

CHAPTER 21 - FATHER AND CHILD

Forsaken as it appears on an outward view, during the morning of which we now write, the house of Numerian is yet not tenantless. In one of the sleeping apartments, stretched on his couch, with none to watch by its side, lies the master of the little dwelling. We last beheld him on the scene mingled with the famishing congregation in the Basilica of St. John Lateran, still searching for his child amid the confusion of the public distribution of food during the earlier stages of the misfortunes of besieged Rome. Since that time he has toiled and suffered much; and now the day of exhaustion, long deferred, the hours of helpless solitude, constantly dreaded, have at length arrived.

From the first periods of the siege, while all around him in the city moved gloomily onward through darker and darker changes, while famine rapidly merged into pestilence and death, while human hopes and purposes gradually diminished and declined with each succeeding day, he alone remained ever devoted to the same labour, ever animated by the same object--the only one among all his fellow-citizens whom no outward event could influence for good or evil, for hope or fear.

In every street of Rome, at all hours, among all ranks of people, he was still to be seen constantly pursuing the same hopeless search. When the mob burst furiously into the public granaries to seize the last supplies of corn hoarded for the rich, he was ready at the doors watching them as they came out. When rows of houses were deserted by all but the dead, he was beheld within, passing from window to window, as he sought through each room for the treasure that he had lost. When some few among the populace, in the first days of the pestilence, united in the vain attempt to cast over the lofty walls the corpses that strewed the street, he mingled with them to look on the rigid faces of the dead. In solitary places, where the parent, not yet lost to affection, strove to carry his dying child from the desert roadway to the shelter of a roof; where the wife, still faithful to her duties, received her husband's last breath in silent despair--he was seen gliding by their sides, and for one brief instant looking on them with attentive and mournful eyes. Wherever he went, whatever he beheld, he asked no sympathy and sought no aid. He went his way, a pilgrim on a solitary path, an unregarded expectant for a boon that no others would care to partake.

When the famine first began to be felt in the city, he seemed unconscious of its approach--he made no effort to procure beforehand the provision of a few days' sustenance; if he attended the first public distributions of food, it was only to prosecute his search for his child amid the throng around him. He

must have perished with the first feeble victims of starvation, had he not been met, during his solitary wanderings, by some of the members of the congregation whom his piety and eloquence had collected in former days.

By these persons, who entreated that he would suspend his hopeless search he always answered with the same firm and patient denial, his course was carefully watched and his wants anxiously provided for. Out of every supply of food which they were enabled to collect, his share was invariably carried to his abode. They remembered their teacher in the hour of his dejection, as they had formerly revered him in the day of his vigour; they toiled to preserve his life as anxiously as they had laboured to profit by his instructions; they listened as his disciples once, they served him as his children now.

But over these, as over all other offices of human kindness, the famine was destined gradually and surely to prevail. The provision of food garnered up by the congregation ominously lessened with each succeeding day. When the pestilence began darkly to appear, the numbers of those who sought their afflicted teacher at his abode, or followed him through the dreary streets, fatally decreased.

Then, as the nourishment which had supported, and the vigilance which had watched him, thus diminished, so did the hard-tasked energies of the unhappy father fail him faster and faster. Each morning as he arose, his steps were more feeble, his heart grew heavier within him, his wanderings through the city were less and less resolute and prolonged. At length his powers totally deserted him; the last-remaining members of his congregation, as they approached his abode with the last-remaining provision of food which they possessed, found him prostrate with exhaustion at his garden gate. They bore him to his couch, placed their charitable offering by his side, and leaving one of their number to protect him from the robber and the assassin, they quitted the house in despair.

For some days the guardian remained faithful to his post, until his sufferings from lack of food overpowered his vigilance. Dreading that, in his extremity, he might be tempted to take from the old man's small store of provision what little remained, he fled from the house, to seek sustenance, however loathsome, in the public streets; and thenceforth Numerian was left defenceless in his solitary abode.

