CHAPTER XIV

THE POISONED CUP

Nyria tells of how Phyllis, Domitian’s nurse, visited Julia: of how the maid Lavinia partook of a poisoned cup intended for the Empress: and of how Euphena warned Nyria against going to the house of Bishop Clement with Domitilla.

Nyria: “When I got back to the house, I found that Julia had sent for Phyllis, Domitian’s nurse.1 Now Phyllis, having been Domitian’s foster-mother, knew much of what was in his mind, though at times when his mood was ill, he seemed to scorn her. Yet often would Caesar go and talk with Phyllis, like, ‘twas said, the nurserling he once had been.

I wanted to tell thee about Phyllis.

She was an old woman, though not old like Euphena—for she was still comely, and had a gentle, kindly face. She loved Domitian—I should think she was the only person who did—and she had her own rooms in the Palace and was well provided for, but she thought more of a visit from Domitian than of anything else. She had nursed Julia too, and if aught kind could be said of Julia it came from Phyllis. But some there were who said that Phyllis was like many another woman-fool and made excuses that had no truth in them because she loved these two. Yet, I think that Phyllis knew more than she would talk of. She seldom talked to anyone. But after all these things were told about Julia and the slaves gossiped of them, I remember Thanna saying: ‘Now, why waste words in idle conjecture. Go question Phyllis if thou wouldst know the truth.’ But Phyllis would not have told them, though if indeed Julia was not the Emperor’s daughter she must have known it.

I myself saw Phyllis seldom, for she was never in Caesar’s presence when we went to the Palace. That which Phyllis loved most to see was when Domitian went forth in state. Then Phyllis would stand foremost of the crowd and feel herself rewarded if he cast a glance that way. But he seldom did. And Julia was cruel to her. She would call her ‘Crone’ and laugh her to scorn. Yet Phyllis did not seem to mind. She was far too gentle to belong to either Domitian or Julia. She seemed like a person who had been nurse to two wild creatures.

She hated Domitia, because Domitia had once said to her that she owed her a grudge for not having let Domitian die in infancy.

She seemed to be no great person. Withal, she had her own litter and her bearers and suitable attendance, for the which Domitian paid—it went into the Palace costs.

Now, Aemilia told me that Julia, worrying herself into a fever, had taken to her bed again, and being unable to obtain speech with Domitian

1 Phyllis, the nurse of Domitian and Julia. See Appendix 41, Bk. II.
had sent messengers in haste to Phyllis bidding her come. Even ere I returned, Phyllis was then having audience.

Whereon, I sat without upon the steps, and talked with Aemilia who seemed to think that Julia was more ill than had appeared.

‘But she is strong,’ I said. ‘Wherefore dost thou think there can be aught wrong with Julia?’

And Aemilia shook her head and said, ‘Nay, I know not. None knoweth save Euphena. But I like not the look of her.’

‘Mayhap Phyllis will be a better medicine for her than Euphena’s potions,’ said I.

Aemilia looked round over her shoulder to be sure no one was listening.

‘I like not to speak ill of Euphena, but it doth mistrust me that she should give so many potions to Julia.’

‘Thou hadst best not speak ill of Euphena,’ I said. ‘At least, she maketh me suffer when I have so much as thought ill of her. But what can these potions be? Doth she not purchase them of Stephanus, and he is not like to sell her aught that might make mischief.’

‘Nay,’ said Aemilia, ‘she doth concoct these herself, and where she buyeth the drugs none can tell. But methinks they are no bought drugs at all, but stewed berries that she hath gathered herself.’

‘None knoweth what Euphena may do,’ I answered, ‘but it would ill serve her to serve Julia ill.’

‘Hush thee,’ said Aemilia. ‘Here she cometh,’ and then we saw Euphena turning round the corner. Her old head was bent forward and she had a searching gaze in her eyes. At first she took no heed of us, but drawing near to the door of Julia’s room, she peered within and, hearing voices, came back to where Aemilia and I sat.

‘Whom hath Julia with her?’ she asked.

‘Tis Phyllis,’ answered Aemilia. ‘Didst thou not see her bearers?’

‘Nay, I take no heed of such as carry the bodies of them that are too lazy to walk,’ said Euphena. ‘The day will come when Phyllis—ay, and Julia herself—would be glad enough to set foot to earth and may not. Why should they be borne in a litter, forsooth! when such as I must needs stagger along as best I may?’

And Euphena sat her down beside us and unfolding her blanket—for the day was chilly and ‘twas drawing on towards late afternoon—she laid it across her shoulders.

None of us spoke for a minute, and, presently, Euphena looked round at us over her shoulder, drawing her thin, shrivelled mouth back upon her gums—she had two black-looking teeth that hung down on either side from the upper jaw and gave her a fierce appearance.

‘Well, and what pretty thoughts do occupy these my dainty ladies?’ said she. ‘Truly thou art cheerful company.’

‘Nay, we do depend on thee to cheer us, Euphena,’ said Aemilia with a little laugh—I think she was half afraid of Euphena.

‘Ay, in truth I will cheer thee. I will cheer thee with fine doings, but it may not be yet. Thou shalt see as fine a funeral pageant as thou hast ever set eyes upon—but not to-night—no—nor to-morrow. Yet keep thyself prepared for the majesty of this great one who shall pass into the realms of shades that thou mayst with all right reverence, as beseemeth slaves, bid her farewell and a lucky journey.’

Aemilia shivered. I saw she did not like Euphena’s talk.
'A pretty thing indeed,' said Euphena, jerking her head towards Julia's room—'that she who doth depend so much upon Euphena should turn to such as Phyllis. But 'tis ever so. The minds of those that near their final ending do cling to their beginnings.'

Aemilia looked anxiously at her. 'Thou art taking good care of Julia, art thou not, Euphena?' she said.

Euphena laughed. It was a harsh chukle—something like uncooked peas rattling in a pan. 'Oh, ay—I am the servant of the most high gods and 'tis their righteous pleasure that Julia should be well tended, and as such I obey them. Julia shall lack for naught. Right merrily shall she be clad and sped upon her way.'

'I like not thy talk,' began Aemilia. 'Thou dost speak as though Julia's days were numbered.' She stopped and turned round, for in the doorway behind us Phyllis stood.

Now, this side of Julia's rooms looked to the west, so that the sun shone full upon us as we sat, and Euphena in her orange bodice and brown petticoat with the striped blanket lying beside her, looked a strange old creature.

Phyllis was a small woman, but plump, yet with somewhat of dignity, and she looked at Euphena as though she would have scorned her. But Euphena turned slowly and glared upon her.

'Well, hast thou seen thy nurseling?' she said. 'A lovely creature, is she not? She will make a handsome corpse.'

Now Phyllis would have paid no heed to Euphena, but turning to Aemilia she asked: 'What saidst thou? That the lady Julia's days were numbered? Such words are ill-omened, and might perchance but for the mercy of the gods bring their own doom. Yet by the blessing of Aesculapius, she doth seem more at ease, and, in truth, may live many years among us to wear the robes of her desire and rule over such as should be dirt beneath her feet.'

'A pretty thing indeed . . . a pretty thing!' screamed Euphena, 'that such as I am should be called dirt . . . And yet who be better born than I? . . . Better born, I say, than thou . . . daughter of a small wool-merchant who hast sprung unto a place for which thou wert not fitted. List——list and know that thou dost address thyself to the grand-daughter of Candace. . . . She who was so far above such as thou that she would not have had thee about her feet.'

'Nay, nay, I meant naught,' said Phyllis rather nervously, 'but such talk is not fitting so near the presence of the divine Julia.'

'The divine scavenger!' screamed Euphena. 'A truce to such false tales, thou life-long deceiver. Who changed the babe and swore to Titus that thou wert putting in his arms the daughter of his own loins?—Ay, and who paid the dirty wretch that stole about the Palace and had naught of this world's goods to serve him save his comely visage, which he had ne'er learned to wash before the Augusta looked on him.'

I was puzzled and frightened and I cannot quite remember what Euphena said, but that was the kind of thing. . . .

We looked to see Phyllis silence Euphena as she should have been able to do.

But Phyllis only shivered and drew back a little. She looked round her in a frightened way and her eyes fell before Euphena's.

1 Candace was Queen of the Ethiopians of Meroe, who invaded Egypt and was defeated by the Roman governor of Egypt, 22 B.C.
Euphena’s screaming voice had called others up. I saw Thanna come first. She ran, twisting up her hair as she came, and seeing there was something going on—for Thanna loved a riot only next best to a pleasurable junketing—she called over her shoulder: ‘Hither! hither! who would hear Euphena hold her own? What shall we lay on Euphena? Some may back Phyllis but for myself I stand up for the honour of the household. Thy tongue is sharp, Euphena. Stab her with it. See thou makest marks. Again—again.’ And this Thanna said from time to time, while Euphena shrieked at Phyllis.

‘Hush . . . hush . . . ’ cried Phyllis. ‘See, I will not stay to hear thee speak so. Will no one call my bearers?’ And she looked at me.

I stood, feet rooted to the ground, not knowing which way to turn, and Aemilia had shrunk against the pillar and a great concourse of the slaves had gathered round and stood, with Thanna in their foremost, picking up the speeches of both and throwing in words of laughter on each side.

All seemed to have forgotten that Julia might hear them. Euphena looked as though fire must leap from the glistening black spot in the middle of her yellow eyes, and her two black fangs seemed to gleam against the red of her tongue while she poured forth her fury in words which came so loud and fast that scarce could I piece them together and naught that Phyllis could say or do would stop her.

‘Art proud of thy nurslings, Phyllis?’ Euphena screamed and jeered. ‘Thou bringer-up of monsters who wreak destruction wherever they pass upon the accursed globe. . . . Know that I too had a nursling. . . . I had a babe who hung upon these breasts and that was flesh and blood of mine own and no spawn of the city’s scum. . . . And lo, thy nursling . . . grown into a monster, snatched my babe from me. . . . since it was by her command I was put to labour so cruel that the milk dried up in these withered breasts and I had none to give my little one who died from starving. . . .’

And as she shrieked, Euphena tore open her bodice and shewed her brown shrivelled breasts while she went on taunting Phyllis.

‘Oh! ill could that great monster of thine spare a coin from her plenty to provide milk for my starving babe! . . . Mine,’ she cried, ‘. . . my child of pure blood and royal descent, untainted by foul birth or by sin. . . . And thou . . . thou plotting wheedler that wouldst steal that evil-weighted crown from the head of her who, at least, doth lawfully wear it and wouldst place it on the brow of yon low-born. . . .’ Euphena spake a word of which I mind me not, save that it was one of shame. . . . ‘Thinkest thou,’ she went on, ‘that Euphena, princess in Ethiopia, can ever forget how this Julia who doth forsake the lawful embraces not seasoned to her taste, for those which reek of gaudy lust. . . . how this scavenger’s daughter did first seize me from him who was my own true spouse and then did bid me throw the body of our babe upon the dustman’s refuse-cart to be carried without the city walls. . . . A . . . ah!’ she shrieked again. ‘Soon shall Julia have the burying which she denied to my child! . . .’

