CHAPTER 27 - THE VIGIL OF HOPE

A new prospect now opens before us. The rough paths through which we have hitherto threaded our way grow smoother as we approach their close. Rome, so long dark and gloomy to our view, brightens at length like a landscape when the rain is past and the first rays of returning sunlight stream through the parting clouds. Some days have elapsed, and in those days the temples have yielded all their wealth; the conquered Romans have bribed the triumphant barbarians to mercy; the ransom of the fallen city has been paid.

The Gothic army is still encamped round the walls, but the gates are opened, markets for food are established in the suburbs, boats appear on the river and waggons on the highroads, laden with provisions, and proceeding towards Rome. All the hidden treasure kept back by the citizens is now bartered for food; the merchants who hold the market reap a rich harvest of spoil, but the hungry are filled, the weak are revived, every one is content.

It is the end of the second day since the free sale of provisions and the liberty of egress from the city have been permitted by the Goths. The gates are closed for the night, and the people are quietly returning, laden with their supplies of food, to their homes. Their eyes no longer encounter the terrible traces of the march of pestilence and famine through every street; the corpses have been removed, and the sick are watched and sheltered. Rome is cleansed from her pollutions, and the virtues of household life begin to revive wherever they once existed. Death has thinned every family, but the survivors again assemble together in the social hall. Even the veriest criminals, the lowest outcasts of the population, are united harmlessly for a while in the general participation of the first benefits of peace.

To follow the citizens to their homes; to trace in their thoughts, words, and action the effect on them of their deliverance from the horrors of the blockade; to contemplate in the people of a whole city, now recovering as it were from a deep swoon, the varying forms of the first reviving symptoms in all classes, in good and bad, rich and poor--would afford matter enough in itself for a romance of searching human interest, for a drama of the passions, moving absorbingly through strange, intricate, and contrasted scenes. But another employment than this now claims our care. It is to an individual, and not to a divided source of interest, that our attention turns; we relinquish all observations on the general mass of the populace to revert to Numerian and Antonina alone--to penetrate once more into the little dwelling on the Pincian Hill.

The apartment where the father and daughter had suffered the pangs of famine together during the period of the blockade, presented an appearance far different from that which it had displayed on the occasion when they had last occupied it. The formerly bare walls were now covered with rich, thick hangings; and the simple couch and scanty table of other days had been exchanged for whatever was most luxurious and complete in the household furniture of the age. At one end of the room three women, attended by a little girl, were engaged in preparing some dishes of fruit and vegetables; at the other, two men were occupied in low, earnest conversation, occasionally looking round anxiously to a couch placed against the third side of the apartment, on which Antonina lay extended, while Numerian watched by her in silence. The point of Goisvintha's knife had struck deep, but, as yet, the fatal purpose of the assassination had failed.

The girl's eyes were closed; her lips were parted in the languor of suffering; one of her hands lay listless on her father's knee. A slight expression of pain, melancholy in its very slightness, appeared on her pale face, and occasionally a long-drawn, quivering breath escaped her--nature's last touching utterance of its own feebleness! The old man, as he sat by her side, fixed on her a wistful, inquiring glance. Sometimes he raised his hand, and gently and mechanically moved to and fro the long locks of her hair, as they spread over the head of the couch; but he never turned to communicate with the other persons in the room--he sat as if he saw nothing save his daughter's figure stretched before him, and heard nothing save the faint, fluttering sound of her breathing, close at his ear.

It was now dark, and one lamp hanging from the ceiling threw a soft equal light over the room. The different persons occupying it presented but little evidence of health and strength in their countenances, to contrast them in appearance with the wounded girl; all had undergone the wasting visitation of the famine, and all were pale and languid, like her. A strange, indescribable harmony prevailed over the scene. Even the calmness of absorbing expectation and trembling hope, expressed in the demeanour of Numerian, seemed reflected in the actions of those around him, in the quietness with which the women pursued their employment, in the lower and lower whispers in which the men continued their conversation. There was something pervading the air of the whole apartment that conveyed a sense of the solemn, unworldly stillness which we attach to the abstract idea of religion.

