

"Lygia! Lygia!"

But desire, astonishment, rage, and wine cut the legs from under him. He staggered once and a second time, seized the naked arm of one of the bacchanals, and began to inquire, with blinking eyes, what had happened. She, taking a goblet of wine, gave it to him with a smile in her mist-covered eyes.

"Drink!" said she.

Vinicius drank, and fell to the floor.

The greater number of the guests were lying under the table; others were walking with tottering tread through the triclinium, while others were sleeping on couches at the table, snoring, or giving forth the excess of wine. Meanwhile, from the golden network, roses were dropping and dropping on those drunken consuls and senators, on those drunken knights, philosophers, and poets, on those drunken dancing damsels and Patrician ladies, on that society all dominant as yet but with the soul gone from it, on that society garlanded and ungirdled but perishing.

Dawn had begun out of doors.

CHAPTER VIII.

No one stopped Ursus, no one inquired even what he was doing. Those guests who were not under the table had not kept their own places; hence the servants, seeing a giant carrying a guest on his arm, thought him some slave bearing out his intoxicated mistress. Moreover, Acte was with them, and her presence removed all suspicion.

In this way they went from the triclinium to the adjoining chamber, and thence to the gallery leading to Acte's apartments. To such a degree had her strength deserted Lygia, that she hung as if dead on the arm of Ursus. But when the cool, pure breeze of morning beat around her, she opened her eyes. It was growing clearer and clearer in the open air. After they had passed along the colonnade awhile, they turned to a side portico, coming out, not in the courtyard, but the palace gardens, where the tops of the pines and cypresses were growing ruddy from the light of morning. That part of the building was empty, so that echoes of music and sounds of the feast came with decreasing distinctness. It seemed to Lygia that she had been rescued from hell, and borne into God's bright world outside. There was something, then, besides that disgusting triclinium. There was the sky, the dawn, light, and peace. Sudden weeping seized the maiden, and, taking shelter on the arm of the giant, she repeated, with sobbing, —

"Let us go home, Ursus! home, to the house of Aulus."

"Let us go!" answered Ursus.

They found themselves now in the small atrium of Acte's apartments. Ursus placed Lygia on a marble bench at a distance from the fountain. Acte strove to pacify her; she urged her to sleep, and declared that for the moment there was no danger, — after the feast the drunken guests would sleep till evening. For a long time Lygia could not calm herself, and, pressing her temples with both hands, she repeated like a child, —

"Let us go home, to the house of Aulus!"

Ursus was ready. At the gates stood pretorians, it is true, but he would pass them. The soldiers would not stop

out-going people. The space before the arch was crowded with litters. Guests were beginning to go forth in throngs. No one would detain them. They would pass with the crowd and go home directly. For that matter, what does he care? As the queen commands, so must it be. He is there to carry out her orders.

"Yes, Ursus," said Lygia, "let us go."

Acte was forced to find reason for both. They would pass out, true; no one would stop them. But it is not permitted to flee from the house of Cæsar; whoso does that offends Cæsar's majesty. They may go; but in the evening a centurion at the head of soldiers will take a death sentence to Aulus and Pomponia Græcina; they will bring Lygia to the palace again, and then there will be no rescue for her. Should Aulus and his wife receive her under their roof, death awaits them to a certainty.

Lygia's arms dropped. There was no other outcome. She must choose her own ruin or that of Plautius. In going to the feast, she had hoped that Vinicius and Petronius would win her from Cæsar, and return her to Pomponia; now she knew that it was they who had brought Cæsar to remove her from the house of Aulus. There was no help. Only a miracle could save her from the abyss, — a miracle and the might of God.

"Acte," said she, in despair, "didst thou hear Vinicius say that Cæsar had given me to him, and that he will send slaves here this evening to take me to his house?"

"I did," answered Acte; and, raising her arms from her side, she was silent. The despair with which Lygia spoke found in her no echo. She herself had been Nero's favorite. Her heart, though good, could not feel clearly the shame of such a relation. A former slave, she had grown too much inured to the law of slavery; and, besides, she loved Nero yet. If he returned to her, she would stretch her arms to him, as to happiness. Comprehending clearly that Lygia must become the mistress of the youthful and stately Vinicius, or expose Aulus and Pomponia to ruin, she failed to understand how the girl could hesitate.

"In Cæsar's house," said she, after a while, "it would not be safer for thee than in that of Vinicius."

