

CHAPTER 18 - THE FARM-HOUSE

As the night still advanced, so did the storm increase. On the plains in the open country its violence was most apparent. Here no living voices jarred with the dreary music of the elements; no flaming torches opposed the murky darkness or imitated the glaring lightning. The thunder pursued uninterruptedly its tempest symphony, and the fierce wind joined it, swelling into wild harmony when it rushed through the trees, as if in their waving branches it struck the chords of a mighty harp.

In the small chamber of the farm-house sat together Hermanric and Antonina, listening in speechless attention to the increasing tumult of the storm.

The room and its occupants were imperfectly illuminated by the flame of a smouldering wood fire. The little earthenware lamp hung from its usual place in the ceiling, but its oil was exhausted and its light was extinct. An alabaster vase of fruit lay broken by the side of the table, from which it had fallen unnoticed to the floor. No other articles of ornament appeared in the apartment. Hermanric's downcast eyes and melancholy, unchanging expressions betrayed the gloomy abstraction in which he was absorbed. With one hand clasped in his, and the other resting with her head on his shoulder, Antonina listened attentively to the alternate rising and falling of the wind. Her beauty had grown fresher and more woman-like during her sojourn at the farm-house. Cheerfulness and hope seemed to have gained at length all the share in her being assigned to them by nature at her birth. Even at this moment of tempest and darkness there was more of wonder and awe than of agitation and affright in her expression, as she sat hearkening, with flushed cheek and brightened eye, to the progress of the nocturnal storm.

Thus engrossed by their thoughts, Hermanric and Antonina remained silent in their little retreat, until the reveries of both were suddenly interrupted by the snapping asunder of the bar of wood which secured the door of the room, the stress of which, as it bent under the repeated shocks of the wind, the rotten spar was too weak to sustain any longer. There was something inexpressibly desolate in the flood of rain, wind, and darkness that seemed instantly to pour into the chamber through the open door, as it flew back violently on its frail hinges. Antonina changed colour, and shuddered involuntarily, as Hermanric hastily rose and closed the door again, by detaching its rude latch from the sling which held it when not wanted for use. He looked round the room as he did so for some substitute for the broken bar, but nothing that was fit for the purpose immediately met his

eye, and he muttered to himself as he returned impatiently to his seat: 'While we are here to watch it the latch is enough; it is new and strong.'

He seemed on the point of again relapsing into his former gloom, when the voice of Antonina arrested his attention, and aroused him for the moment from his thoughts.

'Is it in the power of the tempest to make you, a warrior of a race of heroes, thus sorrowful and sad?' she asked, in accents of gentle reproach. 'Even I, as I look on these walls that are so eloquent of my happiness, and sit by you whose presence makes that happiness, can listen to the raging storm, and feel no heaviness over my heart! What is there to either of us in the tempest that should oppress us with gloom? Does not the thunder come from the same heaven as the sunshine of the summer day? You are so young, so generous, so brave,--you have loved, and pitied, and succoured me,--why should the night language of the sky cast such sorrow and such silence over you?'

'It is not from sorrow that I am silent,' replied Hermanric, with a constrained smile, 'but from weariness with much toil in the camp.'

He stifled a sigh as he spoke. His head returned to its old downcast position. The struggle between his assumed carelessness and his real inquietude was evidently unequal. As she looked fixedly on him, with the vigilant eye of affection, the girl's countenance saddened with his. She nestled closer to his side and resumed the discourse in anxious and entreating tones.

'It is haply the strife between our two nations which has separated us already, and may separate us again, that thus oppresses you,' said she; 'but think, as I do, of the peace that must come, and not of the warfare that now is. Think of the pleasures of our past days, and of the happiness of our present moments,--thus united, thus living, loving, hoping for each other; and, like me, you will doubt not of the future that is in preparation for us both! The season of tranquillity may return with the season of spring. The serene heaven will then be reflected on a serene country and a happy people; and in those days of sunshine and peace, will any hearts among all the glad population be more joyful than ours?'

