

## **CHAPTER 24 - THE GRAVE AND THE CAMP**

While the second and last embassy from the Senate proceeds towards the tent of the Gothic king, while the streets of Rome are deserted by all but the dead, and the living populace crowd together in speechless expectation behind the barrier of the Pincian Gate, an opportunity is at length afforded of turning our attention towards a scene from which it has been long removed. Let us now revisit the farm-house in the suburbs, and look once more on the quiet garden and on Hermanric's grave.

The tranquility of the bright warm day is purest around the retired path leading to the little dwelling. Here the fragrance of wild flowers rises pleasantly from the waving grass; the lulling, monotonous hum of insect life pervades the light, steady air; the sunbeams, intercepted here and there by the clustering trees, fall in irregular patches of brightness on the shady ground; and, saving the birds which occasionally pass overhead, singing in their flight, no living creature appears on the quiet scene, until, gaining the wicket-gate which leads into the farm-house garden, we look forth upon the prospect within.

There, following the small circular footpath which her own persevering steps have day by day already traced, appears the form of a solitary woman, pacing slowly about the mound of grassy earth which marks the grave of the young Goth.

For some time she proceeds on her circumscribed round with as much undeviating, mechanical regularity, as if beyond that narrow space rose a barrier which caged her from ever setting foot on the earth beyond. At length she pauses in her course when it brings her nearest to the wicket, advances a few steps towards it, then recedes, and recommences her monotonous progress, and then again breaking off on her round, finally succeeds in withdrawing herself from the confines of the grave, passes through the gate, and following the path to the high-road, slowly proceeds towards the eastern limits of the Gothic camp. The fixed, ghastly, unfeminine expression on her features marks her as the same woman whom we last beheld as the assassin at the farm-house, but beyond this she is hardly recognisable again. Her formerly powerful and upright frame is bent and lean; her hair waves in wild, white locks about her shrivelled face; all the rude majesty of her form has departed; there is nothing to show that it is still Goisvintha haunting the scene of her crime but the savage expression debasing her countenance and betraying the evil heart within, unsubdued as ever in its yearning for destruction and revenge.

Since the period when we last beheld her, removed in the custody of the Huns from the dead body of her kinsman, the farm-house had been the constant scene of her pilgrimage from the camp, the chosen refuge where she brooded in solitude over her fierce desires. Scorning to punish a woman whom he regarded as insane for an absence from the tents of the Goths which was of no moment wither to the army or to himself, Alaric had impatiently dismissed her from his presence when she was brought before him. The soldiers who had returned to bury the body of their chieftain in the garden of the farm-house, found means to inform her secretly of the charitable act which they had performed at their own peril, but beyond this no further intercourse was held with her by any of her former associates.

All her actions favoured their hasty belief that her faculties were disordered, and others shunned her as she shunned them. Her daily allowance of food was left for her to seek at a certain place in the camp, as it might have been left for an animal too savage to be cherished by the hand of man. At certain periods she returned secretly from her wanderings to take it. Her shelter for the night was not the shelter of her people before the walls of Rome; her thoughts were not their thoughts. Widowed, childless, friendless, the assassin of her last kinsman, she moved apart in her own secret world of bereavement, desolation, and crime.

Yet there was no madness, no remorse for her share in accomplishing the fate of Hermanric, in the dark and solitary existence which she now led. From the moment when the young warrior had expiated with his death his disregard of the enmities of his nation and the wrongs of his kindred, she thought of him only as of one more victim whose dishonour and ruin she must live to requite on the Romans with Roman blood, and matured her schemes of revenge with a stern resolution which time, and solitude, and bodily infirmity were all powerless to disturb.