And it did not occur to her that, though she told the truth, her words meant, "Be resigned to fate and become the concubine of Vinicius."

As to Lygia, who felt on her lips yet his kisses, burning

as coals and full of beastly desire, the blood rushed to her face with shame at the mere thought of them.

"Never," cried she, with an outburst, "will I remain here, or at the house of Vinicius, — never!"

"But," inquired Acte, "is Vinicius hateful to thee?"

Lygia was unable to answer, for weeping seized her anew. Acte gathered the maiden to her bosom, and strove to calm her excitement. Ursus breathed heavily, and balled his giant fists; for, loving his queen with the devotion of a dog, he could not bear the sight of her tears. In his half-wild Lygian heart was the wish to return to the triclinium, choke Vinicius, and, should the need come, Cæsar himself; but he feared to sacrifice thereby his mistress, and was not certain that such an act, which to him seemed very simple, would befit a confessor of the Crucified Lamb.

But Acte, while caressing Lygia, asked again, "Is he so hateful to thee?"

"No," said Lygia; "it is not permitted me to hate, for I am a Christian."

"I know, Lygia. I know also from the letters of Paul of Tarsus, that it is not permitted to defile one's self, nor to fear death more than sin; but tell me if thy teaching permits one person to cause the death of others?"

"No."

"Then how canst thou bring Cæsar's vengeance on the house of Aulus?"

A moment of silence followed. A bottomless abyss yawned before Lygia again.

"I ask," continued the young freedwoman, "for I have compassion on thee — and I have compassion on the good Pomponia and Aulus, and on their child. It is long since I began to live in this house, and I know what Cæsar's anger is. No! thou art not at liberty to flee from here. One way remains to thee: implore Vinicius to return thee to Pomponia."

But Lygia dropped on her knees to implore some one else. Ursus knelt down after a while, too, and both began to pray in Cæsar's house at the morning dawn.

Acte witnessed such a prayer for the first time, and could not take her eyes from Lygia, who, seen by her in profile, with raised hands, and face turned heavenward, seemed to implore rescue. The dawn, casting light on her dark hair and white peplus, was reflected in her eyes. Entirely in the light, she seemed herself like light. In that pale face, in

those parted lips, in those raised hands and eyes, a kind of superhuman exaltation was evident. Acte understood then why Lygia could not become the concubine of any man. Before the face of Nero's former favorite was drawn aside, as it were, a corner of that veil which hides a world altogether different from that to which she was accustomed. She was astonished by prayer in that abode of crime and infamy. A moment earlier it had seemed to her that there was no rescue for Lygia; now she began to think that something uncommon would happen, that some aid would come, — aid so mighty that Cæsar himself would be powerless to resist it; that some winged army would descend from the sky to help that maiden, or that the sun would spread its rays beneath her feet and draw her up to itself. She had heard of many miracles among Christians, and she thought now that everything said of them was true, since Lygia was praying.

Lygia rose at last, with a face serene with hope. Ursus rose too, and, holding to the bench, looked at his mistress, waiting for her words.

But it grew dark in her eyes, and after a time two great tears rolled down her cheeks slowly.

"May God bless Pomponia and Aulus," said she. "It is not permitted me to bring ruin on them; therefore I shall never see them again."

Then turning to Ursus she said that he alone remained to her in the world; that he must be to her as a protector and a father. They could not seek refuge in the house of Aulus, for they would bring on it the anger of Cæsar. But neither could she remain in the house of Cæsar or that of Vinicius. Let Ursus take her then; let him conduct her out of the city; let him conceal her in some place where neither Vinicius nor his servants could find her. She would follow Ursus anywhere, even beyond the sea, even beyond the mountains, to the barbarians, where the Roman name was not heard, and whither the power of Cæsar did not reach. Let him take her and save her, for he alone had remained to her.

The Lygian was ready, and in sign of obedience he bent to her feet and embraced them. But on the face of Acte, who had been expecting a miracle, disappointment was evident. Had the prayer effected only that much? To flee from the house of Cæsar is to commit an offence against majesty which must be avenged; and even if Lygia suc-

ceeded in hiding, Cæsar would avenge himself on Aulus and Pomponia. If she wishes to escape, let her escape from the house of Vinicius. Then Cæsar, who does not like to occupy himself with the affairs of others, may not wish even to aid Vinicius in the pursuit; in every case it will not be a crime against majesty.