He was first beheld on the scenes which these pages present, a man of austere purpose, of unwearied energy; a valiant reformer, who defied all difficulties that beset him in his progress; a triumphant teacher, leading at

his will whoever listened to his words; a father, proudly contemplating the future position which he destined for his child. Far different did he now appear. Lost to his ambition, broken in spirit, helpless in body, separated from his daughter by his own act, he lay on his untended couch in a death-like lethargy. The cold wind blowing through his opened window awakened no sensations in his torpid frame; the cup of water and the small relics of coarse food stood near his hand, but he had no vigilance to discern them. His open eyes looked steadfastly upward, and yet he reposed as one in a deep sleep, or as one already devoted to the tomb; save when, at intervals, his lips moved slowly with a long and painfully drawn breath, or a fever flush tinged his hollow cheek with changing and momentary hues.

While thus in outward aspect appearing to linger between life and death, his faculties yet remained feebly vital within him. Aroused by no external influence, and governed by no mental restraint, they now created before him a strange waking vision, palpable as an actual event.

It seemed to him that he was reposing, not in his own chamber, but in some mysterious world, filled with a twilight atmosphere, inexpressibly soothing and gentle to his aching sight. Through this mild radiance he could trace, at long intervals, shadowy representations of the scenes through which he had passed in search of his lost child. The gloomy streets, the lonely houses abandoned to the unburied dead, which he had explored, alternately appeared and vanished before him in solemn succession; and ever and anon, as one vision disappeared ere another rose, he heard afar off a sound as of gentle, womanly voices, murmuring in solemn accents, 'The search has been made in penitence, in patience, in prayer, and has not been pursued in vain. The lost shall return--the beloved shall yet be restored!'

Thus, as it had begun, the vision long continued. Now the scenes through which he had wandered passed slowly before his eyes, now the soft voices murmured pityingly in his ear. At length the first disappeared, and the last became silent; then ensued a long vacant interval, and then the grey, tranquil light brightened slowly at one spot, out of which he beheld advancing towards him the form of his lost child.

She came to his side, she bent lovingly over him; he saw her eyes, with their old patient, childlike expression, looking sorrowfully down upon him. His heart revived to a sense of unspeakable awe and contrition, to emotions of yearning love and mournful hope; his speech returned; he whispered tremulously, 'Child! child! I repented in bitter woe the wrong that I did to thee; I sought thee, in my loneliness on earth, through the long day and the gloomy night! And now the merciful God has sent thee to pardon me! I

loved thee; I wept for thee.'

His voice died within him, for now his outward sensations quickened. He felt warm tears falling on his cheeks; he felt embracing arms clasped round him; he heard tenderly repeated, 'Father! speak to me as you were wont; love me, father, and forgive me, as you loved and forgave me when I was a little child!'

The sound of that well-remembered voice--which had ever spoken kindly and reverently to him; which had last addressed him in tones of despairing supplication; which he had hardly hoped to hear again on earth--penetrated his whole being, like awakening music in the dead silence of night. His eyes lost their vacant expression; he raised himself suddenly on the couch; he saw that what had begun as a vision had ended as a reality; that his dream had proved the immediate fore-runner of its own fulfilment; that his daughter in her bodily presence was indeed restored; and his head drooped forward, and he trembled and wept upon her bosom, in the overpowering fulness of his gratitude and delight.

For some moments Antonina, calming with the resolute heroism of affection her own thronging emotions of awe and affright, endeavoured to soothe and support her fast-failing parent. Her horror almost overwhelmed her, as she thought that now, when, through grief and peril, she was at last restored to him, he might expire in her arms; but even yet her resolution did not fail her. The last hope of her brief and bitter life was now the hope of reviving her father, and she clung to it with the tenacity of despair.

She calmed her voice while she spoke to him; she entreated him to remember that his daughter had returned to watch over him, to be his obedient pupil as in days of old. Vain effort! Even while the words passed her lips, his arms, which had been pressed over her, relaxed; his head grew heavier on her bosom. In the despair of the moment, she tore herself from him, and looked round to seek the help that none were near to afford. The cup of water, the last provision of food, attracted her eye. With quick instinct she caught them up. Hope, success, salvation, lay in those miserable relics. She pressed the food into his mouth; she moistened his parched lips, his dry brow, with the water. During one moment of horrible suspense she saw him still insensible; then the vital functions revived; his eyes opened again and fixed famine-struck on the wretched nourishment before him. He devoured it ravenously; he drained the cup of water to its last drop; he sank back again on the couch. But now the torpid blood moved once more in his veins; his heart beat less and less feebly: he was saved. She saw it as she bent over him--saved by the lost child in the hour of her return! It was a

sensation of ecstatic triumph and gratitude which no woeful remembrances had power to embitter in its bright, sudden birth. She knelt down by the side of the couch, almost crushed by her own emotions. Over the grave of the young warrior she had raised her heart to Heaven in agony and grief, and now by her father's side she poured forth her whole soul to her Creator in trembling ejaculations of thankfulness and hope.