Phyllis had shrunk back trembling while Euphena talked, but the last words had scarcely fallen from Euphena’s lips when there was a stir and Julia stood in the doorway, in an embroidered wrapper, looking very tall and flushed yet seeming not to be strong, for she clutched at the wall for support.

‘What mean these unseemly sounds?’ she cried. ‘How darest thou, scum of the earth, disturb my rest?’

Phyllis turned towards her and held out her hands which were shaking,
and she could not speak. Julia did not at first take note of her but looked round again as if in a maze.

Euphena had crept whining to her feet. ‘This wise Phyllis,’ she said, ‘who is so devoted to thee, O divine Julia, hath in most strange unwisdom been exclaiming at thy condition, wondering what ill hath chanced upon thee and that the gods should visit thee at one and the same time with so much sorrow, seeing that Sabinus hath left thee and that thou art sick . . . ay, sick unto death . . . methinks Phyllis said. . . . Did she not say sick unto death? ’ cried Euphena, looking round and clinging to the border of Julia’s robe.

Julia looked down upon her in a sort of horror—trying to draw her skirt away yet seeming half-afraid of Euphena.

‘Thou hag,’ she said slowly. ‘The gods alone know when thou liest. How shall one believe thee?’

Phyllis was sobbing in silence behind her.

‘Nay, nay, I speak but the truth,’ said Euphena. ‘Sick unto death . . . that was the word . . . or, at least, so meseemed—and if none spoke it some thought it . . . and thou knowest, Julia, the mind of Euphena can read the thoughts of men.’

She looked up at Julia with her yellow eyes and again Julia seemed fascinated before her. The other slaves were drawing back, afraid of being punished if they remained and yet eager to see what might follow.

Julia said nothing.

‘The mind of Euphena doth read that thou art sore disturbed and distressed by this talk which thou dost call unseemly . . .’ went on Euphena.

‘Get thee to thy couch, oh sweet and stately Julia, and Euphena will come and tend thee . . . Euphena will sit beside thee and charm around thee such spirits of the air as shall best serve thee now.’

Julia turned and half-disappeared into the room: and then the sound of Phyllis’s sobs struck on her ear. She came forth again and held up her hand.

‘Get thee gone, Phyllis,’ she said.”

NYRIA: “Now there was a thing I wanted to tell thee about Phyllis which I would not myself have believed and methinks thou wouldst not either.

It was when Euphena was shouting and did say that Phyllis would fain snatch the crown and the robes off her who had a lawful right to wear them, that she screamed out, ‘Who mixed the cup for Domitia last night? . . . And who was it that drank in her stead and now doth lie in that silence to which Julia will ere long be hastened? . . .’

This I mind me to tell thee because there was much talk afterwards about that poisoned cup which Domitia ordered the maid Lavinia to drink before her.

Others among the slaves heard the talk also and busied themselves over the matter: and then one among Julia’s bearers was full of somewhat he had gathered from Phyllis’s bearers, for there had been gossip within the Palace that day—that Domitia had been like to drink poison when she had dined with Domitian on the previous evening.

The story went that when Domitia asked for wine they brought her a tale that the cask of her favourite vintage was empty and that for some reason another could not be opened. And when she exclaimed bitterly—for Domitia liked that wine—one came with a cup that he said he had
drawn with difficulty as 'twas the end of the cask, and he set it before her.
Then Domitia, putting it to her lips, had some sudden thought and craved
of Domitian to drink with her, saying it was a special vintage that had been
sent her from the south.

But when she bade them carry the cup to Domitian, he shook his head
and would not drink although she prayed him most courteously as a favour
to his empress and his wife: and then a strange white look came over his
face ... or so they say . . . and he hesitated, with his hand yet upon
the cup scarce knowing how to deny her seeing she had pledged him thus
courteously. Then Domitia, with great unwisdom seeking to press her
advantage, cried, half-rising from her seat.

'Now by the shade of Aelius Lamia I pledge thee, Domitian. Drink to
his memory and to me . . . to that past from which thou didst debar him
. . . and to that future which, then, thou wouldst fain share with me alone.'

And all those who listened heard the ring of scorn in her voice . . . and
Domitian pushed the cup away angrily and would have none of it, crying out:
'A pest upon thee . . . who would pledge by the shade of a dead man.
Wouldst have me too join the shades? 'Tis treason': and this he muttered
into his own glass confusedly.

But Domitia, seeing she had erred, bade them bring the cup back to her,
the which, when she did so, Domitian watched her closely, thinking she was
about to drink, and Domitia seeing the look of eagerness upon his face did
smile, 'twas said, most disagreeably.

'Nay, now, my lord,' she said, 'I have a fancy to share this last sweet
cup with someone and seeing thou wilt not drink with me, we will bid
Lavinia in hither.'

Now Lavinia was a maiden who lived with Phyllis—whether grand­
daughter or niece I know not, but Phyllis loved her. . . . And Domitia,
turning to her servers, said:

'Bid the maid Lavinia hither. Tell her it is the will of the Empress that
she should drink one cup of wine from the royal table.'

Wherefore, they said, Domitia knew the cup was poisoned and Domitian
sat watching her, clutching the end of the table, with his eyes starting from
his head. He dared not interfere lest they should say he knew the cup was
poisoned. Now he cared naught for Lavinia, but he knew it would go ill
with Phyllis if harm befell the maid. . . . I tell thee this as the slaves' gossip
that they told us. . . . And then Lavinia came—a humble-looking maid
who had naught to recommend her save the charm of youth—with brown
hair and a pale face that seemed to flush at the honour done her. And
she knelt before Domitia, who gave her the cup, saying:

'Drink, pretty one: and then shall the legend follow thee so that all
thy descendants may know how Domitia drank after thee.' . . . For this
was great honour from an empress.

And Lavinia raised the cup and drank while the slaves stood round and
none durst interfere. But having drunk she gave back the cup into Domitia's
hand and rose when Domitia bade her. And Domitia looked to see her fall,
but she fell not: and at first Domitia seemed surprised and watched her
without speaking, whereat Domitian cried harshly from the other end of
the table: 'Art satisfied, thou suspicious fool?'

But Domitia shook her head and said, 'Nay . . . wait . . . wait.'
And the maid thought she bade her wait and stood humbly with hands
folded on her breast. But even as she stood, she clutched her side and a
change came over her face: and Domitia watched her but said no word: and the maid reeled and would have fallen had not one caught her from behind. . . . Then, for a moment, she struggled while Domitia kept very still and watched her, but none spoke . . . only Domitian rose from his seat and stood and stared, turning very white and then red.

Domitia waited until the maid's death-struggles were over and then she waved her hand. 'Bear the maid out,' she said. 'Tend her with all fitting honour and bear her straight to Phyllis. Say that the cup hath done its work.'

That was why they talked about Phyllis. But I myself would never have thought that Phyllis could have done this thing. Yet afterward, though Phyllis mourned sore, she dared say naught lest suspicion fall upon her for having mixed the cup.

I did tell thee, I think, that Crispus came to and fro, and I had some speech with him that night. There was much talk going on amongst the slaves, and to me it seemed as though the air were full of troubles and terrors. I could not tell what was about to happen next, and my heart longed for something to lean upon . . . something wherewith I might comfort myself and feel secure.

I began to be afraid that Sabinus would never come back, and Crispus was sore distressed because of rumours that he had gathered at the school and in the Forum on his homeward way. Some said that were not Sabinus a noble Roman he would be sent to the Arena. I could not see why, and Crispus said 'twas most unjust. Crispus had been striving to obtain word with him, but without avail. I thought that perhaps Alexamenos might have arranged that for him. But Crispus knew naught of Alexamenos, and Alexamenos was difficult to obtain audience with. . . . Why I know not, but I have thought, since, he may have feared that some who loved Sabinus might ask for speech with him, and that Alexamenos had not the will to grant it. I did not quite understand Alexamenos, because he had been willing before to save my master. But now that Sabinus was taken prisoner, a strong guard had been placed upon him, and Alexamenos did not come nigh me again. Crispus said it was because his duty forced him: and both Crispus and I were heavy at heart seeing how we feared for Sabinus.

'Go, pray the gods, Nyria, that they protect him,' Crispus said to me. But Crispus did not pray to the gods himself: he cared little for them and I think at heart he was wont to laugh at them as some others did.

Thus my heart was very full that night and it turned to the god of whom the great Clement had spoken to me on the hill and, had I dared, I would have prayed to him for Sabinus. . . . And when the time drew on at which Stephanus had said he would fetch me, I grew uneasy, fearing that Julia would retain me about her. So I went in and Aemilia met me on the doorstep and said, 'None be needed to serve Julia to-night save Euphena only.'

'Nevertheless I needs must ask her,' I said, 'else she may enquire about me.'

Then Thanna, who was passing, stopped and said:

'Thou art always a fool, Nyria. Lo, if a lion's jaws were opened before thee thou wouldst walk into them.'

But I shook my head and stepped into my mistress's room.

Julia lay in half darkness upon her couch. There was a lamp lit but it was not near her. She seemed to be moaning and tossing from side to side,
but yet half sleeping, and beside her crouched Euphena on the floor. Euphena’s hands were clasped around her knees and her eyes were fixed in that strange way she had, crosswise, as though she were looking only at the end of her nose; at the which, when I saw it, I paused and would have withdrawn, but at the stir of my foot, the vision forsook her and, seeing me, she signed to me to begone, and that she would speak with me without.

So, when she came softly out after me, she said that Julia needed none to minister unto her save herself alone.

‘But if she be not well,’ said I, ‘thou canst not wait upon her all the night, Euphena. Thou wilt tire and need sleep thyself.’

‘The night hath not come yet,’ said Euphena. ‘When the night cometh upon Julia, she will need even Euphena no more. Go thou, child, and take thy pleasure . . . if it be thy pleasure to walk this path that leads only to the gates of Hades . . . since the gods have decreed that none shall put forth a hand to save thee.’

She laid her skinny claw upon mine arm as she spoke and looked up into my face. ‘Thou hast been a good girl, Nyria,’ she said more softly than was her wont. ‘I would fain accord thee thy due. Mayhap, Euphena hath been over-harsh to thee, but ’twas more than flesh and blood could stand to place a changeling babe in the bosom of a bereaved woman instead of her own flesh and blood. But this was Julia’s work, not thine. Thou hast always been gentle and kind to Euphena and thou art of different stuff from that chattering crew who echo every gust of the wind—who will acclaim Caesar to-day and his successor to-morrow. See, now, I would even at this hour save thee if it be not too late. Go not to-night whither thy heart leads thee and, mayhap, the doom shall be averted.’