Of the two men cautiously talking together, one was the patrician, Vetranio; the other, a celebrated physician of Rome.

Both the countenance and manner of the senator gave melancholy proof that the orgie at his palace had altered him for the rest of his life. He looked what he was, a man changed for ever in constitution and character. A fixed expression of anxiety and gloom appeared in his eyes; his emaciated face was occasionally distorted by a nervous, involuntary contraction of the muscles; it was evident that the paralysing effect of the debauch which had destroyed his companions would remain with him to the end of his existence. No remnant of his careless self-possession, his easy, patrician affability, appeared in his manner, as he now listened to his companion's conversation; years seemed to have been added to his life since he had headed the table at 'The Banquet of Famine'.

'Yes,' said the physician, a cold, calm man, who spoke much, but pronounced all his words with emphatic deliberation,--'Yes, as I have already told you, the wound in itself was not mortal. If the blade of the knife had entered near the centre of the neck, she must have died when she was struck. But it passed outwards and backwards; the large vessels escaped, and no vital part has been touched.'

'And yet you persist in declaring that you doubt her recovery!' exclaimed Vetranio, in low, mournful tones.

'I do,' pursued the physician. 'She must have been exhausted in mind and body when she received the blow--I have watched her carefully; I know it! There is nothing of the natural health and strength of youth to oppose the effects of the wound. I have seen the old die from injuries that the young recover, because life in them was losing its powers of resistance; she is in the position of the old!'

'They have died before me, and she will die before me! I shall lose all--all!' sighed Vetranio bitterly to himself.

'The resources of our art are exhausted,' continued the other; 'nothing remains but to watch carefully and wait patiently. The chances of life or death will be decided in a few hours; they are equally balanced now.'

'I shall lose all!--all!' repeated the senator mournfully, as if he heeded not the last words.

'If she dies,' said the physician, speaking in warmer tones, for he was struck with pity, in spite of himself, at the spectacle of Vetranio's utter dejection, 'if she dies, you can at least remember that all that could be done to secure

her life has been done by you. Her father, helpless in his lethargy and his age, was fitted only to sit and watch her, as he has sat and watched her day after day; but you have spared nothing, forgotten nothing. Whatever I have asked for, that you have provided; the hangings round the room, and the couch that she lies on, are yours; the first fresh supplies of nourishment from the newly-opened markets were brought here from you; I told you that she was thinking incessantly of what she had suffered, that it was necessary to preserve her against her own recollections, that the presence of women about her might do good, that a child appearing sometimes in the room might soothe her fancy, might make her look at what was passing, instead of thinking of what had passed--you found them, and sent them! I have seen parents less anxious for their children, lovers for their mistresses, than you for this girl.'

'My destiny is with her,' interrupted Vetranio, looking round superstitiously to the frail form on the couch. 'I know nothing of the mysteries that the Christians call their "Faith", but I believe now in the soul; I believe that one soul contains the fate of another, and that her soul contains the fate of mine!'

The physician shook his head derisively. His calling had determined his philosophy--he was as ardent a materialist as Epicurus himself.

'Listen,' said Vetranio; 'since I first saw her, a change came over my whole being; it was as if her life was mingled with mine! I had no influence over her, save an influence for ill: I loved her, and she was driven defenceless from her home! I sent my slaves to search Rome night and day; I exerted all my power, I lavished my wealth to discover her; and, for the first time in this one effort, I failed in what I had undertaken. I felt that through me she was lost--dead! Days passed on; life weighed weary on me; the famine came. You know in what way I determined that my career should close; the rumour of the Banquet of Famine reached you as it reached others!'

'It did,' replied the physician. 'And I see before me in your face,' he added, after a momentary pause, 'the havoc which that ill-omened banquet has worked. My friend, be advised!--abandon for ever the turmoil of your Roman palace, and breathe in tranquillity the air of a country home. The strength you once had is gone never to return--if you would yet live, husband what is still left.'

