BOOK THE THIRD

IN THE HOUSEHOLD OF VALERIA

CHAPTER I

"By the Bread, the Salt and the Wine!"

Nyria tells of how she entered the service of Valeria: of how Paulinus administered to her the slaves' oath of fealty by the ancient Roman custom of the bread, the salt and the wine: of how Valeria sent her with a letter to Licinius Sura, and of how Paulinus came into his wife's chamber and was rebuffed.

Nyria speaks: "I remained in the corner of the room waiting for Valeria to tell me what I should do. But after Vitellia had said that she and her lord would stay for the evening meal, Valeria seemed to think of naught but her sister, keeping Vitellia very close to her side, whereat Vitellia seemed pleased but somewhat as though she did not understand Valeria's mood.

The lords withdrew to their apartments and Valeria also led the way to hers. For the room where she had received Paulinus was not her own sitting-room but lay somewhat back in the middle of the house and was more, as I learned afterwards, for joint service of herself and Paulinus.

Now I, seeing that Valeria had given me no directions and not knowing what my duty should be, followed at a little distance behind my lady and upon entering Valeria's side of the house I saw Aeola rise up from what she was doing and bend in obeisance. Beholding me, she ran to my side after the ladies had passed, and took my hand, but I liked not yet to speak to her. Then Vitellia, turning round, said to Aeola that she should take me whither I could sleep and set my bundle down and shew me whatever was needful, after which I might return again.

Whereon, Aeola ran with me outside to the slaves' houses, one of which she shared with another woman, and said to me that I could sleep there to-night until Valeria should make different ordering. Then I, desiring to serve Valeria, would not delay and hastened back again, but, upon being about to make entrance to Valeria's dressing-room, I was checked by one of the women, who bade me rather roughly not come that way, and not liking to be kept from Valeria, I made explanation that I had been bought and was come to serve her.

Whereat, this one, who was of a surly temper, said:

'We will see what Corellia saith to that. Seeing that I am not admitted to the robing, wherefore shouldst thou be?'

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Thereon, she sat her down outside the door and bade me do the same. I had no mind to obey her and would have passed within, but at that moment Corellia, who was Valeria’s head-woman, came to the door, and she who had stayed me began a long tale with angry mutterings which Corellia silenced, saying I should not enter but should abide her pleasure, and when I began to tell what I could for myself she answered:

‘If thou art so anxious to serve the lady Valeria there will be plenty for thee to do, but remain that side of the curtain. Valeria never alloweth more than one, or haply two, beside myself, in her room.’ So I shrank back, not knowing what to say. ‘Thou canst fill the pitchers and the vessels and rub the pans and bowls,’ she said. ‘There shall be enough work for thee, I promise.’

And I bit my lip angrily, for I liked not such talk. Moreover, in Julia’s household, I had long been accustomed to have those things done for me; and here, it seemed, I was to be of less account than there.

But at that moment Valeria called to Corellia to drop the curtain.

‘With whom wast thou whispering?’ I heard Valeria say. ‘I allow no such talk in my presence. Be silent and forbid those girls entrance.’

And Corellia came not out again and my heart sank for I thought if she were to come between me and my Lady, what should I do and how should I serve Valeria? Aeola was within, but Aeola was too shy to speak for me. The lady Vitellia likewise was within and remained with Valeria while she was robing.

Now the door at which I sat was for the slaves’ entrance and not the one by which Valeria would pass, and suddenly I bethought me that I would run round and await her at the farther door leading through the sitting-room through which she must go to her dinner. So I rose to my feet and ran, though she of whom I had taken no heed, and who had been scowling at me from the other side of the door, called after me: ‘Whither goest thou? Thou hadst best obey Corellia or else it will go harder with thee.’ But I heeded her not and ran round to the door I knew of, because by now I was accustomed to these rooms of Valeria’s though I did not know well the rest of the house.