Thus--the one slowly recovering whatever of life and vigour yet continued in his weakened frame, the other still filled with her all-absorbing emotions of gratitude--the father and daughter long remained. And now, as morning waned towards noon, the storm began to subside. Gradually and solemnly the vast thunder-clouds rolled asunder, and the bright blue heaven beyond appeared through their fantastic rifts. The lessening rain-drops fell light and silvery to the earth, and breeze and sunshine were wafted at fitful intervals over the plague-tainted atmosphere of Rome. As yet, subdued by the shadows of the floating clouds, the dawning sunbeams glittered softly through the windows of Numerian's chamber. They played, warm and reviving, over his worn features, like messengers of resurrection and hope from their native heaven. Life seemed to expand within him under their fresh and gentle ministering. Once more he raised himself, and turned towards his child; and now his heart throbbed with a healthful joy, and his arms closed round her, not in the helplessness of infirmity, but in the welcome of love.

His words, when he spoke to her, fell at first almost inarticulately from his lips--they were mingled together in confused phrases of tenderness, contrition, thanksgiving. All the native enthusiasm of his disposition, all the latent love for his child, which had for years been suppressed by his austerity, or diverted by his ambition, now at last burst forth.

Trembling and silent in his arms, Antonina vainly endeavoured to return his caresses and to answer his words of welcome. Now for the first time she knew how deep was her father's affection for her; she felt how foreign to his real nature had been his assumed severity in their intercourse of former days; and in the quick flow of new feelings and old recollections produced by the delighting surprise of the discovery, she found herself speechless. She could only listen eagerly, breathlessly, while he spoke. His words, faltering and confused though they were, were words of endearment which she had never heard from him before; they were words which no mother had ever pronounced beside her infant bed, and they sank divinely consoling over her heart, as messages of pardon from an angel's lips.

Gradually Numerian's voice grew calmer. He raised his daughter in his

arms, and bent wistfully on her face his attentive and pitying eyes. 'Returned, returned!' he murmured, while he gazed on her, 'never again to depart! Returned, beautiful and patient, kinder and more tender than ever! Love me and pardon me, Antonina. I sought for you in bitter loneliness and despair. Think not of me as what I was, but as what I am! There were days when you were an infant, when I had no thought but how to cherish and delight you, and now those days have come again. You shall read no gloomy task-books; you shall never be separated from me more; you shall play sweet music on the lute; you shall be all garlanded with flowers which I will provide for you! We will find friends and glad companions; we will bring happiness with us wherever we are seen. God's blessing goes forth from children like you--it has fallen upon me--it has raised me from the dead! My Antonina shall teach me to worship, as I once taught her. She shall pray for me in the morning, and pray for me at night; and when she thinks not of it, when she sleeps, I shall come softly to her bedside, and wait and watch over her, so that when she opens her eyes they shall open on me--they are the eyes of my child who has been restored to me--there is nothing on earth that can speak to me like them of happiness and peace!'

He paused for a moment, and looked rapturously on her face as it was turned towards him. His features partially saddened while he gazed, and taking her long hair, still wet and dishevelled from the rain, in his hands, he pressed it over his lips, over his face, over his neck. Then, when he saw that she was endeavouring to speak, when he beheld the tears that were now filling her eyes, he drew her closer to him, and hurriedly continued in lower tones--

'Hush! hush! No more grief, no more tears! Tell me not whither you have wandered--speak not of what you have suffered; for would not every word be a reproach to me? And you have come to pardon and not to reproach! Let not the recollection that it was I who cast you off be forced on me from your lips; let us remember only that we are restored to each other; let us think that God has accepted my penitence and forgiven me my sin, in suffering my child to return! Or, if we must speak of the days of separation that are past, speak to me of the days that found you tranquil and secure; rejoice me by telling me that it was not all danger and woe in the bitter destiny which my guilty anger prepared for my own child! Say to me that you met protectors as well as enemies in the hour of your flight--that all were not harsh to you as I was--that those of whom you asked shelter and safety looked on your face as on a petition for charity and kindness from friends whom they loved! Tell me only of your protectors, Antonina, for in that there will be consolation; and you have come to console!'