But Lygia's thoughts were just the following: Aulus would not even know where she was; Pomponia herself would not know. She would escape not from the house of Vinicius, however, but while on the way to it. When drunk, Vinicius had said that he would send his slaves for her in the evening. Beyond doubt he had told the truth, which he would not have done had he been sober. Evidently he himself, or perhaps he and Petronius, had seen Cæsar before the feast, and won from him the promise to give her on the following evening. And if they forgot that day, they would send for her on the morrow. But Ursus will save her. He will come; he will bear her out of the litter as he bore her out of the triclinium, and they will go into the world. No one could resist Ursus, not even that terrible athlete who wrestled at the feast yesterday. But as Vinicius might send a great number of slaves, Ursus would go at once to Bishop Linus for aid and counsel. The bishop will take compassion on her, will not leave her in the hands of Vinicius; he will command Christians to go with Ursus to rescue her. They will seize her and bear her away; then Ursus can take her out of the city and hide her from the power of Rome.

And her face began to flush and smile. Consolation entered her anew, as if the hope of rescue had turned to reality. She threw herself on Acte's neck suddenly, and, putting her beautiful lips to Acte's cheek, she whispered:

"Thou wilt not betray, Acte, wilt thou?"

"By the shade of my mother," answered the freedwoman, "I will not; but pray to thy God that Ursus be able to bear thee away."

The blue, childlike eyes of the giant were gleaming with happiness. He had not been able to frame any plan, though he had been breaking his poor head; but a thing like this he could do, — and whether in the day or in the night it was all one to him! He would go to the bishop, for the bishop can read in the sky what is needed and what is not. Besides, he could assemble Christians himself. Are his acquaintances few among slaves, gladiators, and free people, both in the

Subura and beyond the bridges? He can collect a couple of thousand of them. He will rescue his lady, and take her outside the city, and he can go with her. They will go to the end of the world, even to that place from which they had come, where no one has heard of Rome.

Here he began to look forward, as if to see things in the future and very distant.

"To the forest? Ai, what a forest, what a forest!"

But after a while he shook himself out of his visions. Well, he will go to the bishop at once, and in the evening will wait with something like a hundred men for the litter. And let not slaves, but even pretorians, take her from him! Better for any man not to come under his fist, even though in iron armor, — for is iron so strong? When he strikes iron earnestly, the head underneath will not survive.

But Lygia raised her finger with great and also childlike seriousness.

"Ursus, do not kill," said she.

Ursus put his fist, which was like a maul, to the back of his head, and, rubbing his neck with great seriousness, began to mutter. But he must rescue "his light." She herself had said that his turn had come. He will try all he can. But if something happens in spite of him? In every case he must save her. But should anything happen, he will repent, and so entreat the Innocent Lamb that the Crucified Lamb will have mercy on him, poor fellow. He has no wish to offend the Lamb; but then his hands are so heavy.

Great tenderness was expressed on his face; but wishing to hide it, he bowed and said, —

"Now I will go to the holy bishop."

Acte put her arms around Lygia's neck, and began to weep. Once more the freedwoman understood that there was a world in which greater happiness existed, even in suffering, than in all the excesses and luxury of Cæsar's house. Once more a kind of door to the light was opened a little before her, but she felt at once that she was unworthy to pass through it.

CHAPTER IX.

LYGIA was grieved to lose Pomponia Græcina, whom she loved with her whole soul, and she grieved for the household of Aulus; still her despair passed away. She felt a certain delight even in the thought that she was sacrificing plenty and comfort for her Truth, and was entering on an unknown and wandering existence. Perhaps there was in this a little also of childish curiosity as to what that life would be, off somewhere in remote regions, among wild beasts and barbarians. But there was still more a deep and trusting faith, that by acting thus she was doing as the Divine Master had commanded, and that henceforth He Himself would watch over her, as over an obedient and faithful child. In such a case what harm could meet her? If sufferings come, she will endure them in His name. If sudden death comes, He will take her; and some time, when Pomponia dies, they will be together for all eternity. More than once when she was in the house of Aulus, she tortured her childish head because she, a Christian, could do nothing for that Crucified, of whom Ursus spoke with such tenderness. But now the moment had come. Lygia felt almost happy, and began to speak of her happiness to Acte, who could not understand her, however. To leave everything, — to leave house, wealth, the city, gardens, temples, porticos, everything that is beautiful; leave a sunny land and people near to one — and for what purpose? To hide from the love of a young and stately knight. In Acte's head these things could not find place. At times she felt that Lygia's action was right, that there must be some immense mysterious happiness in it; but she could not give a clear account to herself of the matter, especially since an adventure was before Lygia which might have an evil ending, — an adventure in which she might lose her life simply. Acte was timid by nature, and she thought with dread of what the coming evening might bring. But she was loath to mention her fears to Lygia; meanwhile, as the day was clear and the sun looked into the atrium, she began to persuade her to take the rest needed after a night without sleep. Lygia did not refuse; and both went to the cubiculum, which was spacious