She would pace for hours and hours together, in the still night and in the broad noonday, round and round the warrior's grave, nursing her vengeful thoughts within her, until a ferocious anticipation of triumph quickened her steps and brightened her watchful eyes. Then she would enter the farm-house, and, drawing the knife from its place of concealment in her garments, would pass its point slowly backwards and forwards over the hearth on which she had mutilated Hermanric with her own hand, and from which he had advanced, without a tremor, to meet the sword-points of the Huns. Sometimes, when darkness had gathered over the earth, she would stand--a boding and menacing apparition--upon the grave itself, and chaunt, moaning to the moaning wind, fragments of obscure Northern legends, whose hideous burden was ever of anguish and crime, of torture in

prison vaults, and death by the annihilating sword--mingling with them the gloomy story of the massacre at Aquileia, and her fierce vows of vengeance against the households of Rome. The forager, on his late return past the farm-house to the camp, heard the harsh, droning accents of her voice, and quickened his onward step. The venturesome peasant from the country beyond, approaching under cover of the night to look from afar on the Gothic camp, beheld her form, shadowy and threatening, as he neared the garden, and fled affrighted from the place. Neither stranger nor friend intruded on her dread solitude. The foul presence of cruelty and crime violated undisturbed the scenes once sacred to the interests of tenderness and love, once hallowed by the sojourn of youth and beauty!

But now the farm-house garden is left solitary, the haunting spirit of evil has departed from the grave, the footsteps of Goisvintha have traced to their close the same paths from the suburbs over which the young Goth once eagerly hastened on his night journey of love; and already the walls of Rome rise--dark, near, and hateful--before her eyes. Along these now useless bulwarks of the fallen city she wanders, as she has often wandered before, watching anxiously for the first opening of the long-closed gates. Let us follow her on her way.

Her attention was now fixed only on the broad ramparts, while she passed slowly along the Gothic tents towards the encampment at the Pincian Gate. Arrived there, she was aroused for the first time from her apathy by an unwonted stir and confusion prevailing around her. She looked towards the tent of Alaric, and beheld before it the wasted and crouching forms of the followers of the embassy awaiting their sentence from the captain of the Northern hosts. In a few moments she gathered enough from the words of the Goths congregated about this part of the camp to assure her that it was the Pincian Gate which had given egress to the Roman suppliants, and which would therefore, in all probability, be the entrance again thrown open to admit their return to the city. Remembering this, she began to calculate the numbers of the conquered enemy grouped together before the king's tent, and then mentally added to them those who might be present at the interview proceeding within--mechanically withdrawing herself, while thus occupied, nearer and nearer to the waste ground before the city walls.

Gradually she turned her face towards Rome: she was realising a daring purpose, a fatal resolution, long cherished during the days and nights of her solitary wanderings. 'The ranks of the embassy,' she muttered, in a deep, thoughtful tone, 'are thickly filled. Where there are many there must be confusion and haste; they march together, and know not their own numbers; they mark not one more or one less among them.'

She stopped. Strange and dark changes of colour and expression passed over her ghastly features. She drew from her bosom the bloody helmet-crest of her husband, which had never quitted her since the day of his death; her face grew livid under an awful expression of rage, ferocity, and despair, as she gazed on it. Suddenly she looked up at the city--fierce and defiant, as if the great walls before her were mortal enemies against whom she stood at bay in the death-struggle.

'The widowed and the childless shall drink of thy blood!' she cried, stretching out her skinny hand towards Rome, 'though the armies of her nation barter their wrongs with thy people for bags of silver and gold! I have pondered on it in my solitude, and dreamed of it in my dreams! I have sworn that I would enter Rome, and avenge my slaughtered kindred, alone among thousands! Now, now, I will hold to my oath! Thou blood-stained city of the coward and the traitor, the enemy of the defenceless, and the murderer of the weak! thou who didst send forth to Aquileia the slayers of my husband and the assassins of my children, I wait no longer before thy walls! This day will I mingle, daring all things, with thy returning citizens and penetrate, amid Romans, the gates of Rome! Through the day will I lurk, cunning and watchful, in thy solitary haunts, to steal forth on thee at nights, a secret minister of death! I will watch for thy young and thy weak once in unguarded places; I will prey, alone in the thick darkness, upon thy unprotected lives; I will destroy thy children, as their fathers destroyed at Aquileia the children of the Goths! Thy rabble will discover me and arise against me; they will tear me in pieces and trample my mangled body on the pavement of the streets; but it will be after I have seen the blood that I have sworn to shed flowing under my knife! My vengeance will be complete, and torments and death will be to me as guests that I welcome, and as deliverers whom I await!'