'Hear me,' pursued Vetranio, in low, gloomy tones. 'I stood alone in my doomed palace; the friends whom I had tempted to their destruction lay lifeless around me; the torch was in my hand that was to light our funeral

pile, to set us free from the loathsome world! I approached triumphantly to kindle the annihilating flames, when she stood before me--she, whom I had sought as lost and mourned as dead! A strong hand seemed to wrench the torch from me; it dropped to the ground! She departed again; but I was powerless to take it up; her look was still before me; her face, her figure, she herself, appeared ever watching between the torch and me!'

'Lower!--speak lower!' interrupted the physician, looking on the senator's agitated features with unconcealed astonishment and pity. 'You retard your own recovery,--you disturb the girl's repose by discourse such as this.'

'The officers of the senate,' continued Vetranio, sadly resuming his gentler tones, 'when they entered the palace, found me still standing on the place where we had met! Days passed on again; I stood looking out upon the street, and thought of my companions whom I had lured to their death, and of my oath to partake their fate, which I had never fulfilled. I would have driven my dagger to my heart; but her face was yet before me, my hands were bound! In that hour I saw her for the second time; saw her carried past me--wounded, assassinated! She had saved me once; she had saved me twice! I knew that now the chance was offered me, after having wrought her ill, to work her good; after failing to discover her when she was lost, to succeed in saving her when she was dying; after having survived the deaths of my friends at my own table, to survive to see life restored under my influence, as well as destroyed! These were my thoughts; these are my thoughts still--thoughts felt only since I saw her! Do you know now why I believe that her soul contains the fate of mine? Do you see me, weakened, shattered, old before my time; my friends lost, my fresh feelings of youth gone for ever; and can you not now comprehend that her life is my life?--that if she dies, the one good purpose of my existence is blighted?--that I lose all I have henceforth to live for?--all, all!'

As he pronounced the concluding words, the girl's eyes half unclosed, and turned languidly towards her father. She made an effort to lift her hand caressingly from his knee to his neck; but her strength was unequal even to this slight action. The hand was raised only a few inches ere it sank back again to its old position; a tear rolled slowly over her cheek as she closed her eyes again, but she never spoke.

'See,' said the physician, pointing to her, 'the current of life is at its lowest ebb! If it flows again, it must flow to-night.'

Vetranio made no answer; he dropped down on the seat near him, and covered his face with his robe.

The physician, beholding the senator's situation, and reflecting on the strange hurriedly-uttered confession which had just been addressed to him, began to doubt whether the scenes through which his patron had lately passed had not affected his brain. Philosopher though he was, the man of science had never observed the outward symptoms of the first working of good and pure influences in elevating a degraded mind; he had never watched the denoting signs of speech and action which mark the progress of mental revolution while the old nature is changing for the new; such objects of contemplation existed not for him. He gently touched Vetranio on the shoulder. 'Rise,' said he, 'and let us depart. Those are around her who can watch her best. Nothing remains for us but to wait and hope. With the earliest morning we will return.'

He delivered a few farewell directions to one of the women in attendance, and then, accompanied by the senator, who, without speaking again, mechanically rose to follow him, quitted the room. After this, the silence was only interrupted by the sound of an occasional whisper, and of quick, light footsteps passing backwards and forwards. Then the cooling, reviving draughts which had been prepared for the night were poured ready into the cups; and the women approached Numerian, as if to address him, but he waved his hand impatiently when he saw them; and then they too, in their turn, departed, to wait in an adjoining apartment until they should be summoned again.

Nothing changed in the manner of the father when he was left alone in the chamber of sickness, which the lapse of a few hours might convert into the chamber of death. He sat watching Antonina, and touching the outspread locks of her hair from time to time, as had been his wont. It was a fair, starry night; the fresh air of the soft winter climate of the South blew gently over the earth, the great city was sinking fast into tranquillity, calling voices were sometimes heard faintly from the principal streets, and the distant noises of martial music sounded cheerily from the Gothic camp as the sentinels were posted along the line of watch; but soon these noises ceased, and the stillness of Rome was as the stillness round the couch of the wounded girl.

