Nyria tells of the threat of Gregorio against Valeria: of Euphena's strange warning to Stephanus and of her own musings and of the Voice that spake to her on the hill-side. Then of how, during the Saturnalia, she serves Julia and is called by Aeola to the sick bed of the Domina Valeria.

Nyria: "It was about this time that Stephanus talked a great deal to me of marriage and explained all about our marriage laws. I promised him that I would think upon the matter; and, for that I would go forth by myself, not letting him come with me.

I did not mind at all being alone, except that I was hurt because now Valeria did not seem to care so much about my company.

The last few times that I had been to see her she was preoccupied. . . . I could tell that, even though no one was by. And once, Gregorio met me on the steps and cried at me, 'Yah! Go home. Thou art not wanted here. . . . Thou needst not come in.'

I took no notice, only, when I did enter and saw that 'twas true she wanted me not, I went away very sadly.

But I came again, and still again, though Gregorio would meet me going out and cry again, 'Doth she want thee! Who was right? Now, it is neither thee nor me, but a worse one than either who is her favourite.'

I was startled and looked at him and he said:

'Ah! thou needst not stare: it is true: thou would'st not believe how often he comes. And Paulinus away—think of that! And she who is said to be the proudest and coldest lady in Rome! But I will be even with them. 'Tis no unmeet thing to favour one of the household, but another matter to take a lover from outside—a stranger and from a half-alien brood. But I will be even with her. Paulinus shall know.'

And as he said that, Gregorio drew his lips back over his gums and showed his teeth, making a hissing sound.

'Paulinus shall know when he returns, and then we shall see who is master here—the rightful lord or this half-breed dog of a Jew.'

That frightened me. I did not answer, for I cared not to discuss Valeria with the boy. And when Gregorio saw that I would not gossip with him, for he but wanted someone to spit out his jealous rage upon, he left me alone.

And, once or twice, when I met him in the road, he stopped and hissed, 'Paulinus shall know,' and when I made to go on, he cried, 'A fair-weather friend thou! Dost care nothing to hear how things go with us?'

But I shook my head and went on.

Now, Stephanus had got wind of Euphena's prophecies at the banquet, and had questioned me. Indeed, I told him truly all that had happened that night. Then went he to Euphena and questioned her, and the outcome was that he came back to me and said:
'Supposing it were true and that Julia should die, what fate, thinkest thou, would be thine, little one? They would sell thee—and maybe to a harder master.'

'I would pray Sabinus to keep me,' I answered.

'He may not choose to do so, or he may not have the power. Euphena says ill-omened things of Sabinus, likewise.'

I looked across at Euphena. She sat at the door of her cabin, heeding not our talk. Her skinny arms were clasped around her knees and her yellowish eyes seemed to turn inwards. She was in one of those strange moods in which she said prophetic things.

It was towards evening. Stephanus on his rounds had called in to speak to me and to bring Euphena some more of those berries he used to give her. It was growing dusk and I was waiting the summons to Julia's dressing-room.

When I told Stephanus that Euphena was seeing things, he took my hand and led me across to the hut door.

'Here is Nyria, Euphena,' he said. 'Look well at her and tell me what thou dost see of her fate.'

Euphena's yellow eyes were dazed and it was as though she saw us not. Nevertheless she spoke.

'Take thy hand from off her, Stephanus: thou art staining her with the blood.'

Stephanus snatched his hand away and looked at it.

'There is no blood upon my hand, Mother. Thou art mistaken,' he said.

'Nay, but there is blood,' she answered in a deep, gruff voice—'And it is dripping—dripping on her robe. Stand back, Stephanus.'

And Stephanus drew back, but he answered:

'I have not spotted her robe. What dost thou mean, Euphena?'

And I was frightened, for she looked so fearsome.

'If doom be laid upon her, shall I not avert it?' he asked.

But still Euphena only rocked and moaned, her eyes half-closed, staring at nothing.

'What dost thou see, Mother? What dost thou hear?' cried Stephanus.

'I hear the shouts of the populace,' she answered. 'I hear the tramp of the Praetorians. I hear the people acclaiming Cæsar. I hear a sound as of many winds blowing through the trees. Louder and louder it grows till it becomes a wailing and a mourning—a mourning for the lives of the innocent victims. . . . I hear the roaring of many wild beasts. . . .' Stephanus drew back and snatched my hand again and drew me close to him. Then my fear left me. I did not remember that Euphena was speaking of me until Stephanus said:

'What has this to do with Nyria?'
'Nyria! ... Nyria!' said Euphena in a strange muttering voice. 'I know not. ... But it doth sometimes come to pass that the innocent bear the burden of the guilty. Sin and suffering end not alone with those who bring them about.'

'But Nyria is safe, for my arms will protect her,' cried Stephanus.

'Safe: yes, safe—but not in thy arms, Stephanus. She will be held in the arms of one stronger than thou—even as death is stronger than life.'

'Thou liest, old hag,' he cried stormily and, turning, caught me fast in his arms even where I stood.

'Now by all the gods of Greece, this shall not be,' he said. 'I will save thee, Nyria, hap what may—or die in the saving.'

Then I laughed. It seemed so wild and strange. But I was angry when he kissed me there under the sky, for many slaves were passing to and fro and any might see.

'I shall be in danger of Julia—both of the whip and of her tongue—if I go not when she calls. And thou canst not save me from that, Stephanus,' I said.

'Be my wife, Nyria,' he answered so earnestly that I was fain to listen. 'Come to me and I will protect thee against anything and everything—even from Julia herself. I mean it, dearest. The gods alone know how greatly thou hast need of a protector. Think of it, Nyria, I beseech thee.'

'Euphena hath turned thee silly with her mad talk, Stephanus,' I answered. 'But I will think of it. Farewell.'

For so I thought best to get me away.

'Nay, say no more. Euphena is an evil augur.'

I put my palm over his mouth. But when he kissed it again, I fled, and after that I kept even more out of Stephanus's way: and so, oft I wandered on the hill-side alone.

Thou knowest it was late autumn and the leaves were turning red and brown. A little trailing pink flower I was fond of was all dead and there were only long brown wreaths of it left. But in some places were scarlet berries on high straight stems, and clusters of another kind in the bushes and some others that were good to eat. I would nibble them as I walked, and nuts which I could gather on a part of the hill-side—rich ripe nuts that I would break with a stone upon the ground, and sitting down would make a meal that lasted me some time.

Now, when I went up the hill-side by myself, I used to wander about with the goats: then sometimes I would climb down one side of the hill a little way and sit myself upon a knoll which doth overtop the Quarries. In this place the rocks stand up at the edge of the knoll where it falleth steeply downward, and below, there windeth a narrow road that is almost hidden as it goeth along the cliff side. And often I would see through the spaces between the rocks, or when I bent over the knoll's edge, certain persons hurrying along the narrow path. But I knew not who the people were until Stephanus told me that they belonged to that sect called Christians; likewise, he warned me that I must not talk about them—though then I knew not why.

I guessed from what Stephanus said that they had some praying-place round there, and I used to stretch over and watch them. Sometimes, they would look up, and when they saw me they always seemed worried, so I would turn away, or I would lie flat down on the ground and just put my head over.
I got interested in these people. They looked so grave and sometimes sad—not like ordinary people when they were going to some big sacrifice at one of the temples. Those, even if they had paid a good deal for what they were going to sacrifice, would still look cheerful, for they would feel sure that the god would help them.

But these people looked heavy and downcast as they wound along under the hill with their cloaks up to their faces. It was chiefly early in the morning that I saw them, or sometimes of late evening when I went up there to watch the sun set. But Stephanus did not like my doing that because the dusk fell quickly and the hill was rough for climbing down.

I wondered if these people had a god. They never carried his image in procession as I heard that some strange peoples did. Nor did they seem to have processions. They looked rather as if they wanted to avoid each other, and they seldom talked together.

I wondered many things about them. I used to have many thoughts up there on the hill-side, and I did not like Stephanus stopping my going at sunset, for that was a very beautiful time.

I remember it used to seem to me as though it were the earth that was setting and not the sun—as though the earth were sinking gradually into sleep and that the sky was going to draw the night curtains so that she might slumber gently.

And always, somewhere behind the sky, there seemed to me to be Someone very great and wonderful who was waiting to say good night to the poor tired earth, and yet who would not go away. It was like a nurse with a little child. I never saw that Someone’s face, but I always felt Him there.

Then I would stand at the edge of the knoll and stretch my arms out wide and lift my face to the sky, and when the breeze came over me it always seemed like a bit of the veil which that great Someone wore, touching my forehead. And sometimes it seemed to me that I heard a Voice calling softly, ‘Nyria. . . . Nyria.’

At first I wanted to answer, but I knew not what to say, as when Julia calls me, or my master. . . . Then, I have to go with folded hands and bow myself and stand silent and wait the command. . . . But when the Voice calleth I can but open my heart and listen and wait. . . . And then it hath seemed to me that I hear the Voice say:

‘Some day, Nyria, thou shalt see my face.’”

Nyria: “Of course, in the Saturnalia,1 we slaves were supposed to do as we liked. We were not obliged to serve our masters and we could go away if we pleased. But if we did not do as the master desired we got whipped when we came back.

More often, the master allowed his slaves to do as they pleased. Stephanus said that Juvenal had told him this was because of the strong feeling there is in the matter, and that there would be an uprising if the Saturnalia were done away with. Also, it is a religious festival and there are services to a god . . . Saturn. This begins the holiday and, thou seest, if the slave attends the services, that doth count in their favour. If it could be proved that the slave had not attended any of the ceremonies and had just made holiday for himself, that would go very much against him; but if it were

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1 The Saturnalia. See Appendix 27, Bk. II.
known that he had attended most of the ceremonies, then would the priests perhaps speak in his favour and, sometimes even, excuses would be made that he had been kept away in employment by the priests and he would get off from punishment in that manner.

So at the beginning of the Saturnalia there was always a great clearance of everybody's household, and all the slaves could be out together, and none dared say a word.

But if a master or mistress did specially require the service of any of their slaves during the Saturnalia, then they had to bargain with them for certain moneys and the slave had the right to refuse his service. But it was not worth the slave's while to do that, for immediately the Saturnalia was over he was again his master's property and would be punished.

One thing—if a slave worked for his master for money during the Saturnalia, it was usual for the master to give him afterwards—at a convenient time—a holiday of the same length. That was by favour of the master: the slave could not demand it. Good masters gave it: others did not. Thus, thou seest, if the slaves lost their Saturnalia they had poor chance of getting any holiday.

Sabinus paid generously the slaves he employed during the festival and he always gave them a holiday afterwards. Thus Julia's household was well served by the men-servants: it was her women who failed her; therefore in the time of Saturnalia it usually came to pass that of all Julia's women for the robing none remained but myself.

Aemilia was married, and for those days liked to take her husband and children into the country to her parents who had a farm in the Campagna.

Thou dost ask if Aemilia being Roman-born1 were not free-born and why then she was a slave. But it doth depend upon what is meant by free-born. If one were born in the city of Rome of freed parents, that counted. But in the country the small farmers were usually freedmen, and though a freedman could not be made a slave, I think there was a way in which his child could. There were certain loopholes. For instance, Julia, seeing the daughter of a freedwoman or a farmer, would find out to whom the land belonged—or who had been the last master of the girl's father, and would pay him for the girl, and the girl would become hers. And though the parents might complain, it could not be helped. I don't quite know the law, but that was the kind of thing that happened.

I do not think Julia ever suffered for only having me, for I worked doubly, so that she should not miss anything. But it was hard service.

There was not even Thanna there to help me and Euphena was away the first part of the time. Euphena often went away at the Saturnalia.

The table-men Sabinus kept were very kind in filling the ewers and vessels that were needed for Julia—the oil-cans for her lamps and the scented oil for rubbing her body and also for the hair. Some of it was kept in a large quantity in heavy jars that I could not lift. And there were the scent-bottles and scented water for her bath. I had to rub her. That was hard work.

The men would polish the mirror for me when she was out. But what with having to get my own food, see to my clothes and clean the little cabin, I was kept very busy.

Sabinus generally contrived to have a set of bearers for Julia. Her own went off, and she used to grumble a great deal about the way the others shook her. It was no pleasure to be in attendance at such times.

1 Treatment of Roman-born slaves. See Appendix 28, Bk. II.
Now in that time there came one day which was of great import to me. Julia had been to the Palace alone that day. I had got all her clothes ready for the robing. When she returned she was angered and was talking much about some strange delay that was troubling her, and saying that things might chance which would do her harm.

She kept murmuring:

'Blockhead! Laggard!' and words like that. 'And he will let the fool be one too many for him yet!' she said.

What that could mean I did not know. But when she said very sharply half-laughing, 'that only dead men could be trusted to hold their peace,' I had a sudden fear, for I thought of my master and I wondered if she had been plotting against him.

But I had much to do and little time to think, for Julia had a few friends dining with her that night—a small dinner-party—I scarce remember who the people were, but it was her boast that the Saturnalia made no difference in her household plans, and that she could bid her friends welcome to a properly tended board, as at other times.

That was true, but it was not her management but Sabinus's. Thus, this evening, I followed Julia, bearing her fan and scent-bottle. But I had forgotten the handkerchief—or rather, I thought she had taken it, and as napkins were supplied she did not miss it at first.

But afterwards there was talk of fine-woven flax with a woman who was there and who had a mind to purchase some that had come from a place in the South. And Julia desired to show her the embroidery on her kerchief, and finding she had it not, reprimanded me and bade me fetch one at once.

It was then that I went back to Julia's rooms. The lights were low—there was only one silver lamp kept burning, for Julia punished us if we burned the scented oil needlessly. So it was my custom to extinguish the lamps swiftly as she left her rooms, leaving but this one swinging silver lamp hanging from the arm of a white stone boy.

And in the dark as I entered, the room was full of shadows, and upon the step of the wide window there crouched a small dark figure which rose up as I came forward and then shrank against the wall.

I was not afraid, for I fear nought save Bibbi's lash, Domitian's notice and Julia's tongue, and it was none of these, I knew. Then, seeing that the form seemed that of a woman, I wondered if Thanna or one of the others had come back, and cried out:

'Who art thou? Speak.'