Again she paused--the wild triumph of the fanatic on the burning pile was flashing in her face--suddenly her eyes fell once more upon the stained helmet-crest; then her expression changed again to despair, and her voice grew low and moaning, when she thus resumed:--

'I am weary of my life; when the vengeance is done I shall be delivered from this prison of the earth--in the world of shadows I shall see my husband, and my little ones will gather round my knees again. The living have no part in me; I yearn towards the spirits who wander in the halls of the dead.'

For a few minutes more she continued to fix her tearless eyes on the helmet-crest. But soon the influence of the evil spirit revived in all its strength; she

raised her head suddenly, remained for an instant absorbed in deep thought, then began to retrace her steps rapidly in the direction by which she had come.

Sometimes she whispered softly, 'I must be doing ere the time fail me: my face must be hidden and my garments changed. Yonder, among the houses, I must search, and search quickly!' Sometimes she reiterated her denunciations of vengeance, her ejaculations of triumph in her frantic project. At the recapitulation of these the remembrance of Antonina was aroused; and then a bloodthirsty superstition darkened her thoughts, and threw a vague and dreamy character over her speech.

When she spoke now, it was to murmur to herself that the victim who had twice escaped her might yet be alive; that the supernatural influences which had often guided the old Goths, on the day of retribution, might still guide her; might still direct the stroke of her destroying weapon--the last stroke ere she was discovered and slain--straight to the girl's heart.

Thoughts such as these--wandering and obscure--arose in close, quick succession within her; but whether she gave them expression in word and action, or whether she suppressed them in silence, she never wavered or halted in her rapid progress. Her energies were braced to all emergencies, and her strong will suffered them not for an instant to relax.

She gained a retired street in the deserted suburbs, and looking round to see that she was unobserved, entered one of the houses abandoned by its inhabitants on the approach of the besiegers. Passing quickly through the outer halls, she stopped at length in one of the sleeping apartments; and here she found, among other possessions left behind in the flight, the store of wearing apparel belonging to the owner of the room.

From this she selected a Roman robe, upper mantle, and sandals--the most common in colour and texture that she could find--and folding them up into the smallest compass, hid them under her own garments. Then, avoiding all those whom she met on her way, she returned in the direction of the king's tent; but when she approached it, branched off stealthily towards Rome, until she reached a ruined building half-way between the city and the camp. In this concealment she clothed herself in her disguise, drawing the mantle closely round her head and face; and from this point--calm, vigilant, determined, her hand on the knife beneath her robe, her lips muttering the names of her murdered husband and children--she watched the high-road to the Pincian Gate.

There for a short time let us leave her, and enter the tent of Alaric, while the Senate yet plead before the Arbiter of the Empire for mercy and peace.

At the moment of which we write, the embassy had already exhausted its powers of intercession, apparently without moving the leader of the Goths from his first pitiless resolution of fixing the ransom of Rome at the price of every possession of value which the city contained. There was a momentary silence now in the great tent. At one extremity of it, congregated in a close and irregular group, stood the wearied and broken-spirited members of the Senate, supported by such of their attendants as had been permitted to follow them; at the other appeared the stately forms of Alaric and the warriors who surrounded him as his council of war. The vacant space in the middle of the tent was strewn with martial weapons, separating the representatives of the two nations one from the other; and thus accidentally, yet palpably, typifying the fierce hostility which had sundered in years past, and was still to sunder for years to come, the people of the North and the people of the South.