Day after day, and night after night, since the assassination in the temple, Numerian had kept the same place by his daughter's side. Each hour as it passed found him still absorbed in his long vigil of hope; his life seemed suspended in its onward course by the one influence that now enthralled it. At the brief intervals when his bodily weariness overpowered him on his melancholy watch, it was observed by those around him that, even in his

short dreaming clumbers, his face remained ever turned in the same direction, towards the head of the couch, as if drawn thither by some irresistible attraction, by some powerful ascendancy, felt even amid the deepest repose of sensation, the heaviest fatigue of the overlaboured mind, and worn, sinking heart. He held no communication, save by signs, with the friends about him; he seemed neither to hope, to doubt, nor to despair with them; all his faculties were strung up to vibrate at one point only, and were dull and unimpressible in every other direction.

But twice had he been heard to speak more than the fewest, simplest words. The first time, when Antonina uttered the name of Goisvintha, on the recovery of her senses after her wound, he answered eagerly by reiterated declarations that there was nothing henceforth to fear; for he had seen the assassin dead under the Pagan's foot on leaving the temple. The second time, when mention was incautiously made before him of rumours circulated through Rome of the burning of an unknown Pagan priest, hidden in the temple of Serapis, with vast treasures around him, the old man was seen to start and shudder, and heard to pray for the soul that was now waiting before the dread judgment-seat; to murmur about a vain restoration and a discovery made too late; to mourn over horror that thickened round him, over hope fruitlessly awakened, and bereavement more terrible than mortal had ever suffered before; to entreat that the child, the last left of all, might be spared--with many words more, which ran on themes like these, and which were counted by all who listened to them but as the wanderings of a mind whose higher powers were fatally prostrated by feebleness and grief.

One long hour of the night had already passed away since parent and child had been left together, and neither word nor movement had been audible in the melancholy room. But, as the second hour began, the girl's eyes unclosed again, and she moved painfully on the couch. Accustomed to interpret the significance of her slightest actions, Numerian rose and brought her one of the reviving draughts that had been left ready for use. After she had drunk, when her eyes met her father's fixed on her in mute and mournful inquiry, her lips closed, and formed themselves into an expression which he remembered they had always assumed when, as a little child, she used silently to hold up her face to him to be kissed. The miserable contrast between what she was now and what she had been them, was beyond the passive endurance, the patient resignation of the spirit-broken old man; the empty cup dropped from his hands, he knelt down by the side of the couch and groaned aloud.

'O father! father!' cried the weak, plaintive voice above him. 'I am dying! Let

us remember that our time to be together here grows shorter and shorter, and let us pass it as happily as we can!'

He raised his head, and looked up at her, vacant and wistful, forlorn already, as if the death-parting was over.

'I have tried to live humbly and gratefully,' she sighed faintly. 'I have longed to do more good on the earth than I have done! Yet you will forgive me now, father, as you have always forgiven me! You have been patient with me all my life; more patient than I have ever deserved! But I had no mother to teach me to love you as I ought, to teach me what I know now, when my death is near, and time and opportunity are mine no longer!'

'Hush! hush!' whispered the old man affrightedly; 'you will live! God is good, and knows that we have suffered enough. The curse of the last separation is not pronounced against us! Live, live!'

'Father,' said the girl tenderly, 'we have that within us which not death itself can separate. In another world I shall still think of you when you think of me! I shall see you even when I am no more here, when you long to see me! When you go out alone, and sit under the trees on the garden bank where I used to sit; when you look forth on the far plains and mountains that I used to look on; when you read at night in the Bible that we have read in together, and remember Antonina as you lie down sorrowful to rest; then I shall see you! then you will feel that I am looking on you! You will be calm and consoled, even by the side of my grave; for you will think, not of the body that is beneath, but of the spirit that is waiting for you, as I have often waited for you here when you were away, and I knew that the approach of the evening would bring you home again!'

'Hush! you will live!--you will live!' repeated Numerian in the same low, vacant tones. The strength that still upheld him was in those few simple words; they were the food of a hope that was born in agony and cradled in despair.