As he waited for her reply he felt her tremble on his bosom, he saw the shudder that ran over her frame. The despair in her voice, though she only pronounced in answer to him the simple words, 'There was one'--and then ceased, unable to proceed--penetrated coldly to his heart.

'Is he not at hand?' he hurriedly resumed. 'Why is he not here? Let us seek him without delay. I must humble myself before him in my gratitude. I must show him that I was worthy that my Antonina should be restored.'

'He is dead!' she gasped, sinking down in the arms that embraced her, as the recollections of the past night again crowded in all their horror on her memory. 'They murdered him by my side. O father! father! he loved me; he would have revered and protected you!'

'May the merciful God receive him among the blessed angels, and honour him among the holy martyrs!' cried the father, raising his tearful eyes in supplication. 'May his spirit, if it can still be observant of the things of earth, know that his name shall be written on my heart with the name of my child; that I will think on him as on a beloved companion, and mourn for him as a son that has been taken from me!'

He ceased, and looked down on Antonina, whose features were still hidden from him. Each felt that a new bond of mutual affection had been created between them by what each had spoken; but both now remained silent.

During this interval the thoughts of Numerian wandered from the reflections which had hitherto occupied him. The few mournful words which his daughter had spoken had been sufficient to banish its fulness of joy from his heart, and to turn him from the happy contemplation of the present to the dark recollections of the past. Vague doubts and fears now mingled with his gratitude and hope, and involuntarily his thoughts reverted to what he would fain have forgotten for ever--to the morning when he had driven Antonina from her home.

Baseless apprehensions of the return of the treacherous Pagan and his profligate employer, with the return of their victim--despairing convictions of his own helplessness and infirmity rose startingly in his mind. His eyes wandered vacantly round the room, his hands closed trembling over his daughter's form; then, suddenly releasing her, he arose as one panic-stricken, and exclaiming, 'The doors must be secured--Ulpus may be near--the senator may return!' endeavoured to cross the room. But his strength was unequal to the effort; he leaned back for support against the wall, and breathlessly repeating, 'Secure the doors--Ulpus, Ulpus!' he motioned to

Antonina to descend.

She trembled as she obeyed him. Remembering her passage through the breach in the wall, and her fearful journey through the streets of Rome, she more than shared her father's apprehensions as she descended the stairs.

The door remained half open, as she had left it when she entered the house. Ere she hurriedly closed and barred it, she cast a momentary glance on the street beyond. The gaunt figures of the slaves still moved wearily to and fro, amid the mockery of festal preparation in Vetrano's palace; and here and there a few ghastly figures lay on the ground contemplating them in languid amazement. Over all other parts of the street the deadly tranquillity of plague and famine still prevailed.

Hurriedly ascending the steps, Antonina hastened to assure her father that she had obeyed his commands, and that they were now secure from all intrusion from without. But, during her brief absence, a new and more ominous prospect of calamity had presented itself before the old man's mind.

As she entered the room, she saw that he had returned to his couch, and that he was holding before him the little wooden bowl which had contained his last supply of food, and which was now empty. He addressed not a word to her when he heard her enter; his features were rigid with horror and despair as he looked down on the empty bowl; he muttered vacantly, 'It was the last provision that remained, and it was I that exhausted it! The beasts of the forest carry food to their young, and I have taken the last morsel from my child!'

In an instant the utter desolateness of their situation--forgotten in the first joy of their meeting--forced itself with appalling vividness upon Antonina's mind. She endeavoured to speak of comfort and hope to her father; but the fearful realities of the famine in the city now rose palpably before her, and suspended the vain words of solace on her lips. In the midst of still populous Rome, within sight of those surrounding plains where the creative sun ripened hour by hour the vegetation of the teeming earth, where field and granary displayed profusely their abundant stores, the father and daughter now looked on each other, as helpless to replace their exhausted provision of food as if they had been abandoned on the raft of the shipwrecked in an unexplored sea, or banished to a lonely island whose inland products were withered by infected winds, and around whose arid shores ran such destroying waters as seethe over the 'Cities of the Plain'.