By and by, the ladies issued from Valeria’s dressing-room, Vitellia preceding her sister. I rose to my feet and then bent low and looked up at them, craving that they should speak to me yet not daring to speak since I was now Valeria’s slave.

But Vitellia noticed me and smiling kindly she paused and said: ‘Well, dost thou find thyself happy here, Nyria? Thou shouldst know thy way about. Truly my lord Paulinus did a gracious and kindly act in the purchasing of thee.’

Whereat Valeria paused too and said: ‘Oh, Nyria, art thou there? I wondered whither thou hadst gone.’

‘May it please thee, Domina, I ran round to do thy bidding, but the slaves gave me not entrance seeing thou wert being robed.’

‘Methinks thou shouldst have the right of entrance,’ said Vitellia kindly, ‘none deserves it better.’

‘Ay, ay—’ said Valeria sharply, and looked at me, but as though she scarcely saw me; and, as they were about to pass on, I made bold to place myself before her.

‘May it please thee, Domina, that I remain near thee?’

‘Yes, yes, of course,’ answered Valeria.
‘And do I attend thee to table?’ I asked. ‘For that was Julia’s pleasure.’

Valeria paused and for the first time seemed to think as she looked at me.

‘Ay,’ she answered of a sudden. ‘It is my pleasure, Nyria, that thou remain near me always—unless I order thee otherwise.’

And just then the slave with Corellia came from out the door and stood watching. But I looked not up, only bent again and followed Valeria—for I cared not at all for the slaves, save that I might find my place near her.

Now, when we went towards the room where the repast was spread, Asiaticus and Paulinus met the ladies in the antechamber and walked with them. A stout slave followed Paulinus, and another of his own was behind Asiaticus. But as they issued from the way that I thought led to Paulinus’s rooms, I saw the face of Gregorio peering after them, and seeing me, he gnashed with his teeth at me and dropped the curtain, disappearing within Paulinus’s rooms.

I followed Valeria and stood behind her at the table as had been my wont with Julia. But soon I saw that Valeria had not been accustomed to keep a female slave behind her chair, for she heeded me not nor ever spoke a word. Neither did she drop anything, nor send me on messages as had been Julia’s way: and none noticed me till, towards the end of the banquet, when Paulinus’s gaze fell upon me and he made kindly mock of his lady’s new attendant.

But there was naught ill-natured in Paulinus’s mockery, and though I had like to have sunk into the ground with shame when any noticed me at Julia’s, here I could scarce keep from smiling: and I felt happy too now that I was near Valeria, even though she noticed me not.

Paulinus had been talking freely throughout the repast and seemed much to enjoy his dinner. Paulinus sat in a great carved wooden chair and the table was of wood, but polished finely so that the fruit and dishes shone in it and the wine was served in white glass, finely chased, but not coloured such as Julia would have had it.

Afterward I knew that Valeria arranged all such matters and that with her too many colours were not welcome. Valeria was wont to say that wine looked richer when untinged by the colours of the glass.

Valeria took wine herself, but sparingly, and mixed it with water. She was very gracious and talked much, yet it seemed to me not easily, but as though she were anxious not to let silence reign. And, truly, it was not like to do so, for Paulinus and Asiaticus were both full of many deeds that they had done and much that they had gone through. Asiaticus had a coarse wit and I liked not his manner of pledging Valeria, wherein he did couple her name with Paulinus’s, saying that he drank to the union of husbands and wives, and that was ever his favourite toast seeing that he knew how sad a thing it was to be separated from one’s faithful consort—the which he could not himself endure: and his lady being of like mind, was wont to follow him—even into the thickest of the fight.

Whereat Vitellia smiled, but coldly: and, methought, the sentiment was not to her taste though it was what she ever preached.

Now Asiaticus made every new excuse for another glass, and Paulinus drank freely and laughed at him, saying: ‘Thou dost not drink without some pledge, nor dost thou pledge thyself to aught without a drink. Methinks that drinks and pledges are both good in their way, but I need no excuse for a glass, nor yet, with my lady-wife before me, do I need excuse for a
pledge.' That was something of it, I have it not quite. . . . Whereat Valeria seemed to stiffen and smiled, but a very little, as she turned her head.