'Oh, if I might live!' said the girl softly, 'if I might live but for a few days yet, how much I have to live for!' She endeavoured to bend her head towards her father as she spoke; for the words were beginning to fall faintly and more faintly from her lips--exhaustion was mastering her once again. She dwelt for a moment now on the name of Hermanric, on the grave in the farm-house garden; then reverted again to her father. The last feeble sounds she uttered were addressed to him; and their burden was still of consolation and of love.

Soon the old man, as he stooped over her, saw her eyes close again--those innocent, gentle eyes which even yet preserved their old expression while the face grew wan and pale around them--and darkness and night sank down over his soul while he looked. 'She sleeps,' he murmured in a voice of awe, as he resumed his watching position by the side of the couch. 'They call death a sleep; but on her face there is no death!'

The night grew on. The women who were in attendance entered the room about midnight, wondering that their assistance had not yet been required. They beheld the solemn, unruffled composure on the girl's wasted face; the rapt attention of Numerian, as he ever preserved the same attitude by her side; and went out again softly without uttering a word, even in a whisper. There was something dread and impressive in the very appearance of this room, where Death, that destroys, was in mortal conflict with Youth and Beauty, that adorn, while the eyes of one old man watched in loneliness the awful progress of the strife.

Morning came, and still there was no change. Once, when the lamp that lit the room was fading out as the dawn appeared, Numerian had risen and looked close on his daughter's face--he thought at that moment that her features moved; but he saw that the flickering of the dying light on them had deceived him; the same stillness was over her. He placed his ear close to her lips for an instant, and then resumed his place, not stirring from it again. The slow current of his blood seemed to have come to a pause--he was waiting as a man waits with his head on the block ere the axe descends--as a mother waits to hear that the breath of life has entered her new-born child.

The sun rose bright in a cloudless sky. As the fresh, sharp air of the early dawn warmed under its spreading rays, the women entered the apartment again, and partly drew aside the curtain and shutter from the window. The beams of the new light fell fair and glorifying on the girl's face; the faint, calm breezed ruffled the lighter locks of her hair. Once this would have awakened her; but it did not disturb her now.

Soon after the voice of the child who sojourned with the women in the house was heard beneath, in the hall, through the half-opened door of the room. The little creature was slowly ascending the stairs, singing her faltering morning song to herself. She was preceded on her approach by a tame dove, bought at the provision market outside the walls, but preserved for the child as a pet and plaything by its mother. The bird fluttered, cooing, into the room, perched upon the head of the couch, and began dressing its

feathers there. The women had caught the infection of the old man's enthralling suspense; and moved not to bid the child retire, or to take away the dove from its place--they watched like him. But the soft, lulling notes of the bird were powerless over the girl's ear, as the light sunbeam over her face--still she never woke.

The child entered, and pausing in her song, climbed on to the side of the couch. She held out one little hand for the dove to perch upon, placed the other lightly on Antonina's shoulder, and pressed her fresh, rosy lips to girl's faded cheek. 'I and my bird have come to make Antonina well this morning,' she said gravely.

The still, heavily-closed eyelids moved!--they quivered, opened, closed, then opened again. The eyes had a faint, dreaming, unconscious look; but Antonina lived! Antonina was awakened at last to another day on earth!

Her father's rigid, straining gaze still remained fixed upon her as at first, but on his countenance there was a blank, an absence of all appearance of sensation and life. The women, as they looked on Antonina and looked on him, began to weep; the child resumed very softly its morning song, now addressing it to the wounded girl and now to the dove.

At this moment Vetranio and the physician appeared on the scene. The latter advanced to the couch, removed the child from it, and examined Antonina intently. At length, partly addressing Numerian, partly speaking to himself, he said: 'She has slept long, deeply, without moving, almost without breathing--a sleep like death to all who looked on it.'

The old man spoke not in reply, but the women answered eagerly in the affirmative.

'She is saved,' pursued the physician, leisurely quitting the side of the couch and smiling on Vetranio; 'be careful of her for days and days to come.'

'Saved! saved!' echoed the child joyfully, setting the dove free in the room, and running to Numerian to climb on his knees. The father glanced down when the clear young voice sounded in his ear. The springs of joy, so long dried up in his heart, welled forth again as he saw the little hands raised towards him entreatingly; his grey head drooped--he wept.