I made no answer, but I looked at her in doubt for I could not understand how Euphena knew these things that had never been told her: and I was not willing that she should hinder me. She looked me through and through, so that I would fain have covered my breast and face with my hands, for it seemed as though she read my soul.

‘Thou art stiff-necked, Nyria,’ she said. ‘Were the gods themselves to come down to keep thee from this path, thou wouldst yet follow that stranger-god whom in thy heart thou seekest. Thus be it unto thee, then, for naught shall avert the finger that writeth on the face of the heavens. Thou must have thy will. Go, then, and remember, when the red clouds close round thee and all earth and heaven drip blood, that Euphena would have held thee back if it were possible.’

Then I found my tongue. I shivered a little, for her words always seemed to mean so much.

‘I know not what thou wouldst have, Euphena,’ I answered. ‘I was but going down the hill to . . . ’ and there I paused, for I might not say where, nor did I truly know.

‘Seek not to excuse thyself,’ she said, pointing her finger to the door. ‘Nor need’st thou to answer Euphena that which she hath not asked of thee. Now, by all the stars on high, dost thou think that one skilled in such a lore as theirs would need to learn the secrets of men’s hearts through human lips. Thine is plain to me, Nyria. But it matters not. Go in peace and may the——’ it was something about the wings of some great power—‘uphold thee so that darkness fall not yet upon thee.’

And I ran but half frightened, yet not daring to ask Euphena again what she meant.
I stayed not to tell Aemilia whither I was going, but hastened through the
courtyard and through the lower gate that led down by the flight of steps
thereon knowest of, out upon the road below the Aventine. Now, at the bottom
of the flight of steps, Stephanus met me and I almost ran into his arms.

'Say, Nyria,' he cried, kissing me, 'what hath lent wings to thy feet?
Alas! my dear, 'tis no longing for Stephanus, I fear. Thou dost not always
hasten thus to me.'

I laughed and slipped my hand in his and he felt that I was trembling.

'Hath anything affrighted thee?' he asked.

But I cared not to explain what Euphena had said, for it would go with
Stephanus's own mind and he might have kept me back. So I only told him
that Euphena was in one of her ill moods.

'Had Euphena lived in Greece long ago,' he said, 'she would have been
stretched upon the ground and left there to see whether or no the gods would
feed and save her. In truth, she is a strange evil thing and I like not to have
her near thee, Nyria.'

Now I remembered that Euphena had spoken kindly to me and I did not
want him to think too ill of her. 'She hath strange ways, but so have
all wise people,' I answered. 'Look at yon Ascletario, how strange a life
he leadeth.'

'Ay, but he doeth ill to none and is ever courteous.'

'Euphena doeth no ill,' I said. 'Tis but her talk.'

'I know not,' he answered. 'Strange things are said of them that deserve
it not, and, mayhap, they who do deserve it are clever enough to keep men
silent on their doings.'

I wondered what he was thinking of: and then it came into my mind that
ill things were said of the Christians . . . how that they slew and ate babes
and had riotous love-feasts and kept no laws. But these things I could not
believe, if it were true that Clement were a Christian and the lady Domitilla.

So then I pressed Stephanus's hand and asked him if he thought thus of the
Christians.

'Thinkest thou,' he answered harshly, 'that if these things were true,
I would take thee amongst them? Nay, Nyria, thou mayst have more
faith in Stephanus than that. A set of wild fanatics they may be—but the
worst fault that I have heard of with regard to them is that they will not
bear arms and fight in their country's need. They pride themselves upon
their peaceful ways and think fighting wicked. I am not one with them there,
though I grant they do uphold that which they believe. For myself I had
rather show a stout pair of fists to one that injured me than sit me meekly
down to be chastised, though I go so far as that any sect to which my
lady Domitilla doth belong must needs have some measure of friendly feeling
from me. . . . But now that thou wouldst go amongst them, Nyria, what
shall I say?' And he clasped my hand closer. 'Is every Christian, in future,
to be dearer to Stephanus?'

'Nay, I know not,' I said. 'Leave me time to judge of them. But yet,
mesems, Stephanus, that, if they be like the lady Domitilla and like the lord
Clement who did address me, and if they do bear such peace within their
breasts, then would I fain be one of them, for I am in sore need of peace.'

'Now, why?' he answered bending quickly over me, and slipping my hand
into his other one, he placed his arm around me and drew me closer to his side
as we walked. 'What wouldst thou have of peace, Nyria, that thou canst
not find in the arms of Stephanus?' Behold, they are open and aching for
Thee, child, needing only that thou shouldst rest for ever within them. What peace had like to be so sweet as this?

But I would not answer, for I could not make Stephanus understand. And yet I wanted to be kind to him. I turned my face against his toga and kissed a fold of it.

'Thou art very dear to me, Stephanus. But it sometimes seems that 'tis no love like thine I need—but one that shall be greater far and that shall lift me to heights of understanding of the which I now only dimly reckon.'

Stephanus made a sort of angry movement and half drew himself away.

'I know not what to make of thee, Nyria. If thou wert other than thyself, I should say that thou hadst set thine affection upon Caesar and fain would queen it over Rome.'

But I shuddered. ' 'Tis no love of Caesar that I would have,' I answered.

'The lowest brute would seem to me more like to love than Caesar. Thou dost not understand, Stephanus: and how shall I show thee?'

'In truth I know not,' he answered gruffly. 'I would thou wert more like ordinary maids, Nyria, with but the simple cravings for motherhood and love of home and husband. Then would it be easier for Stephanus to fulfil thy need.'

'I wonder much that thou hast patience to bear with me,' I answered.

'But what can I do, Stephanus? I made not myself.'

'Thou art a changeling maid as oft-times I have told thee. ... None knew thy parentage, Nyria,' he said half laughing and wholly tenderly again.

'And sometimes I have thought thou camest from a union of some god with a foreign woman. For half thyself is not of this earth at all and seemeth but to find its joy in things whereof we mortal men are wont only to speak as the pleasures that do come when we are translated and fit to abide with the gods. And verily I have often thought that I would not hail that change with great delight, for to me the lower joys of earth ... of sun and wine, good food and prosperity and, sweeter far than all, the arms of mine own wife and babes—were dearer joys than such as Olympus can offer me.'
CHAPTER XV

ACROSS THE STYX

Nyria tells of how she visits Bishop Clement and of how that night Julia dreams a strange dream: and of how at sunset of the next day the Shade of Sabinus summons his wife to bear him company in his passage across the Styx.

NYRIA: "The road was steep where we were walking, and it was very dark save where a house or two stood far apart, each with torches set in the stone support upon its wall... for I have told thee of Domitian's laws for lighting. Now I would not have Stephanus's arm around me when we reached the streets because I liked not others to see. But he would have kept it there before all Rome and teased me for bidding him take it away.

'Thou art like a little young bird, Nyria, that would strive with its wings because they have just grown. But thou wilt come back to the nest of my arms some day,'

'I know not,' I answered. 'Mayhap 'twill be so. But let me fly now, Stephanus. All things that have wings desire to fly.'

'In truth, it is so,' he said and teased me no more. But he still held my hand, for that was naught, because many a one might hold his maid's hand as they walked.

But when we got down to the lower part of the city, where the streets were poor and narrow, Stephanus held me close to him. We had left the Forum behind us and skirted the lower forum, where the markets were held, by a covered passage: and then, thou knowest, there is a street wider than the rest which leadeth straight down to the Tiber, so that the river floweth across the end of it. 'Tis a respectable street, where many good citizens live, and some shops there be, though none quite close to the river end, for there none would go to shop. The district called the Suburra lay upon one side of it... and now I think I remember that it lay also upon the other.

Thou knowest that in most parts, especially the more favoured parts of the Suburra,1 where the houses facing the river were used by innkeepers, there was a path wide enough to drive a chariot slowly along it, and there were wooden balconies jutting from the path on posts into the river where musicians gathered and street mimes would play... This for the entertainment of those who took their supper at the inns and who liked to sit by the open windows looking out on the river. But where Stephanus took me was a quiet street. Few passed that way save such as lived there and, while we walked along seeing but few people, a veiled figure passed before us attended by a damsels, which made me think that it must be a person of note. Now Stephanus squeezed my hand and quickened his pace.

1 Nyria, coming down from the shop of Stephanus near by the Via Argentaria, would have crossed or passed along the irregular street of the Suburra. But I cannot trace the Suburra region as facing the river. Perhaps one better acquainted with the topography of ancient Rome can make this point clear. (Ed.)
Tis the lady Domitilla,' said he. 'We will haste.' And we, following upon her steps, and being close behind her, he said somewhat in a low tone the which I did not understand, and the lady turned and half drew her veil from her face, and then I saw 'twas she.

'A greeting, friends,' she said. 'Thou comest in good time, Stephanus. And this is our little maid?' . . . She put her hand upon my shoulder, and walked upon the other side of me.

Stephanus conversed with her in a low voice, but I did not understand much that he said nor, indeed, did I listen for I was too eager and excited at the thought of whither I was going.

Now when we had nearly reached the end of the street, Domitilla paused before a tall house . . . methinks it was the last but one or two, almost near to the river. And here she struck softly on the door, which was opened from within.

A young slave stood there clad in a tunic, and seeing who it was, drew aside and we entered. The place was dark—a low dim passage—and it seemed to me the house was poor. But yet I was full of wonder for what might come.

Now, turning to one side, we entered a room. 'Twas low and seemed to serve for a parlour and a sleeping-chamber in one, for a great bed covered the corner of the floor. There were a table and some chairs, and another door led beyond.

While I stood there wondering what I should see, Domitilla, signing to the slave to approach her, spoke a few words to him. This, too, in terms I did not understand—though, here and there, I caught a word; and presently bowing low he withdrew. We had not waited long before the door upon the farther side opened and one stood there bearing a lamp, which cast shadows about him. He was tall, or so he seemed, with a grey beard sweeping to his breast, and when I saw the grey beard and the grey cloak I looked at him more closely and knew it was Clement—he who had spoken to me on the hill. I had been sitting as Domitilla bade me, but I rose at once and stood while she went forward and knelt before him, crav ing his blessing. And this right humbly till it seemed to me amazing that a lady of high repute in Rome and of noble station should stoop so before any man . . . most of all, one who was well known to be her husband's cousin.1

Stephanus stood behind me, but as the great Clement glanced towards him, he, too, came forward and made a bow. But he did not stoop very low, for that was not Stephanus's way. Clement spoke to him most kindly.