It was Aeola—the waiting-maid of Valeria—I knew her not at first.

'Ah, Nyria!' she cried and rushed forward and caught my hand. 'Ah, Nyria—it is thou!'

'What dost thou here?' I answered. 'What is it? What hast thou come for? Speak, Aeola!'  

And I took her and shook her a little, for she seemed stupid and a sudden fear filled me lest all might not be well with Valeria.

Then I remembered that it was the Saturnalia and that Aeola most likely was having holiday, too, and perchance had come round only to see me. But it was an ill hour to call, for Julia waited still and I must needs hasten back.

'Come in an hour hence,' I said. 'If thou hast aught to see me about, Aeola. I may not delay with thee now.'

Then she found her tongue.
‘Thou mayst not delay without me,’ she said. ‘That is—if thou carest for her thou wilt not delay for aught else, but will come back with me quickly. For she is ill—very, very ill and calleth for thee.’

‘Who is ill?—Valeria?’ I asked.

‘Ay, with the fever and lying sick unto death it doth seem. Oh, Nyria, if Stephanus would but come with me!’

‘Hath she seen no doctor?’ I asked.

‘No doctor—none. There hath been no one to see her. How could there be? For there was no one to send. It is the Saturnalia. None but I am there.’

‘And thou hast left her all alone!’ I cried. ‘Go back: Go back and tell her I am coming.’

‘There is no need to tell her,’ sobbed Aeola. ‘She will not hear me or understand. She but crieth for thee—and for... others——’ Aeola stopped and stammered and I wondered who the others might be.

‘I asked her, should I fetch thee,’ Aeola went on hurriedly, ‘but she answered not. There is none come to her bedside. The lady Vitellia is abroad, and there is none other. No one has been near her these three days.’

At that, I would not wait to crave Julia’s permission but caught Aeola’s hand and together we ran down the steps and through the courtyard. We met one of the table-stewards—Crispus was his name.

‘When Julia calls for me,’ I said, stopping him for a moment, ‘tell her that Nyria, too, claims the Saturnalian right, and is gone. But that she will return.’

He called after me—the man was wont to make fun of me——

‘So little stay-at-home has found wings!’ he said. ‘Does Stephanus send for thee? Who is his messenger?’

And he caught Aeola’s veil that she had wound round her head and tried to look beneath it. But I pulled her away and bade her run.

Crispus laughed but did not follow us.

At the great gate I stopped. ‘Art thou afraid to go down into the city alone?’ I asked Aeola.

‘Nay—and yea... Why?’

‘Dost thou know the house of Stephanus?’

‘Yes, I know where he lives,’ she answered.

‘Go then,’ I said. ‘Tell him that Nyria needs him at the villa of Paulinus on the Cælian where Valeria lies sick with fever. And if he be not there, remain till he come.’

‘But, Nyria—’Aeola hesitated and blushed—‘how can I stay in the house of Stephanus—now at night? That is not well——’

‘Valeria will not be well if thou dost not do this. It is for thou or I—and since Valeria needs me, it must be thou. No scandal can touch thee, Aeola, for waiting at the house of Stephanus, since all Rome knows that it is Nyria he loves. So prate no more, but go.’

I did not mind speaking plainly like that to Aeola, but I wondered afterwards how I could have said it, for I was not one to speak of Stephanus’s caring for me.

But I had not time to think of anything but Valeria, and on I ran. We parted just below the Aventine, where the narrow winding street goes down between the houses to the Forum—it is a shorter way than the main road—and I ran along the wide upper road to the Cælian.’
CHAPTER VI

Nyria Claims the Saturnalia

Nyria tells how, having sent Aeola for Stephanus, she goes alone up the Cælian hill, then how, by turns, the three tend Valeria during the night.

Nyria: “It was very dark on the hill. But where the big villas stood there were torches stuck on the gate-posts, and between the villas along the road were also torches on high posts. . . . Thou knowest, that was a thing Domitian had done which was very good for Rome.  

Down in the street the houses were badly lighted, but among the dwellings of great folk things were better managed. It had been settled by Domitian that each big house should have its own torches and then, I think, a certain number of those living near paid for the ones which came between, so that when I got on to the lower Cælian the road was not really dark.

The Aventine was not so well lighted, because after you passed Julia’s house there were not so many of note. For there was but one road to the temple and Domitian said that the priests could look after it themselves. That was what I heard. Then the frontage of Julia’s house took up a great deal of space, and we were supposed to have torches at each of the entrances. But, besides, when she gave a dinner-party or upon any great occasion, Julia had torches stuck in sconces every two or three yards along the walls.

But again the road became dark before I drew near the villa of Paulinus on the upper Cælian.  

Thou knowest it was in the curve at the bend of the hill near the top, and there were no other houses just near it—I think there was one right on the top of the hill where somebody lived, but I can’t remember just now to whom it belonged.

Paulinus’s house was almost in darkness. Aeola had only left the hanging lamp alight at the big entrance near the outer door, but I went round to the side gate, for I knew that way to Valeria’s rooms and ran towards them. I remember that I stumbled and hurt my foot against a bit of stone coping that jutted out, but I was too frightened for Valeria to stop to think of it even though my foot bled greatly, as I saw afterwards, and I had naught to bandage it.

But now I went in. Aeola had put a little shell with a burning wick upon the step, but the outer room was dark.

I was not sure then how Valeria’s bedroom lay and there was no means of making a light. So I went across very slowly. All the time, I left a bloody footprint on the floor, but that I knew not.

1 The Roman Torch. See Appendix 29, Bk. II.
2 For verification of the Valerian villa, see Appendix 30, Bk. II.
3 This villa was no doubt on the site of what subsequently became the Lateran palace, and dates back even further than the Domus Valerianorum. See Appendix 31, Bk. II.
There was a glimmer of light somewhere beyond and I went towards that. Then I heard a low moaning sound. It was not like Valeria's voice, and for a moment I stood still quite frightened and listening. Now, it came again, and I knew it was Valeria, for I heard her call my name twice. . . . And then, 'Oh, why doth she not come? . . . Why am I here all alone? Why doth no one come?' And then she asked for water till it made my heart ache.

I went through the room. There was an archway with curtains, and when I opened these I saw her bedroom beyond through a little ante-chamber. I went in, it was lighted, and Aeola must have had hard work, for the room was orderly and neat and all that Valeria could need stood upon a tripod near her bed. There was fruit, but it looked bruised and shrivelled, and I saw that the ice had melted, and when I touched the water it seemed hot, but not so hot as Valeria herself.

'If they had sent for Nyria, she would have come.'

I did not stop to talk, but held the cup to her lips which were burning and her poor hands nearly scorched mine as they touched me. Then I wiped some of the grapes and gave them to her. She took one, but lay back again and I waited hoping Stephanus would come. I wanted to do several things but I did not like to leave Valeria. She lay very still with her head back on the embroidered flax of the pillow—all her bed was beautiful—and stared—so strangely. Her eyes were large and shining, but she did not seem to see me. Only when I moved about, her look followed me.

'Why doth no one send for Nyria?' she said: and then turned her head aside and lay quite quietly, seeming to think. But Aeola was a long time coming: and I wished very much that someone else had been there. Presently, she grew restless and began muttering and then her hands set to pick and pull at the embroidered coverlet. 'Is there no one whom I can trust?' she cried. 'No, not one. I have none. But Nyria could be trusted. I want Nyria. Why doth not someone send for Nyria?'

It hurt me to hear her. I went across and knelt down by her and took her poor hands and tried to still them.

'Nyria hath come, Domina,' I said. 'Nyria is here.'

She looked at me for a minute and then she turned her head away. 'You are a good girl,' she said. 'I am sure you mean to please me, and I have not always been kind to you. But I want Nyria.'

Then I saw it was no use trying to explain, and I drew back and crept across to the outer door to listen till someone came. But it seemed to be a long, long while. I wanted to get fresh snow, but I dared not leave her though I knew where that would be kept. But I was afraid to go lest she called me. So I could only wait.

I went back once or twice, and straightened the bed. I took the coverlet off her and, when I saw she was not sleeping and tried to comb back some of her hair, for it made her so hot, she caught my hand and held it to her face; then she said 'Dearest,' in such a sweet low voice.

I started, for I could not think she meant me. But she said it again and murmured, 'Oh, stay with me. Do not leave me.'

'Domina, Nyria will not leave thee,' I answered. But when I bent over her I saw again that she was wandering, and then a thought went through me that seemed to fill me with shame, for I did not want others to hear her cry for a man who was not her husband.
I remembered what Aeola had said about 'others.' I felt that Aeola would not betray her, but I longed for Stephanus to come. I could trust Stephanus, though, maybe, Valeria would not have done so.

When I was going across the room again, to watch at the outer door, I heard a stir behind me and looking back I saw Valeria had risen. She was half-sitting, half-leaning. Her hair was all about her shoulders and her hands were clasped upon her bosom. Then she threw them out and tried to rise upon her feet, with a look in her face that was beautiful and yet so sad that it made me full of pity.

'Marcus,' she called quite loudly, and her voice was clear. 'Come back to me. Oh, why wilt thou leave me when thou knowest that I need only thee? Leave me not, Marcus, or if go thou must, why then, take me with thee.'

I heard all those words because she spoke so clearly, but as she struggled to rise, weakness overcame her and she fell against the bed.

I ran back and tried to raise her. I was stronger than thou mightst think, for I was practised in weights seeing that Julia was a heavy woman.

But Valeria though thin—and she was very thin now—was strangely heavy, and I struggled with her, for she dropped back like a dead weight in my arms, and just then I heard a stir and looked up. I saw someone through the door and Aeola cried in a whisper, 'Nyria,' and behind her there was a broad shadowy figure which I knew to be Stephanus.

'Help me,' I cried to Aeola. 'The Domina hath fainted,' and Aeola came running in, looking pale and frightened, with her long hair and her veil wet from the night dew. I saw that she must have been out in it for some time, and guessed that she had not waited in the house of Stephanus, but by the door.

Aeola tried to raise the Domina's head as I held my arms round her, but cried:

'I cannot do it. Let Stephanus come.'

So then I called him.

'The Domina hath fainted. Help us to lift her.'

He came right in and put down the things he carried, but he never said a word. Though Stephanus was a great talker, he never talked when there was anything to be done or anyone was ill. He raised the Domina in his arms and laid her on her bed, drawing the coverlet neatly round her, for Stephanus was gentle and deft as a woman. Then he took her wrist and held it.

'Now, Nyria,' he said, 'go fetch my things, and thou, little one' (to Aeola), 'bring ice—or snow—and bandages.'

I brought his wallet—a leathern one in which he carried his instruments and medicines—and watched him while he measured a few drops in a glass and forced them between Valeria's lips. Aeola stood half-frightened.

'Will Nyria not come with me?' she said. 'I am afeard. The ice-house is so dark; I cannot go alone.'

Stephanus just jerked his head towards me. 'Go with her,' he said. Stephanus was always short like that—even to me—at such times.

So Aeola took a swinging lamp and a large glass ladle and bowl. I carried these and she carried the lamp, and out we went and round the house down to the entrance of the snow-room.

That, thou knowest, has a door let into the ground. Down brick steps we went till we came to another door which was very stiff and heavy, and I wondered not that one so young as Aeola should mind coming alone.
The door was very thick and heavy, with great pieces of metal at the corners that stuck into its setting, and it would not open when Aeola pulled—so we set the lamp and bowl down and both pulled together. At last we tugged it open, and a great rush of cold air came out as we stepped within.

'Fix the door,' Aeola cried, 'lest it slam': and I put a block of wood to keep it, while Aeola went on, bearing the lamp in her hand. It cast strange shadows on the ceiling as she went towards the great stone vats where the snow was kept.

We had to be very quick, for no one was allowed to carry even a lamp long in the ice-room lest the ice or snow should melt. There was no ice at all left, but the snow seemed firm.

Aeola explained while she ladled it out, that a fresh supply of ice should have been ordered and that the ice-ships were then coming up the Tiber. But no order had been given, and when all the servants went away for the Saturnalia there had only been a very little left.

'How came they all to go away?' I questioned. 'Why did not the Domina plan to keep some?'

But Aeola pursed up her mouth and shook her shoulders and would not say.

'It was cruel of them,' I said, 'Surely one among so many might have waited and helped thee, Aeola?'

'The Domina would not ask them,' answered Aeola. 'And thou knowest, Nyria, no one is glad to give up his Saturnalia for nothing.'

'Except thou,' I answered.

'And thou, too,' she retorted.

Stephanus was cutting bandages and spreading them upon the bed and had laid the damp sheets around Valeria. Stephanus was skilled in fevers but, all the same, she lay like one dead. . . . He spread the snow between the bands of linen and wrapped it round her forehead and wrists and hands for the fever was very high, and he wanted to bring that down first. Then he asked Aeola for some milk and she ran to get it. Yet there was but a very little, for in Saturnalia time the milk-sellers, like everyone else, were apt to fail. But Aeola had kept a little that was pure and sweet.

"One of you must go down into the market to-morrow," he said to Aeola, when he had made Valeria as comfortable as was possible.

My heart bled to see her looking so, yet I was glad that she did not speak before the others as she had done before me alone.

'Now,' said Stephanus to Aeola, 'thou must tell me how came this fever upon her and who has seen her in it. But do not look so frightened. It will be well with thy mistress if we can get the fever down.'

'I am not frightened now Nyria is here,' said Aeola, 'that is if Nyria will stay.'

I just nodded my head.

'Nyria will stay,' said Stephanus with a half-smile. 'But we have Julia to reckon with, little one, and thou must be brave and strong for much depends on thee, and thou canst not count on Nyria.'

'But she can count on me,' I answered. 'This is the Saturnalia, and I may claim some days at least of freedom.'

'During the other Saturnalias thou hast served thy mistress just the same,' said Stephanus looking at me. 'Thou hast found another mistress, it seems. Pray the gods she be not as hard a one.'

'I do not leave Valeria while she needs me,' I answered. 'If I have to go back and tell Julia, I shall come again.'
"Well, well," said Stephanus impatiently. "But it is Aeola I must charge, and Aeola who can tell me most. How came this fever?"