At a sign from the physician the child was led from the room. The silence of deep and solemn emotion was preserved by all who remained; nothing was heard but the suppressed sobs of the old man, and the faint, retiring notes

of the infant voice still singing its morning song. And now one word, joyfully reiterated again and again, made all the burden of the music--

'SAVED! SAVED!'

THE CONCLUSION. 'UBI THESAURUS IBI COR.'

Shortly after the opening of the provision markets outside the gates of Rome, the Goths broke up their camp before the city and retired to winter quarters in Tuscany. The negotiations which ensued between Alaric and the Court and Government at Ravenna, were conducted with cunning moderation by the conqueror, and with infatuated audacity by the conquered, and ultimately terminated in a resumption of hostilities. Rome was besieged a second and a third time by 'the barbarians'. On the latter occasion the city was sacked, its palaces were burnt, its treasures were seized; the monuments of the Christian religion were alone respected.

But it is no longer with the Goths that our narrative is concerned; the connection with them which it has hitherto maintained closes with the end of the first siege of Rome. We can claim the reader's attention for historical events no more--the march of our little pageant, arrayed for his pleasure, is over. If, however, he has felt, and still retains, some interest in Antonina, he will not refuse to follow us, and look on her again ere we part.

More than a month had passed since the besieging army had retired to their winter quarters, when several of the citizens of Rome assembled themselves on the plains beyond the walls, to enjoy one of those rustic festivals of ancient times, which are still celebrated, under different usages, but with the same spirit, by the Italians of modern days.

The place was a level plot of ground beyond the Pincian Gate, backed by a thick grove of pine trees, and looking towards the north over the smooth extent of the country round Rome. The persons congregated were mostly of the lower class. Their amusements were dancing, music, games of strength and games of chance; and, above all, to people who had lately suffered the extremities of famine, abundant eating and drinking--long, serious, ecstatic enjoyment of the powers of mastication and the faculties of taste.

Among the assembly were some individuals whose dress and manner raised them, outwardly at least, above the general mass. These persons walked backwards and forwards together on different parts of the ground as observers, not as partakers in the sports. One of their number, however, in whatever direction he turned, preserved an isolated position. He held an

open letter in his hand, which he looked at from time to time, and appeared to be wholly absorbed in his own thoughts. This man we may advantageously particularise on his own account, as well as on account of the peculiarity of his accidental situation; for he was the favoured minister of Vetranio's former pleasures--'the industrious Carrio'.

The freedman (who was last introduced to the reader in Chapter XIV., as exhibiting to Vetranio the store of offal which he had collected during the famine for the consumption of the palace) had contrived of late greatly to increase his master's confidence in him. On the organisation of the Banquet of Famine, he had discreetly refrained from testifying the smallest desire to save himself from the catastrophe in which the senator and his friends had determined to involve themselves. Securing himself in a place of safety, he awaited the end of the orgie; and when he found that its unexpected termination left his master still living to employ him, appeared again as a faithful servant, ready to resume his customary occupation with undiminished zeal.

After the dispersion of his household during the famine, and amid the general confusion of the social system in Rome, on the raising of the blockade, Vetranio found no one near him that he could trust but Carrio--and he trusted him. Nor was the confidence misplaced: the man was selfish and sordid enough; but these very qualities ensured his fidelity to his master as long as that master retained the power to punish and the capacity to reward.

The letter which Carrio held in his hand was addressed to him at a villa--from which he had just returned--belonging to Vetranio, on the shores of the Bay of Naples, and was written by the senator from Rome. The introductory portions of this communication seemed to interest the freedman but little: they contained praises of his diligence in preparing the country-house for the immediate habitation of its owner, and expressed his master's anxiety to quit Rome as speedily as possible, for the sake of living in perfect tranquillity, and breathing the reviving air of the sea, as the physicians had counselled. It was the latter part of the letter that Carrio perused and re-perused, and then meditated over with unwonted attention and labour of mind. It ran thus:--