and furnished with luxury because of Acte's former relations with Cæsar. There they lay down side by side, but in spite of her weariness Acte could not sleep. For a long time she had been sad and unhappy, but now she was seized by a certain uneasiness which she had never felt before. So far life had seemed to her simply grievous and deprived of a morrow; now all at once it seemed to her dishonorable.

Increasing chaos rose in her head. Again the door to light began to open and close. But in the moment when it opened, that light so dazzled her that she could see nothing distinctly. She divined, merely, that in that light there was happiness of some kind, happiness beyond measure, in presence of which every other was nothing, to such a degree that if Cæsar, for example, were to set aside Poppæa, and love her, Acte, again, it would be vanity. Suddenly the thought came to her that that Cæsar whom she loved, whom she held involuntarily as a kind of demigod, was as pitiful as any slave, and that palace, with columns of Numidian marble, no better than a heap of stones. At last, however, those feelings which she had not power to define began to torment her; she wanted to sleep, but being tortured by alarm she could not.

Thinking that Lygia, threatened by so many perils and uncertainties, was not sleeping either, she turned to her to speak of her flight in the evening.

But Lygia was sleeping calmly. Into the dark cubiculum, past the curtain which was not closely drawn, came a few bright rays, in which golden dust-motes were playing. By the light of these rays Acte saw her delicate face, resting on her bare arm, her closed eyes, and her mouth slightly open. She was breathing regularly, but as people breathe while asleep.

"She sleeps, — she is able to sleep," thought Acte. "She is a child yet."

Still, after a while it came to her mind that that child chose to flee rather than remain the beloved of Vinicius; she preferred want to shame, wandering to a lordly house, to robes, jewels, and feasts, to the sound of lutes and citharas.

"Why?"

And she gazed at Lygia, as if to find an answer in her sleeping face. She looked at her clear forehead, at the calm arch of her brows, at her dark tresses, at her parted lips, at her virgin bosom moved by calm breathing; then she thought again, —

"How different from me!"

Lygia seemed to her a miracle, a sort of divine vision, something beloved of the gods, a hundred times more beautiful than all the flowers in Cæsar's garden, than all the statues in his palace. But in the Greek woman's heart there was no envy. On the contrary, at thought of the dangers which threatened the girl, great pity seized her. A certain motherly feeling rose in the woman. Lygia seemed to her not only as beautiful as a beautiful vision, but also very dear, and, putting her lips to her dark hair, she kissed it.

But Lygia slept on calmly, as if at home, under the care of Pomponia Græcina. And she slept rather long. Mid-day had passed when she opened her blue eyes and looked around the cubiculum in astonishment. Evidently she wondered that she was not in the house of Aulus.

"That is thou, Acte?" said she at last, seeing in the darkness the face of the Greek.

"I, Lygia."

"Is it evening?"

"No, child; but midday has passed."

"And has Ursus not returned?"

"Ursus did not say that he would return; he said that he would watch in the evening, with Christians, for the litter."

"True."

Then they left the cubiculum and went to the bath, where Acte bathed Lygia; then she took her to breakfast and afterward to the gardens of the palace, in which no dangerous meeting might be feared, since Cæsar and his principal courtiers were sleeping yet. For the first time in her life Lygia saw those magnificent gardens, full of pines, cypresses, oaks, olives, and myrtles, among which appeared white here and there a whole population of statues. The mirror of ponds gleamed quietly; groves of roses were blooming, watered with the spray of fountains; entrances to charming grottos were encircled with a growth of ivy or woodbine; silver-colored swans were sailing on the water; amidst statues and trees wandered tame gazelles from the deserts of Africa, and rich-colored birds from all known countries on earth.