'Friend, I would welcome thee and the maid that thou dost bring. Nevertheless, I would that thy visit were for the entering in of thine own self into our body.'

Stephanus said something short and gruff, he meant not to be rough, I saw, but he seemed not wholly at ease, and Domitilla said:

'Ah that, too, would I. It hath been mine earnest prayer that Stephanus, faithful friend as he is and one with Flavius and myself in all things save this, should join us too in the grace of the Lord.'

Clement spoke softly.

'Tis but a natural desire. Yet, remember, sister, that the Master said, "Other sheep I have which are not of this fold."'

'Yea,' said Domitilla. 'But the Master added, "Them also I must bring

1 This relationship stated by Nyria, has been put forward by various writers, but has not been fully substantiated.
that they may be one with Me in Thy Kingdom . . .’’ and all this while Stephanus stood looking shy and awkward, which Clement seeing and pitying, he did salute him in brotherly fashion, saying:

‘‘Whether or no, friend Stephanus, thou art most welcome, since like one of the Master’s own shepherds thou hast brought a lamb into the fold.’

And then he came across to where I stood, but Stephanus stepped before him, and seemed then to find his voice.

‘‘May it please thee, Clement,’’ he said, ‘‘the maid, Nyria, knoweth naught of thee and thy teachings, but the favour of the lady Domitilla hath pleased and flattered the maid so that she gave me no peace till I should bring her as Domitilla had said, therefore are we come. Nevertheless, Nyria is no Christian.’’

Stephanus spoke confusedly and quickly, but Clement looked from him to me most kindly.

‘‘Now, methinks, thou art not wholly right, friend,’’ he said, ‘‘seeing that though Nyria be no Christian as yet, she is most surely one of the Lord’s little lambs, for whom a place has been prepared.’

He put out his hand and took both mine in one of his as he stood and turned smiling to Stephanus.

‘‘The maid hath told me,’’ said Stephanus gruffly, ‘‘that thou didst meet her on the hill and speak to her words of comfort when she was sore troubled over a private sorrow; for which I thank thee, Clement, though had Nyria come to me I would have striven to ease her pain. Nevertheless, Nyria knoweth naught save such as thou didst tell her then.’’

‘‘Methinks Nyria doth,’’ said Clement kindly. ‘‘For Nyria hath been, meseems, taught by One whom thou and even I scarce know more of than she.’’

Stephanus was silent. He walked away and stood with his back towards us, while Clement raised me from my knees and bade me be seated.

He placed himself upon a large wooden chair with arms, and I drew a stool to his feet while the lady Domitilla sat close by.

‘‘Say, Nyria,’’ he said. ‘‘Wilt thou be a lamb in our little flock? We use these terms,’’ he said, ‘‘because the Master used them . . . . He who came down from heaven and entered into flesh for the shepherding of the whole world. Now, dost thou see, little one, how we would call all sheep into the fold?’’

‘‘I will be a lamb, may it please thee, lord,’’ I said. ‘‘Shew me the door to enter.’’

‘‘Yea, verily that will I, Nyria,’’ he answered. ‘‘The door is by Baptism, wherein all thy sins will be washed away, and thou shalt be pure and clean as the wool of some unstained lamb.’’ Whereat Stephanus turned upon his heel and came towards us. ‘‘May it please thee, lord,’’ he answered, ‘‘the maid pratteth nonsense. She hath never committed sin.’’

‘‘Verily, friend Stephanus,’’ said Clement gently, ‘‘we are all born in sin—Nyria as well as the vilest sinner.’’

Whereat Stephanus made a rough sound but seemed to find no words to speak.

‘‘Nevertheless, Nyria desireth not to sin and, by the merit of Him who died for her, she shall sin no more,’’ Clement said.

‘‘Lord, who did die for me? I cried.

He looked at me most tenderly and again stroked my head. ‘‘Thou dost not know, but thou shalt learn,’’ he said. ‘‘’Twas verily the Son of God
Himself who shed His fine estate and came down to dwell among men, living as the poorest and suffering as the most sorrowful, till He gave his life for thee and me, Nyria. . . . Yea, and for all them that are His.'

Now this seemed to me most strange and wonderful. 'And wherefore did He die?' I asked. 'Did men sacrifice Him? and if He were indeed God could He not save Himself?'

'Thou dost echo the cry that hath rung many a time,' Clement answered. 'He was indeed God, nevertheless He chose to sacrifice Himself at the hands of men so that we might inherit eternal life.'

Now, again, this seemed to me most wonderful. 'Eternal life!' I asked . . . 'life in the sunshine: life without pain, without beatings, without sorrow. Say, lord, dost thou mean such life as this?'

'Yea, Nyria . . . that I do mean. For, though pain and suffering may come to thee, the Lord our Master will help His children bear this, seeing that He hath suffered Himself.

Stephanus came forward and would have interfered, for I saw he liked it not lest I should be led away. But I turned to him.

'Now, peace, Stephanus,' I said, 'I pray thee, for no god of whom thou hast told me hath done this.' And Stephanus was hushed, and I turned again to Clement. 'Tell me more of this god,' I cried. 'For may it please thee, lord, it semeth to me a stranger, sweeter story than any I have ever heard.'

'Yea, I will tell thee, Nyria, but thou must bear in mind that though the Master died to save His children, He willeth that they serve Him. Wilt thou serve Him, Nyria?'

'Aye, that I will,' I answered. 'Thou knowest, lord, that the service of a little slave is of small account, yet Nyria is faithful and fain would serve Him with all her heart.'

He drew me closer to him and turned to the lady Domitilla. 'Verily, out of the mouths of babes He hath perfected praise,' said Clement. 'Now it seems to me that here we have one who may be received without delay.'

'I will be her sponsor,' said the lady Domitilla. 'Flavius and I will present her, unless, indeed, Clement, thou wert thinking of immediate baptism.'

Now Stephanus seemed as though he could scarce contain himself, for he was treading to and fro in the small room, seeming to fill it with his presence, and at this he turned again. 'May it please thee, Domitilla, and thee also, lord Clement,' he said. 'Give the maid time. She knoweth naught of the ceremony of baptism, and to take an ignorant child and set her up at thy shrine, pledging her to purposes of which she doth know naught, is surely no better than that most savage custom of old-time of sacrificing maids to other gods in other temples.'

'Stephanus speaketh truly,' said Clement. 'And such was not my intention, friend. Nevertheless, I grieve to see in thee this spirit which is ill set against the maid's chances of eternal life.'

'Saving thy presence, lord,' said Stephanus. 'Tis because the maid is dear to me that I like not to see her thus sacrificed. I am a plain fellow and one that hath naught save what he hath worked for, yet the lady Domitilla there, will speak for my faithful service. Now, I have had small dealings with gods of any kind, but it doth seem to me that saving perhaps Hermes, upon whom one doth call by custom, there is none of these—Greek, Roman or Christian—who can aid a man or maid in their way through life.'
BUST OF THE EMPRESS DOMITIA
Clement put up his hand as though he would have stayed his speech. 'Blaspheme not, friend,' he said, but yet he said it mildly. 'Say what thou willest of the Roman gods, or of the gods of thine own country, but before me, at least, thou mayst not speak ill of the Master whom I serve.'

'Nay, that would I not,' said Stephanus, 'out of courtesy to thee. But truly it seemeth to me that what the maid doth need for her guidance, is a strong arm to shield her and a loving heart that she may shelter in.'

'None is so strong nor yet so loving as He whom we do call Master,' said Clement. 'Thou mayst safely trust Nyria to His keeping.'

But Stephanus shook his head and Clement spoke to him again, holding my hand in his. 'We will give the maid time, friend Stephanus. There is no need for such haste as thou fearest. The maid's heart is wholly the Lord's already, so that it scarce matters when she shall be signed with His sign. Therefore, take the maid home with thee, friend Stephanus, and bring her again if thou wilt, or if thou wilt not, then do not bring her. Yet will she surely come, for the Lord knoweth them that are His, and when His voice doth cry aloud in the wilderness of the world all other voices must needs be silent.'

Stephanus stepped forward and taking me by the shoulder a little roughly he pulled me to him, but I clung to Clement. 'When shall I come, lord? Send me not away from thy presence without bidding me come again.'

'Nay I do not send thee from me, Nyria. 'Twere no avail if I did. For thou wilt surely come again even as Mary followed Him who was her heart's dearest. Come when the spirit moveth thee, child. I may not now say when, but thou shalt hear from me again. Go now, I will talk to the lady Domitilla.'

I knelt and kissed the hem of his robe, but he laid his hands upon my head and blessed me, and to me it seemed as though a great peace came down into my soul. . . . And thus I left them with Stephanus following me.

When we reached the end of the street where Stephanus lived, I would have left him there and speeded up alone. But he would not stay and was angry with me for thus speaking. 'Art thou going to Shel me altogether, Nyria?' he said. 'Wilt thou thrust thy old friend on one side for this new fancy that hath come to thee? Verily, I thought more of thy constancy.'

And this pained me, but I could make no answer save such as pleased him not, so I kept silence: and when we reached the lower gate by the steps that led into the courtyard, I bade him good night. But he caught me in his arms and strained me very tight.

'Am I to lose thee altogether then, Nyria? Say, is this new sect to snatch from me my best treasure?'

I laid my head upon his shoulder for a moment.

'I go not away from thee, Stephanus,' I said . . . 'even though I try to follow Him of whom Clement spake. Mayhap, thou wilt, some day, follow Him too.'

'Nay, nay,' said he. 'I have followed thine every whim, Nyria, until, sometimes, it seems to me I am but a fool for my pains. But I'll not follow thee into this foolish chase——'

So then I let him kiss me, but his kisses were rough and hurt me, and I saw that Stephanus was very angry, and for this I was sorry. Nevertheless, it could not take that wondrous peace out of my mind. Now I did not go to Julia's rooms because Euphena had said she would need me not. Therefore
I went to the hut and, ere I entered, I remember looking across at the house—
which shewed very black and white in the shadows—white where the stars'
light shone and black where it stood in darkness; and I looked up to the sky
which was full of stars and thought of what Clement had said of how that
great god came down from the heavens and left His fine estate to suffer among
men, and I wondered if all the heavens were paved with gold or silver and if
these glinting stars I saw were but the bits that shewed through from the
flooring. And I remembered that Clement had said I should see Him there
one day, which seemed a wondrous thought.

Then I went within. But ere I laid me down to rest, it seemed to me that
I should try to offer prayer to Him who was to be my God. I had no altar
and no flowers and nothing in my hand to bring and I knew not what to say
and yet I fain would have prayed to Him.