"Nay, I know not," said Aeola shivering, and I saw that Aeola was bursting to speak more freely but shrank from disclosing aught concerning her mistress.

"Thou needst not mind telling Stephanus anything," I said. "Thou knowest I would die to serve Valeria, and Stephanus is my friend and——"

"And likewise must die to serve thy friend," said Stephanus with a little laugh. "Have faith in me, Aeola. Dost thou know aught that could have brought thy mistress to this pass?"

"Nay, I think not," said Aeola slowly. "But I cannot tell. Lately, it hath seemed that Valeria cared naught for anything but her own thoughts and—the visits of——"

I was about to put my hand before her mouth, but Stephanus thrust my arm down. "Stay, Nyria. This is no time for secrets. Speak, Aeola—the visits of—whom?"

"Marcus Licinius Sura," replied Aeola, and covered her face with her veil. For Aeola was a modest maid and though young, she, as well as I, knew what such intimacies led to.

Stephanus answered not, but he went back to the bed and stood looking down in silence upon Valeria. Once he touched her temple with one finger.

"She is somewhat cooler," he said, shaking his head. "There hath been mind trouble here—as I thought. What doctor hath visited her, Aeola?"

"None," said Aeola.

"None!" he answered in amaze.

"None at all, Stephanus. My mistress said no word, and how could I judge whom to send for?"

"Truly, nay. And so thou thoughtst there was but one doctor in Rome and he Stephanus," replied Stephanus patting her shoulder with a smile, for Stephanus must ever have his little joke when things were going well enough to give him time.

"I commend thy judgment, Aeola, but another doctor she must have, for it is not fitting that the wife of Paulinus should be attended only by one who is unregistered as I am. Hath the lady no relatives?"

"None in Rome, I think," Aeola answered. "Paulinus is not returned from Egypt and the lady Vitellia is absent also."

"The lady Vitellia—so . . . who is she?" said Stephanus, putting his things together as he spoke.

"The Domina's sister," answered Aeola—"wife of Valerius Asiaticus. Were she in Rome it would be well," and Aeola gave a little sigh.

"Those not in Rome cannot serve her much. Is there no one of her family or friends," asked Stephanus, "who could be appealed to in this plight?"

Aeola looked at me. "Nyria knoweth that though the Domina hath many friends in Rome, none are like to be of service now."

"Friends!" repeated Stephanus, "and thou callest them friends! But no matter, if there be none to appeal to, then must we do our best. When does Paulinus return?"

"I know not," answered Aeola. "My mistress never speakaheth of him, but 'tis said . . . ."

"Ay—go on," said Stephanus. "'Tis said—what?"

Aeola blushed and hung her head and murmured, "that she looketh not for his return." . . . I pressed her hand and whispered, "Never mind,
Aeola. Stephanus needeth to know. Else how can he judge what is best to do? And we may trust Stephanus.'

I looked at Stephanus and felt proud, for I knew that when he saw I trusted him nothing would make Stephanus unworthy of that trust. Truly he is a good man and a kindly one. He sat him down for a moment and thought.

'To-night we must do as we are, Nyria; wilt thou remain?'

'Assuredly, I will stay,' I answered, 'till the dawn—or till such time as it seemeth needful. Thou knowest, Stephanus, at the Saturnalia we may do as we will, and even Julia hath no claim upon me now.'

'Ay, but Julia will make thee pay for thy liberty, poor little maid,' he answered. 'And such liberty! But do as thou wilt, if that be so, I will go home towards the dawn and fetch such things as be needful, and leave a written message for Denarmid' (the boy who helped him). 'Then I must see who is of best repute in Rome to attend the Most Noble Valeria. But she will be very weak and need nourishment. Thou must be prepared for that, Aeola. One of you must go down into the market to-morrow and buy such things as I shall order.

'Ye two can sleep in turn to-night,' he said. 'I shall lie outside within call and will look in once or twice, so that even if Aeola sleep at her watch it matters not, and she may have to be alone to-morrow night if Julia keepeth thee. And in the Saturnalia it is hard to hire even a watcher. All Rome is off its head.'

'I shall be here,' I answered, and Aeola saying 'I will find thee a rug, good Stephanus,' ran off. Then Stephanus turned to me and came closer.

'Now thou hast a spirit that I like, Nyria,' he said. 'But why keep it only for such cause as this? Dost thou not think, my dear, that if thou wast to hold thus loyally to poor friend Stephanus as well as to yonder noble lady, it would be kinder to him and better far for thyself?'

'I do hold to thee, Stephanus,' I said, putting my hands in his as he held them out, 'thou knowest it. Thou art the best of friends.' And I bent my face down to his hands, for I loved Stephanus very much just then.

'Then, Nyria, give me something of a reward,' he made answer. 'See, we are alone, and if Stephanus hath done his best to serve thee, let thy lips reward him.'

I looked up and saw that his face was all flushed and trembling, yet still I liked him because he had been good, and I made as though I would kiss him. But he drew back and held my hands very tightly, looking full in my face with such a strange look of yearning tenderness, and yet as though he would not hurt me.

'Nay, I need no lips of a saint to kiss,' he answered, 'nor yet of—it was a Greek word he said—I have forgotten, but I mind me it meant—of a spirit of the air. 'Thou art sweet in every shape, Nyria, but sweetest far as the woman thou dost not know thyself to be.'

I laughed. 'Now if thou wilt have none of my kisses, Stephanus, thou canst not complain. Never say I would not offer thee one. . .' And I drew away from him. But he made as though he would have caught me again, only just then Aeola cried softly from the doorway:

'I have brought a warm—' she said a word I cannot remember for a plaided quilt—'from Paulinus's rooms.'

Stephanus thanked her and said, 'Get thee now to thy slumbers, Aeola,
and let Nyria watch the first hour or so, for she must sleep a little before the
dawn.'

And Stephanus strode off carrying the bundle with him. I could not
help thinking well of him as I sat beside Valeria's bed.

She seemed to have fallen into a slumber. Only once I moved the snow
bandages and changed them for others, as Stephanus had bidden me, and
once, when she seemed wakeful, I gave her milk to drink, and she turned
over and soon went to sleep again. But though she had opened her eyes
and looked at me, I saw she did not know who it was that tended her. I
sat very still and looked round the room. The violet and silver curtains
were drawn over the archway at the end and I wondered what lay behind
them. Thou knowest it was not till later that I learned the secret of that
shrine wherein sat the marble divinity with flowers set and lights burning,
whom Valeria in her heart did worship. . . .

Nor, methinks, had Aeola knowledge concerning that Greek goddess, for,
by command of her lady, she said, no one might lift those curtains nor enter
therein save the Domina herself.

And now, as I looked at the alcove, methought that mayhap Valeria
kept the place for a private study in which she wrote her strange fancies. . . .
For Valeria made scorn of the gods of Rome.

I was very glad that the Domina had not betrayed herself before the
others in her talk of 'Marcus.' I knew that Aeola must already have heard
somewhat and I was sure that I could trust Stephanus, nevertheless I did
not want her to speak thus openly in their hearing.

She looked very ill as she lay there. The shaded lamp hanging above, a
little to one side, cast shadows on her face and there were deep dark circles
round her eyes and mouth. The corner of her nose looked blue and pinched,
and every now and then her forehead would twitch, or her hand, and I could
not bear to see it. I wanted to help her and there seemed nothing that I
could do.

I let Aeola sleep as long as I could. Twice Stephanus came in and just
 glanced at Valeria. He went away again directly, though the second time
he pointed to Aeola as though he thought I should awake her. But I would
not. I remembered that Julia did not get up early, and it was useless my
going down there too soon.

Then when at last I got up and was shaking my dress and preparing myself
to lie down where Aeola lay, I suddenly saw Julia's embroidered handkerchief
fall out of my sleeve wherein I had tucked it the night before as I ran up the
hill.

'Julia will chastise me,' I thought, 'if she knows I have taken it,' for
Julia was ever one to suppose the hardest of her slaves. Yet she could but
scold me for not bringing it back to her. So I laid me down to sleep and it
was late when I awoke.

'Stephanus hath but just gone,' said Aeola. 'He would not have thee
disturbed. I was to tell thee that he will return as soon as may be with the
best doctor he can get. . . . Oh, if thou canst come back to me, Nyria,
thou wilt?'

'Of course I will come,' I answered. 'I would not leave thee, but it is
right that I should tell Julia.'

'Thou wilt not let her keep thee? ' asked Aeola.

'She cannot,' I answered proudly.
All the same, I expected to have trouble, but I would not tell Aeola so. 'Thou art not afraid to be left?' I asked.

'Nay—not now, by daylight: and Stephanus will be back soon. Stephanus loveth thee very dearly,' said Aeola gently. 'But thou dost not love him, Nyria?'

'Nay, what is love?' I answered. 'Methinks I love Stephanus, but he is not satisfied. We are over young, thou and I, Aeola, to talk of love and over busy too, methinks.' And I kissed Aeola and betook me on my way to the house of Julia.'
CHAPTER VII

THE WHIPPING-POST

Nyria tells of how she goes back to claim the Saturnalia from Julia: and of how Julia in her wrath orders that she be beaten at the whipping-post by Balbus Plautius, the Public Whiper of slaves.

Nyria: I went down the hill as quickly as I could. I was divided between hoping that Julia might be still sleeping, so that I could get in unobserved and prepare for her robing, and the hope that she might be up so that thus I need not be so long away. But the Most Noble was awake and sitting up upon her couch. Very red and big she looked, with all her hair ruffled and her sleepy face angry. She heard me moving in the dressing-room and called out to know who it was.

'Tis Nyria, Most Noble,' I answered and entering made my obeisance. She raised herself then and sat forward leaning on her hands. 'So, thou runaway, thou hast returned! And what hast thou to say for thyself?'

'Most Noble, it is the Saturnalia,' I answered.

'And what has that to do with thee?'

'I am a slave,' I answered, putting my hands again to my forehead.

'And what has that to do with thee?'

'I render the service of a slave and as such I claim a slave's dues.'

Julia was so angry that she could not answer for a minute. Then she broke forth:

'So that is what thou hast to say. Dost realise that thou art lower than the least of my slaves: and by no means entitled to their privileges? Thou foreign brat, bought as a babe and tended at my trouble and expense! Is this the return thou wouldst make?'

'Most Noble, I have endeavoured to serve thee faithfully,' I answered humbly. 'But... I stopped. I was about to say: 'One came to summon me last night—and I thought of naught else.' But I feared to betray Aeola lest Julia's vengeance should overtake her.

'But what?' repeated Julia crossly. 'There be nothing thou canst say to make me think less ill of thee, Nyria.'

'Then, Most Noble, I will not seek to try, for time presses and I came but to tell thee that for the rest of the Saturnalia, Nyria's services are needed elsewhere.'

'Nyria—my slave! Her services needed elsewhere! How darest thou speak so? I forbid thee, girl. Dost thou hear? I forbid thee to leave this house. Hearest thou?' she repeated petulantly, as I made no answer.

'I hear, Most Noble. Nevertheless, the custom of the Saturnalia is on Nyria's side. I have ever served thee, as I said, and claimed no due. This time—oh, this time, Most Noble, let me go.'

Julia fell back and laughed.

'A pretty way to sue,' she cried. 'First to defy me and then, finding that
fail, to humbly pray thy due—thy due indeed? Go, get ready the bath, girl.'

'I go, Most Noble,' I answered: 'and I will attend thy robing as thou desirest. But it cannot be for long. I am called away. I have asked thee of thy favour to grant me that which is my right, but if thou wilt not, then Nyria must take it.'

Julia sprang out of bed and caught me by the shoulder. Her face was scarlet and her great limbs were shaking. She shook me violently and, as she did so, there dropped out from my sleeve the embroidered kerchief. She pounced upon it.

'What's this? What, hast thou been stealing, girl? My kerchief!' Then she swore by—I forget which god—'This is the cause of thy flitting, to pilfer my goods.'

'Most Noble, I have taken nothing. The kerchief dropped because I secured it there last night when I was called away—the kerchief that thou didst send me for.'

'And why not have brought it if thou wert honest? A truce to such false excuses, Nyria. Thou shalt have twenty lashes for this. I keep no thieves in my household.'

'Most Noble—my heart sank, for if Julia kept me to beat me, it would take so long, and, besides, I should be unfit to help Aeola. Twenty lashes made one bleed, though ten might only raise weals. And yet I would not stoop to ask her to let me off. Then I remembered that Bibbi was away during Saturnalia—and who was there to lash me? Maybe, it was but a threat which Julia could not carry out. I moved across the room and Julia picked up the kerchief herself and bade me hasten.

'Thou wilt not have much energy left for work when I have done with thee, girl. And methinks thou wilt think twice before thou goest forth holiday-making in such plight as thou wilt find thyself.'

I went on filling the vessels, bringing water and oil and setting out Julia's things, with my heart beating fast. Yet all the time, I felt that perhaps she would not be able to get the beating done. Of course, I could have thrown down whatever was in my hand and run away. Outside her gates, she could not touch me. But I did not want to do that, for it was like to go harder with me when I returned, and I thought that if I helped Julia to dress and did her hair very nicely, she would let me go.

But I did not yet know Julia. When she had had her bath and was partially dressed, with a silken wrapper round her shoulders, and her face had been done, the complexion tinted and her hair arranged, she suddenly bade me ring into the outer atrium where there were always more slaves waiting. It was a little silver thing which she struck—there were different bells for different things that she wanted, and the louder bells would carry further.

One of the men raised the curtain and made an obeisance. She asked him sharply who was in attendance and, firstly, whether Bibbi was there. He only shook his head and smiled. He was not one of Julia's men.

'It is the Saturnalia, lady.'

'Now may the Saturnalia perish and may all the gods wreak destruction upon these besotted holiday makers. Is there no one to do my bidding?'

'Crispus is here.' And he mentioned two or three others—they were all Sabinus's servants—the men who had waited the night before and one or two underlings.
'Who hath the strongest arm?'

The man turned back his sleeve and held out his own arm. It was brawny and muscular, covered with hair—unlike those of the Roman lords—and full of knots. He gazed proudly at it.

'My arm is strong, lady.'

'Good,' she answered. 'Go, whip me Nyria.'