The silence which had long prevailed in the room, the bitter reflections which still held the despairing father and the patient daughter speechless alike, were at length interrupted by a hollow and melancholy voice from the street, pronouncing, in the form of a public notice, these words:--

'I, Publius Dalmatius, messenger of the Roman Senate, proclaim, that in order to clear the streets from the dead, three thousand sestertii will be given by the Prefect for every ten bodies that are cast over the walls. This is the true decree of the Senate.'

The voice ceased; but no sound of applause, no murmur of popular tumult was heard in answer. Then, after an interval, it was once more faintly audible as the messenger passed on and repeated the decree in another street; and then the silence again sank down over all things more awfully pervading than before.

Every word of the proclamation, when repeated in the distance as when spoken under his window, had clearly reached Numerian's ears. His mind, already sinking in despair, was riveted on what he had heard from the woe-boding voice of the herald, with a fascination as absorbing as that which rivets the eye of the traveller, already giddy on the summit of a precipice, upon the spectacle of the yawning gulfs beneath. When all sound of the proclamation had finally died away, the unhappy father dropped the empty bowl which he had hitherto mechanically continued to hold before him, and glancing affrightedly at his daughter, groaned to himself: 'The corpses are to be cast over the walls--the dead are to be flung forth to the winds of heaven--there is no help for us in the city. O God, God!--she may die!--her body may be cast away like the rest, and I may live to see it!'

He rose suddenly from the couch; his reason seemed for a moment to be shaken as he tottered to the window, crying, 'Food! food!--I will give my house and all it contains for a morsel of food. I have nothing to support my own child--she will starve before me by tomorrow if I have no food! I am a citizen of Rome--I demand help from the Senate! Food! food!'

In tones declining lower and lower he continued to cry thus from the window, but no voice answered him either in sympathy or derision. Of all the people--now increased in numbers--collected in the street before Vetrano's palace, no one turned even to look on him. For days and days past, such fruitless appeals as his had been heard, and heard unconcernedly, at every hour and in every street of Rome--now ringing through the heavy air in the shrieks of delirium; now faintly audible in the last faltering murmurs of exhaustion and despair.

Thus vainly entreating help and pity from a populace who had ceased to give the one or to feel the other, Numerian might long have remained; but now his daughter approached his side, and drawing him gently towards his couch, said in tender and solemn accents: 'Remember, father, that God sent the ravens to feed Elijah, and replenished the widow's cruse! He will not desert us, for He has restored us to each other, and has sent me hither not to perish in the famine, but to watch over you!'

'God has deserted the city and all that it contains!' he answered distractedly. 'The angel of destruction has gone forth into our streets, and death walks in his shadow! On this day, when hope and happiness seemed opening before us both; our little household has been doomed! The young and the old, the weary and the watchful, they strew the streets alike--the famine has mastered them all--the famine will master us--there is no help, no escape! I, who would have died patiently for my daughter's safety, must now die despairing, leaving her friendless in the wide, dreary, perilous world; in the dismal city of anguish, of horror, of death--where the enemy threatens without, and hunger and pestilence waste within! O Antonina! you have returned to me but for a little time; the day of our second separation draws near!'

For a few moments his head drooped, and his sobs choked his utterance; then he once more rose painfully to his feet. Heedless of Antonina's entreaties, he again endeavoured to cross the room, only again to find his feeble powers unequal to sustain him. As he fell back panting upon a seat, his eyes assumed a wild, unnatural expression--despair of mind and weakness of body had together partially unhinged his faculties. When his daughter affrightedly approached to soothe and succour him, he impatiently waved her back; and began to speak in a dull, hoarse, monotonous voice, pressing his hand firmly over his brow, and directing his eyes backwards and forwards incessantly, on object after object, in every part of the room.