The Gothic king stood a little in advance of his warriors, leaning on his huge, heavy sword. His steady eye wandered from man to man among the broken-spirited senators, contemplating, with cold and cruel penetration, all that suffering and despair had altered for the worse in their outward appearance. Their soiled robes, their wan cheeks, their trembling limbs were each marked in turn by the cool, sarcastic examination of the conqueror's gaze. Debased and humiliated as they were, there were some among the ambassadors who felt the insult thus silently and deliberately inflicted on them the more keenly for their very helplessness. They moved uneasily in their places, and whispered among each other in low and bitter accents.

At length one of their number raised his downcast eyes and broke the silence. The old Roman spirit, which long years of voluntary frivolity and degradation had not yet entirely depraved, flushed his pale, wasted face as he spoke thus:--

'We have entreated, we have offered, we have promised--men can do no more! Deserted by our Emperor and crushed by pestilence and famine, nothing is now left to us but to perish in unavailing resistance beneath the walls of Rome! It was in the power of Alaric to win everlasting renown by moderation to the unfortunate of an illustrious nation; but he has preferred to attempt the spoiling of a glorious city and the subjugation of a suffering people! Yet let him remember, though destruction may sate his vengeance, and pillage enrich his hoards, the day of retribution will yet come. There are

still soldiers in the empire, and heroes who will lead them confidently to battle, though the bodies of their countrymen lie slaughtered around them in the streets of pillaged Rome!

A momentary expression of wrath and indignation appeared on Alaric's features as he listened to this bold speech; but it was almost immediately replaced by a scornful smile of derision.

'What! ye have still soldiers before whom the barbarian must tremble for his conquests!' he cried. 'Where are they? Are they on their march, or in ambush, or hiding behind strong walls, or have they lost their way on the road to the Gothic camp? Ha! here is one of them!' he exclaimed, advancing towards an enfeebled and disarmed guard of the Senate, who quailed beneath his fierce glance. 'Fight, man!' he loudly continued; 'fight while there is yet time, for imperial Rome! Thy sword is gone--take mine, and be a hero again!'

With a rough laugh, echoed by the warriors behind him, he flung his ponderous weapon as he spoke towards the wretched object of his sarcasm. The hilt struck heavily against the man's breast; he staggered and fell helpless to the ground. The laugh was redoubled among the Goths; but now their leader did not join in it. His eye glowed in triumphant scorn as he pointed to the prostrate Roman, exclaiming--

'So does the South fall beneath the sword of the North! So shall the empire bow before the rule of the Goth! Say, as ye look on these Romans before us, are we not avenged of our wrongs? They die not fighting on our swords; they live to entreat our pity, as children that are in terror of the whip!'

He paused. His massive and noble countenance gradually assumed a thoughtful expression. The ambassadors moved forward a few steps--perhaps to make a final entreaty, perhaps to depart in despair; but he signed with his hand in command to them to be silent and remain where they stood. The marauder's thirst for present plunder, and the conqueror's lofty ambition of future glory, now stirred in strong conflict within him. He walked to the opening of the tent, and thrusting aside its curtain of skins, looked out upon Rome in silence. The dazzling majesty of the temples and palaces of the mighty city, as they towered before him, gleaming in the rays of the unclouded sunlight, fixed him long in contemplation. Gradually, dreams of a future dominion amid those unrivalled structures, which now waited but his word to be pillaged and destroyed, filled his aspiring soul, and saved the city from his wrath. He turned again toward the shrinking ambassadors--in a voice and look superior to them as a being of a higher

sphere--and spoke thus:--

'When the Gothic conqueror reigns in Italy, the palaces of her rulers shall be found standing for the places of his sojourn. I will ordain a lower ransom; I will spare Rome.'

A murmur arose among the warriors behind him. The rapine and destruction which they had eagerly anticipated was denied them for the first time by their chief. As their muttered remonstrances caught his ear, Alaric instantly and sternly fixed his eyes upon them; and, repeating in accents of deliberate command, 'I will ordain a lower ransom; I will spare Rome,' steadily scanned the countenances of his ferocious followers.

Not a word of dissent fell from their lips; not a gesture of impatience appeared in their ranks; they preserved perfect silence as the king again advanced towards the ambassadors and continued--

'I fix the ransom of the city at five thousand pounds of gold; at thirty thousand pounds of silver.'