I shrank behind her chair, for they looked at me in surprise.

'Nyria! lady!' 'Ay, Nyria, dolt. Did I not say so? She stole a handkerchief last night—one of my best from—I mind me not the name. Give her twenty lashes. Twill warm her blood and make her more attentive to her tasks and keep her, mayhap, from thieving any more.'

The man shook his head and turned back his sleeve slowly.

'Thy pardon, lady, but I whip not Nyria,' he answered, and a great thrill of joy went through me.

Julia turned upon him crossly. 'Did I not speak?'

'Ay, Most Noble, thou didst give me an order which no law of Rome can compel me to fulfil.'

Julia looked very angry. She began—bursting out with something, and then stopped short.

'Go, fetch me one less disobedient than thyself,' she said.

He made an obeisance, dropped the curtain and went away. But Julia would not let me out of her sight, and both she and I waited till he came back again. She was eager to have me whipped, I saw, and then I remembered that though she could not whip me for having run away during the Saturnalia, for that was my right if I chose to take it, yet she could have me whipped for stealing, for it was the law that twenty lashes might be given for a small offence of theft, and this was by favour of the master or mistress. For if she so chose, she could have me sent away and placed in the public prison to be kept until the law should deal with me.¹

I guessed that Julia did not want to lose my services since she was alone and that, therefore, a whipping was more to her taste.

It doth seem a long time when one is waiting to be whipped.

Well, presently, Crispus came back again. I was sitting then cleaning some jewellery of Julia's—no, I was putting the room tidy—Julia sat in a chair—it did seem to me that she was not thinking of me half the time, but she was fanning herself, and when Julia fanned herself hard in that way it meant that she was very cross; she was a person who got hot quickly—yes, that was like Domitian, but I do not think he got hot in the same sort of way. Julia's heat was a kind of blood heat; she took fever very easily. Domitian would flush in his face when he really seemed to be quite cool in his body and in his manner.

But I was going to tell thee—I had to go about the room, and Julia watched me as though she feared I would slip away. She bade me push back the curtains between the bathroom and the room where she sat so that she could see me all the time, and when I wanted to empty things that should have been carried right out for the cleansing, she bade me set them near the door and wait her pleasure. I told thee why I did not run away. Now, I began to wish I had done so. For it seemed as though Julia were serious about whipping me. Then, presently, Crispus called at the door to know if he might

¹ Nyria is quite correct as to the regulations for the punishment of slaves. See Appendix 32, Bk. II.
THE WHIPPING-POST

speak to Julia and she bade me give him entrance. He made obeisance and then he said:

'Might it please the Most Noble'—but it did not please Julia at all—
'there be none in the household who would deal chastisement to Nyria,'
and Julia was affronted and asked whose slaves they were and by what right they refused her orders.

Crispus, methought, was about to make reply, but he seemed to change his mind and a kind of smile came over his mouth as he said that,'it were best they should themselves reply on that point to the Most Noble.'

Then Julia stormed at him and said that it was he who had set the example of insubordination. But she dared not say much, for Crispus was a skilled servant in many ways, and one upon whom both she and Sabinus did depend.

Now Julia bade him summon the household—as many as there were—saying she would see them outside her own room. And Crispus made the obeisance and withdrew: and I looked round the room and wondered whether I dared make a dart for it. But methought I need not fear, seeing there were none to whip me.

So when Julia bade me spread her robe and stand behind her as she went to the steps by the window—I did so and smiled to myself, for it seemed to me that since these six slaves would lay no finger on me and slaves could not be hired nor pressed into service during the Saturnalia, Julia would have time to let her wrath evaporate.

But Julia cast her eye along the row of men as they stood before her and made the obeisance, and scornfully she spoke:

'Dogs,' she cried. 'By what right dare ye reject the orders of your mistress!'

And with one voice they cried:

'We are Sabinus's slaves,' and one more courageous than the rest, came forward and said:

'Oh, Most Noble, thou knowest that by the laws of Rome we obey him who hath bought us. He it is who is our master and whose commands we are compelled not to reject lest vengeance overtake us. But the Most Noble—Most Noble though she be—and the lady-wife of him whom we serve—has yet neither bought us nor is entitled to our service save at command of him who is our master.'

And thus he answered, feeling secure, for, I afterwards heard 'twas he who had attended Sabinus to the Senate House that morning and had received orders from his master to return home for that he himself would be detained till long past midday.

'Where is Sabinus?' Julia called. 'Fetch me him!'

Thou knowest it was ill-bred of a Roman lady to speak so of her husband and her lord. But Julia minced not small things and cared little for courtesies towards Sabinus.

Now, the man who had spoken and whom I had not thought to be in especial my friend answered that his lord was out, and he made excuses when Julia demanded again where Sabinus might be—for I saw that she had half a mind to send after him. But though the slaves knew where he was, they would not say.

So presently she folded her arms across her great breast, beating on her hip with the fan she carried.

'Think ye to oppose me?' said she. 'Nyria shall be whipped, and that before the sun has reached its highest point in heaven. Hast thou a mind to defy me further, or is there one of you who will seek me in the streets
or at——' She said the name of the office—and the name of a man whom I guessed not that she knew of—'twas one of the public whippers.

' It seems,' she said, 'that it he whom I need. Go, get me him. Or if he, too, be brain-sodden—and is keeping Saturnalia like the rest of mad Rome, send me hence the ablest to be found at the——,' she named a public office where slave-beaters were kept—I recall not the word.

Thou knowest, there are large offices in Rome where thou couldst procure any sort of person whom thou mightest need—a clerk or a secretary or a whipper—or one to take for the day any special office.

Now, these men were not slaves like oneself, but slaves of the Government and hired out. Their services had to be paid for, and I felt a dreadful pain in my heart when I knew that this shame of being exposed to a stranger, and of having the lash of the public whipper curling round my shoulders, was to fall upon me. I drew me back behind Julia—I did not mean at that moment to run away, because it seemed impossible, but I suppose Julia thought I did, for she turned round and pulled me forward and kept her hand upon me while she cried out:

'Am I to be obeyed in my own house, ye scum? Or will ye let this thief and liar escape? If thou dost, a ten times greater vengeance shall fall upon her once this cursed Saturnalia be over.'

And when she saw a shiver half of fear, half of indecision pass over the men, she cried out:

'Bring the ropes and bind her to the post.'

After a pause, Nyria goes on:

"I would tell thee that the whipping of slaves was done after this fashion. We were beaten in the courtyard where there is a platform and a post to which we slaves were bound for the lashing. One could see the place from Julia's rooms. The more publicity the greater shame. And there the men were beaten as well as the women, so that by the marks at different heights which the ropes had worn on the wood thou couldst tell where a man or a woman had been bound.

Thou wert given a linen loin cloth to hold round the lower limbs, but yet the lashes came through. We were beaten round the shoulders and body to the ankles. Sometimes the beater would cry out that thou must hold up thy arms—for he is forbidden to lash the arms, neck or face. Then wouldst thou fasten thy garment with a pin and hold up thy arms. From ten lashes to fifty were given—thou couldst not have borne more than fifty, I generally got about fifteen—it depended on what I had done. Sometimes it was twenty or thirty. If Julia was out of temper one might be beaten every day, and that is worst of all, for, when the flesh is bruised or swollen, if a weal be lashed anew it becometh a sore. . . . To faint is nothing. . . . One is thankful to faint...

Now, Crispus looked very black. He made a movement as though he would have stepped towards Julia, but two of the others, who were strangers to me, came forward hesitatingly and bent before her. Then one hastened to fetch the ropes and the other put out his hand to take me.

I had no mind to cower before Julia, but what I could not bear was the man touching me, so I shook my head and bade him let go. 'I will come with thee,' I said, 'if you layest no finger on me, but touch me and I'll bite and scratch like a wild cat.'

Julia heard and laughed. 'So, my pretty Nyria—my dainty well-dressed
waiting-maid! The great Domitian’s darling! This is fitting language, verily. Out then, cat, as thou callest thyself, and let us see thy downy fur laid bare.’

So I went towards the whipping-post. I had to cross along beside the men, and Crispus looked at me as though he had half a mind to snatch me back. But since I had to go I would not cringe, and as Pheidias—that was the man’s name—did not touch me, I was bound to follow him.

And then the other one came back with the rope and set to work to slip the noose round my ankles and wrists.

I could see that Julia was watching and that nothing escaped her, but presently Crispus crossed over before her eyes. ‘Set those nooses slack,’ he said, ‘see they tighten not upon the maid’s skin or I will have a mark on each of thine for every one thou makest upon her. Hounds!’ he cried.

Then one of them said something about ‘Fine words flying truly, since Julia called them dogs if they obeyed not orders, and Crispus said they were hounds if they did.’

‘Curses on thy ready tongue and hand,’ answered Crispus. ‘Thou wouldst have done better to stand in the maid’s place for disobedience than to chastise such a child.’

Then Julia called them sharply, and asked who was going for a whipper, and Pheidias bent low and said if it pleased the Most Noble he would go.

He had not been long in Sabinus’s service and he did not know Julia and feared to disobey her. But I saw Crispus follow him as he crossed near where I stood and heard him say:

‘The beaters are all out keeping Saturnalia like the rest of the world—if in truth the great god be not too high and wise to grant them pleasure at his festival. Curses on their calling! But mark, if thou dost bring other word than that, thou scurvy, bloody-fingered wretch, I’ll have a lash off thy skin for every lash that leaves its line on Nyria.’

And Pheidias just shook himself and answered shortly, ‘What can I do? A slave lives but to obey!’

‘A slave is not the less a man,’ answered Crispus, and Pheidias went away.

Julia got tired of watching, and, seeing I was safe at the post, she went indoors, and the others moved quietly away, though I could see them sitting in twos near the corner of the house and talking together as time went on. Crispus had gone towards the servants’ huts and, by and by, he came with something in a little jar in one hand and a bigger jar and cup in the other.

I looked not at him at first, for mine eyes were turned towards the gate, wondering whether Pheidias would return with the whipper soon, or if salvation should come to me by other means, and wondering, too, what Valeria had done and how Aeola was getting on without me. I longed to know about Valeria.

Now, Crispus came close up to me.

‘Art thou magnetised, Nyria?’ he said, ‘for, in truth, it seems to me that thou art in that sleep the conjurers cast upon birds and serpents when they would work their will upon them, and in very truth it would be better so...’ Poor maid!’ he exclaimed, and I turned and looked at him. ‘Art very troubled, Nyria? Cheer thee, for if the scoundrel bring a lash I will cut off the half of it when he is not looking; and see, I have brought one of Mother Euphena’s ointments which, if thou wilt rub it into thy skin, little one, will render thee hard and impervious to the pain. It is good, for I have
tried it. And thou knowest Mother Euphena, ugly old scarecrow though she be and hard upon thee at times, Nyria, like all the rest of the world, yet is she witch enough to be wise about her potions.'

I answered not a word and he set down what he carried and, removing the lid of the little jar, shewed it to me half full of Euphena's ointment. Then, with a small piece of wood, he took some ointment and put it on a large leaf and held it out to me. But I shook my head. He looked at me very kindly:

'Thou art stupefied, poor maid. Now all plagues rest upon that pest-spot's head. She is the devil's worst disease that he hath ever sent among men. Drink. See, I will give thee wine: it is that thou needest': and he poured from the bigger jar to the cup and held it to my lips, not seeming to care if Julia saw him. But I pushed it away.

'I am afeard thou hast put in a drug, Crispus?' I asked. For it was the custom among the slaves, if one knew he was going to be whipped, to drink some drugged wine or vinegar beforehand—or, if he could not get it himself, one who was a friend would bring it, for when the slaves were cut down from the post, they were generally too stupid with pain and too sore to move themselves and had to be carried or led. So, it mattered not if they seemed to be drunk, and the drug working would sometimes send sleep and so make them forget the pain.

But I did not want to be drugged, for I feared to lose my senses after it and I wanted to get away as soon as I could.

Crispus half smiled. He began to shake his head, but when I looked at him he stooped and answered me:

'Now I could almost say a plague on thy truth-loving nature, Nyria, for I cannot tell thee lies. Behold, there is but a grain or two in the bottom of the cup.'

I took the cup out of his hand and emptied it upon the ground and wiped it well with the edge of my garment. Then I held it out.

'Wilt thou spare me another cup, Crispus, and I will take it thankfully. But I need no drug.'

'Thou art a little fool, Nyria,' he answered. 'Why shouldst thou suffer more than need be?'

'The pain of the lashes makes only my body suffer, but if I cut myself off from my soul, both I and it suffer sorely.'

I scarcely knew what I was saying, seeing that a sort of cold horror came over me. For, just then, I saw Pheidias re-enter and, with him, a great man shrouded in a long dark cloak—a very big man he was, and a corner of the cloak was folded crosswise over his head half concealing his face. He followed Pheidias to the steps of Julia's rooms and there made his obeisance.

Crispus snatched the cup from me. 'Hearten thyself, child, if thou canst,' he said. 'Crispus's hand has been powerless to save thee, but Crispus's sympathy is with thee. I had rather bear the brute's lashes on my own shoulders than that they should touch thine.'

'Thou art very good, Crispus,' I answered. 'I knew not that such a matter as this would be aught to thee.'

'Because a man is light of tongue and liketh to game when he hath leisure, didst thou think he had no heart? But, see, thou hast not used the ointment, Nyria—Quick! Dip thy fingers, spread it over thy breast and shoulders—or wilt thou let me?'