The gardens were empty; but here and there slaves were working, spade in hand, singing in an undertone; others, to whom was granted a moment of rest, were sitting by ponds or in the shade of groves, in trembling light produced by sun-rays breaking in between leaves; others were watering

roses or the pale lily-colored blossoms of the saffron. Acte and Lygia walked rather long, looking at all the wonders of the gardens; and though Lygia's mind was not at rest, she was too much a child yet to resist pleasure, curiosity, and wonder. It occurred to her, even, that if Cæsar were good, he might be very happy in such a palace, in such gardens.

But at last, tired somewhat, the two women sat down on a bench hidden almost entirely by dense cypresses and began to talk of that which weighed on their hearts most, — that is, of Lygia's escape in the evening. Acte was far less at rest than Lygia touching its success. At times it seemed to her even a mad project, which could not succeed. She felt a growing pity for Lygia. It seemed to her that it would be a hundred times safer to try to act on Vinicius. After a while she inquired of Lygia how long she had known him, and whether she did not think that he would let himself be persuaded to return her to Pomponia.

But Lygia shook her dark head in sadness. "No. In Aulus's house, Vinicius had been different, he had been very kind, but since yesterday's feast she feared him, and would rather flee to the Lygians."

"But in Aulus's house," inquired Acte, "he was dear to thee, was he not?"

"He was," answered Lygia, inclining her head.

"And thou wert not a slave, as I was," said Acte, after a moment's thought. "Vinicius might marry thee. Thou art a hostage, and a daughter of the Lygian king. Aulus and Pomponia love thee as their own child; I am sure that they are ready to adopt thee. Vinicius might marry thee, Lygia."

But Lygia answered calmly, and with still greater sadness, "I would rather flee to the Lygians."

"Lygia, dost thou wish me to go directly to Vinicius, rouse him, if he is sleeping, and tell him what I have told thee? Yes, my precious one, I will go to him and say, 'Vinicius, this is a king's daughter, and a dear child of the famous Aulus; if thou love her, return her to Aulus and Pomponia, and take her as wife from their house.'"

But the maiden answered with a voice so low that Acte could barely hear it, —

"I would rather flee to the Lygians." And two tears were hanging on her drooping lids.

Further conversation was stopped by the rustle of approaching steps; and before Acte had time to see who was

coming, Poppæa Sabina appeared in front of the bench with a small retinue of slave women. Two of them held over her head bunches of ostrich feathers fixed to golden wires; with these they fanned her lightly, and at the same time protected her from the autumn sun, which was hot yet. Before her a woman from Egypt, black as ebony, and with bosom swollen as if from milk, bore in her arms an infant wrapped in purple fringed with gold. Acte and Lygia rose, thinking that Poppæa would pass the bench without turning attention to either; but she halted before them and said, —

"Acte, the bells sent by thee for the doll were badly fastened; the child tore off one and put it to her mouth; luckily Lilith saw it in season."

"Pardon, divinity," answered Acte, crossing her arms on her breast and bending her head.

But Poppæa began to gaze at Lygia.

"What slave is this?" asked she, after a pause.

"She is not a slave, divine Augusta, but a foster child of Pomponia Græcina, and a daughter of the Lygian king, given by him as hostage to Rome."

"And has she come to visit thee?"

"No, Augusta. She is dwelling in the palace since the day before yesterday."

"Was she at the feast last night?"

"She was, Augusta."

"At whose command?"

"At Cæsar's command."

Poppæa looked still more attentively at Lygia, who stood with bowed head, now raising her bright eyes to her with curiosity, now covering them with their lids. Suddenly a frown appeared between the brows of the Augusta. Jealous of her own beauty and power, she lived in continual alarm lest at some time a fortunate rival might ruin her, as she had ruined Octavia. Hence every beautiful face in the palace roused her suspicion. With the eye of a critic she took in at once every part of Lygia's form, estimated every detail of her face, and was frightened. "That is simply a nymph," thought she, "and 't was Venus who gave birth to her." On a sudden this came to her mind which had never come before at sight of any beauty, — that she herself had grown notably older! Wounded vanity quivered in Poppæa, alarm seized her, and various fears shot through her head. "Perhaps Nero has not seen the girl, or, seeing her through the emerald, has not appreciated her. But

what would happen should he meet such a marvel in the daytime, in sunlight? Moreover she is not a slave, she is the daughter of a king, — a king of barbarians, it is true, but a king. Immortal gods! she is as beautiful as I am, but younger!" The wrinkle between her brows increased, and her eyes began to shine under their golden lashes with a cold gleam.