Here he suddenly ceased, as if pondering further on the terms he should exact. The hearts of the Senate, lightened for a moment by Alaric's unexpected announcement that he would moderate his demands, sank within them again as they thought on the tribute required of them, and remembered their exhausted treasury. But it was no time now to remonstrate or to delay; and they answered with one accord, ignorant though they were of the means of performing their promise, 'The ransom shall be paid.'

The king looked at them when they spoke, as if in astonishment that men whom he had deprived of all freedom of choice ventured still to assert it by intimating their acceptance of terms which they dared not decline. The mocking spirit revived within him while he thus gazed on the helpless and humiliated embassy; and he laughed once more as he resumed, partly addressing himself to the silent array of the warriors behind him--

'The gold and silver are but the first dues of the tribute; my army shall be rewarded with more than the wealth of the enemy. You men of Rome have laughed at our rough bearskins and our heavy armour, you shall clothe us with your robes of festivity! I will add to the gold and silver of your ransom, four thousand garments of silk, and three thousand pieces of scarlet cloth. My barbarians shall be barbarians no longer! I will make patricians, epicures, Romans of them!'



The members of the ill-fated embassy looked up as he paused, in mute appeal to the mercy of the triumphant conqueror; but they were not yet to be released from the crushing infliction of his rapacity and scorn.

'Hold!' he cried, 'I will have more--more still! You are a nation of feasters;--we will rival you in your banquets when we have stripped you of your banqueting robes! To the gold, the silver, the silk, and the cloth, I will add yet more--three thousand pounds weight of pepper, your precious merchandise, bought from far countries with your lavish wealth!--see that you bring it hither, with the rest of the ransom, to the last grain! The flesh of our beasts shall be seasoned for us like the flesh of yours!'

He turned abruptly from the senators as he pronounced the last words, and began to speak in jesting tones and in the Gothic language to the council of warriors around him. Some of the ambassadors bowed their heads in silent resignation; others, with the utter thoughtlessness of men bewildered by all that they had seen and heard during the interview that was now close, unhappily revived the recollection of the broken treaties of former days, by mechanically inquiring, in the terms of past formularies, what security the besiegers would require for the payment of their demands.

'Security!' cried Alaric fiercely, instantly relapsing as they spoke into his sterner mood. 'Behold yonder the future security of the Goths for the faith of Rome!' and flinging aside the curtain of the tent, he pointed proudly to the long lines of his camp, stretching round all that was visible of the walls of the fallen city.

The ambassadors remembered the massacre of the hostages of Aquileia, and the evasion of the payment of tribute-money promised in former days, and were silent as they looked through the opening of the tent.

'Remember the conditions of the ransom,' pursued Alaric in warning tones, 'remember my security that the ransom shall be quickly paid! So shall you live for a brief space in security, and feast and be merry again while your territories yet remain to you. Go! I have spoken--it is enough!'

He withdrew abruptly from the senators, and the curtain of the tent fell behind them as they passed out. The ordeal of the judgment was over; the final sentence had been pronounced; the time had already arrived to go forth and obey it.

The news that terms of peace had been at last settled filled the Romans who

were waiting before the tent with emotions of delight, equally unalloyed by reflections on the past or forebodings for the future. Barred from their reckless project of flying to the open country by the Goths surrounding them in the camp, shut out from retreating to Rome by the gates through which they had rashly forced their way, exposed in their helplessness to the brutal jeers of the enemy while they waited in a long agony of suspense for the close of the perilous interview between Alaric and the Senate, they had undergone every extremity of suffering, and had yielded unanimously to despair when the intelligence of the concluded treaty sounded like a promise of salvation in their ears.