'Listen, child, listen!' he hastily began. 'I tell you there is no food in the house, and no food in Rome!--we are besieged--they have taken from us our granaries in the suburbs, and our fields on the plains--there is a great famine in the city--those who still eat, eat strange food which men sicken at when it is named. I would seek even this, but I have no strength to go forth into the byways and force it from others at the point of the sword! I am old and feeble, and heart-broken--I shall die first, and leave fatherless my good, kind daughter, whom I sought for so long, and whom I loved as my only child!'

He paused for an instant, not to listen to the words of encouragement and hope which Antonina mechanically addressed to him while he spoke, but to collect his wandering thoughts, to rally his failing strength. His voice acquired a quicker tone, and his features presented a sudden energy and earnestness of expression, as if some new project had flashed across his mind, when, after an interval, he continued thus:--

'But though my child shall be bereaved of me, though I shall die in the hour when I most longed to live for her, I must not leave her helpless; I will send her among my congregation who have deserted me, but who will repent when they hear that I am dead, and will receive Antonina among them for my sake! Listen to this--listen, listen! You must tell them to remember all that I once revealed to them of my brother, from whom I parted in my boyhood--my brother, whom I have never seen since. He may yet be alive, he may be found--they must search for him; for to you he would be father to the fatherless, and guardian to the unguarded--he may now be in Rome, he may be rich and powerful--he may have food to spare, and shelter that is good against all enemies and strangers! Attend, child, to my words: in these latter days I have thought of him much; I have seen him in dreams as I saw him for the last time in my father's house; he was happier and more beloved than I was, and in envy and hatred I quitted my parents and parted from him. You have heard nothing of this; but you must hear it now, that when I am dead you may know you have a protector to seek! So I received in anger my brother's farewell, and fled from my home--(those days were well remembered by me once, but all things grow dull on my memory now). Long years of turmoil and change passed on, and I never met him; and men of many nations were my companions, but he was not among them; then much affliction fell upon me, and I repented and learnt the fear of God, and went back to my father's house. Since that, years have passed--I know not how many. I could have told them when I spoke of my former life to him--to my friend, when we stood near St. Peter's, ere the city was besieged, looking on the sunset, and speaking of the early days of our companionship; but now my very remembrance fails me; the famine that threatens us with separation and death casts darkness over my thoughts; yet hear me, hear me patiently--for your sake I must continue!'

'Not now, father--not now! At another time, on a happier day!' murmured Antonina, in tremulous, entreating tones.

'My home, when I arrived to look on it, was gone,' pursued the old man sadly, neither heeding nor hearing her. 'Other houses were built where my father's house had stood; no man could tell me of my parents and my brother; then I returned, and my former companions grew hateful in my

eyes; I left them, and they followed me with persecution and scorn.--Listen, listen!--I set forth secretly in the night, with you, to escape them, and to make perfect my reformation where they should not be near to hinder it; and we travelled onward many days until we came to Rome, and I made my abode there. But I feared that my companions whom I abhorred might discover and persecute me again, and in the new city of my dwelling I called myself by another name than the name that I bore; thus I knew that all trace of me would be lost, and that I should be kept secure from men whom I thought on only as enemies now. Go, child! go quickly!--bring your tablets and write down the names that I shall tell you; for so you will discover your protector when I am gone! Say not to him that you are the child of Numerian--he knows not the name; say that you are the daughter of Cleander, his brother, who died longing to be restored to him. Write--write carefully, Cleander!--that was the name my father gave to me; that was the name I bore until I fled from my evil companions and changed it, dreading their pursuit! Cleander! write and remember, Cleander! I have seen in visions that my brother shall be discovered: he will not be discovered to me, but he will be discovered to you! Your tablets--your tablets!--write his name with mine--it is--'

He stopped abruptly. His mental powers, fluctuating between torpor and animation--shaken, but not overpowered by the trials which had assailed them--suddenly rallied, and resuming somewhat of their accustomed balance, became awakened to a sense of their own aberration. His vague revelations of his past life (which the reader will recognise as resembling his communications on the same subject to the fugitive land-owner, previously related) now appeared before him in all their incongruity and uselessness. His countenance fell--he sighed bitterly to himself: 'My reason begins to desert me!--my judgment, which should guide my child--my resolution, which should uphold her, both fail me! How should my brother, since childhood lost to me, be found by her? Against the famine that threatens us I offer but vain words! Already her strength declines; her face, that I loved to look on grows wan before my eyes! God have mercy upon us!--God have mercy upon us!'