So, knowing naught, I went out again and stood at the door of the hut
looking up to the floor of the sky, and there I lifted my hands and folded them
on my breast and I prayed in my heart.

'Lord, teach me how to pray': and then I went back and laid me down
to sleep.'

NYRIA (continuing): 'Now, very early in the morning, I was awake and
up again, and as I went without, Crispus passed me with his blanket folded
about his shoulders.

'Thou art early,' said he, and looked so anxious that I asked what was the
matter and if he were going to the Gladiators' School.

He answered, 'Not yet. I go to gather news of Sabinus, if that be possible.'

'Hast thou heard aught of him?' I asked.

'Nay, nothing, save that he is still in prison and my heart doth tell me
that he stands in danger.' Then Crispus took his hand forth from his blanket
and I saw his clenched fist knot and the veins stand out.

'Now,' said he, 'by all these gods and goddesses who amuse themselves
with the sorrows of mankind and most specially by those who lend them­
selves to vengeance, I swear that if one hair of Sabinus's head be hurt, I'll
be even with his ill-users!'

And so saying Crispus disappeared.

I went within and washed and dressed myself for I was only in my blanket,
and then I hastened to Julia's door. There was silence within and I hoped
that she slumbered. So taking off my shoes that I should not disturb her,
I crept in. Euphena sat in the outer room alone, her eyes staring and yellow.

'Hast thou not slept all night, Euphena?' I asked.

'I shall have time enough to sleep,' she answered, seeming to rub her
eyes as though she would dash sight from them.

'And how fareth Julia?' I asked.

'Julia slumbereth,' she answered. 'Thou needst not trouble about her,
Nyria. Let her sleep as long as she may.'

'Nay, I do not grudge her sleep,' I answered. 'But, hark. . . . It
seemeth not to be slumber. Surely she is awake.' For I heard Julia moaning.

'Go and see,' said Euphena. So I went within, and Julia lay beneath her
rich coverlet with her eyes closed and seemed to be asleep. But, every now
and then, she turned a little and moaned.

'There is somewhat wrong with her,' I answered as I came out. 'She looks
not like herself. There hath a change come over her face and I like not the
sound of her sleeping.'
'Heed her not,' said Euphena in the same tone. 'She is but dreaming—as men call it, little knowing of what they speak.'

'Is she having bad dreams then, Euphena?' I asked, crouching down beside her. 'Is it only the dreams that seem to distress her?'

'Nay, I know not,' answered Euphena crossly. 'How can I tell what Julia may be seeing in her sleep?'

I shrank away and got myself some food and brought somewhat to Euphena for she would not budge. And then I went without and sat upon the steps of the loggia waiting till the other women should come, for I liked not being alone with Euphena and Julia frightened me. I would have been glad to see Aemilia or even Samu, but I liked not to go and call them.

Now, the morning grew lighter. There were light streaks in the sky and no more glints of gold and silver left, and I looked up at it until the first rose curtain was drawn across the sky. But I could not see the sunrise from where I sat, for that was upon the other side of the house. Yet I saw the rosy shade spread high, and at its edges was a shade of yellow. While I watched there came a sudden burst of light and I knew the sun had risen; and even as I sat there I could hear Julia moaning so that my heart went out to her and I longed to go and fetch her something that should ease her pain. But I liked not to go with Euphena sitting there and, maybe, it was better not to disturb her.

Presently, Aemilia and Samu came and they asked what I did sitting there and if I knew how fared Julia.

So I told them, and while we stood there talking, and day had wholly broken, there came a great cry from within, so that we all threw down our blankets and ran through the antechamber to Julia's door.

Euphena was there before us, but she said no word, only stood with folded arms near the foot of Julia's bed and watched her.

Now, Julia had raised herself and her eyes were large and round and seemed staring from her head with horror at somewhat which she saw that we could not see. And she cried out again words that we could not distinguish, but seeming to be terrified, so that Samu hung back and even Aemilia looked frightened. I rushed up to Julia and took her hands in mine, but she knew me not; and then she clung to me, seeming to crush the bones of my hand and arm in her grip.

'It is Nyria, lady,' I said. 'Dost thou not know Nyria?'

I felt that a great sweat had broken out all over her and the drops stood out on her forehead and her hands were wringing wet. Then suddenly she turned to me, and a curtain seemed to fall from her eyes and she clutched me anew and said:

'Oh, Nyria—is't thou? I have had such a terrible dream.'

'Dreams are naught, lady,' I answered. 'Lay thee down again, and I will bring thee somewhat to sustain thee.'

At first she would not let me lay her lower, but clung to me, nor would she let me go. Then I signed to Samu to bring up more pillows, and I placed them behind her that she lay high and could see us all and know that she was not alone. . . . And I took some milk in a cup that Euphena had warmed outside. But when she saw Euphena hand it to me and I brought it to the bed, Julia waved it away and would have none of it.

'Nay, I will have naught that hath touched that hell-hag's fingers,' she said. 'Do thou get me fresh milk, Nyria, and warm it for me here where I can see. But bid Euphena begone.'
Now I looked towards Euphena, for I liked not so to command her, and Euphena stood in the doorway watching everything that went on, and I was forced to go without and fetch the milk. So I passed Euphena, who heeded me not for her eyes were fixed upon Julia, and I ran hastily through the courtyard to the sheds where the fresh milk was stored and filled a basin there. On the way I poured out that which Euphena had given me, and there was somewhat white and thick clinging to the bottom of the cup which made me fear Euphena was indeed bent on poisoning Julia, and I feared Euphena.

But when I went back, Euphena met me and smiled when she saw my brimming bowl of fresh milk.

‘Thou little fool,’ she said. ‘Dost think Euphena would risk her own life for the purpose of depriving Julia of hers? I have told thee, Euphena is but a servant of the gods and Julia shall go when the gods call her, but not for Euphena’s sending.’

‘Thou wilt not come within again?’ I said, ‘for Julia is affrighted of thee.’

I have told Julia,’ she made answer, ‘that I leave her now, seeing she needeth me no more. But the hour will come ere long when thou and I shall perform a welcome service for the great Julia who thought to rule over the realm of Rome but is bidden instead to the court of a more dread king than Domitian.’

I answered not but went within and warmed the milk as Julia bade me in a vessel over the lamp beside her, which, after she had taken it, seemed to make her easier in mind and body. But she would not let Aemilia or Samu nor yet Thanna nor one of her women go, save only Euphena. She tried to sit up again and gave them all orders about the doing of one thing and another—preparing her garments and her jewels and all her false tresses and the ornaments for her head, and her bath. But ‘twas impossible she could take her bath, for when she tried to stand she was too weak, and she sank back gratefully into the bed, the which we tried to straighten with her in it, and Thanna and I brought water and sponges and did perform such toilet for her as was possible.

Now, it was after this, when she was again lying quiet, that she began to show terror once more.

‘I had such a dreadful dream,’ she said, ‘but only a dream, was it not, Nyria?’ And this she said to me, clinging to my hand again and holding me close to her side. Thanna said afterward that she had like to be glad ‘twas not herself, for after Thanna had done her serving she kept her distance and was for making excuses to slip out.

Now, when Julia spake thus to me, I answered her: ‘Lady, if thou tellst thy dream ‘twill break the charm.’ And this I said, desiring to ease her. ‘Tell Nyria, lady... What didst thou dream?’ And she began a-muttering and gazing before her, and once she raised herself and said:

‘Is thy master in the house?’ And this was to the group of women who stood frightened about the doorway; and I mind me now ‘twas before she spoke again of her dream.

And when they feared to answer but only shook their heads, she pressed again.

‘Where is thy master?’ and ‘twas only Thanna who had courage to speak, for my heart failed me and I feared to pain her. But Thanna stepped forward and said:

‘The Most Noble Julia knoweth that by Caesar’s orders Sabinus was taken hence three nights ago.’
Then repeated Julia, 'Three nights ago, said she, and kept on a-muttering it and turning on her pillow; and now, when the terror seemed to overcome her again:

'Whither did he go?' she kept a-muttering. 'Whither went Sabinus?' and none of us durst answer her. But when I bade her tell me her dream she hung upon my hand and said:

'Ay, will it break the charm? Then will I tell it thee, Nyria. I thought thy master entered at the door and spake to me, and there was a bleeding wound upon his shoulder, nigh to his throat, from which the blood poured, and he spake—Oh, Nyria, he spake——

"I have not come to say farewell," said he, "for, Julia, I will come again when the sun shall hang above the horizon ere yet the night cometh and day is gone down upon this deed. Then will I fetch thee, Julia, for thou shalt come with me since it be lonely crossing the shadows of the river and the ferryman doth wait——" . . . Ah! and she shrieked again. . . . 'What meant he? . . . What meant he, Nyria? . . .'

'Lady,' I said, 'twas but a dream. Did he not then leave thee?'

'Ay,' she said, 'but I was terrified and cried out. And as he went away he looked at me again over his bleeding shoulder, and he said, "At sundown I will come, Julia——" Now, whither went thy master?'

'Lady,' I said, 'Sabinus is in Caesar's keeping.'

Then Thanna drew forward saying, 'Cheer thee, lady; thou wouldst not doubt great Caesar's care?'

But Julia scarcely heeded her. 'Why doth Domitian not come?' she said. 'I would he came to-day. Send messengers to the Palace, Nyria. Send two or three—one after the other if the first be not enough—and bid them say that Julia would fain have word with Caesar without delay, and that the matter brooks not waiting.'

Now, there came a stir from without and voices murmuring, and one or two did seem to cry out, and the women in the doorway looked at each other. But Julia raised herself upon her elbow.

'What mean those sounds?' she asked, and grew red in her face.

'Look without, Aemilia, and ask who cometh. Mayhap—mayhap it be a messenger from Caesar.'

And Aemilia bent low and went without. But when she came back her face was strangely sad, and she gazed pitifully at Julia but did not speak.

'Well, woman——' cried Julia harshly. 'Hast no tongue? Wherefore did I send thee? Hast learned naught? Speak an thou wouldst not wholly madden me.'

Wherefore Aemilia bent low again and said, 'Lady, one stands without who bearth news of Sabinus.'

'Bid him enter, cried Julia, and her voice went off in a sort of harsh, high note. 'Bid him enter—enter, dost thou hear—without delay. I fain would enquire of Sabinus. Am I not mistress in mine own house? Bid him enter, woman. Why standest thou staring?'

And Aemilia, who I saw thought her not fit to receive the tidings and yet feared to gainsay her, turned to do her bidding. And when she came back a man followed her with his mantle folded crosswise on his head after the manner of mourners: and when he lifted up his face I saw that it was Crispus.

Julia recognised him and stared upon him without speaking.