Valeria was most queenly clad: and that I had observed when she came forth from the robing room. She wore a dress of palest violet silk—so pale that it seemed like grey: and round her waist was a girdle of silver and upon the brodery of the dress there was much silver woven with pearls and silver clasps set with pearls and, likewise, clasps of small green stones upon her shoulders. But her hair was simply dressed, and there was naught but a silver fillet binding it. Her sandals too were of silver with purple thongs.

There was a great deal of show about Julia's household, but here it was not show, yet was there more of beauty and of value in Valeria's home. The dinner was not so long nor so sumptuous as at Julia's: and yet there were many goodly dishes, and some were of Paulinus's favourites. That I knew because he said so, and he praised Valeria for her remembrance of them. But when he said aught of that nature to his wife, she but turned her head so that I, behind her, could see the little smile that curled her mouth, and once she answered graciously—and still it seemed to me with coldness. 'Tis but a small matter, my lord, to have remembered. The steward—had he been the same that knew thee before—would have remembered just as well.' From which I gathered that the chief steward had been changed in Paulinus's absence.

'Like enough—like enough,' quoth Paulinus. 'Yet the dishes do taste sweeter, Valeria, since they have been thought of by thee'—a speech which I saw was not pleasing to Valeria.

Now 'twas towards the end of the banquet when conversation flagged somewhat that Paulinus bethought him of me.

'So thou hast thy new toy with thee,' he said to Valeria. 'Little Yellow-hair, dost thou know what is the work of a good slave? Lo! thou hast springs all over thy body and when thy mistress toucheth one, that part of thee shall act and none other. A good slave is but a Greek—I remember not the word—'twas a toy that one touched and made to work—thou knowest the Greeks were skilled in contriving those things. They would make little horses that ran, and dolls that moved their arms and legs if one touched them.'

To all this I answered not, for a slave hath not to speak. Then Paulinus, thinking to amuse himself, said to me across the table: 'Hast eaten aught since thou didst enter the lady Valeria's service?'

To which I shook my head and being obliged, answered, 'Nay, lord.'

'So, ho!—So Valeria hath not yet bound thee over.' Then turning to a slave behind him, Paulinus said: 'Go fetch the flour or meal and thou fellow fill this glass. Nay, not that vintage—'tis too strong for Yellow-hair. Come, give her a cup of this. We need not to bear thee out afterwards, eh, Yellow-hair?'

Whereat I laughed, feeling rather uncomfortable, for I saw Paulinus meant me to go through the ceremony of old custom, whereby slaves were pledged to the faithful service of their owners.1

'Twas no harmful ceremony and but seldom dealt in, nowadays, though

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1 Slaves' oath of fealty. I have searched in vain for a record of the slaves' oath of fealty, but have no found it in Gaius, Ulpian or other authorities on slave-law. It would be interesting to learn whether any such record, justifying Nyria's description, does exist. (Ed.)
tales there were of new young slaves who had been had up before a merry party and made mock of in this pledging. But I feared not that from Paulinus. So, when he bade me come round beside him to the table, and put the bowl of flour in my hand and the cup of wine, and then drew to him the great glass salt-cellar and took a goodly ladle to sprinkle my lips, I could not help but laugh and looked at Valeria, who smiled kindly; and I was glad to see she was not angry as Julia would have been.

Vitellia also smiled, and, said she most generously: 'Nyria will serve her mistress well. I'll warrant, whether or no thou dost anoint her with flour and salt, Paulinus.'

And Asiaticus leaned his arms upon the table and leered at me—'twas not a pleasant look. 'By all the gods,' he cried, 'verily it seems to me my judgment served me well. This maid whom I did purchase as a babe hath proved worth her keep, doubtless, to Julia. May she serve thee equally well, Valeria.'