He returned feebly to his couch; his head declined on his bosom; sometimes a low groan burst from his lips, but he spoke no more.

Deep as was the prostration under which he had now fallen, it was yet less painful to Antonina to behold it than to listen to the incoherent revelations which had fallen from his lips but the moment before, and which, in her astonishment and affright, she had dreaded might be the awful indications of the overthrow of her father's reason. As she again placed herself by his

side, she trembled to feel that her own weariness was fast overpowering her; but she still struggled with her rising despair--still strove to think only of capacity for endurance and chances of relief.

The silence in the room was deep and dismal while they now sat together. The faint breezes, at long intervals, drowsily rose and fell as they floated through the open window; the fitful sunbeams alternately appeared and vanished as the clouds rolled upward in airy succession over the face of heaven. Time moved sternly in its destined progress, and Nature varied tranquilly through its appointed limits of change, and still no hopes, no saving projects, nothing but dark recollections and woeful anticipations occupied Antonina's mind; when, just as her weary head was drooping towards the ground, just as sensation and fortitude and grief itself seemed declining into a dreamless and deadly sleep, a last thought, void of discernible connection or cause, rose suddenly within her--animating, awakening, inspiring. She started up. 'The garden, father--the garden!' she cried breathlessly. 'Remember the food that grows in our garden below! Be comforted, we have provision left yet--God has not deserted us!'

He raised his face while she spoke; his features assumed a deeper mournfulness and hopelessness of expression; he looked upon her in ominous silence, and laid his trembling fingers on her arm to detain her, when she hurriedly attempted to quit the room.

'Do not forbid me to depart,' she anxiously pleaded. 'To me every corner in the garden is known; for it was my possession in our happier days--our last hopes rest in the garden, and I must search through it without delay! Bear with me,' she added, in low and melancholy tones--'bear with me, dear father, in all that I would now do! I have suffered, since we parted, a bitter affliction, which clings dark and heavy to all my thoughts--there is no consolation for me but the privilege of caring for your welfare--my only hope of comfort is in the employment of aiding you!'

The old man's hand had pressed heavier on her arm while she addressed him; but when she ceased it dropped from her, and he bent his head in speechless submission to her entreaty.

For one moment she lingered, looking on him silent as himself; the next, she left the apartment with hasty and uncertain steps.

On reaching the garden, she unconsciously took the path leading to the bank where she had once loved to play secretly upon her lute and to look on the distant mountains reposing in the warm atmosphere which summer

evenings shed over their blue expanse. How eloquent was this little plot of ground of the quiet events now for ever gone by!--of the joys, the hopes, the happy occupations, which rise with the day that chronicles them, and pass like that day, never to return the same!--which the memory alone can preserve as they were, and the heart can never resume but in a changed form, divested of the presence of the companion of the incident of the departed moment, which formed the charm of the past and makes the imperfection of the present.

Tender and thronging were the remembrances which the surrounding prospect called up, as the sad mistress of the garden looked again on her little domain! She saw the bank where she could never more sit to sing with a renewal of the same feelings which had once inspired her music; she saw the drooping flowers that she could never restore with the same childlike enjoyment of the task which had animated her in former hours! Young though she still was, the emotions of the youthful days that were gone could never be revived as they had once existed! As waters they had welled up, and as waters they had flowed forth, never to return to their source! Thoughts of these former years--of the young warrior who lay cold beneath the heavy earth--of the desponding father who mourned hopeless in the room above--gathered thick at her heart as she turned from her flower-beds--not, as in other days, to pour forth her happiness to the music of her lute, but to search laboriously for the sustenance of life.

At first, as she stooped over those places in the garden where she knew that fruits and vegetables had been planted by her own hand, her tears blinded her. She hastily dashed them away, and looked eagerly around.