"Hast thou spoken with Cæsar?"

"No, Augusta."

"Why dost thou choose to be here rather than in the house of Aulus?"

"I do not choose, lady. Petronius persuaded Cæsar to take me from Pomponia. I am here against my will."

"And wouldst thou return to Pomponia?"

This last question Poppæa gave with a softer and milder voice; hence a sudden hope rose in Lygia's heart.

"Lady," said she, extending her hand to her, "Cæsar promised to give me as a slave to Vinicius, but do thou intercede and return me to Pomponia."

"Then Petronius persuaded Cæsar to take thee from Aulus, and give thee to Vinicius?"

"True, lady. Vinicius is to send for me to-day; but thou art good, have compassion on me." When she had said this, she inclined, and, seizing the border of Poppæa's robe, waited for her word with beating heart. Poppæa looked at her for a while, with a face lighted by an evil smile, and said, —

"Then I promise that thou wilt become the slave of Vinicius this day."

And she went on, beautiful as a vision, but evil. To the ears of Lygia and Acte came only the wail of the infant, which began to cry, it was unknown for what reason.

Lygia's eyes too were filled with tears; but after a while she took Acte's hand and said, —

"Let us return. Help is to be looked for only whence it can come."

And they returned to the atrium, which they did not leave till evening. When darkness had come and slaves brought in tapers with great flames, both women were very pale. Their conversation failed every moment. Both were listening to hear if some one were coming. Lygia repeated again and again that, though grieved to leave Acte, she preferred that all should take place that day, as Ursus must be waiting in the dark for her then. But her breathing grew quicker

from emotion, and louder. Acte collected feverishly such jewels as she could, and, fastening them in a corner of Lygia's peplus, implored her not to reject that gift and means of escape. At moments came a deep silence full of deceptions for the ear. It seemed to both that they heard at one time a whisper beyond the curtain, at another the distant weeping of a child, at another the barking of dogs.

Suddenly the curtain of the entrance moved without noise, and a tall, dark man, his face marked with small-pox, appeared like a spirit in the atrium. In one moment Lygia recognized Atacinus, a freedman of Vinicius, who had visited the house of Aulus.

Acte screamed; but Atacinus bent low and said, —

"A greeting, divine Lygia, from Marcus Vinicius, who awaits thee with a feast in his house which is decked in green."

The lips of the maiden grew pale.

"I go," said she.

Then she threw her arms around Acte's neck in farewell.

CHAPTER X.

THE house of Vinicius was indeed decked in the green of myrtle and ivy, which had been hung on the walls and over the doors. The columns were wreathed with grapevine. In the atrium, which was closed above by a purple woollen cloth as protection from the night cold, it was as clear as in daylight. Eight and twelve flamed lamps were burning; these were like vessels, trees, animals, birds, or statues, holding cups filled with perfumed olive oil, lamps of alabaster, marble, or gilded Corinthian bronze, not so wonderful as that famed candlestick used by Nero and taken from the temple of Apollo, but beautiful and made by famous masters. Some of the lights were shaded by Alexandrian glass, or transparent stuffs from the Indus, of red, blue, yellow, or violet color, so that the whole atrium was filled with many colored rays. Everywhere was given out the odor of nard, to which Vinicius had grown used, and which he had learned to love in the Orient. The depths of the house, in which the forms of male and female slaves were moving, gleamed also with light. In the triclinium a table was laid for four persons. At the feast were to sit, besides Vinicius and Lygia, Petronius and Chrysothemis. Vinicius had followed in everything the words of Petronius, who advised him not to go for Lygia, but to send Atacinus with the permission obtained from Cæsar, to receive her himself in the house, receive her with friendliness and even with marks of honor.

"Thou wert drunk yesterday," said he; "I saw thee. Thou didst act with her like a quarryman from the Alban Hills. Be not over-insistent, and remember that one should drink good wine slowly. Know too that it is sweet to desire, but sweeter to be desired."