'I have now to repose in you a trust, which you will execute with perfect fidelity as you value my favour or respect the wealth from which you may obtain your reward. When you left Rome you left the daughter of Numerian lying in danger of death: she has since revived. Questions that I have addressed to her during her recovery have informed me of much in her

history that I knew not before; and have induced me to purchase, for reasons of my own, a farm-house and its lands, beyond the suburbs. (The extent of the place and its situation are written on the vellum that is within this.) The husbandman who cultivated the property had survived the famine, and will continue to cultivate it for me. But it is my desire that the garden, and all that it contains, shall remain entirely at the disposal of Numerian and his daughter, who may often repair to it; and who must henceforth be regarded there as occupying my place and having my authority. You will divide your time between overlooking the few slaves whom I leave at the palace in my absence, and the husbandman and his labourers whom I have installed at the farm; and you will answer to me for the due performance of your own duties and the duties of those under you--being assured that by well filling this office you will serve your own interests in these, and in all things besides.'

The letter concluded by directing the freedman to return to Rome on a certain day, and to go to the farm-house at an appointed hour, there to meet his master, who had further directions to give him, and who would visit the newly acquired property before he proceeded on his journey to Naples.

Nothing could exceed the perplexity of Carrio as he read the passage in his patron's letter which we have quoted above. Remembering the incidents attending Vetranio's early connection with Antonina and her father, the mere circumstances of a farm having been purchased to flatter what was doubtless some accidental caprice on the part of the girl, would have little perplexed him. But that this act should be followed by the senator's immediate separation of himself from the society of Numerian's daughter; that she was to gain nothing after all from these lands which had evidently been bought at her instigation, but the authority over a little strip of garden; and yet, the inviolability of this valueless privilege should be insisted on in such serious terms, and with such an imperative tone of command as the senator had never been known to use before--these were inconsistencies which all Carrio's ingenuity failed to reconcile. The man had been born and reared in vice; vice had fed him, clothed him, freed him, given him character, reputation, power in his own small way--he lived in it as in the atmosphere that he breathed; to show him an action, referable only to a principle of pure integrity, was to set him a problem which it was hopeless to solve. And yet it is impossible, in one point of view, to pronounce him utterly worthless. Ignorant of all distinctions between good and bad, he thought wrong from sheer inability to see right.

However his instructions might perplex him, he followed them now--and continued in after days to follow them--to the letter. If to serve one's own

interests be an art, of that art Carrio deserved to be head professor. He arrived at the farm-house, not only punctually, but before the appointed time, and calling the honest husbandman and the labourers about him, explained to them every particular of the authority that his patron had vested in him, with a flowing and peremptory solemnity of speech which equally puzzled and impressed his simple audience. He found Numerian and Antonina in the garden when he entered it. The girl had been carried there daily in a litter since her recovery, and her father had followed. They were never separated now; the old man, when his first absorbing anxiety for her was calmed, remembered again more distinctly the terrible disclosure in the temple, and the yet more terrible catastrophe that followed it, and he sought constant refuge from the horror of the recollection in the presence of his child.

The freedman, during his interview with the father and daughter, observed, for once, an involuntary and unfeigned respect; but he spoke briefly, and left them together again almost immediately. Humble and helpless as they were, they awed him; they looked, thought, and spoke like beings of another nature than his; they were connected, he knew not how, with the mystery of the grave in the garden. He would have been self-possessed in the presence of the Emperor himself, but he was uneasy in theirs. So he retired to the more congenial scene of the public festival which was in the immediate neighbourhood of the farm-house, to await the hour of his patron's arrival, and to perplex himself afresh by a re-perusal of Vetranio's letter.

The time was now near at hand when it was necessary for the freedman to return to his appointed post. He carefully rolled up his note of instructions, stood for a few minutes vacantly regarding the amusements which had hitherto engaged so little of his attention, and then, turning, he proceeded through the pine-grove on his way back. We will follow him.

On leaving the grove, a footpath conducted over some fields to the farm-house. Arrived here, Carrio hesitated for a moment; then moved slowly onward to await his master's approach in the lane that led to the highroad. At this point we will part company with him, to enter the garden by the wicket-gate.