'Thou art—Crispus?' she said at length, as though the words were slow and painful to her—and Crispus bowed.
"Hast brought news of Sabinius?" asked Julia.

"Ay," answered Crispus.

"Well, what is't? Whither went he? When doth he return? Is he detained still in custody?"

Crispus shook his head. But even he who hated Julia could not cast her a look of scorn, then—

"Lady," he answered slowly, "Sabinius suffered at dawn."

"What dost thou mean?" cried Julia shrilly, clinging with her hands to either side of the bed and raising herself as though she would fain have struck him. "What meanest thou? Sabinius suffered at dawn—"

"The death penalty, lady, for the substance of his deeds."

Whereat Julia shrieked out: "Thou dost lie. It is not Caesar's will."

"That I know not, lady. But 'twas at Caesar's command." And Julia fell back upon the bed and answered never a word, at which, when Crispus saw, he bent low again and withdrew.

And, one by one, the women stole out after him, for all were eager, I could see, to hear what he had to tell, and I alone remained with Julia.

But she lay silent, seeming to be in a stupor, which I knew not if 'twere merciful or yet the stupor of death. By and by, one came to the door whispering and brought me food. It was Aemilia, and she bade me come without for a breath of fresher air, saying she would take my place. But I shook my head, for I liked not to leave Julia, and all day long I stayed there.

It was a dark day. There were heavy clouds that covered the sky, so that in Julia's room we had to keep a lamp lit, and, by and by, when Aemilia came again and I was talking with her just without, saying I knew not if Julia slept or were busy with her own thoughts, for she uttered no sound, Aemilia whispered very low:

"Euphena doth say she will depart at sundown, and if this be so, mayhap 'twill be her dream that shall bring it about."

"No," said I. "See, 'tis dark. Can we not let her think the hour of sundown hath passed? She seeth not the sun in here. I will shake out the hour-glass."

So then I fetched it very noiselessly, but Julia seemed not to see: and I shook out some of the grains, for the time was drawing on. But Aemilia said it was so dark over all the face of the heavens that one could not tell whether 'twas evening or night approaching.

The messengers had not returned from the Palace, for we had sent them as Julia desired, and, afterwards, we heard that Domitian had stayed them there. By and by, having fed Julia with a little milk and seeing that she seemed to doze and lay peacefully again, I stole without and found the women gathered on the steps outside with their mantles around them, for none cared to be about their business.

And lower down in the courtyard were many of the other slaves grouped together and all talking. Only Euphena was not there, but, by and by, as I sat me down beside Aemilia, listening all the while for the least sound from Julia's room, Euphena came round the corner of the court.

"A pretty company," she said. "Julia will have a fair off-sending," and then she glanced round at everyone. "So, ye fools who did flout Euphena's prophecy, what art waiting for? Do ye now believe?"

And some fell a-muttering, saying that it was senseless to talk of sundown, seeing the sun could not be seen, for the sky was dark; and others that Nyria had emptied the hour-glass and that Julia would not know the time;
and others, again, that if a messenger brought word to Julia from the Palace she would be satisfied and raise her up and make a good evening meal and that should Caesar himself visit her she would need her dressers and her tirewomen.

But Euphena laughed them all to scorn. 'Nyria was ever a fool,' she said. 'But emptying the hour-glass is not pouring forth the vengeance of the gods, who wait to do this themselves,' and she sat her down in silence amongst us and none spake, while the time drew slowly on.

I have told thee that Julia's rooms faced the west. Now towards the hour of sunset there came a break in the dark curtain of clouds which, parting, showed the sky all crimson and flecked with stripes of deeper red. And lo! in the middle, the sun, like a ball of fire, was dropping slowly... so slowly that, meseemed, I scarce could breathe.

Thus, from the steps of Julia's loggia, we watched as often before I had watched from that place for the sun's setting. While lower, lower its rim sank and nearer yet to the line behind which it would disappear.

Then, when the great red ball had reached that line and was sinking down from sight, of a sudden, there came a stir among those by the doorway, and, turning me about, I saw that Julia stood there—she who had seemed too weak to raise herself upon her bed. But when I would have rushed to her support Euphena held me back.

'Touch her not,' she cried. 'These matters of the gods are not for thee or me to meddle with.'

But Julia looked not at the sun. She seemed to be seeing one we saw not, standing among us, and some of the women drew apart, dividing like a herd of sheep on either side and seeming afraid of the glance of her eye. But she greeted them not—only, she moved a step or two forward and I saw her lips move.

'Ay—ay—I come,' she muttered. 'But whither goest thou? Not there—Sabinus—Oh, not there.'

And then she shrieked. 'Tis dark. I will not go.' And then again fell to muttering and came forward step by step slowly, thrusting her hands before her as one who was half-blind or saw but one thing that guided her. 'Thou wert ever a fool,' I heard her mutter as she passed me. 'Why wilt thou not go alone?' And then she threw up her head in a strange swift movement. 'Peace, peace,' she cried. 'Touch me not, for I will come. Ay—ay—Sabinus—Ay, I come.'

And swiftly, none of us knowing what would chance, she fell along the ground at our feet.

'Twas as though her head had but just escaped the edge of the steps, but none of us durst go near her, save Euphena and I. Yet, when I would have tried to raise her Euphena stayed me again.

'Let her lie,' she said. 'And even just as she lay there and the women shivered and moaned and the men-slaves crowded the foot of the steps, there came the sound of lictors and the great gates swung and a litter with the imperial liveries was borne round to the side of the house. Before it walked one of Caesar's chamberlains, who, seeing us, strode forward and addressed Aemilia, knowing her to be chief of Julia's women. 'Say unto the Most Noble,' he said, 'that Caesar sendeth greeting and a litter which waits to bear her to the Palace.'

But none of us answered and when he saw us look from one to the other he repeated:
Cæsar would have the Most Noble understand that imperial business hath detained him, else would he have been here ere this, for he desires to know how his kinswoman fares, and, if it be well with Julia, bid her come at the Emperor’s pleasure.

Now he saw the form of Julia lying along the steps and strode up one or two quickly and looked down upon her.

‘What is this?’ he cried.

‘Nay,’ said Euphena, coming forward and looking full at him and then down at Julia’s form. ‘ ’Tis but somewhat that the soul of Julia hath left in passing hence. Say unto the divine Augustus that the Most Noble hath not waited to hear his pleasure, for Sabinus called her, and seeing that the passage of the Styx is lonely, Julia went with him.’

The INSTRUMENT paused:

‘That is not quite the right order. . . . I have got confused. . . . Don’t speak to me or touch me for a moment, and I will get it directly. . . .’

Then, presently——

‘I think it was more like this. . . .’

It was when the Chamberlain gave his second message and no one answered that Euphena said—coming forward and bending before him:

‘Since none of these who are more highly placed in the household find words to answer thee, that will I. Say unto Cæsar that Euphena—whom he will doubtless remember—sendeth greeting, and word of the Most Noble Julia, who surely would regret that she is not here to obey Cæsar’s pleasure. But she hath been called hence.’

‘Whither, and by whom?’ asked the Chamberlain in surprise.

‘By the lord Sabinus, whither he hath but now gone,’ Euphena answered.

Whereat the chamberlain started and drew back and turned very pale.

‘The passage of the Styx is lonely,’ said Euphena, ‘and Sabinus did desire his loyal and tender spouse should company him on his way. Wherefore, Cæsar will understand that his behest cannot be obeyed.’

And the chamberlain, seeing that something strange had happened, cast his eyes around the scene until they fell upon the body of Julia. And I stood at her feet with a silken shawl in my hand, desiring to cover her.

‘What . . . what is that?’ he cried, coming forward. And Euphena glanced down as though ‘twere naught.

‘Oh, that!’ she said. ‘ ’Tis but somewhat Julia left in passing.’”

1 Nyria’s account of the death of Julia concurs with historical statements as to its cause. See Appendix 42, Bk. II.
Nyria tells of how she helped Euphena to array Julia's body for the burning and of how, out of all Julia's women, Euphena alone followed it to the pyre: also, of Stephanus's mortgage upon his goods that he might obtain money to buy Nyria.

Nyria: "Thou knowest that after the death of a master and mistress, all the property goes to the next of blood who is entitled to it. Unhappily for us—at least we felt it so—we were all to be claimed by Cæsar, and I was sore affrighted and prayed Aemilia to put me out of sight should Cæsar come nigh the house. Now, none knew what might befall; and thus spake Euphena when she commanded me to attend her in the washing and dressing of Julia and chid me seeing that I shrank from such service. Nevertheless, I could not refuse, for none of the other women would go near Julia, save Aemilia who did offer us her help. But Euphena could not command Aemilia as she did me, and soon Aemilia left us. . . .

It seemed to please Euphena to deck the body of Julia in her finest raiment, thinking only to load her with that which was costliest and most colourful and saying that this had been always Julia's taste. But I could not bear that Julia should be made mock of and I fetched the right robings and persuaded Euphena to put them on. We dressed Julia in a robe of rose-coloured silk embroidered in silver and then Euphena wanted to load her with jewellery. 'For,' she said, 'when Cæsar cometh he will like to see that Julia is cherishing his love-gifts.' So she laid ropes of them around her neck; and 'twas a pity, because the last night before they took the body of Julia out to the burning, that jewellery was stolen, and nothing was left except a few rings that fitted on her finger so tightly the thieves could not draw them off.

Now, after Euphena had prepared the body of Julia who was lying in state upon her bed beneath the silken canopy and all the fine draperies, she sent messengers to Cæsar bidding him come, 'for that Julia was ready to receive him.' But he came not.

And at last, the day came on which they bore away the body of Julia.

Euphena, finding that it had been rifled, muttered over it and one minute was for decking it anew, and another deeming it waste, that the jewels would be burned with Julia. But she had not minded that at first.

Now, it was usual, when a Roman lady died who was well beloved among her women, that they followed her to the fire, walking next the body and surrounding it and mourning. But Aemilia, being among the women, gave it as her opinion that none of us should ask permission so to attend. For Aemilia said that we did not mourn our mistress and that 'twere more shame to Julia should we be present than honour to her remains. Nevertheless, Vibius—who was chief amongst the slaves—said that for the
sake of Sabinus he would have desired it and that he for one would go, and
he prayed of the men that such as had regard for their master's memory
would follow with him. Thus a party of them—perchance fifty in number—
agreed to go. But, of the women, Euphena alone went: and when 'twas
found that only one of Julia's women would attend unless it were by
compulsion, those in charge—so said Vibius afterwards—had much mind
to prevent her. But no definite order was given to Euphena, and so it
happed that when the body of Julia was borne forth, Euphena took her
place behind it. She had put mud, caked, on her head and carried within
her arms a bundle that she had made. None knew what the bundle was,
but it looked like the form of a child rolled in some of her own under-
grments: and Aemilia shuddered when she saw it and said that Euphena
meant it for the image of her own dead baby whom she had never forgotten,
and by whom she sought to bring vengeance on the soul of Julia.