Chrysothemis had her own and a somewhat different opinion on this point; but Petronius, calling her his vestal and his dove, began to explain the difference which must exist between a trained charioteer of the circus and the youth who sits on the quadriga for the first time. Then, turning to Vinicius, he continued, —

"Win her confidence, make her joyful, be magnanimous. I have no wish to see a gloomy feast. Swear to her, by

Hades even, that thou wilt return her to Pomponia, and it will be thy affair that to-morrow she prefers to stay with thee."

Then pointing to Chrysothemis, he added, —

"For five years I have acted thus more or less with this timid dove, and I cannot complain of her harshness."

Chrysothemis struck him with her fan of peacock feathers, and said, —

"But I did not resist, thou satyr!"

"Out of consideration for my predecessor —"

"But wert thou not at my feet?"

"Yes; to put rings on thy toes."

Chrysothemis looked involuntarily at her feet, on the toes of which diamonds were really glittering; and she and Petronius began to laugh. But Vinicius did not give ear to their bantering. His heart was beating unquietly under the robes of a Syrian priest, in which he had arrayed himself to receive Lygia.

"They must have left the palace," said he, as if in a monologue.

"They must," answered Petronius. "Meanwhile I may mention the predictions of Apollonius of Tyana, or that history of Rufinus which I have not finished, I do not remember why."

But Vinicius cared no more for Apollonius of Tyana than for the history of Rufinus. His mind was with Lygia; and though he felt that it was more appropriate to receive her at home than to go in the rôle of a myrmidon to the palace, he was sorry at moments that he had not gone, for the single reason that he might have seen her sooner, and sat near her in the dark, in the double litter.

Meanwhile slaves brought in a tripod ornamented with rams' heads, bronze dishes with coals, on which they sprinkled bits of myrrh and nard.

"Now they are turning toward the Carinæ," said Vinicius, again.

"He cannot wait; he will run to meet the litter, and is likely to miss them!" exclaimed Chrysothemis.

Vinicius smiled without thinking, and said, —

"On the contrary, I will wait."

But he distended his nostrils and panted; seeing which, Petronius shrugged his shoulders, and said, —

"There is not in him a philosopher to the value of one sestertium, and I shall never make a man of that son of Mars."

"They are now in the Carinæ."

In fact, they were turning toward the Carinæ. The slaves called lampadarii were in front; others called pedisequii, were on both sides of the litter. Atacinus was right behind, overseeing the advance. But they moved slowly, for lamps showed the way badly in a place not lighted at all. The streets near the palace were empty; here and there only some man moved forward with a lantern, but farther on the place was uncommonly crowded. From almost every alley people were pushing out in threes and fours, all without lamps, all in dark mantles. Some walked on with the procession, mingling with the slaves; others in greater numbers came from the opposite direction. Some staggered as if drunk. At moments the advance grew so difficult that the lampadarii cried, —

"Give way to the noble tribune, Marcus Vinicius!"

Lygia saw those dark crowds through the curtains which were pushed aside, and trembled with emotion. She was carried away at one moment by hope, at another by fear.

"That is he! — that is Ursus and the Christians! Now it will happen quickly," said she, with trembling lips. "O Christ, aid! O Christ, save!"

Atacinus himself, who at first did not notice the uncommon animation of the street, began at last to be alarmed. There was something strange in this. The lampadarii had to cry oftener and oftener, "Give way to the litter of the noble tribune!" From the sides unknown people crowded up to the litter so much that Atacinus commanded the slaves to repulse them with clubs.

Suddenly a cry was heard in front of the procession. In one instant all the lights were extinguished. Around the litter came a rush, an uproar, a struggle.

Atacinus saw that this was simply an attack; and when he saw it he was frightened. It was known to all that Cæsar with a crowd of attendants made attacks frequently for amusement in the Subura and in other parts of the city. It was known that even at times he brought out of these night adventures black and blue spots; but whoso defended himself went to his death, even if a senator. The house of the guards, whose duty it was to watch over the city, was not very far; but during such attacks the guards feigned to be deaf and blind.

Meanwhile there was an uproar around the litter; people

struck, struggled, threw, and trampled one another. The thought flashed on Atacinus to save Lygia and himself, above all, and leave the rest to their fate. So, drawing her out of the litter, he took her in his arms and strove to escape in the darkness.

But Lygia called, "Ursus! Ursus!"

She was dressed in white; hence it was easy to see her. Atacinus, with his other arm, which was free, was throwing his own mantle over her hastily, when terrible claws seized his neck, and on his head a gigantic, crushing mass fell like a stone.