Alas! others had reaped the field from which she had hoped abundance! In the early days of the famine Numerian's congregation had entered the garden, and gathered for him whatever it contained; its choicest and its homeliest products were alike exhausted; withered leaves lay on the barren earth, and naked branches waved over them in the air. She wandered from path to path, searching amid the briars and thistles, which already cast an aspect of ruin over the deserted place; she explored its most hidden corners with the painful perseverance of despair; but the same barrenness spread around her wherever she turned. On this once fertile spot, which she had entered with such joyful faith in its resources, there remained but a few poor decayed roots, dropped and forgotten amid tangled weeds and faded flowers.

She saw that they were barely sufficient for one scanty meal as she collected them and returned slowly to the house. No words escaped her, no tears

flowed over her cheeks when she reascended the steps--hope, fear, thought, sensation itself had been stunned within her from the first moment when she had discovered that, in the garden as in the house, the inexorable famine had anticipated the last chances of relief.

She entered the room, and, still holding the withered roots, advanced mechanically to her father's side. During her absence his mental and bodily faculties had both yielded to wearied nature--he lay in a deep, heavy sleep.

Her mind experienced a faint relief when she saw that the fatal necessity of confessing the futility of the hopes she had herself awakened was spared her for a while. She knelt down by Numerian, and gently smoothed the hair over his brow; then she drew the curtain across the window, for she feared even that the breeze blowing through it might arouse him.

A strange, secret satisfaction at the idea of devoting to her father every moment of the time and every particle of the strength that might yet be reserved for her; a ready resignation to death in dying for him--overspread her heart, and took the place of all other aspirations and all other thoughts.

She now moved to and fro through the room with a cautious tranquillity which nothing could startle; she prepared her decayed roots for food with a patient attention which nothing could divert. Lost, through the aggravated miseries of her position, to recent grief and present apprehension, she could still instinctively perform the simple offices of the woman and the daughter, as she might have performed them amid a peaceful nation and a prosperous home. Thus do the first-born affections outlast the exhaustion of all the stormy emotions, all the aspiring thoughts of after years, which may occupy, but which cannot absorb, the spirit within us; thus does their friendly and familiar voice, when the clamour of contending passions has died away in its own fury, speak again, serene and sustaining as in the early time, when the mind moved secure within the limits of its native simplicity, and the heart yet lay happy in the pure tranquillity of its first repose!

The last scanty measure of food was soon prepared; it was bitter and unpalatable when she tasted it--life could barely be preserved, even in the most vigorous, by provision so wretched; but she set it aside as carefully as if it had been the most precious luxury of the most abundant feast.

Nothing had changed during the interval of her solitary employment--her father yet slept; the gloomy silence yet prevailed in the street. She placed herself at the window, and partially drew aside the curtain to let the warm breezes from without blow over her cold brow. The same ineffable

resignation, the same unnatural quietude, which had sunk down over her faculties since she had entered the room, overspread them still. Surrounding objects failed to impress her attention; recollections and forebodings stagnated in her mind. A marble composure prevailed over her features. Sometimes her eyes wandered mechanically from the morsels of food by her side to her sleeping father, as her one vacant idea of watching for his service, till the feeble pulses of life had throbbled their last, alternately revived and declined; but no other evidences of bodily existence or mental activity appeared in her. As she now sat in the half-darkened room, by the couch on which her father reposed--her features pale, calm, and rigid, her form enveloped in cold white drapery--there were moments when she looked like one of the penitential devotees of the primitive Church, appointed to watch in the house of mourning, and surprised in her saintly vigil by the advent of Death.

Time flowed on--the monotonous hours of the day waned again towards night; and plague and famine told their lapse in the fated highways of Rome. For father and child the sand in the glass was fast running out, and neither marked it as it diminished. The sleeper still reposed, and the guardian by his side still watched; but now her weary gaze was directed on the street, unconsciously attracted by the sound of voices which at length rose from it at intervals, and by the light of the torches and lamps which appeared in the great palace of the senator Vetrano, as the sun gradually declined in the horizon, and the fiery clouds around were quenched in the vapours of the advancing night. Steadily she looked upon the sight beneath and before her; but even yet her limbs never moved; no expression relieved the blank, solemn peacefulness of her features.

Meanwhile, the soft, brief twilight glimmered over the earth, and showed the cold moon, poised solitary in the starless heaven; then, the stealthy darkness arose at her pale signal, and closed slowly round the City of Death!