She paused a moment. Some sudden thought or recollection heightened her colour and caused her to hesitate ere she proceeded. She was about at length to continue, when a peal of thunder, louder than any which had preceded it, burst threateningly over the house and drowned the first

accents of her voice. The wind moaned loudly, the rain splashed against the door, the latch rattled long and sharply in its socket. Once more Hermanric rose from his seat, and approaching the fire, placed a fresh log of wood upon the dying embers. His dejection seemed now to communicate itself to Antonina, and as he reseated himself by her side, she did not address him again.

Thoughts, dreary and appalling beyond any that had occupied it before, were rising in the mind of the Goth. His inquietude at the encampment in the suburbs was tranquillity itself compared to the gloom which now oppressed him. All the evaded dues of his nation, his family, and his calling; all the suppressed recollections of the martial occupation he had slighted, and the martial enmities he had disowned, now revived avengingly in his memory. Yet, vivid as these remembrances were, they weakened none of those feelings of passionate devotion to Antonina by which their influence within him had hitherto been overcome. They existed with them--the old recollections with the new emotions--the stern rebukings of the warrior's nature with the anxious forebodings of the lover's heart. And now, his mysterious meeting with Ulpius; Goisvintha's unexpected return to health; the dreary rising and furious progress of the night tempest, began to impress his superstitious mind as a train of unwonted and meaning incidents, destined to mark the fatal return of his kinswoman's influence over his own actions and Antonina's fate.

One by one, his memory revived with laborious minuteness every incident that had attended his different interviews with the Roman girl, from the first night when she had strayed into his tent to the last happy evening that he had spent with her at the deserted farm-house. Then tracing further backwards the course of his existence, he figured to himself his meeting with Goisvintha among the Italian Alps; his presence at the death of her last child, and his solemn engagement, on hearing her recital of the massacre at Aquileia, to avenge her on the Romans with his own hands. Roused by these opposite pictures of the past, his imagination peopled the future with images of Antonina again endangered, afflicted, and forsaken; with visions of the impatient army, spurred at length into ferocious action, making universal havoc among the people of Rome, and forcing him back for ever into their avenging ranks. No decision for resistance or resignation to flight presented itself to his judgment. Doubt, despair, and apprehension held unimpeded sway over his impressible but inactive faculties. The night itself, as he looked forth on it, was not more dark; the wild thunder, as he listened to it, not more gloomy; the name of Goisvintha, as he thought on it, not more ominous of evil, than the sinister visions that now startled his imagination and oppressed his weary mind.

There was something indescribably simple, touching, and eloquent in the very positions of Hermanric and Antonina as they now sat together--the only members of their respective nations who were united in affection and peace--in the lonely farm-house. Both the girl's hands were clasped over Hermanric's shoulder, and her head rested on them, turned from the door towards the interior of the room, and so displaying her rich, black hair in all its luxuriance. The head of the Goth was still sunk on his breast, as though he were wrapped in a deep sleep, and his hands hung listlessly side by side over the scabbard of his sheathed sword, which lay across his knees. The fire flamed only at intervals, the fresh log that had been placed on it not having been thoroughly kindled as yet. Sometimes the light played on the white folds of Antonina's dress; sometimes over the bright surface of Hermanric's cuirass, which he had removed and laid by his side on the ground; sometimes over his sword, and his hands, as they rested on it; but it was not sufficiently powerful or lasting to illuminate the room, the walls and corners of which it left in almost complete darkness.

The thunder still pealed from without, but the rain and wind had partially lulled. The night hours had moved on more swiftly than our narrative of the events that marked them. It was now midnight.

No sound within the room reached Antonina's ear but the quick rattling of the door-latch, shaken in its socket by the wind. As one by one the moments journeyed slowly onward, it made its harsh music with as monotonous a regularity as though it were moved by their progress, and kept pace with their eternal march. Gradually the girl found herself listening to this sharp, discordant sound, with all the attention she could have bestowed at other times on the ripple of a distant rivulet or the soothing harmony of a lute, when, just as it seemed adapting itself most easily to her senses, it suddenly ceased, and the next instant a gust of wind, like that which had rushed through the open door on the breaking of the rotten bar, waved her hair about her face and fluttered the folds of her light, loose dress. She raised her head and whispered tremulously to Hermanric--

'The door is open again--the latch has given way!'