I knew not how such things went for I remained in the huts, scarce
daring to look without, lest Caesar should perchance come down for the
procession. But some said that Caesar's mind was full of other things. There
were rumours of war\(^1\) and there were likewise other State troubles which
those who wished to excuse Caesar put forward as a reason for his not
attending Julia's funeral. But afterwards we heard that he, walking on one
of the terraces of Palatine and catching sight of the smoke, asked what caused
it, and that being told 'twas the burning of Julia's pyre he went hastily
within and would not look upon it.

Now, 'twas not until after the removal of Julia's body that aught could
be done with us, and the time of such a restriction was always most irksome
to the slaves of a household, for they were kept within the precincts of the
courtyards and not allowed to issue from the walls upon any excuse what-
soever. I for one was ill-disposed to do so though my heart yearned to be
upon the Celian and I wondered whether Valeria knew what had chanced.
'Twas certain that she must have heard and I wondered longingly if she would
not send down to buy me, seeing that money was of no account, for though
she had none of her own, yet Paulinus kept her well supplied.

Then, in due time, an order came from Caesar and was read publicly in
the slaves' quarters—that we were all to be sold in the Forum upon a date
fixed... I mind not the exact date... it might have been four weeks: it
might have been two... it was not immediately.

And hearing this, I was thankful, for now I knew that Caesar had either
forgotten me or would not command my presence.

I said that we were not allowed to issue from the walls; neither were
those upon the farther side permitted to come in to speak to us. And yet
I wondered that Stephanus had not come nigh me. For Stephanus could
have special grace by excuse that one was ill and needed him, and also
because Stephanus was so liked that he went everywhere... even where
others might be forbidden to go.

I longed to see him and, likewise, that he should perchance take a message
for me to the Celian. For I thought if one could obtain word with Aeola
she might perhaps bring my plight before Valeria who would send to
purchase me. But Stephanus came not and, as the days went on, we sat
most of us within, seeing that we could not leave our property. Euphena
had naught of value, methought—neither had I, but I mounted guard over
Aemilia's box when she desired to take the air with her children. For Vibius

\(^1\) The Sarmatian War began about this time.
had been compelled to return to each of us—and this in public before us all—writing the names in a book—each package or box that had been kept for us by Sabinus containing such papers or other articles of value as he had protected for us. Thou knowest, that amongst so many slaves there were some of ill-habit who would take the chance to steal one from another: and seeing that the body of Julia could only have been rifled by those who knew how she had been decked, it made us fearful one of another. Always, when there was to be a public sale of slaves, each slave kept his own belongings with him in a bundle or box ready for the moving.

I had naught save my clothes and my amber beads. There was Caesar’s necklace, and I knew not what to do with that, for I had not buried it properly. I had scraped a hole in a soft part of the ground within the hut, where I had laid it, but I durst not leave it there, and I wanted to take it out and bury it. But I could not leave the walls, and whatsoever I did within them the other slaves might see.

It was thought best that every slave should be clothed as well as he could be at the time of the sale so that he should be more attractive, and for this reason I knew that they would have had me keep out my embroidered robe that Caesar gave me. But I liked not to wear it for ‘twas a handsome dress and if it were talked of might bring me to Caesar’s observation. I doubt not I was foolish to care thus for every trifle, but thou wouldst have been the same hadst thou feared Caesar as I did.

Well, now Euphena came to me and asked wherefore Stephanus would not come, because she would fain have had word with him, and she seemed to blame me that he came not. But I knew not why it was, and told her so, and, as the days went on, I found Euphena was sore vexed, for she seemed anxious to see Stephanus.

As the time drew near for the sale, some who might be purchasers were permitted to come in and look at us, with certain officers who had charge of the sale: and though we knew not how things were to be done unto us, it filled us with anxiety and dismay when one and another came.

And there came a certain lawyer . . . him whom they called Matho, who desired to examine all the slaves of Julia. For to him had been given the task of completing our sale.¹

He was not the one who would conduct the sale, thou understandest, but to him had been given the legal portion of it, for that he had been employed by Julia in certain previous matters: and she had made mention of him to Caesar and of his cleverness.

Now though he had been down in money and repute, he was at that time doing somewhat better and was anxious again to rise into position. Wherefore, as Julia’s lawyer, he had, I think, applied for the office concerning the sale of her slaves. I liked not his face as he came around amongst us with certain followers and one who read out the list to him, giving our numbers and descriptions. He paused before me, but did not seem to take much heed of me though he said I should fetch a good price. And at Euphena, he made one or two rude speeches. But she cared not. Euphena was like to scorn everyone who spoke to her of being sold, as though that fate were not one to overtake her, which seemed to us strange, for Euphena, though she might be a sorceress, had yet to be sold like the rest of us.”

¹ Of Matho, the lawyer, his prosperity, downfall and subsequent rehabilitation, Martial and others of the period have written. See Appendix 43, Bk. II.
NYRIA (resuming): "Now it was after many such things had gone by and
certain officers of many great houses—chief stewards and chamberlains
—had by written permit been allowed to walk round amongst us that one
day Alexamenos came. It was thought that he was about to examine the
slaves to see if there were any he would wish to purchase, but he sent for
me and, by order of Vibius, I was called forward and permitted converse
alone with him.

I liked not to see Alexamenos, for he recalled to me the sad fate that had
overtaken my master and I wondered whether Alexamenos could not have
saved him. I would fain have asked him, too, what manner of doom had
fallen upon Sabinus, for this we knew not. But when I did ask he just shook
his head and said:

'Enquire not, Nyria. 'Tis better thou shouldst not know.'

So then I cried shame on him for having done as he had in the matter
and asked wherefore had he not saved Sabinus?

'Sabinus would not save himself,' he made answer. And then he told
me I did not understand and tried to hush my reproaches. 'For while I
was yet free of Caesar's command in the matter,' he said, 'it would have been
in my power to save Sabinus had he listened... and that I would gladly
have done, but when Caesar's command came upon me, and Sabinus had not
made good his escape, there was naught for me to do but to bear out the
commands of Caesar.'... 'Even the command of a tyrant!' I answered.

'And when that command meaneth death to a good man—'

'With the nature of the command I have naught to do, I am not placed
in mine office to judge Caesar, but to obey the orders given unto me as officer
of my men and not as a private individual,' he made answer.

But I shook my head for I saw not such reasoning.

'I grieve to have hurt thee, Nyria,' he said, 'and the more because it is
of thyself that I have come to speak: and this manner of thine is but a poor
promise of my success.'

So then I asked him what he could have to say about me: and he spoke
quite simply and plainly.

It would be in his power to purchase me, he said, seeing that Caesar had
favoured him with money and reward for certain things which he had
done... methinks, against an uprising not long before. But that he
desired not to buy me as one might buy a slave; and, said he: 'If
thou wilt wed me, Nyria, give me thy word, and I will go to Caesar and
claim thee from him. Caesar will not refuse me.' Now at that, I was sore
frighted.

'Caesar will not take heed of thy request,' I said. 'Caesar would scarce
deem one of Julia's handmaidens a fitting wife for his favoured officer.'

'Give me the chance to reason with Caesar,' he said. 'Let that rest
between him and me. Do thou but say the word....

'Ah, Nyria,' he said, 'these are troublous times in Rome, and sorrow is
like to be thy portion if thou dost go with the other slaves before the sale-
man in the Forum.'

'Sorrow is the portion of slaves,' I said. 'What else can I expect?'

'But thou art no ordinary slave,' he answered. 'I have heard of thy
birth and lineage, Nyria: and in truth one had only to look at thee to know
that thou wast never born of slave nor freedwoman. Thou art fitted for
another life than this, and, as my wife, I could greatly improve thy case.
It cannot be as one of the most noble ladies in Rome that thou wouldst
DECKED FOR THE PYRE

... reign, Nyria, nor in state befitting thy birth, for born a princess thou dost far excel even those. Nevertheless thou knowest that the Praetorians are a power in the land ... perhaps the greatest power of all, seeing that though Caesar rules Rome, the Praetorians rule Caesar: and of all the Praetorians, methinks there are few more favoured than Alexamenos. It may be that I shall rise to be Tribune of the Guard. What wouldst thou think of that? It was the office held by Paulinus himself. Say, if I stood where Paulinus stands, wouldst thou not care to wed me?

And while I waited, not making him any answer, for as he spoke of Paulinus my thoughts flew to Valeria, presently he added: 'Nay, 'tis not for such reason that I would have thee wed me, Nyria. 'Tis because I love thee and would have thee love me in return. Hast thou no love to spare me, Nyria?'

But I shook my head. 'I love thee not,' I said. 'And thou hast just said that the Praetorians rule Caesar: and if this be so, why didst thou not save Sabinus?'

'That is a woman's reasoning,' he made answer. 'How shall I make thee understand, Nyria? Yet I would fain endeavour so to do. It is this way that the Praetorians rule Caesar. We are his safeguard: and he doth depend upon us for the upholding of his throne and of himself upon it. He pays us well—but that is Caesar's way, and men must live. We earn our money, and it is our duty, while Caesar reigns, to obey his behests....'

And he said more in this fashion, urging me to accede to his request. But thou knowest I did not want to marry and, all the time I listened, my heart was full of but one desire ... that Valeria should purchase me ... the which Alexamenos by his very words had strengthened. So, when he pressed me the more, I could only say:

'Nay, I like thee, Alexamenos, but I will not marry thee, for 'tis not fitting: and Nyria hath no desire to wed.' Yet still he urged ... and then he spake of that night when we had conferred beside the gate ... 'that heavenly night' he called it, 'when love for thee came down and flooded my soul ... and as we talked,' he said, 'it seemed to me that thou hadst somewhat in thy heart that would turn thee to the faith which is so dear to me and that thou too mightst become Christian.'

Now, when he said this it had more weight than aught else, and as he put out his hand to me I let my hand lie in his for the while. ... But as he prated further of tender companying in our faith and of the care he would bestow upon me and of this revealing love he bore me ... of the which I remember not all his words, my mind being sore distraught ... I drew my hand away. ... For in truth it did seem to me that had I love to give to any, it should have been to Stephanus who was my faithful friend since so long a time. ...

And I said, 'This closer companionship of which thou dost speak, Alexamenos, methinks, 'tis not for Nyria': and when he yet pleaded, I bade him cease. ... 'Nay, we may not talk more. ... Go thou, Alexamenos, and leave me to myself. ... There may come another maid whom thou wilt care for and who will make thee a better wife in all these things wherein Nyria cannot. ...'

