious being who had come to him for shelter and for aid; who had awakened in him already new sources of sensation; and who seemed to his startled imagination to have suddenly twined herself for ever about the destinies of his future life.

He was still deep in meditation, when he was startled by a hand suddenly laid on his arm. He looked up and saw that Antonina, whom he had imagined to be slumbering on her couch, was standing by his side.

'I cannot sleep,' said the girl in a low, awe-struck voice, 'until I have asked you to spare my father when you enter Rome. I know that you are here to ravage the city; and, for aught I can tell, you may assault and destroy it to-night. Will you promise to warn me before the walls are assailed? I will then tell you my father's name and abode, and you will spare him as you have

mercifully spared me? He has denied me his protection, but he is my father still; and I remember that I disobeyed him once, when I possessed myself of a lute! Will you promise me to spare him? My mother, whom I have never seen and who must therefore be dead, may love me in another world for pleading for my father's life!

In a few words, Hermanric quieted her agitation by explaining to her the nature and intention of the Gothic blockade, and she silently returned to the couch. After a short interval, her slow, regular breathing announced to the young warrior, as he watched by the side of the fire, that she had at length forgotten the day's heritage of misfortune in the welcome oblivion of sleep.