The Goth started from his reverie and looked up hastily. At that instant the rattling of the latch recommenced as suddenly as it had ceased, and the air of the room recovered its former tranquillity.

'Calm yourself, beloved one,' said Hermanric gently; 'your fancy has misled you--the door is safe.'

He parted back her dishevelled hair caressingly as he spoke. Incapable of doubting the lightest word that fell from his lips, and hearing no suspicious or unwonted sound in the room, she never attempted to justify her suspicions. As she again rested her head on his shoulder, a vague misgiving oppressed her heart, and drew from her an irrepressible sigh; but she gave her apprehensions no expression in words. After listening for a moment more to assure himself of the security of the latch, the Goth resumed insensibly the contemplations from which he had been disturbed; once more his head drooped, and again his hands returned mechanically to their old listless position, side by side, on the scabbard of his sword.

The faint, fickle flames still rose and fell, gleaming here and sinking there, the latch sounded sharply in its socket, the thunder yet uttered its surly peal, but the wind was now subsiding into fainter moans, and the rain began to splash faintly and more faintly against the shutters without. To the watchers in the farm-house nothing was altered to the eye, and little to the ear. Fatal security! The last few minutes had darkly determined their future destinies--in the loved and cherished retreat they were now no longer alone.

They heard no stealthy footsteps pacing round their dwelling, they saw no fierce eyes peering into the interior of the farm-house through a chink in the shutters, they marked no dusky figure passing through the softly and quickly opened door, and gliding into the darkest corner of the room. Yet, now as they sat together, communing in silence with their young, sad hearts, the threatening figure of Goisvintha stood, shrouded in congenial darkness, under their protecting roof and in their beloved chamber, rising still and silent almost at their very sides.

Though the fire of her past fever had raged again through her veins, and though startling visions of the murders at Aquileia had flashed before her mind as the wild lightning before her eyes, she had traced her way through the suburbs and along the high-road, and down the little path to the farm-house gate, without straying, without hesitating. Regardless of the darkness and the storm, she had prowled about the house, had raised the latch, had waited for a loud peal of thunder ere she passed the door, and had stolen shadow-like into the darkest corner of the room, with a patience and a determination that nothing could disturb. And now, when she stood at the goal of her worst wishes, even now, when she looked down upon the two beings by whom she had been thwarted and deceived, her fierce self-possession did not desert her; her lips quivered over her locked teeth, her bosom heaved beneath her drenched garments, but neither sighs nor

curses, not even a smile of triumph or a movement of anger escaped her.

She never looked at Antonina; her eyes wandered not for a moment from Hermanric's form. The quickest, faintest gleam of firelight that gleamed over it was followed through its fitful course by her eager glance, rapid and momentary as itself. Soon her attention was fixed wholly upon his hands, as they lay over the scabbard of his sword; and then, slowly and obscurely, a new and fatal resolution sprung up within her. The various emotions pictured in her face became resolved into one sinister expression, and, without removing her eyes from the Goth, she slowly drew from the bosom-folds of her garment a long sharp knife.

The flames alternately trembled into light and subsided into darkness as at first; Hermanric and Antonina yet continued in their old positions, absorbed in their thoughts and in themselves; and still Goisvintha remained unmoved as ever, knife in hand, watchful, steady, silent as before.

But beneath the concealment of her outward tranquillity raged a contention under which her mind darkened and her heart writhed. Twice she returned the knife to its former hiding-place, and twice she drew it forth again; her cheeks grew paler and paler, she pressed her clenched hand convulsively over her bosom, and leant back languidly against the wall behind her. No thought of Antonina had part in this great strife of secret emotions; her wrath had too much of anguish in it to be spent against a stranger and an enemy.

After the lapse of a few moments more, her strength returned--her firmness was aroused. The last traces of grief and despair that had hitherto appeared in her eyes vanished from them in an instant. Rage, vengeance, ferocity, lowered over them as she crept stealthily forward to the very side of the Goth, and, when the next gleam of the fire played upon him, drew the knife fiercely across the back of his hands. The cut was true, strong, and rapid--it divided the tendons from first to last--he was crippled for life.