I pushed it away. 'Tis too late. They would see it, and thou knowest, Crispus, my lot would but be fifty lashes instead of twenty.'
Julia stood upon the steps and spoke to the great man in the cloak. At her bidding, it seemed, he unwrapped himself and disclosed the whip he carried. It had a very long lash and in a pocket he wore there seemed to be several lengths which he could knot on if so desired.\footnote{For the whip used for the beating of slaves, and the barbarity of Roman mistresses in watching their punishment, see Appendix 33, Bk. II.}

Julia was not satisfied with the whip and bade him take off the end and substitute a newer piece. The handles of such whips fitted the one inside the other, so that he could lengthen or shorten the handle as he wished. Then Julia bade him come to me and said she would herself count the lashes. Pheidias led him, and another man—a name like Euge—was called up also and they took their stand, either one at a short distance from me on either side. This was usual lest by any chance a slave should escape. But Crispus spoke to the Whipper who had come,

'\textbf{Thou art—— [What was his name?]—The first name began with a B and the second with a P—I think it was Plautius—Balbus Plautius] and thou hast chosen a profession well fitted to thy ancestry,' he said severely. 'Now I, Crispus Sabinus, am looking for my freedom which it hath been foretold me, shall shortly be mine. Having cultivated a good arm and a stout leg, it seemeth to me that the profession of gladiator might suit me better. Now thou knowest, good Plautius, a tussle with one such in the arena might happen to advance thy interests. Look to thy training, friend, for the day will come when Crispus shall be free to pay back with interest the lashes thou bestowest on yonder little maid.'

And that was the last thing I heard. Balbus Plautius took up his position, and then I felt the first lash curl. Thou knowest, when thou art whipped it is like the hissing of a serpent, and somewhat of the way a serpent springs. Though I had never had a serpent bite me, I should think the cutting of the lash hurt more, because the serpent's tooth would only make one small spot, but the lash makes a long quivering line. Still, it doth whizz round thy head and doth frighten thee in somewhat the same kind of way. I had folded my arms over my breast. We women always did that because it was agony if the lash cut one's bosom, and seeing that thy bosom was not exposed, of course, when thou wert in attendance, they were free to lash it. I had nothing on but my lower under-garment. The other things had been slit off—that was the dreadful part of it—because only men were there. Usually, women came and did it for thee at the last moment.

As I was trying to unfasten my dress, Pheidias and the other one came forward to help me. But I bade them stand back, I shook my head. I wanted to speak, but I could not. Then did Crispus turn on them.

'\textbf{She is at the mercy of one brute. In the name of pity and justice, let her be free from more,' he cried.}

But seeing that I could not manage my fastenings, he said: '\textbf{May I, Nyria?} quite gently.

Afterward, when I thought it all over, I was surprised at Crispus, because he always seemed just a merry roystering fellow who did his work well, and was clever and skilled with his fingers but troubled not himself at all at anything. And all the words he had ever had with me had been teasing or joking. Yet I let him help me. I did not so much mind his touching me, and then he drew back and I heard the lash whizz.

Thou knowest, it is quite a difficult thing to let fly the lash as it should be done, for it must not fall upon the upper part of a maid's shoulders nor
upon her face, nor should it fall upon her arms: and yet one was wont to
protect oneself with one's arms, because it hurt less there and I hoped to
save myself a little in that way. . . . Now, there came a long quivering
pain all round me, and another . . . and another. . . . I felt sick—half
with fright, I think, for I do not believe it hurt me so very much at first.
. . . I did not seem to realise the pain. But it was the shame and fear
of it. . . . And then I heard Julia call out:

'Hold, good Balbus.' Julia never forgot a name if she wanted the bearer
of it to oblige her. Usually, she addressed other people's servants and often
her own by the class they held instead of by their own names, but I think she
called him Balbus, and I lifted up my head feeling dizzy and wondering
whether she would bid him cease.

But that was not her thought. 'Twist that hair upon the brat's head,'
she cried, 'and see those arms are raised. By what right doth the mean-
spirited little witch keep them fast?'

Shuddering, I tried to bind my hair and pile it up together. Crispus
held out a little pointed piece of wood he had brought for the ointment and
I pinned up my hair with that; and then I stood and held up my arms and
the lashes fell again. . . . They went on. . . . I forgot to count. . . .
'Twas like a dozen serpents at once, striking me. . . . I could not see the
men for they stood a little behind me where Bibbi always stood, and I shut
my eyes lest the lash should strike them and just stood and bore it. . . .
And presently, I felt a curious stiffening all over me and a kind of singing
in my ears. . . . I knew that it was the faintness and I was glad when that
came. I had not cried out. I never did. I could endure. But twenty lashes
was more than I was accustomed to, and when it got past twelve the pain
became dreadful, for the lash did drive into thy sore flesh. At first thou
didst seem just a standing bleeding thing scarce knowing what should hap.
Then, so sharp was the agony, thou didst seem to be even more alive—and,
afterward, as I said, the stiffening came and everything got horribly dark.
. . . It was a very bright sunny day, and, though the weather was cold,
standing in the sun so long waiting had made me feel sick before. Yet I
loved the sun. . . . And now it seemed like something warm folding me
round and, in a kind of way, holding me up. Then I felt as though I must
drop into it, and when that black cloud came over the skins of my eyes, I
opened them and saw the lash quivering just above my head against a
purple sky. My face felt wet and I had a feeling as though the air was drop-
ing blood. I think it must have been, because I was bleeding myself by
that time. . . . And then across the courtyard I heard Julia's voice again
calling out slowly the number of the lashes. I had heard her at first, but
I had lost the sound of her voice in between. Now, it came back as if I were in
a dream. . . . And then something seemed to slip from under me and I
felt myself falling, falling, falling, surely a long way.

What really happened was that I must have dropped and as I fell, thou
seest, being held up by the ropes, the ropes ran up against the broken
flesh on my legs and arms and made the sores worse. Thou knowest, we
did not have our wrists fastened together at the back. There was always
a separate loop round each wrist, because we had to hold our arms up high.
. . . Then I know not what befell. . . . When it was over—I think I had
had all but the last two lashes—Julia went indoors and paid Balbus. But
while she was gone to get the money, I suppose he came forward and wanted
to help take me out of the ropes and said something about it being a sore pity.
But Crispus flew at him and snarled and bade him take his great hands away for that they had done enough of harm.

That was what Crispus told me afterwards: and that Balbus bent over me as I lay on the ground when Crispus was trying to slip off the nooses without hurting me, and he said:

'Had they told me 'twas for this job they might have got another to come. For Balbus Plautius is no butcher, and 'twas a butcher that they needed.'

But he went up and took the money, for that, thou knowest, was his living.'
Nyria tells of how, by the kindness of Crispus, she was carried in a litter up to the Valerian villa and of how the Domina Vitellia entrusted to her the nursing of Valeria: then of how Valeria in her delirium betrays her love for Licinius Sura and Vitellia is perturbed thereat.

Nyria: "When I came back to myself, the room was almost dark. There was a little window at the back, but the curtain was drawn over it leaving only a glimmer of light. Someone had stretched a piece of cloth on the floor and laid thereon a cup with a little wine in it and some pieces of light cake of a kind that we slaves used to make for ourselves. I looked around. But I was alone. The backs of my legs were very sore... and all down the sides of my thighs. I felt very sore, too, down my back—just below the shoulders, and there were two or three great cuts across the upper arms. I had on no garment, but someone had wrapped a soft white cloth round me. It was stained all over. They had put ointment on me, and the blood and ointment had marked the sheet.

As I was thinking what I would do, the curtain between the rooms was pushed aside and Crispus peeped through them. When he saw me sitting up, he came in. 'How art thou, Nyria?' he asked. 'Thou shouldst not struggle to sit up.'

'But I have to get about my business,' I said.

'A truce to thy business,' he answered. 'This is the Saturnalia. Dost thou not remember? And not even that she-beast Julia can make thee work.' Then he came close and kneeled down beside me. 'Thou hadst best have some of the drugged wine, Nyria,' he said. 'For the gods have been hard upon thee, child. Drink this,' and he lifted a cup to me.

'It is not drugged?' I made answer before I sipped it.

'Nay—of what avail to drug thee now?' And at that I took a big draught, for I trusted Crispus.

'In truth no—it would not do to drug me now, for I must get upon my feet,' I said. 'I am ashamed before thee, Crispus,' and I tried to pull the sheet around me.

'Nay then, thou needst not be. For if Julia forgot thou art a woman, Crispus hath not forgotten it. Think not shame, child, for none hath looked on thee save these eyes of mine, and for once Crispus was blind.'

He was very kind and gentle and soothed me. 'Nay, friend, thou must suppose Crispus to be but a dotard without eyes or sense: and this, too, thou mayst remember, Nyria. I had a little sister once.'

It was the first time he had spoken of her, but I had heard that he had lost his little sister long ago and grieved sore after her, so I smiled at him and said, 'Well, then, I am grateful to thee, Crispus, but words will not pay and I
BY VALERIA'S BEDSIDE

have naught else to do it with. Wilt leave me now? For I must robe myself and be gone.'

‘Whither goest thou?’ he asked rising upon his feet. ‘Thou art not fit to enter on any fresh adventure, Nyria.’

‘But I must,’ I answered. ‘Do not try to stay me, Crispus.’

‘Since I cannot,’ he answered, ‘mayhap Stephanus could. I would have fetched him to thee, but I liked not to leave thee alone. Now, if thou needest a messenger, little one, tell me, for I will do thy bidding.’

‘Nay, it is no messenger I need,’ I answered. ‘I go, Crispus, to the villa of Valeria, wife of Paulinus. She is sore smitten with the fever and hath but little Aeola—the youngest of her handmaidens—to tend her.’

‘And that was where thou wast all night?’ enquired Crispus.

‘Yes, I stayed with Aeola. But Stephanus was there too: and Stephanus will be there to-night, he doth not neglect his patients. Though the noble Valeria is no patient of his,’ I said, ‘he came because Aeola and I sent for him, not knowing what else to do. Detain me not, Crispus.’

So Crispus went out, bidding me call him if I needed help. But first, he fetched a jar of water that he had warmed, and placed it in readiness for me with a pile of soft rag which he had routed from one of Euphena’s cupboards, for he knew that it would hurt me sorely to stoop. And so it proved, for my dressing was a labour: and it hurt my shoulders much when I tried to draw my garments over them.

At last I had made as brave an effort as I could, and then I went out and called him. He sat upon the low mud wall outside and was smoking one of those queer curly pipes with herbs that some of them used to smoke. It astonished me to see him, for it was not considered fitting for any slave who was about to tend his master or mistress to carry the breath of such an odour with him. But he answered me laughingly:

‘Sabinus hath given me leave, Nyria. Now look not so afraid; Julia is not my mistress, remember. See, I will tie up thy arms for thee, child, and then I am coming with thee if go thou must: and behold, here are thy bearers coming, for it is a little noble lady who is going to visit the great Valeria.’

There was a litter being borne across the courtyard of a kind that tradespeople and suchlike folk hired on the outskirts of the Forum.

‘What is this?’ I asked.

‘It is for thee. Those poor little limbs cannot bear thee up the Celian.’

‘But how didst thou get it? And I have naught to repay thee with,’ I answered.

‘Sabinus advanced me a couple of sesterces, and that was enough. He is a good fellow, Sabinus, with a kindly heart and a gentle soul—fitter than to mate with that sharp-fanged she-wolf of his.’

They put down the litter and Crispus helped me into it and bade the bearers not to shake me when they raised it. It was my first ride in a litter since I was quite a little child, when sometimes I had been taken up by the wives of some of the slaves who had meant to be kind to me and would take me for a ride if they had a treat of one.

We went along, and as we were crossing the courtyard there came a message by Pheidias that Julia demanded my presence as soon as I was fit to

1 It has been objected that there is no mention by writers of that period of smoking such as Nyria describes. I have been unable to find any, and it would be interesting to learn if such a record exists. (Ed.)
stand—to which Crispus, signing me to be silent, made answer. 'Tell the
Most Noble that by grace of the gods who are kinder then men, Nyria is
able to stand though not yet to work, therefore she attendeth the Saturnalia
according to the law of the land and is now on her way to give thanks in
the Temple.'

We did not talk much going up the hill, for I was tired and I wanted to
keep all the strength I had for Aeola. The bearers put me down just outside
the gates of Paulinus's villa, and then Crispus paid them and sent them off.

It was about sundown and there was a gleam of reddish light, I remember,
but the shadows were beginning to fall. I was much later than I had said
I would be, and I was afraid when I thought of how troubled Aeola might
have felt.

'Thou wilt take this,' said Crispus lifting a package which he had brought
with him. 'There is a little flask of wine and some bread and meat, Nyria,
for though I doubt not Stephanus will see after thee, he may not chance to
come just yet and thou wilt need food. Eat—and thou wilt feel stronger.
'I thank thee,' I answered. 'I thank thee very much, Crispus. Thou
hast been a kind friend to me.'

'Wait—who is this?' he answered as the gate in the wall opened.

It was Aeola who looked out—very small and frightened.

'Oh, Nyria, thou art come,' she cried when she saw me. 'I was wondering
what had chanced to thee. The day hath seemed so long.'

'I was kept,' I answered. 'But thou shouldst not have left the Domina,
Aeola. How is she?'

'Sleeping—and there hath been a great doctor here. But she is not alone
now. The lady Vitellia hath arrived.'

'The lady Vitellia!' But I thought she was absent from Rome.'

'She hath but returned to-day and came hither at once, knowing nothing
of my lady's illness.'

Aeola clung to my arm and, seeing the face of Crispus suddenly over my
shoulder, shrank back. Crispus smiled and I turned and spoke his name.

'This is Crispus, my very good friend, Aeola. Salute him, for were it
not for his good aid I should not be here.'

Aeola blushed right up to the roots of her hair and saluted him as she
would have saluted a lord.

'It was very kind of thee, sir,' said Aeola, and speaking in her little, low
half-frightened voice.

'Nay, nay, thou art kind to me,' said Crispus. 'But thou wouldst be
kinder still, sweet maiden, if thou didst not think me such an ogre.'

I thought Aeola would never have done blushing, so I pulled her arm and
said, 'Come in, we must hasten. Thou canst thank Crispus another time—
and, truly, we have much to thank him for.'

'One moment, Nyria,' called Crispus. 'I will be hither to-morrow about
the fifth hour to learn how thou art and the lady thou befriendest. Perchance
if thou art not free to come and speak to me, this maiden will.'

I nodded and said 'Yes,' that one of us would. And then we ran in, Aeola
clinging to my hand.

'I told the lady Vitellia about thee,' Aeola said breathlessly, 'and she
bade me bring thee to her when thou didst come. Enter, but tread softly,
for Valeria sleeps.'