The trees, the flower-beds, and the patches of grass, all remained in their former positions--nothing had been added or taken away since the melancholy days that were past; but a change was visible in Hermanric's grave. The turf above it had been renewed, and a border of small evergreen shrubs was planted over the track which Goisvintha's footsteps had traced. A white marble cross was raised at one end of the mound; the short Latin

inscription on it signified--'PRAY FOR THE DEAD'.

The sunlight was shining calmly over the grave, and over Numerian and Antonina as they sat by it. Sometimes when the mirth grew louder at the rustic festival, it reached them in faint, subdued notes; sometimes they heard the voices of the labourers in the neighbouring fields talking to each other at their work; but, besides these, no other sounds were loud enough to be distinguished. There was still an expression of the melancholy and feebleness that grief and suffering leave behind them on the countenances of the father and daughter; but resignation and peace appeared there as well--resignation that was perfected by the hard teaching of woe, and peace that was purer for being imparted from the one to the other, like the strong and deathless love from which it grew.

There was something now in the look and attitude of the girl, as she sat thinking of the young warrior who had died in her defence and for her love, and training the shrubs to grow closer round the grave, which, changed though she was, recalled in a different form the old poetry and tranquillity of her existence when we first saw her singing to the music of her lute in the garden on the Pincian Hill. No thoughts of horror and despair were suggested to her as she now looked on the farm-house scene. Hers was not the grief which shrinks selfishly from all that revives the remembrance of the dead: to her, their influence over the memory was a grateful and a guardian influence that gave a better purpose to the holiest life, and a nobler nature to the purest thoughts.

Thus they were sitting by the grave, sad yet content; footsore already on the pilgrimage of life, yet patient to journey farther if they might--when an unusual tumult, a noise of rolling wheels, mingled with a confused sound of voices, was heard in the lane behind them. They looked round, and saw that Vetranio was approaching them alone through the wicket-gate.

He came forward slowly; the stealthy poison instilled by the Banquet of Famine palpably displayed its presence within him as the clear sunlight fell on his pale, wasted face. He smiled kindly as he addressed Antonina; but the bodily pain and mental agitation which that smile was intended to conceal, betrayed themselves in his troubled voice as he spoke.

'This is our last meeting for years--it may be our last meeting for life,' he said; 'I linger at the outset of my journey, but to behold you as guardian of the one spot of ground that is most precious to you on earth--as mistress, indeed, of the little that I give you here!' He paused a moment and pointed to the grave, then continued: 'All the atonement that I owe to you, you can

never know--I can never tell!--think only that I bear away with me a companion in the solitude to which I go in the remembrance of you. Be calm, good, happy still, for my sake, and while you forgive the senator of former days, forget not the friend who now parts from you in some sickness and sorrow, but also in much patience and hope! Farewell!'

His hand trembled as he held it out; a flush overspread the girl's cheek while she murmured a few inarticulate words of gratitude, and, bending over it, pressed it to her lips. Vetranio's heart beat quick; the action revived an emotion that he dared not cherish; but he looked at the wan, downcast face before him, at the grave that rose mournful by his side, and quelled it again. Yet an instant he lingered to exchange a farewell with the old man, then turned quickly, passed through the gate, and they saw him no more.

Antonina's tears fell fast on the grass beneath as she resumed her place. When she raised her head again, and saw that her father was looking at her, she nestled close to him and laid one of her arms round his neck: the other gradually dropped to her side, until her hand reached the topmost leaves of the shrubs that grew round the grave.

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Shall we longer delay in the farm-house garden? No! For us, as for Vetranio, it is now time to depart! While peace still watches round the walls of Rome; while the hearts of the father and daughter still repose together in security, after the trials that have wrung them, let us quit the scene! Here, at last, the narrative that we have followed over a dark and stormy track reposes on a tranquil field; and here let us cease to pursue it!

So the traveller who traces the course of a river wanders through the day among the rocks and precipices that lead onward from its troubled source; and, when the evening is at hand, pauses and rests where the banks are grassy and the stream is smooth.