At that instant the fire touched the very heart of the log that had been laid on it. It crackled gaily; it blazed out brilliantly. The whole room was as brightly illuminated as if a Christmas festival of ancient England had been preparing within its walls!

The warm, cheerful light showed the Goth the figure of his assassin, ere the first cry of anguish had died away on his lips, or the first start of irrepressible horror ceased to vibrate through his frame. The cries of his hapless companion, as the whole scene of vengeance, treachery, and

mutilation flashed in one terrible instant before her eyes, seemed not even to reach his ears. Once he looked down upon his helpless hands, when the sword rolled heavily from them to the floor. Then his gaze directed itself immovably upon Goisvintha, as she stood at a little distance from him, with her blood-stained knife, silent as himself.

There was no fury--no defiance--not even the passing distortion of physical suffering in his features, as he now looked on her. Blank, rigid horror--tearless, voiceless, helpless despair, seemed to have petrified the expression of his face into an everlasting form, unyouthful and unhopeful--as if he had been imprisoned from his childhood, and a voice was now taunting him with the pleasures of liberty, from a grating in his dungeon walls. Not even when Antonina, recovering from her first agony of terror, pressed her convulsive kisses on his cold cheek, entreating him to look on her, did he turn his head, or remove his eyes from Goisvintha's form.

At length the deep steady accents of the woman's voice were heard through the desolate silence.

'Traitor in word and thought you may be yet, but traitor in deed you never more shall be!' she began, pointing to his hands with her knife. 'Those hands, that have protected a Roman life, shall never grasp a Roman sword, shall never pollute again by their touch a Gothic weapon! I remembered, as I watched you in the darkness, how the women of my race once punished their recreant warriors when they fled to them from a defeat. So have I punished you! The arm that served not the cause of sister and sister's children--of king and king's nation--shall serve no other! I am half avenged of the murders at Aquileia, now that I am avenged on you! Go, fly with the Roman you have chosen to the city of her people! Your life as a warrior is at an end!'

He made her no answer. There are emotions, the last of a life, which tear back from nature the strongest barriers that custom raises to repress her, which betray the lurking existence of the first rude social feeling of the primeval days of a great nation, in the breasts of their most distant descendants, however widely their acquirements, their prosperities, or their changes may seem to have morally separated them from their ancestors of old. Such were the emotions now awakened in the heart of the Goth. His Christianity, his love, his knowledge of high aims, and his experience of new ideas, sank and deserted him, as though he had never known them. He thought on his mutilated hands, and no other spirit moved within him, but the ancient Gothic spirit of centuries back; the inspiration of his nation's early Northern songs and early Northern achievements--the renown of

courage and the supremacy of strength.

Vainly did Antonina, in the midst of the despair that still possessed her, yearn for a word from his lips or a glance from his eyes; vainly did her trembling fingers, tearing the bandages from her robe, stanch the blood on his wounded hands; vainly did her voice call on him to fly and summon help from his companions in the camp! His mind was far away, brooding over the legends of the battle-fields of his ancestors, remembering how, even in the day of victory, they slew themselves if they were crippled in the fray, how they scorned to exist for other interests than the interests of strife, how they mutilated traitors as Goisvintha had mutilated him! Such were the objects that enchained his inward faculties, while his outward senses were still enthralled by the horrible fascination that existed for him in the presence of the assassin by his side. His very consciousness of his existence, though he moved and breathed, seemed to have ceased.

'You thought to deceive me in my sickness, you hoped to profit by my death,' resumed Goisvintha, returning contemptuously her victim's glance. 'You trusted in the night, and the darkness, and the storm; you were secure in your boldness, in your strength, in the secrecy of this lurking-place that you have chosen for your treachery, but your stratagems and your expectations have failed you! At Aquileia I learnt to be wily and watchful as you! I discovered your desertion of the warriors and the camp; I penetrated the paths to your hiding-place; I entered it as softly as I once departed from the dwelling where my children were slain! In my just vengeance I have treated you as treacherously as you would have treated me! Remember your murdered brother; remember the child I put into your arms wounded and received from them dead; remember your broken oaths and forgotten promises, and make to your nation, to your duties, and to me, the atonement--the last and the only one--that in my mercy I have left in your power--the atonement of death.'