'It needeth not for thee to remind me,' I answered. 'Go, tell the lady
Vitellia I have come and wait her pleasure.' I did not want to be taught
by Aeola how to be careful for Valeria, and I waited till Vitellia should summon me, though my heart craved for Valeria.

Vitellia came into the outer room to speak to me and when she saw that I moved with pain and difficulty, she asked me what had chanced. Then was I covered with confusion.

' Hast been in trouble, child? ' she asked.

I answered meekly that I had been under correction and, as I stood near her, she drew my garment aside and glanced at some of the marks.

' Nay, thou mayst have been in fault, but others have erred likewise, ' she said in that gentle, severe voice of hers. ' Aeola tells me thou didst come hither last night and share her watch over my poor sister who fares but ill, I fear.

' Ay, lady, ' I answered and waited meekly.

' Thou art of Sabinus's household? ' ' Julia is my mistress, ' I answered.

' Julia! ah, yes. That accounteth for it, ' she said looking at me pityingly. ' And thou art the yellow-haired little damsel I have seen here before. Thou dost visit the Most Noble Valeria and bring her flowers. Is it not so, child? '

I answered that by the favour of Valeria this had been my privilege many times.'

' And Aeola telleth me thou art skilled in nursing? She is but a child. Art thou free to serve Valeria for a while, or will Julia demand thy presence? ' ' It is the Saturnalia, lady, ' I replied. ' I claimed my right and came last night, and by that right I have come again.

' At a bitter price, I fear, ' said she. ' Thou lookest more like to be upon a bed of sickness thyself. But listen, and I will tell thee what the doctor said. ' Then quoted she one—Aspergius—Aslargius—some name like that. ' He, ' she said, ' is of repute in Rome, and was brought hither by one Stephanus who himself is not qualified, I find.

' Stephanus is but the slaves' doctor, lady, ' I answered. ' He is goldsmith and jeweller by profession, but hath studied medicine and surgery and knoweth much of these things. ' ' So it doth seem, for Aslargius—methinks she said—spoke of him as one wasted in his own trade. But he is only a freedman and is not fitted to follow the much higher profession. '

I could but bow my head. I did not like her to speak slightingly of Stephanus, though I knew she did not mean it unkindly. Then she gave me the written list of directions that the great doctor had left. But I shook my head over it and nearly cried as I put it back into her hand.

' What troublest thee? ' she asked.

' I cannot read, lady, ' I answered. ' If it will please thee to repeat to me the great doctor's words then Nyria will faithfully carry them out. But I am but a poor ignorant slave-girl and it hath not pleased the giver of wisdom to vouchsafe knowledge of letters to Nyria. ' ' He hath given thee other knowledge, ' she answered looking at me gravely, ' which, if I judge aright, hath stood and will yet stand thee in good stead. Come then, Nyria, I will read thee the doctor's directions, ' and she read the paper over to me slowly while I committed the words to memory as I had been wont to with Stephanus's directions. ' Now tell me, ' said she, ' What must thou do first? ' ' I answered her and repeated the directions so well that she stared at me in some surprise.
'Truly, if you canst not read with thine eyes, thy little mind is a book-scroll upon which one may write freely. To-night I shall myself stay with Valeria, but I must rest a while, for I have had a long journey, and now thou mayst take thy share. But do not exhaust thyself needlessly, for thou lookest not over strong and thou hast suffered much.'

I ventured to answer that it mattered not. I was there to serve Valeria and she should have faithful service.

And then making my obeisance I went into the inner room. Valeria lay stretched so motionless beneath the sheet that it seemed to me with a sudden terror that she lay dead. I moved swiftly across and stood at the foot of her couch, scarce daring to breathe. The shadows made her poor face sharp and unsightly and there was but the faintest motion of her breast. But still I saw that she lived, and my feeling of thankfulness was so great that for a moment it almost turned me faint again. It was then, I think, that I first wanted to pray. I would have liked to thank the gods and yet I could not think that they had known much about it.

I looked round swiftly for an altar—or at least an image before which I might light a lamp and place a vase of flowers, but there was naught. The violet curtains I told thee of hung closed and thick with silver fringe. Afterwards I found out that behind those curtains was the only goddess whom Valeria loved.'

NYRIA (resuming): 'I stayed beside Valeria the whole night. Aeola crept in once for a short time and asked me many questions, but only in a whisper, because Valeria slept. Aeola told me that she had served Vitellia. Vitellia had had some food sent in for herself, but she had brought none of her own waiting-women and had said that she might only stay a short time, for she would not remain long away from her husband, 'seeing that is the duty of a good wife,' she had said to Aeola. 'Methinks a good wife must have many duties,' said Aeola in her funny little way. 'But if one were loved it would not matter...'. And then she looked at me shyly wondering... 'And what said to thee whom thou callest Crispus? And who is Crispus,' she asked, gazing at me with her lips apart as one who would catch flies, and her eyes round and big... 'Serveth he Julia?'

'Nay,' I answered. 'He serveth not Julia,' and I laughed, remembering how in the morning he had refused to serve her. 'Tis not his way to serve Julia when Julia's commands do not please him.'

'Ay, but he is courageous,' murmured Aeola. 'How dare he disobey? though, in truth, he seemeth a great lord himself.'

'Thou art a silly little fool, Aeola. Crispus is but Crispus—one of Sabinus's dressers. That is what he is, and serveth at the table since Sabinus liketh his wit and merry humour. 'Twas he who pulled our veils last night. Dost thou not remember?' and Aeola crimsoned. I saw that she remembered very well.

'That—that was Crispus! But he seemeth different this eve,' she answered. 'He was laughing at us then.'

'Ay, Crispus laughs at everything and everyone,' I answered, 'save folks that are in trouble. If thou wouldst win his favour, Aeola, pull a long face; be faint and weak and thus find the road to the heart of Crispus.'

Aeola looked at me still as though she thought I were laughing at her and glanced at Valeria's long mirror opposite. She put aside the short brown
curls that hung over her forehead and drew her little round face into solemn shape.

'My face is short,' she said, 'and round—I cannot pull it long. And there be naught ill with me.'

She stood before the mirror turning her small body, and then lifting her arms she pushed back the embroidered sleeves—for Valeria always dressed her maidens well, and liked them to wear soft bright colours. Aeola had on a rose-red robe bordered with white; 'twas simply made of muslin, I think, but it became her well, and the sleeves were wide and fell open from her little, thin girlish arms which were smaller even than mine. She turned to me and paused a moment and then said:

'Crispus would not look at me, thinkest thou, Nyria?'

'He looked at thee this eve,' I answered. 'But be silent, Aeola, or else go away. We must not talk while Valeria lieth sleeping. Hush thee and get to sleep, else Crispus would not like thy face with all the colour gone from it...'

Then I stayed there watching. There was medicine to give Valeria and milk with some drops in it, and that roused her. She opened her eyes, but though she looked at me she seemed to see me not, till, as I was putting down the cup, she caught my hand and kissed it and murmured 'Marcus' soft and low.

It made my heart ache to hear her. For I knew that it was the name of Licinius Sura and that 'twas for him she craved.

I laid her gently down among the pillows and smoothed the coverlet and sat beside her whilst she held my hand, kissing it oft and cooing 'Marcus' and fondling it as though it were a child. Other words she said which I could not wholly catch, but they were all of tenderness. Then, suddenly, it seemed to me that this was unbecoming, for I am but a slave, and though Valeria knew it not 'twas Nyria and no 'Marcus' to whom she thus spake.

So I withdrew my hand, whispering gently to her and trying to turn her into sleep. But, as I stepped away, her eyes rolled round on me with a stare that shewed they could not see me. And now, a strange strength came into her voice and she cried: 'Marcus, why art thou so unreasonable? Have I not given more than ever I gave before? Am I not wholly thine? What matters it then how one gives? There is none to share thy kingdom, for thou dost reign supreme in Valeria's heart.' Then, half raising herself, she clasped her hands before her and stared out across the room... 'Marcus... Beloved,' she cried again, 'come back to me, come back. Surely it is not thus that thou wiltst leave Valeria. Ah come,' she cried and her voice rose to a wail. 'Have I not said that I would go with thee?—That thy people shall be my people and that all thou dost desire shall be my desire? What care I for the status of a Roman matron? What care I for Paulinus? Is it because of him thou frettest thyself? Ah me! Dost thou know me so little, dear love! Bid me not see Paulinus again, and thy word is law. Command me as thou wilt, Marcus. Command me, for Valeria lives only to obey thee.'

All this and much more she said, sometimes speaking quickly, sometimes slowly, and dropping her voice into a cry that seemed to go right down into my soul. Oftentimes she raised it and her tone was full of pain. I stood there listening, not knowing how to silence her and scarcely daring to do anything, fearing lest I should perhaps awaken her to consciousness. I forgot she would not know that she had spoken thus to me, and while I
wondered and sorrowed at the sorrow that seemed to be filling her, I heard a soft tread and the movement of garments and Vitellia stood beside me. At first, she heeded me not but stood there gazing at Valeria, her eyes large and dark and full of tears with a great and, as it seemed to me, a godly pity in them. Once she stepped swiftly to the head of the couch and rearranged the clothes around Valeria. In doing so she laid her hand for a moment upon Valeria’s mouth as though she longed to force her into silence. Then she turned to me and hesitated again as if she were not sure whether to speak.

I had drawn back into the shadow, waiting till she should notice me. At length she called me. ‘Nyria. Thou hast nursed fever before?’

‘Ay, lady,’ I answered.

‘Thou knowest that many a one such as my poor sister prateth of matters that are of no moment, seeming to be distressed by that which is naught. ’Tis but a dream that disturbeth Valeria.’ She paused and looked at me questioningly.

‘’Tis but a dream, lady,’ I answered, and a swift sigh broke from Vitellia’s lips. She seemed relieved. ‘A dream,’ she said, ‘which might assail anyone—a madness of fever from which even one such as Valeria might not be free.’

I bowed my head. It needed not for me to speak. Yet knew I full well that Valeria’s dream had shape in reality.

Vitellia looked at her very earnestly. Then she turned to me again.

‘Thou art a sage little soul, Nyria, fit to be trusted, I feel sure. Remember, though oft one prateth of that which matters not, it is not seemly for a watcher to prate again of what she heareth or may chance to see in a sick room.’

Now this cut me. For I loved Valeria and I was not wont to be disloyal.

‘Thou are a wise girl, I know,’ said Vitellia again.

‘I am Nyria, lady,’ I answered, ‘slaves speak not secrets—and if they did, who would listen? Am I not a slave?’

Vitellia seemed surprised at my answer. ‘Thou art not Valeria’s slave,’ she said kindly. ‘A slave should be loyal to her own mistress, but needeth not to be loyal to another.’

I held my hands out.

‘I am Nyria,’ I said again. ‘I have naught but faithful service to render. My lips, like my hands, are at Valeria’s service. I say no word that can injure her.’

‘Nothing that thou couldst say could injure the lady Valeria,’ replied Vitellia proudly. ‘But gossip is rife in Rome and it is not well that the name of one so highly placed should be bandied about. But I will trust thee, Nyria.’ She laid her hand on my shoulder as she went out, and seeing that I winced with the pain, for she had touched a sore, she added ‘Poor child, thou art injured and needest rest. Thou shalt sleep at dawn, Nyria.’ Then she went away.

I got some sleep towards morning because Aeola took my place. Later on in the day, Aeola had some sleep. We took it in turns all the time.

Vitellia saw the big doctor when he came and they questioned as to who should take care of Valeria. But there was a difficulty about hiring servants and Vitellia had not many of hers at hand. She could have spared one but the woman was exhausted with the journey, for they had come a long way. Yet Vitellia herself, though she was tired, seemed always a strong woman.
Aeola wept when Vitellia spoke of sending her from the room and prayed that she and I alone might wait upon Valeria.

I said nothing while Vitellia spoke to Aeola. I just stood quietly by, with my eyes upon the ground, waiting lest she should question me. I always felt that Vitellia trusted me. So when presently she said, 'Thou art not nervous, Nyria. Thinkest thou that thou canst give time and strength to help the Domina Valeria back to life?'

I was not surprised and I said: 'My time and strength are at the Domina Valeria's service, lady. Nyria asks nothing but to serve her.'

Then said Vitellia, 'That is well. The lady Valeria will reward thee after her own manner, I have no doubt. But save her life if thou canst—and careful nursing will do it, the doctor says—then will I see thou dost gain and not suffer, Nyria.'

'I need no gain, lady,' I answered, and making my obeisance again, I went from her presence back to Valeria while she talked a while with Aeola.

A messenger had come that morning to say that her lord Asiaticus was nearing the gates of Rome and would reach it that day. It was but for a short time that he was returning and Vitellia would not leave him. They would both be going away again before very long, Aeola told me; meanwhile, though Vitellia came every day to see her sister, she could not stay all the time.

Stephanus came up that morning, too, I remember, but when I would have taken him in at once to see Valeria he shook his head and said it was not for him to attend her now since the care of her had passed into other hands. But me he bade unrobe that he might see my wounds, and sorely did he curse and gnaw his beard and vow vengeance upon Julia. Crispus had found him the night before and told him the truth and Stephanus was at once sorry and very wroth. He swore all sorts of curses upon Julia, but seemed angry with me, too.

'For thou art but a fool to endure it,' he cried, 'seeing there is a good home waiting for thee and a hand strong enough to protect thee—ay, even against Julia herself.'

That made me cry a little, for I was feeling very stiff and sore and it hurt me that he should speak so. Then Stephanus bade me not blubber like a babe but act like a wise woman who knew her friends, and, seeing I sobbed the more, he was wroth against himself and kissed my wounds and said:

'Tis enough to bring madness on a man to see such wrong done. For though they sacrificed young things upon the altars of the gods, it seems that the gods are not satisfied but allow baser sacrifices in the privacy of the household.'

Stephanus went on binding my wounds and putting on fresh ointment. He had brought a flagon of wine with him and made me drink. 'Tis not so rich a brand, mayhap, as that of thy friend Crispus,' he cried. 'Since when hast thou drunk Crispus's wine, Nyria?'

'Since yesternoon,' I answered, 'when Crispus gave it me.'

He looked at me very sharply. Stephanus had a way of screwing up his eyes when he wanted to make out anything very particularly. 'Ay—he told me that. Thou dost not then take favours from Crispus, Nyria?'