He dropped in one instant, as an ox felled by the back of an axe before the altar of Jove.

The slaves for the greater part were either lying on the ground, or had saved themselves by scattering in the thick darkness, around the turns of the walls. On the spot remained only the litter, broken in the onset. Ursus bore away Lygia to the Subura; his comrades followed him, dispersing gradually along the way.

The slaves assembled before the house of Vinicius, and took counsel. They had not courage to enter. After a short deliberation they returned to the place of conflict, where they found a few corpses, and among them Atacinus. He was quivering yet; but, after a moment of more violent convulsion, he stretched and was motionless.

They took him then, and, returning, stopped before the gate a second time. But they must declare to their lord what had happened.

"Let Gulo declare it," whispered some voices; "blood is flowing from his face as from ours; and the master loves him; it is safer for Gulo than for others."

Gulo, a German, an old slave, who had nursed Vinicius, and was inherited by him from his mother, the sister of Petronius, said, —

"I will tell him; but do ye all come. Do not let his anger fall on my head alone."

Vinicius was growing thoroughly impatient. Petronius and Chrysothemis were laughing; but he walked with quick step up and down the atrium.

"They ought to be here! They ought to be here!"

He wished to go out to meet the litter, but Petronius and Chrysothemis detained him.

Steps were heard suddenly in the entrance; the slaves rushed into the atrium in a crowd, and, halting quickly at

the wall, raised their hands, and began to repeat with groaning, —

“Aaaa! — aa!”

Vinicius sprang toward them.

“Where is Lygia?” cried he, with a terrible and changed voice.

“Aaaa!”

Then Gulo pushed forward with his bloody face, and exclaimed, in haste and pitifully, —

“See our blood, lord! We fought! See our blood! See our blood!”

But he had not finished when Vinicius seized a bronze lamp, and with one blow shattered the skull of the slave; then, seizing his own head with both hands, he drove his fingers into his hair, repeating hoarsely, —

“Me miserum! me miserum!”

His face became blue, his eyes turned in his head, foam came out on his lips.

“Whips!” roared he at last, with an unearthly voice.

“Lord! Aaaa! Take pity!” groaned the slaves.

Petronius stood up with an expression of disgust on his face. “Come, Chrysothemis!” said he. “If ’t is thy wish to look on raw flesh, I will give command to open a butcher’s stall on the Carinæ.”

And he walked out of the atrium. But through the whole house, ornamented in the green of ivy and prepared for a feast, were heard, from moment to moment, groans and the whistling of whips, which lasted almost till morning.

CHAPTER XI.

VINICIUS did not lie down that night. Some time after the departure of Petronius, when the groans of his flogged slaves could allay neither his rage nor his pain, he collected a crowd of other servants, and, though the night was far advanced, rushed forth at the head of these to look for Lygia. He visited the district of the Esquiline, then the Subura, Vicus Sceleratus, and all the adjoining alleys. Passing next around the Capitol, he went to the island over the bridge of Fabricius; after that he passed through a part of the Trans-Tiber. But that was a pursuit without object, for he himself had no hope of finding Lygia, and if he sought her it was mainly to fill out with something a terrible night. In fact he returned home about daybreak, when the carts and mules of dealers in vegetables began to appear in the city, and when bakers were opening their shops.

On returning he gave command to put away Gulo’s corpse, which no one had ventured to touch. The slaves from whom Lygia had been taken he sent to rural prisons, — a punishment almost more dreadful than death. Throwing himself at last on a couch in the atrium, he began to think confusedly of how he was to find and seize Lygia.

To resign her, to lose her, not to see her again, seemed to him impossible; and at this thought alone frenzy took hold of him. For the first time in life the imperious nature of the youthful soldier met resistance, met another unbending will, and he could not understand simply how any one could have the daring to thwart his wishes. Vinicius would have chosen to see the world and the city sink in ruins rather than fail of his purpose. The cup of delight had been snatched from before his lips almost; hence it seemed to him that something unheard of had happened, something crying to divine and human laws for vengeance.

But, first of all, he was unwilling and unable to be reconciled with fate, for never in life had he so desired anything as Lygia. It seemed to him that he could not exist without her. He could not tell himself what he was to do without her on the morrow, how he was to survive the days following. At moments he was transported by a rage against her, which approached madness. He wanted to