Again she paused, and again no reply awaited her. Still the Goth neither moved nor spoke, and still Antonina--kneeling unconsciously upon the sword, now useless to him for ever--continued to stanch the blood on his hands with a mechanical earnestness that seemed to shut out the contemplation of every other object from her eyes. The tears streamed incessantly down her cheeks, but she never turned towards Goisvintha, never suspended her occupation.

Meanwhile, the fire still blazed noisily on the cheerful hearth; but the storm, as if disdaining the office of heightening the human horror of the farmhouse scene, was rapidly subsiding. The thunder pealed less frequently and

less loudly, the wind fell into intervals of noiseless calm, and occasionally the moonlight streamed, in momentary brightness, through the ragged edges of the fast breaking clouds. The breath of the still morning was already moving upon the firmament of the stormy night.

'Has life its old magic for you yet?' continued Goisvintha, in tones of pitiless reproach. 'Have you forgotten, with the spirit of your people, the end for which your ancestors lived? Is not your sword at your feet? Is not the knife in my hand? Do not the waters of the Tiber, rolling yonder to the sea, offer to you the grave of oblivion that all may seek? Die then! In your last hour be a Goth; even to the Romans you are worthless now! Already your comrades have discovered your desertion; will you wait till you are hung for a rebel? Will you live to implore the mercy of your enemies, or, dishonoured and defenceless, will you endeavour to escape? You are of the blood of my family, but again I say it to you--die!'

His pale lips trembled; he looked round for the first time at Antonina, but his utterance struggled ineffectually, even yet, against unyielding despair. He was still silent.

Goisvintha turned from him disdainfully, and approaching the fire sat down before it, bending her haggard features over the brilliant flames. For a few minutes she remained absorbed in her evil thoughts, but no articulate word escaped her; and when at length she again abruptly broke the silence, it was not to address the Goth or to fix her eyes on him as before.

Still cowering over the fire, apparently as regardless of the presence of the two beings whose happiness she had just crushed for ever as if they had never existed, she began to recite, in solemn, measured, chanting tones, a legend of the darkest and earliest age of Gothic history, keeping time to herself with the knife that she still held in her hand. The malignity in her expression, as she pursued her employment, betrayed the heartless motive that animated it, almost as palpably as the words of the composition she was repeating: thus she now spoke:--

'The tempest-god's pinions o'ershadow the sky, The waves leap to
welcome the storm that is nigh, Through the hall of old Odin re-echo the
shocks That the fierce ocean hurls at his rampart of rocks, As, alone
on the crags that soar up from the sands, With his virgin SIONA the
young AGNAR stands; Tears sprinkle their dew on the sad maiden's
cheeks, And the voice of the chieftain sinks low while he speaks:

"Crippled in the fight for ever, Number'd with the worse than slain;

Weak, deform'd, disabled!--never Can I join the hosts again! With the
battle that is won AGNAR'S earthly course is run!

"When thy shatter'd frame must yield, If thou seek'st a future field;
When thy arm, that sway'd the strife, Fails to shield thy worthless life;
When thy hands no more afford Full employment to the sword; Then,
preserve--respect thy name; Meet thy death--to live is shame! Such is
Odin's mighty will; Such commands I now fulfil!"

At this point in the legend, she paused and turned suddenly to observe its
effect on Hermanric. All its horrible application to himself thrilled through
his heart. His head drooped, and a low groan burst from his lips. But even
this evidence of the suffering she was inflicting failed to melt the iron
malignity of Goisvintha's determination.

'Do you remember the death of Agnar?' she cried. 'When you were a child, I
sung it to you ere you slept, and you vowed as you heard it, that when you
were a man, if you suffered his wounds you would die his death! He was
crippled in a victory, yet he slew himself on the day of his triumph; you are
crippled in your treachery, and have forgotten your boy's honour, and will
live in the darkness of your shame! Have you lost remembrance of that
ancient song? You heard it from me in the morning of your years; listen,
and you shall hear it to the end; it is the dirge for your approaching death!'