None of the apprehensions aroused in the minds of their superiors by the vastness of the exacted tribute now mingled with the unreflecting ecstasy of their joy at the prospect of the removal of the blockade. They arose to return to the city from which they had fled in dismay, with cries of impatience and delight. They fawned like dogs upon the ambassadors, and even upon the ferocious Goths. On their departure from Rome they had mechanically preserved some regularity in their progress, but now they hurried onward without distinction of place or discipline of march--senators, guards, plebeians, all were huddled together in the disorderly equality of a mob.

Not one of them, in their new-born security, marked the ruined building on the high-road; not one of them observed the closely-robed figure that stole out from it to join them in their rear; and then, with stealthy footstep and shrouded face, soon mingled in the thickest of their ranks. The attention of the ambassadors was still engrossed by their forebodings of failure in collecting the ransom; the eyes of the people were fixed only on the Pincian Gate; their ears were open to no sounds but their own ejaculations of delight. Not one disguised stranger only, but many, might now have joined them in their tumultuous progress, alike unquestioned and unobserved.

So they hastily re-entered the city, where thousands of heavy eyes were strained to look on them, and thousands of attentive ears drank in their joyful news from the Gothic camp. Then were heard in all directions the sounds of hysterical weeping and idiotic laughter, the low groans of the weak who died victims of their sudden transport, and the confused outbursts of the strong who had survived all extremities, and at last beheld their deliverance in view.

Still silent and serious, the ambassadors now slowly penetrated the throng on their way back to the Forum; and as they proceeded the crowd gradually dispersed on either side of them. Enemies, friends, and strangers, all whom the ruthless famine had hitherto separated in interests and sympathies,

were now united together as one family, by the expectation of speedy relief.

But there was one among the assembly that was now separating who stood alone in her unrevealed emotions, amid the rejoicing thousands around her. The women and children in the throng, as, preoccupied by their own feeling, they unheedfully passed her by, saw not the eager, ferocious attention in her eyes, as she watched them steadily till they were out of sight. Within their gates the stranger and the enemy waited for the treacherous darkness of night, and waited unobserved. Where she had first stood when the thick crowd hemmed her in, there she still continued to stand after they slowly moved past her and space grew free.

Yet beneath this outward calm and silence lurked the wildest passions that ever raged against the weak restraint of human will; even the firm self-possession of Goisvintha was shaken when she found herself within the walls of Rome.

No glance of suspicion had been cast upon her; not one of the crowd had approached to thrust her back when she passed through the gates with the heedless citizens around her. Shielded from detection, as much by the careless security of her enemies as by the stratagem of her disguise, she stood on the pavement of Rome, as she had vowed to stand, afar from the armies of her people--alone as an avenger of blood!

It was no dream; no fleeting, deceitful vision. The knife was under her hand; the streets stretched before her; the living beings who thronged them were Romans; the hours of the day were already on the wane; the approach of her vengeance was as sure as the approach of darkness that was to let it loose. A wild exultation quickened in her the pulses of life, while she thought on the dread projects of secret assassination and revenge which now opposed her, a solitary woman, in deadly enmity against the defenceless population of a whole city.

As her eyes travelled slowly from side to side over the moving throng; as she thought on the time that might still elapse ere the discovery and death--the martyrdom in the cause of blood--which she expected and defied, would overtake her, her hands trembled beneath her robe, and she reiterated in whispers to herself: 'Husband, children, brother--there are five deaths to avenge! Remember Aquileia! Remember Aquileia!'

Suddenly, as she looked from group to group among the departing people, her eyes became arrested by one object; she instantly stepped forwards, then abruptly restrained herself and moved back where the crowd was still

thick, gazing fixedly ever in the same direction. She saw the victim twice snatched from her hands--at the camp and in the farm-house--a third time offered to her grasp in the streets of Rome.

The chance of vengeance last expected was the chance that had first arrived. A vague, oppressing sensation of awe mingled with the triumph at her heart--a supernatural guidance seemed to be directing her with fell rapidity, through every mortal obstacle, to the climax of her revenge!

She screened herself behind the people; she watched the girl from the most distant point; but concealment was now vain--their eyes had met. The robe had slipped aside when she suddenly stepped forward, and in that moment Antonina had seen her.