And when he began to answer ... impatiently yet very earnestly, there came up someone with Vibius who, being chief amongst us, was deputed always to take round any desiring to look over the slaves. ... So, afterwards, I returned to Euphena's hut and Alexamenos went away very sorrowful.
Now, it must have been past the midday hour of rest when Stephanus came. I was sitting outside Euphena’s hut, and saw his face looking at me over the wall. At first he did not speak, and I rose to my feet and went towards him.

‘So thou hast come,’ I said.

‘Ay, I have come,’ he answered—‘and soon enough, is it not so, Nyria? ... seeing thou wilt have none of Stephanus’s protection in the ills that befall thee.’

‘No ills have befallen me,’ I said. ‘I am safe enough and will not look for ills.’

‘Perchance thou wilt say a different thing as soon as the sale be over,’ he answered.

‘Now do not quarrel with me, Stephanus,’ said I. ‘How know I but that some kind and worthy mistress may purchase me?’

‘There be not many such in Rome,’ he said.

‘I had a mind to ask thee to intercede for me with the lady Domitilla,’ said I. ‘Dost think she would buy me, Stephanus?’

‘I know not. But she shall not have the chance if Stephanus can prevent it,’ he answered. ‘Thou mayest walk the road to ruin, Nyria, if thou wilt, but thinkest thou that Stephanus will push thee along it?’

‘Thou wert not wont to speak thus of the lady Domitilla,’ I answered.

‘The lady Domitilla leadeth her own life and Stephanus may not say yea or nay concerning it. He is but her steward. But he is more than that to thee, Nyria, or would be if thou wouldst let him.’

Just then, we heard Euphena’s voice behind us from the hut.

‘So thou hast come, Stephanus,’ she shrieked. ‘Hie thee within. I have somewhat to say to thee. Haste thou, and cease there thy silly chattering.’

Stephanus looked vexed, but Euphena called again petulantly:

‘Tis worth thy while, Stephanus. I have a bargain for thee. Come.’

Then he said to me, ‘I may as well humour her. Wait, Nyria, I will be without again immediately. I too have somewhat to say unto thee.’

And with that he stepped within, and Euphena banged the door behind him.

I remained where I was, leaning up against the wall of the hut, not thinking to listen, yet was I fain to hear the buzz of their voices within, when all of a sudden, Euphena’s tones were raised and likewise those of Stephanus. They seemed to be arguing over something which Stephanus would not agree to.

‘Tis not in my power, I tell thee, woman. I have somewhat else to do with the money. What dost thou think Stephanus has been after this week and more?’

Euphena mumbled some retort, and then went on trying to persuade him.

‘What matter who purchaseth the goods,’ I heard Stephanus say, ‘so thou dost sell them and obtain thy value?’

But again Euphena demurred. ‘I want no prying eyes here,’ I heard her say: and then again I heard her shriek out: ‘Tis some nonsense for Nyria. ... Thou thinkest of naught but that maid who maketh thee her slave. I wonder thou hast not more spirit, Stephanus.’

‘My spirit is my own,’ he retorted, ‘and needeth no comment from thee.’

‘But the maid be not,’ sneered Euphena.

‘She too needeth not thy comment,’ said Stephanus.
' Mayhap. But thou art a fool to waste thy substance on that which will never drop within thy mouth, Stephanus. Nyria is for no man: and they who desire her will but find themselves face to face with wrath and bloodshed.'

I shrank back against the wall, for I liked not the sound of Euphena's speech. Moreover, I liked not to hear her speak so to Stephanus, and, almost without thinking, I pushed open the door and stood before them.

'Seeing thou dost talk so loud of me,' I said, 'I have come to warn thee that thy words carry.'

At first, Euphena shrieked, and she stooped as though she would fling a cloth over a glittering pile that lay upon a wooden-legged stool between her and Stephanus. But seeing 'twas only I, she growled at me angrily: and then, 'Come in, Nyria, and shut the door behind thee. As thy word hath such weight with this fool, come and add it unto mine.'

'What wouldst thou have of him?' I said, drawing near.

'Gold,' said Euphena. 'Ay, gold . . . much gold, and I am prepared with gold . . . ay, and gems—to give him in return. Now, Nyria, look.'

She pointed to the pile, which was of jewellery . . . rings, chains, bracelets, set with many gems. I saw amongst them the long gold chain set with emeralds that Julia had given to her, and others again which she and I had placed on Julia's body.

'How camest thou by these?' I asked, pointing to them.

Euphena shrugged her shoulders. 'Gifts: gifts,' she answered, 'gifts for loyal, faithful service. Gifts from Julia living and gifts from Julia dead.'

'So thou wert the thief?' said I, turning upon her.

Euphena made as though she would clutch the jewellery, and glanced upon me. Then she smiled.

'Ay, brand me,' she said. 'Go, spread it forth abroad that Euphena robbed the body. But know, if thou dost this, that my word is as good as thine, Nyria. And if thou dost say I stole them, I shall say Julia gave them unto me, and none can gainsay my word. And thou wilt find if thou dost do despite to Euphena's power by betraying her, that the vengeance of Euphena shall follow thee, and that, methinks, thou wouldst not court.'

'I have no wish to betray thee,' I answered. 'Of what avail would that be?'

'Ah! that is better,' said Euphena. 'Thou art wiser than I thought': and as I looked down at the heap of jewellery, I saw amongst them mine own chain, set with pearls which Caesar had given to me. Euphena saw my look.

'Tis a pretty chain, is it not?' she said. 'And I found it in a most strange hiding-place.' She pointed to the corner of the hut, where I had hidden it, and I saw the ground had been disturbed. 'Methinks, Nyria, that if the price be good enough without it, I will keep that chain.'

I did not answer, but I saw that Euphena meant to keep it as a means to seal my lips. So I only shrank back and looked from her to Stephanus who was watching us. He would have spoken, but I signed to him to be silent. And then Euphena addressed him again. 'See, it is a fine lot, most worthy goldsmith. Now, give me a good price since Nyria can bear witness to them:' and Stephanus looked toward me.

'Euphena desireth that I should purchase these things,' he said. 'Mayhap 'twould be safe enough to do so, since, as she says, there is her word that Julia gave them unto her, to the which she telleth me thou canst bear witness in
the matter, at least, of some of them. But I have told her that I have not the money. There is Onesimus in the Porticus Margaritaria, who hath more money than I, and who will readily conclude such a purchase."

"But I desire to sell them only to thee," cried Euphena. "Thou art a fool, Stephanus, if thou dreamest I would have Onesimus hither to see these. Why, man, he would give me not half their value. Nay, it is thou and thou only who shall buy them, Stephanus."

"Woman, I tell thee it is impossible. I have not the money, and, if I had, I have other ways of spending it."

"How wilt thou to spend thy money, friend Stephanus?" whined Euphena. "Shall I tell thee? Is't not to purchase Nyria in the slave-market that thou hast been putting a claim upon all thy goods . . . so that if thou needest to raise more money thou mayest do so?"

"I know not how thou knowest this," answered Stephanus sulkily, "but 'tis true."

"Thou mayest save thy pains," retorted Euphena. "For if thou wentest up to three . . . ay, four thousand sestertia, thou wouldst be outbid. 'Tis not to thee that Nyria will fall. But fret not thyself, for the path this maid shall tread will be of her own choosing."

Stephanus glowered at Euphena from under his pent brows and said half angrily, 'Thou art a veritable hag of Hades, woman—and yet—'

"And yet never have I lied," she answered. "Come now, friend Stephanus. Leave the purchase of Nyria to others seeing she desireth not to become thy property, and place in Euphena's power the means of purchasing her own freedom. Do this and thou shalt not suffer for it. For all thy business shall prosper, and for the next three years gold shall roll into thy coffers. Perchance, Stephanus . . . ' and Euphena put on her whining tone again, 'a day may come when Nyria will need thy help even more than now, and thus the money that thou wilt have paid to Euphena shall bring in interest that may stand to Nyria's direr need."

But Stephanus got up and shook himself. 'I will not do this thing,' he said. 'Nyria may be mine or not . . . by her own will or not. . . . But at least, she shall not stand in the slave-market without one friend to bid for her, and if I do as thou willest that cannot be. But give me yon load of gewgaws—thou canst surely trust Stephanus—and I will take them down to the Porticus Margaritaria,1 and find thee a buyer. One need not know whence they came, for in the trade none would question Stephanus. . . . Say, dost thou agree?'

Euphena sat moodily silent and ill-pleased. But she saw that Stephanus was not to be turned from his word, and at length she uprose and began sulkily wrapping the things up and putting them into the bag from whence she had taken them.

"Ay," she said sulkily. 'But I hold Nyria as hostage. Bring me back a good price for them . . . ay, over and above what I shall need, and thou canst give a pretty fair guess what that may be, Stephanus, else shall harm come to Nyria."

'There shall no harm come to Nyria,' he said. 'I will guard the things well, old woman, and I will bring thee the best price to be obtained for them.'

Euphena went on packing the jewels in silence, and presently Stephanus shouldered the bundle she gave him.

1 Porticus Margaritaria. See Appendix 44, Bk. II.
When he had gone, Euphena pushed me into the inner room, and barring the outer door sat herself down in the outer room to wait till he should return.

"There thou dost stay," she said. "And think not that thou shalt escape until Stephanus is back with the price of Euphena's freedom."

The time seemed long until Stephanus returned. Torches were lit in the courtyard. Euphena had lighted her lamp and crouched on the floor beside it. I, watching her from within, saw the long black shadows dance about her as the wind blew in through cracks by the window stirring the flame of her lamp, and the strangest, evilest thing she looked; and yet I could not believe that the heart of Euphena was wholly black.

When Stephanus rapped on the door, Euphena hasted to open unto him: and then, calling me, bade me go out.

"Thou art free now," she said, "since I know that Stephanus's wallet is full of gold coin." And said she: "Wert not afraid to walk up from the city with so much on thy person, Stephanus?"

But he heeded not her talk. "Sit thee down and count the gold, old hag," he cried. "For I want not to waste more time with thee. 'Tis Nyria I would talk with." To which Euphena answered strangely:

"The day may come when in order to talk with Nyria thou wouldst claim Euphena's help, for all other help shall fail thy need, and even the advice of the wise woman may not avail thee..." Then said she, 'Go forth, Nyria, and guard the door safe after thee': and, as I pulled it to behind me, I heard the click of coin and the murmur of their voices in conference together... Now, many minutes passed before Stephanus came out again, and putting his arms around me as I stood against the door, he held me close to his breast. 'Yon hag has secured herself from adverse happenings,' he said. "Ah, Nyria, would that I could secure thee.'"