She continued--

"SIONA, mourn not!--where I go The warriors feel nor pain nor woe;
They raise aloft the gleaming steel, Their wounds, though warm,
untended heal; Their arrows bellow through the air In showers, as they
battle there; In mighty cups their wine is pour'd, Bright virgins throng
their midnight board!

"Yet think not that I die unmov'd; I mourn the doom that sets me free,
As I think, betroth'd--belov'd, On all the joys I lose in thee! To form my
boys to meet the fray, Where'er the Gothic banner streams; To guard
thy night, to glad thy day, Made all the bliss of AGNAR'S dreams--
Dreams that must now be all forgot, Earth's joys have passed from
AGNAR'S lot!

"See, athwart the face of light Float the clouds of sullen Night! Odin's
warriors watch for me By the earth-encircling sea! The water's dirges
howl my knell; 'Tis time I die--Farewell-Farewell!"

'He rose with a smile to prepare for the spring, He flew from the rock
like a bird on the wing; The sea met her prey with a leap and a roar,
And the maid stood alone by the wave-riven shore!

The winds mutter'd deep, with a woe-boding sound, As she wept o'er
the footsteps he'd left on the ground; And the wild vultures shriek'd, for
the chieftain who spread Their battle-field banquets was laid with the
dead!

As, with a slow and measured emphasis, Goisvintha pronounced the last lines of the poem she again approached Hermanric. But the eyes of the Goth sought her no longer. She had calmed the emotions that she had hoped to irritate. Of the latter divisions of her legend, those only which were pathetic had arrested the lost chieftain's attention, and the blunted faculties of his heart recovered their old refinement as he listened to them. A solemn composure of love, grief, and pity appeared in the glance of affection that he now directed on the girl's despairing countenance. Years of good thoughts, an existence of tender cares, an eternity of youthful devotion spoke in that rapt, momentary, eloquent gaze, and imprinted on his expression a character ineffably beautiful and calm--a nobleness above the human, and approaching the angelic and divine.

Intuitively Goisvintha followed the direction of his eyes, and looked, like him, on the Roman girl's face. A lowering expression of hatred replaced the scorn that had hitherto distorted her passionate features. Mechanically her hand again half raised the knife, and the accents of her wrathful voice once more disturbed the sacred silence of affection and grief.

'Is it for the girl there that you would still live?' she cried sternly. 'I foreboded it, coward, when I first looked on you! I prepared for it when I wounded you! I made sure that when my anger again threatened this new ruler of your thoughts and mover of your actions, you should have lost the power to divert it from her again! Think you that, because my disdain has delayed it, my vengeance on her is abandoned? Long since I swore to you that she should die, and I will hold to my purpose! I have punished you; I will slay her! Can you shield her from the blow to-night, as you shielded her in your tent? You are weaker before me than a child!'

She ceased abruptly, for at this moment a noise of hurrying footsteps and contending voices became suddenly audible from without. As she heard it, a ghastly paleness chased the flush of anger from her cheeks. With the promptitude of apprehension she snatched the sword of Hermanric from under Antonina, and ran it through the staples intended to hold the rude

bar of the door. The next instant the footsteps sounded on the garden path, and the next the door was assailed.

The good sword held firm, but the frail barrier that it sustained yielded at the second shock and fell inwards, shattered, to the floor. Instantly the gap was darkened by human forms, and the firelight glowed over the repulsive countenances of two Huns who headed the intruders, habited in complete armour and furnished with naked swords.

'Yield yourself prisoner by Alaric's command,' cried one of the barbarians, 'or you shall be slain as a deserter where you now stand!'

The Goth had risen to his feet as the door was burst in. The arrival of his pursuers seemed to restore his lost energies, to deliver him at once from an all-powerful thralldom. An expression of triumph and defiance shone over his steady features when he heard the summons of the Hun. For a moment he stooped towards Antonina, as she clung fainting round him. His mouth quivered and his eye glistened as he kissed her cold cheek. In that moment all the hopelessness of his position, all the worthlessness of his marred existence, all the ignominy preparing for him when he returned to the camp, rushed over his mind. In that moment the worst horrors of departure and death, the fiercest rackings of love and despair, assailed but did not overcome him. In that moment he paid his final tribute to the dues of affection, and braced for the last time the fibres of manly dauntlessness and Spartan resolve!