'I took many yesterday,' I answered. 'Tis by favour of Crispus that I am alive, methinks.'

'Now that is untrue,' said Stephanus roughly. 'For though thou hast been whipped brutally, thou hast somewhat more stuff left in thee, Nyria,
than to die like a dog beneath the lash. But I would learn more of this Crispus. What doth he—following thee about thus?

'Kind things,' I answered. 'Else, it would not be Crispus. Abuse not my friend, Stephanus. If thou lovest me thou owrest him much.'

'Are thy debts mine then, Nyria?' said Stephanus tenderly.

'Ay, if thou wilt help me bear them and wilt not scold me,' I answered sobbing.

'Nay, little one,' he said putting his arms round me very tenderly. 'The day will never dawn on which Stephanus will seek to scold thee. But it doth make his blood boil, Nyria, to think that another standeth closer to thee.'

'None standeth closer,' I answered. 'Thou art foolish to talk so, Stephanus. Crispus is but Sabinus's body-man and steward, and thou hast seen him often and knowest him as well as I. Dost thou not remember the story of Loyola, that little sister of his, and how she went from him and took half his heart too. Well—bend low, Stephanus, and I will whisper thee a secret. Methinks perchance there is a maid to whom, if he would give the other half, she would treasure it well.'

'Tis not Nyria,' said Stephanus looking hungrily into my face. 'Thine eyes are blue as the skies of Greece, child. Rome knows no skies like those. But let no lie be writ on them.'

'I lie not,' I answered. 'If thou wouldst use thine own eyes, Stephanus, methinks thou mightst discover the maid for thyself, for she is not a league hence. And now, if thou hast done binding me, I will go.'

Stephanus let me go and put together his ointments and his bandages and, seeing I had not drunk his wine, he was about to empty it angrily on the carpet. But I stayed him with a gesture and bade him water the ground outside. 'But if thou wast to ask me prettily and not seem so cross, Stephanus, perhaps I would pledge thee,' I said, drawing my robe up on my shoulder.

So then he held the cup out, and I quaffed, letting him keep it to my lips, but, as he drew the cup away he leaned forward quite suddenly and kissed my mouth all wet with the wine.

I said, 'That was rude, Stephanus, and I shall go.' Then he laughed and I saw he was not cross any more, so I crept to Valeria's door and listened. But she seemed to be silent. So I went with Stephanus to the terrace where Valeria used to sit and, there, standing upon the edge of it, was Aeola all laughing and blushing, and who should be below leaning on the step with his head just reaching to her shoulder, but Crispus.

'How now,' said Stephanus crossly. 'Here cometh that scoundrel courting as I thought. Now, if thou favouredst him, Nyria?'

'Hold thy peace,' I answered. 'Seest thou not he hath not eyes for thee or me?'

Stephanus's mouth went into a large round O and he whistled softly.

'By Hecate!' he cried, 'Tis one thing to rob a man of his mistress and quite another thing to steal a child.'"
CHAPTER IX

THE LOVER OF VALERIA

Nyria tells of how Stephanus brought the doctor Archigenes and how the great doctor Symmachus also came to Valeria who lay betwixt life and death; and of how Marcus Licinius Sura wrote a letter to Valeria and charged Nyria with its delivery when Valeria should be better.

Nyria: "Valeria's fever increased. She was very ill, and for some days ... I know not how long ... it was as much as I could do to tend her, my own body being sore and my brain heavy after the beating.

Stephanus came up whenever he could. But I did not want him much, for it was not for Valeria that he came. By his bringing, a great doctor was now in attendance upon Valeria. ... Aslargius, I think he was called.

Then one day Stephanus was had up to confer with this great doctor who knew not if Valeria would live or die. When I heard that, it made me sick of heart, and afterwards I questioned Stephanus upon what had been said between them.

Stephanus was puffing and seeming important, for I believe he was pleased that the great doctor desired his opinion. And when I asked him whether the great doctor had taken his advice and whether the new direction would be from him as well, Stephanus answered:

'Oh yes' ... that the doctor had proposed one or two things, but that it was not much good proposing anything, because it was Valeria's mind which caused her sickness. ... And I saw that Stephanus understood that which I knew already, though he had not heard her say those words which I had heard her speak in her wandering.

Then, when Valeria seemed to be worse instead of better, there came a second great doctor ... he who was called Symmachus. He thought much of himself, and methinks he would not have met Stephanus had he known that Stephanus was but a goldsmith.

Now Symmachus wanted to let blood and Aslargius would have agreed, but Stephanus was never in favour of blood-letting. He was wont to say that there was too much blood let already in Rome from healthy people—meaning, I suppose, the slaves who were beaten—and that the letting of sick folks' blood would not appease the gods, who seemed to like a healthy stream.

But I do not believe Stephanus had made that up himself. More like, methinks, 'twas something Juvenal had said to him, for Juvenal was always growling about the ill-treatment of the people and Stephanus was not wont to say such clever things.

Now, thou knowest, had the word of both these great doctors been for the blood-letting that of Stephanus would have been of no account, but Aslargius would not go against him. He said Stephanus had shown much wisdom in
the beginning, though methinks Stephanus's wisdom was in sending for Aslargius—and he agreed with Stephanus that blood-letting weakened afterwards, and that a delicate woman who drank but little wine and was not full-blooded could ill spare what she had. Symmachus was wroth at first. But when Stephanus prescribed blisters for her feet and somewhat strong lotions to rub on the palms of her hands, which brought the fever down amazingly, Symmachus was fain to be content. . . ."

At this point there occurs an unforeseen interruption. Later, Nyria opens the conversation by correcting a former statement. . . .

"Now I mind me of somewhat I must say to thee. One thing I told thee was not right. The name of that doctor was not Aslargius. 'Twas Archimenes.\(^1\) He was the second best doctor in Rome and in great favour with women. There was a bigger one who served about the court and was more skilled with men—they called him Celsus.\(^2\) And one, Symmachus, who also saw Valeria, was likewise of high repute. But were a woman in ill plight, 'twas ever Archimenes that was sent for by reason of his soft tongue and gentle ways that gave every woman confidence. And though some said he let women cure themselves and never really did so himself, yet methinks that was not just. It was but his traducers who spoke in that way. For he had certain wisdom. And he was kind and pleasant to all—even to a slave like me.

Symmachus came not often, and I guessed he would not have come those times were it not that Valeria was wife to Paulinus, and Symmachus lived in a fine house and kept many slaves, for the keep of which long fees were needed.

Much of this Stephanus told me. 'Twas I that took Stephanus in that day when he arrived to meet the great Symmachus. . . . A lean, spare man was Symmachus with a peaky beard and narrow dark eyes which kept themselves almost shut and only opened wide with a sort of affronted look when one did not pay him sufficient due.

He looked not at me nor rose to greet Stephanus, at which both Stephanus and I were vexed. For, seeing that Stephanus came as a doctor, he was their equal for the visit. Now Archimenes seemed of a kinder nature.

Archimenes was a big man, broad, and wore his robes loose. He had a way of carrying pouches which contained powders or sweetmeats for little children. Not that he ever gave me any then, but I heard that when he was called in to some noble lady's house he had ever a bit of preserved fruit or sugared violet to lay upon the tongue of any little one who would not look at him. I liked Archimenes. He was kind to me. He had a kindly way of saying, 'Well, how are we to-day? ' and he always seemed to draw me in: he never thrust me outside as though I were but a slave and, if Vitellia were not present, I remained in the room, or near by, at call.

Once, my robe slipped and shewed him that my shoulder was bound up. I saw him glance at it, and though he spake naught then, seeing that he was examining Valeria, he said to me afterwards:

'What have we here, little one? ' and turned the sleeve back:

I looked, affrighted, at Vitellia, since for very shame I dared not say, and she made answer for me:

\(^1\) Valeria's Doctor. Nyria made a mistake, which I corrected later, in one letter. The name was Archigenes. See Appendix 34, Bk. II. (Ed.)

\(^2\) For Celsus and Symmachus, see Appendix 35, Bk. II.
'Nyria hath been in trouble, it was a painful matter, but she is better now. Art thou not, Nyria?'
Then said I, 'Ay, lady, it is naught.'
But he was adjusting the bandage that had slipped and spoke to me kindly:
'There beats a brave heart in this small body, I am sure. Hast many stripes, such as these, my child?'
I did not answer and he looked at Vitellia. But she shook her head, smiling:
'Nay, I know not. Nyria is proud and will not speak of what ails her. Moreover, she hath her own doctor.'
'So,' said Archimenes, 'and who is that?'
'Stephanus, may it please thee, lord,' I answered. For Archimenes was a great man and it was right to speak to him humbly.
'Good Stephanus!' he answered. 'Thou couldst not have a better.'
Then he told me that Stephanus had bound me well, but that I must take care of the wrappings upon my arm, and, as I turned away, I heard him say to Vitellia:
'A slashing that was undeserved, I'll warrant, lady. I'd like to give the whipp'r a trouncing.'
'Alas, I fear the mouth that ordered and not the hand that whipped most needs rebuke,' Vitellia answered.
'Ay, that is so,' he said. 'Tis one of the crying shames of Rome.'
'Ah me!' said Vitellia sadly. 'Much of it, I fear, is greatly the fault of the women. In yonder poor child's household 'tis the mistress who rules and orders punishments, and in so inhuman a fashion as would make many a man—most certainly her own husband—shrink therefrom. If but the women had learned gentleness and held to their wifely duty, there would be less of trouble in Rome.'
Archimenes placed his hand upon his heart and made a courtly bow.
'Not so, lady. Tis unfair to over-blame the women. Were men less coarse and vindictive our women would not have the force of man's stronger nature to set them upon the same way.'
I liked Archimenes' talk and I knew why Stephanus had brought him—because he seemed to have a big heart and to be tender towards women, for this many Roman men were not.
And Stephanus himself was always soft-hearted over women nor could he have raised his finger against any woman unless it might have been Julia.
I went down to see Julia as soon as I could walk. Perhaps it was silly of me, for I knew she would be very angry. But I would have liked to attend upon her too, and I could have gone there twice a day for the dressing and still have sped up to help Aeola nurse Valeria. Now, I found that Julia had none to serve her save Euphena whom she had sent for and bribed with much gold. But Euphena could not dress hair properly and thou canst guess what a figure Julia looked. For Euphena remembered only the ways of her own country and she wanted to braid Julia's hair with coloured silk and to loop it low down over the ears. Julia let her do it once—so she told me—but when it was done, swore at the fright she looked, and would have slapped Euphena, had not Euphena laughed her to scorn, biding her get another dresser and she would go and serve Domitia.
That was often Euphena's threat, and it seemed to make Julia more angry.
than anything else—I know not why. She complained to me about Euphena and would have had me stay and serve her. She spake now in better temper because she wanted me to come, but when I said that I could only stay an hour, she grew angry again. Yet she let me wait upon her and do all that I could. Only when I said I was going, she slapped me over the shoulder with her hand-mirror—a great silver piece with a carved handle—and made my wound break out afresh. Nevertheless I went again for I could not help being sorry for Julia. No one served her for love, and Euphena, sitting in the sun and hugging her lean knees, said, when she saw me coming,

‘Little fool, what dost thou here? Truly, if the fly hath escaped from the spider’s web, he had best remain outside it. Else some day the spider will bite his neck and suck his blood.’

But I shook my head and laughed and said that if the spider were Julia then had she bitten me so often that a bite more or less mattered little; and I was grieved for her since none would serve her for love and she was, just now at least, without suitable service.

But Euphena mumbled: ‘Gold she hath in plenty to pay her way to the grave. Beyond that, even thou canst not follow her.’

Truly, methought, if Euphena glowered after such fashion and talked of the grave to Julia’s face, she was but a dismal companion. And yet Julia seemed to cling to Euphena and would not let her go.

‘Thou art ungrateful, Nyria,’ she said to me many times, ‘since thou wilt leave me to the mercies of that black-skinned hag who talketh ever of death and the dungeon. How know I but that she will compass mine end some day?’

That was one evening when Julia was very fretful and seemed to be thinking miserable thoughts. Often she would sit for quite a long time doing nothing, saying nothing while I waited on her.

And now when she grumbled at Euphena, I said,

‘Surely, the Most Noble need not distress herself. It is impossible to suppose that one placed so low as Euphena could wreak harm on one who hath so much as the great and mighty Julia.’

‘Tis truth,’ she answered, ‘nevertheless the hag has dealings with witchcraft, and one never knows whither that may lead.’ And Julia nodded her head and went on muttering to herself. Presently she spoke again just as I was leaving.

‘Thou said’st wrong, Nyria, in prating that Julia hath all she doth desire. What woman hath?’ And Julia arose and looked at her great, comely shape in the mirror. ‘I am beautiful. Yes—and I have wit to lead me along a somewhat difficult road. Yet am I not the Augusta, neither have I, it seems, such service as that sour-faced jade thou adorest can claim.’

I knew she meant Valeria and that made me angry and, lest I answer rudely, I withdrew.

Thus, while the Saturnalia lasted there were but Aeola and myself at the Coelian villa.

The Domina Vitellia was in her house on the Esquiline, where, if need were, we sought her. But that was not often, for every day she came to Valeria.

The Domina Vitellia’s husband, Valerius Asiaticus, was a General and oft away with his soldiers at some distant place, whither she would sometimes go to be with him. Lately, he had had fighting, short and sharp, in which he
had been successful, and he was now come to Rome that he might see Caesar and take directions for the government of the conquered peoples.

Now, in Rome it was said that Domitian preferred to keep Valerius outside the walls of the city. Yet he dared not to oppose him greatly because Caesar feared Valerius Asiaticus.

So said Juvenal, of whose sayings I heard through Stephanus . . . and that 'twas for this reason Domitian feareth Valerius Asiaticus. Said Juvenal, 'Asiaticus though a bad man in many ways, hath much power over the soldiery, and seeing that the Praetorians guard Caesar and that Domitian feeleth he is safe while they rally round him, he doth mistrust lest Asiaticus come to evil commerce with them. . . .'