Numerian, moving slowly with his daughter through the crowd, felt her hand tighten round his, and saw her features stiffen into sudden rigidity; but the change was only for an instant. Ere he could speak, she caught him by the arm, and drew him forward with convulsive energy. Then, in accents hardly articulate, low, breathless, unlike her wonted voice, he heard her exclaim, as she struggled on with him, 'She is there--there behind us! to kill me, as she killed him! Home! home!'

Exhausted already, through long weakness and natural infirmity, by the rough contact of the crowd, bewildered by Antonina's looks and actions, and by the startling intimation of unknown peril, conveyed to him in her broken exclamations of affright, Numerian's first impulse, as he hurried onward by her side, led him to entreat protection and help from the surrounding populace. But even could he have pointed out to them the object of his dread amid that motley throng of all nations, the appeal he now made would have remained unanswered.

Of all the results of the frightful severity of privation suffered by the besieged, none were more common than those mental aberrations which produced visions of danger, enemies, and death, so palpable as to make the persons beholding them implore assistance against the hideous creation of their own delirium. Accordingly, most of those to whom the entreaties of Numerian were addressed passed without noticing them. Some few carelessly bid him remember that there were no enemies now; that the days of peace were approaching; and that a meal of good food, which he might soon expect to enjoy, was the only help for a famished man. No one, in that period of horror and suffering, which was now drawing to a close, saw anything extraordinary in the confusion of the father and the terror of the child. So they pursued their feeble flight unprotected, and the footsteps of

Goisvintha followed them as they went.

They had already commenced the ascent of the Pincian Hill, when Antonina stopped abruptly, and turned to look behind her. Many people yet thronged the street below; but her eyes penetrated among them, sharpened by peril, and instantly discerned the ample robe and the tall form, still at the same distance from them, and pausing as they had paused. For one moment, the girl's eyes fixed in the wild, helpless stare of terror on her father's face; but the next, that mysterious instinct of preservation, which is co-existent with the instinct of fear--which gifts the weakest animal with cunning to improve its flight, and takes the place of reason, reflection, and resolve, when all are banished from the mind--warned her against the fatal error of permitting the pursuer to track her to her home.

'Not there! not there!' she gasped faintly as Numerian endeavoured to lead her up the ascent. 'She will see us as we enter the doors!--through the streets! Oh, father, if you would save me! we may lose her in the streets!--the guards, the people are there! Back! back!'

Numerian trembled as he marked the terror in her looks and gestures; but it was vain to question or oppose her. Nothing short of force could restrain her,--no commands or entreaties could draw from her more than the same breathless exclamation: 'Onward, father; onward, if you would save me!' She was insensible to every sensation but fear, incapable of any other exertion than flight.

Turning and winding, hurrying forward ever at the same rapid pace, they passed unconsciously along the intricate streets that led to the river side; and still the avenger tracked the victim, constant as the shadow to the substance; steady, vigilant, unwearied, as a bloodhound on a hot scent.

And now, even the sound of the father's voice ceased to be audible in the daughter's ears; she no longer felt the pressure of his hand, no longer perceived his very presence at her side. At length, frail and shrinking, she again paused, and looked back. The street they had reached was very tranquil and desolate: two slaves were walking at its further extremity. While they were in sight, no living creature appeared in the roadway behind; but as soon as they had passed away, a shadow stole slowly forward over the pavement of a portico in the distance, and the next moment Goisvintha appeared in the street.

The sun glared down fiercely over her dark figure as she stopped and for an instant looked stealthily around her. She moved to advance, and Antonina

saw no more. Again she turned to renew her hopeless flight; and again her father--perceiving only as the mysterious cause of her dread a solitary woman, who, though she followed, attempted not to arrest, or even to address them--prepared to accompany her to the last, in despair of all other chances of securing her safety.

More and more completely did her terror now enchain her faculties, as she still unconsciously traced her rapid way through the streets that led to the Tiber. It was not Nunerian, not Rome, not daylight in a great city, that was before her eyes: it was the storm, the assassination, the night at the farmhouse, that she now lived through over again.