The next instant he tore himself from the girl's arms, the old hero-spirit of his conquering nation possessed every nerve in his frame, his eye brightened again gloriously with its lost warrior-light, his limbs grew firm, his face was calm, he confronted the Huns with a mien of authority and a smile of disdain, and, as he presented to them his defenceless breast, not the faintest tremor was audible in his voice, while he cried in accents of steady command--

'Strike! I yield not!'

The Huns rushed forward with fierce cries, and buried their swords in his body. His warm young blood gushed out upon the floor of the dwelling which had been the love-shrine of the heart that shed it. Without a sigh from his lips or a convulsion on his features, he fell dead at the feet of his enemies; all the valour of his disposition, all the gentleness of his heart, all the vigour of his form, resolved in one humble instant into a senseless and burdensome mass!

Antonina beheld the assassination, but was spared the sight of the death that followed it. She fell insensible by the side of her young warrior--her dress was spotted with his blood, her form was motionless as his own.

'Leave him there to rot! His pride in his superiority will not serve him now--even to a grave!' cried the Hun leader to his companions, as he dived on the garments of the corpse his reeking sword.

'And this woman,' demanded one of his comrades, 'is she to be liberated or secured?'

He pointed as he spoke to Goisvintha. During the brief scene of the assassination, the very exercise of her faculties seemed to have been suspended. She had never stirred a limb or uttered a word.

The Hun recognised her as the woman who had questioned and bribed him at the camp. 'She is the traitor's kinswoman and is absent from the tents without leave,' he answered. 'Take her prisoner to Alaric; she will bear us witness that we have done as he commanded us. As for the girl,' he continued, glancing at the blood on Antonina's dress, and stirring her figure carelessly with his foot, 'she may be dead too, for she neither moves nor speaks, and may be left like her protector to lie graveless where she is. For us, it is time that we depart--the king is impatient of delay.'

As they led her roughly from the house, Goisvintha shuddered, and attempted to pause for a moment when she passed the corpse of the Goth. Death, that can extinguish enmities as well as sunder loves, rose awful and appealing as she looked her last at her murdered brother, and remembered her murdered husband. No tears flowed from her eyes, no groans broke from her bosom; but there was a pang, a last momentary pang of grief and pity at her heart as she murmured while they forced her away--'Aquileia! Aquileia! have I outlived thee for this!'

The troops retired. For a few minutes silence ruled uninterruptedly over the room where the senseless girl still lay by the side of all that was left to her of the object of her first youthful love. But ere long footsteps again approached the farm-house door, and two Goths, who had formed part of the escort allotted to the Hun, approached the young chieftain's corpse. Quickly and silently they raised it in their arms and bore it into the garden. There they scooped a shallow hole with their swords in the fresh, flower-laden turf, and having laid the body there, they hastily covered it, and rapidly departed without returning to the house.

These men had served among the warriors committed to Hermanric's command. By many acts of frank generosity and encouragement, the young chieftain had won their rough attachment. They mourned his fate, but dared not obstruct the sentence, or oppose the act that determined it. At their own risk they had secretly quitted the advancing ranks of their comrades, to use the last privilege and obey the last dictate of human kindness; and they thought not of the lonely girl as they now left her desolate, and hurried away to reassume their appointed stations ere it was too late.

The turf lay caressingly round the young warrior's form; its crushed flowers pressed softly against his cold cheek; the fragrance of the new morning wafted its pure incense gently about his simple grave! Around him flowered the delicate plants that the hand of Antonina had raised to please his eye. Near him stood the dwelling, sacred to the first and last kiss that he had impressed upon her lips; and about him, on all sides, rose the plains and woodlands that had engrossed, with her image, the devotion of all her dearest thoughts. He lay, in his death, in the midst of the magic circle of the best joys of his life! It was a fitter burial-place for the earthly relics of that bright and generous spirit than the pit in the carnage-laden battle-field, or the desolate sepulchres of a northern land!