Thou mayst ask why Domitian doth not order that Valerius Asiaticus be destroyed. But there would be a risk in that lest the legionaries should rise. 'Even now,' saith Juvenal, 'there is much disaffection and were the Praetorians to become dissatisfied Domitian's chances would be few, seeing that Valerius Asiaticus hath the ear of the soldiery and doth ever see that they are liberally supplied in food and pay.' I mind that I have not myself yet seen Valerius Asiaticus, but I know his figure, for Stephanus hath pictured him to me . . . a big man, broadly built, with a great square beard—and a thick thatch of hair and little twinkling eyes deep-set beneath low brows . . . reputed lazy in peace but bold as a lion when roused.

Yet did Stephanus laugh loudly once when I spoke of the fine qualities his wife Vitellia doth attribute to Asiaticus, making of him, it seemed to me, somewhat of a god—verily, on her showing, a most noble lord. Whereat Stephanus cried out in scorn:

'A noble lord! I trow nobility is at a premium in Rome if this be the best she can shew. Why, Asiaticus is a coarser brute than I would have to tie my shoe-thong, Nyria. Skip thou out of sight should Valerius Asiaticus come by, for Domitian may be a brute, but a clever brute is he, and Asiaticus, save when he hath the smell of war in his nostrils, knoweth naught but of bestiality.'

NYRIA (continuing):

"And now I must tell thee of that which happened when I had been with Valeria it may have been two or three days.

It was one morning when I was sitting on the . . . I would I could mind me of that word . . . Loggia, it is not. Loggia means a small square place and this was wide like a terrace and half covered over—Porticus was a word which was used—that meant the covered space over a principal door—or window—they were the same because the windows opened in like doors. But this was another word. . . . It doth not really matter. Put what seemeth good to thee."

Well, then, I sat there having had my midday meal. We had meals in different ways—one or other of us prepared them. A little soup, maybe, in a cauldron and a few pieces of meat in the stew or some floured cakes—but often Vitellia sent us food from her household—and there were other ways. Crispus brought many a basket of fruit decked round with leaves, and meat and olive cakes, but he brought them to Aeola. I thought that Stephanus had spoken too roughly to him for that he should care now to do aught for me. Yet Crispus only laughed and said I had a dog who shewed fight even more fiercely than Cerberus if one approached me.

1 Nyria meant no doubt the Vestibulum. See Appendix 36, Bk. II.
And then after eating I fell a-drowsing—for mine had been the morning watch—Aeola had gone within and I loved to lay my head in the sun as thou knowest. . . . And through my sleep I heard a voice without, cry to me softly . . . calling a name that sounded to me as in a dream.

’Twas the name of a maid of old who had slept on through the years until a young and beauteous lord of rainbow-hued wings and shining presence came and awakened her with a kiss.

I had heard the story when I was little and played about the cabin-door—the Greek slaves told it me. And of how the shining god-prince had borne away the human maid to be his bride, and from the twain had sprung a great and god-like race that peopled Thessaly. . . . My domina loved the tale. . . . Not long since, had I seen her in her marble chair and watched Licinius Sura at her feet on the stool whereon I was wont to sit, and had listened to his voice as he read her the tale. And when ’twas ended I turned me away again, they not knowing. And as I passed to the gate Gregorio’s mocking words came to me:

‘Thou seest—’tis not thee nor me she needeth. . . .’

And now, a second time, I heard the voice call that name. . . . I will try to give thee a sound like it. . . . Xidera . . . Xydra . . . it cometh back to me.

‘Xydra’ was what the voice called—‘Xydra sleeping! Doth she wait the embrace of her rainbow-hued lord?’

So then I sat up and rubbed my eyes and looked to see who spoke. ’Twas Marcus Licinius Sura . . . a comely figure . . . a shade too slender mayhap, for I—if I have a choice—like men to have strong muscles and stout limbs—somewhat as hath Stephanus—though I would not tell him so. This man was rather thin, his arms not so white and womanish as the arms of many a dandy in Rome, and his legs brown. His brows were drawn together in a dark narrow line, but his eyes gleamed plainly and a smile widened his mouth.

‘Ah! now I see ’tis no princess but the little watchdog maid. She whom they call Nyria.’

I got up then and made my obeisance.

‘Tis Nyria, lord,’ I answered.

‘And what dost thou here? ’ he questioned. ‘Has the Most Noble Valeria added to her staff of maidens, or did she see that there is but one faithful watching-maid in Rome and hence must steal or purchase thy services. For sure, it is the Saturnalia and such as thou should be dancing in the Campus Martius.’

For, during the Saturnalia this was given up to the slaves.

‘I know not, lord,’ I answered. ‘While I am free I wait here upon the Most Noble Valeria, for she is sick.’

‘Sick!’ he answered and his brow darkened. ‘Now that is not unlikely for I told her it would chance if she were not wise: and I trow,’ he added mumbling as to himself, ‘that wisdom and Valeria are not mates.’

I answered not, seeing that such speech was no concern of mine.

‘What hath she, child? Speak. In what way is Valeria sick?’

‘With the fever, may it please thee, lord,’ I said.

‘Now, in truth, it doth not please me,’ he answered sharply. ‘Thou art

1 I have asked several students of Greek literature about the story of Xydra, and have been unable to find any confirmation of Nyria’s version of “The Sleeping Beauty.” [Ed.]
a poor little watch-dog or wouldst choose thy words better. The fever, in truth! . . . Is it serious? Who hath seen her?'

I gave him the names of the doctors, putting Stephanus first as was but meet, seeing that Stephanus had been the first to tend her.

'I know not this Stephanus,' he said. 'But Rome goes on apace and there may well be strangers. . . . A Greek by his name who has sprung into a prominence of which Licinius Sura in his hermit life knows not. As for Archigenes . . . 'tis but an old woman with a woman's faddish fears. Symmachus is better but he is not in charge here, thou sayest?'

'The lord Symmachus came twice or thrice,' I answered. Now it had been, I must tell thee, five or seven days since I had come, for there had been time for Symmachus to have been called.

'And by whose bidding?' he said. 'Who hath charge here seeing that Paulinus is away?'

'The lady Vitellia,' I made answer and told him of the coming of Valeria's sister.

His face changed. 'Well now, it is time for all who be not saints to pass without, for their room is better than their company to Vitellia,' he answered: and I wondered that he spoke so free to me. 'Is she within?' he said shortly.

I shook my head. 'Not so, lord. The lady Vitellia comes but once a day. More often towards evening.'

'Why, now, I wonder'—he said and paused. Then thrusting his hand into the pouch men wore at their belt he brought forth a handful of coin and selected therefrom one that I could not see. 'Say, child, thou hast service for gold pieces I warrant. Couldst spend one upon sweetmeats or gew-gaws in the lower streets?'

He held it out, but I shrank back. 'I am well supplied, lord,' I answered proudly. ' 'Tis to Julia's household I belong.' I was ever proud to say that, for Julia's household was of repute and though we were fed with blows there was no lack of other food.

'But now thou art not with Julia?' he said astonished.

'I serve the lady Valeria by special favour,' I answered, 'and I need no money for the serving.'

'Thou art different from the rest of thy sex,' he answered, coolly putting back his coin within the pouch.

'I'll rebuke thee not. Licinius is not so rich that he can spare coins to unwilling maids. But since thou wilt not accept what I offer perchance thou wouldst not deny me my request. I would see thy mistress. Wilt bear her this message—that Licinius waits without and craves her pleasure?'

I shook my head again sadly. 'Valeria knows naught of any man's pleasure,' I answered sadly. 'She sleeps a sleep nigh unto death and we may not disturb her.'

'How!' he exclaimed. 'Is there danger of death? Now by all the gods of Greece and Rome, 'tis ill chance. . . . Does she know naught?'

I nodded silently. 'Naught, my lord,' I said.

A sudden sickness seemed to seize him and he sat him down upon the step, turning his back to me and staring on the ground. For a while he said nothing. . . . Then, 'But yet she speaks at times, perchance?'

'Ay, fevered words, my lord.'

'And hath she said aught of me?'

'I know not, lord. She hath said much of one, Marcus.' And this I said
looking straight before me and thinking it were best to tell the truth, but wondering how he would take it.

For a while, he made no answer. Then he took his tablets and stilus from his vest and laid them on his knee.

'Nyria,' he said. 'If I should write a few words to Valeria—say, wouldst thou see she hath them when the fever leaves her?'

Now when he spoke thus, I felt as though I had come to a crossing of the ways. Two roads seemed to lie before me, each leading I knew not whither. But one would mean saying 'No' and the other 'Yes.' I hesitated. Yet I seemed to see again Valeria's pale, sharpened face upon the pillow as I had watched it through the night and heard the rambling, broken sentences fall from her lips.

'Twas not much to do—to give comfort to her whom I adored: and I answered 'Yes.'

He nodded gloomily. 'Sit thou there and wait. I will give thee the message when it is finished.'

I obeyed him, sitting silent in the sun as before, while his stilus travelled quickly over the waxed slips of ivory. Presently he folded them together.

'Nyria, hast thou a morsel of silk and somewhat by which I may seal this?'

I rose obediently. 'Ay, lord, I will fetch what thou requirest.' And then I brought the taper and a strand of violet silk from Valeria's embroidery basket. He looked at the silk as though he knew it and there came a gleam of tenderness to his face.

'Where didst get this, child,' he said gently.

So I told him.

'Ah, I thought so,' he answered, and bound the silk threads about the tablets, sealing them with Valeria's stem of violet wax, but his hand shook so that a drop fell on the edge.

'I want no prying eyes to read my missive,' he said, smiling a little as he lifted it. 'Dost understand, Nyria? Can I trust thee?'

'None ever said they could not, lord,' I answered.

'I believe thee,' he answered. 'Thou wilt guard it?'

'As Valeria's self,' I answered: and making my obeisance I withdrew.

He came again. Aeola was outside and saw him coming. But he spake not to her, saying to me in her hearing that he knew her for a little fool, which sore hurt Aeola.

Aeola was not very wise, but she tried hard to do her best and it was not kind nor seemly in a stranger lord to speak thus of her. Of me, Licinius questioned—'How is Valeria?' And then I told him that the fever had been high—that was since Stephanus had ceased giving advice—and though they attended her carefully and gave her drugs yet still she seemed sore troubled in her mind, and that, methought, was why she could not get well. So I told him, there being no reason why I should not thus speak, seeing that he questioned me closely. So then he said with a smile:

'She needeth another doctor. See, little watchdog: ask Valeria when next she knows thee if she would not have the great doctor Marcus to her side.' And this he said laughing, but I saw that there was meaning in his words and I liked them not, for 'twas not seemly to joke of Valeria's state.

So then I was silent and he looked at me gravely and said he:

'I trust thee, maid. Is Marcus Licinius a fool therefore?'
I answered him, 'Lord, let them that have trusted me speak mine answer': and with that he seemed satisfied, but just as he was going away, a thought seemed to strike him, and back he came and laid hands upon my robe.

'Maiden,' he said, 'thou carest for Valeria? Is that not so?'

I answered, 'Yes, lord,' but I was not willing to mention my love for Valeria beside his.

'See then,' he answered, 'thou wouldst not withhold from her that which should make her well again?'

'Nay, lord,' I answered. 'That would I not do.'

'Whatever it were?' he questioned.

'Whatever it were,' I answered.

'Then when Valeria hath sense to know me, bid me to her bedside, and I will heal her': and with that he turned away, seeming not to need an answer. And well it was so, for I was in no mind to give one. My thoughts had strayed to Paulinus; seeing that he loved his lady I pitied him because she loved him not. And though I would not have had him nigh her, 'twas not fitting that a stranger should stand in his stead.

Well then, the days went by and I know not what happened. It is all a mist to me—a mist full of pain and fear, for there were nights when Archigenes—ay and even Stephanus—stood by Valeria's bed and looked grave, and Archigenes was for sending a messenger to Egypt—the country where Paulinus was. But Stephanus being wiser, bade him pause.

'For,' said he, 'If Paulinus should come it might but hasten her end: and 'tis a long journey and who knoweth that the messenger, when he reach the spot, may not find Paulinus, who might have gone further. Time enough to send when there should be something more certain to tell.'

And Archigenes' after-thought seemed to agree with the thought of Stephanus. 'For in very truth,' said he, 'Paulinus cometh home to a wife—or to no wife—but his coming cannot keep her; and, gossip hath it, she doth not desire that he should come.' And this Archigenes said looking at Stephanus just to see what he might know. But Stephanus said little, for he could keep his teeth over his tongue if need were: and though Stephanus gossiped freely among his own kind, he was not one to speak of private matters with a doctor who was greater than he, since such idle chatter might bring him into evil notice. Stephanus was wont to say that he had a wise head upon his shoulders, though methinks he was not always so wise as he boasted.

But I was sore frightened seeing that Valeria was so ill, and nothing that they said comforted me, and I would not listen to Stephanus when he talked of love to me, for all my desire was towards Valeria. I kept me very close beside her till the end of the Saturnalia drew near and soon I should have to go back to Julia.

Once again Licinius prayed me to admit him, but I was not willing without Valeria's word.

'But she asketh for me,' he said.

'There is no meaning in her talk,' I answered. 'Wait. When she is well enough, if that ever be, she shall know of thy coming, and shall command thee herself.' So I sent him away and I wondered and I longed and wept sore, for my heart was very full: and the lady Vitellia seemed sad likewise. And Aeola would have wept for company had she not had her own happy moments
when she had been talking with Crispus—or so I guessed—at the gate. At first she told me everything he said. 'Twas idle talk, and I had not thought Crispus such a fool; it was as though Aeola had bewitched him. And, after a while, Aeola, when I questioned her, would shake her head with a merry smile or with a long long look like one that seeth heaven, and at times she said, 'such talk would not please thee'—which in truth it would not—or else that Crispus's sayings were but for her. And when I asked her did she not long to play ball or bones again, she would answer me as one who had grown to the height of all knowledge, that such things were for babes. At which I answered her 'Thou art old, Aeola! and thou wilt pass down into the grave before Nyria who hath learned nothing of these wondrous matters which seem to have added years and dignity to thee.'

And Aeola had but a smile or a sigh for answer and said, 'Thou too, Nyria, wilt learn these things some day.'"