Still the quick flight and the ceaseless pursuit were continued, as if neither were ever to have an end; but the close of the scene was, nevertheless, already at hand. During the interval of the passage through the streets, Nunerian's mind had gradually recovered from its first astonishment and alarm; at length he perceived the necessity of instant and decisive action, while there was yet time to save Antonina from sinking under the excess of her own fears. Though a vague, awful foreboding of disaster and death filled his heart, his resolution to penetrate at once, at all hazards, the dark mystery of impending danger indicated by his daughter's words and actions, did not fail him; for it was aroused by the only motive powerful enough to revive all that suffering and infirmity had not yet destroyed of the energy of his former days--the preservation of his child. There was something of the old firmness and vigour of the intrepid reformer of the Church, in his dim eyes, as he now stopped, and enclosing Antonina in his arms, arrested her instantly in her flight.

She struggled to escape; but it was faintly, and only for a moment. Her strength and consciousness were beginning to abandon her. She never attempted to look back; she felt in her heart that Goisvintha was still behind, and dared not to verify the frightful conviction with her eyes. Her lips moved; but they expressed an altered and a vain petition: 'Hermanric! O Hermanric!' was all they murmured now.

They had arrived at the long street that ran by the banks of the Tiber. The people had either retired to their homes or repaired to the Forum to be informed of the period when the ransom would be paid. No one but Goisvintha was in sight as Nunerian looked around him; and she, after having carefully viewed the empty street, was advancing towards them at a quickened pace.

For an instant the father looked on her steadily as she approached, and in

that instant his determination was formed. A flight of steps at his feet led to the narrow doorway of a small temple, the nearest building to him.

Ignorant whether Goisvintha might not be secretly supported by companions in her ceaseless pursuit, he resolved to secure this place for Antonina, as a temporary refuge at least; while standing before it, he should oblige the woman to declare her purpose, if she followed them even there. In a moment he had begun the ascent of the steps, with the exhausted girl by his side. Arrived at the summit, he guided her before him into the doorway, and stopped on the threshold to look round again. Goisvintha was nowhere to be seen.

Not duped by the woman's sudden disappearance into the belief that she had departed from the street--persisting in his resolution to lead his daughter to a place of repose, where she might most immediately feel herself secure, and might therefore most readily recover her self-possession, Numerian drew Antonina with him into the temple. He lingered there for a moment, ere he departed to watch the street from the portico outside.

The light in the building was dim,--it was admitted only from a small aperture in the roof, and through the narrow doorway, where it was intercepted by the overhanging bulk of the outer portico. A crooked pile of dark heavy-looking substances on the floor, rose high towards the ceiling in the obscure interior. Irregular in form, flung together one over the other in strange disorder, for the most part dusky in hue, yet here and there gleaming at points with a metallic brightness, these objects presented a mysterious, indefinite, and startling appearance. It was impossible, on a first view of their confused arrangement, to discover what they were, or to guess for what purpose they could have been pile together on the floor of a deserted temple. From the moment when they had first attracted Numerian's observation, his attention was fixed on them, and as he looked a faint thrill of suspicion--vague, inexplicable, without apparent cause or object--struck chill to his heart.

He had moved a step forward to examine the hidden space at the back of the pile, when his further advance was instantly stopped by the appearance of a man who walked forth from it dressed in the floating, purple-edged robe and white fillet of the Pagan priests. Before either father or daughter could speak, even before they could move to depart, he stepped up to them, and, placing his hand on the shoulder of each, confronted them in silence.

At the moment when the stranger approached, Numerian raised his hand to thrust him back, and, in so doing, fixed his eyes on the man's countenance,

as a ray of light from the doorway floated over it. Instantly his arm remained outstretched and rigid, then it dropped to his side, and the expression of horror on the face of the child became reflected, as it were, on the face of the parent. Neither moved under the hand of the dweller in the temple when he laid it heavily on each, and both stood before him speechless as himself.