'Her service will differ somewhat,' answered Valeria rather coldly. 'I need not that which Julia desired: and thus, methinks, the training Nyria hath received should ill befit her for her service with me.'

And I, not wholly understanding her, felt myself grow hot and shamed. 'Come, come, Valeria,' said Paulinus kindly, 'I trow the maid is a good one and will serve thee well. Be not hard upon her.'

'I have not yet been hard on Nyria,' said Valeria coldly.

But I, looking at her, saw a smile in her eyes and seemed to see that she trusted me, whereat I would have bent, but for the flour and wine in my hand.

'Now, Yellow-hair, we'll hear thee take the vow,' said Paulinus. 'By the bread—get on, little maid—dost know the words?'

'Oh, ay, lord,' I whispered, half-shamed and half-laughing.

'By the bread,' he cried again—and I took him. 'By the bread that keepeth life in man, fruit of the earth—'

'And by the salt,' he shouted.

'By the salt that is the savour of all things unto men—'

'And by the wine—'

'And by the wine that maketh glad man's heart. By all these that strengthen life and make service staunch, and most of all by—'and here of a sudden I paused—for I liked not to call on any Roman god, and 'twas wont to be left to the choice of him who took the vow which god he should call upon—but I hesitated.

'Say, who is thy fancy, Yellow-hair? By Venus, I should say—or Artemis—or, if thou wert a year or two older—by that playful god who, they say, hides himself in the form of a child, and who verily hath all the wiles of manhood at his command—say, is't by Eros thou wouldst swear?'

'Nay, lord,' I answered shyly. 'But by the greatest god of all—'

'Thou art not modest,' he replied. 'Here, Jupiter, list to the maid's vow and register it eternally.'

But I had turned to Valeria, seeing she was my mistress.

'By the greatest god of all, I vow to serve thee faithfully. My hands, thy hands—my feet, thy feet—my lips to thine—that I may faithfully do thy bidding and that if my life be demanded of me, that too, I may give, since I am no more mine own, nor any man's, save only thine—I pray thee hear my vow.'

'Well done, Yellow-hair, well done,—drink the wine,' cried Paulinus,
SOUL OF NYRIA

and would have tossed it down my throat himself, had I not raised the cup. But it was part of my duty to take a sup from it and taste a mouthful of the flour: and then he, having laid the salt upon my lips, leaned back in his chair and seemed well satisfied.

'Many a vow is taken in jest,' said Vitellia gently, 'but though to such as these there be not much weight nowadays, yet verily, I trow that Nyria will keep her word—even to the death—'

And Valeria bent forward and laid her hand on mine as I set down the bowl, and said gently:

'Twas well done, Nyria. I'll exact no difficult service from thee,' and with that she signed to me that I might go.

But, as I was leaving the room, she called me back again and said:

'Await me in the antechamber to my sitting-room, I need thee there.'

Therefore went I thither.

Now thou knowest that I had had no food except the sup of wine and was growing hungry; but I liked not to go out and seek any supper until Valeria gave me leave. So I waited there alone, for the other slaves had all gone forth to theirs.

And presently, Valeria came in haste and closed the curtains behind her. She walked swiftly across the room, her robe shimmering like a silver cloud, and stood before me.

'Nyria,' she said, and I saw her heart beating, as she laid her own hand upon her breast, so that she seemed scarcely able to speak.

'Thou hast pledged thyself to my faithful service. Yet it is not by that alone I trust thee, for I know that thou art faithful. I have somewhat for thee to do to-night. Canst thou be swift and silent?'

I bent at her feet.

'Trust me, lady,' I said.

She thrust her hand again within her gown and seemed to feel something that lay there. Then she said:

'Wait for me while I write,' and she took a tablet and a pen and wrote swiftly, binding it with ribbon and with wax, and she gave to me the packet, saying:

'Veil that head and face of thine. If thou has naught, take some old cloak of mine. Let none know who thou art. Let none know who thou art. Then haste thee—be sure thou art not long. Speed down the hill until thou comest to the house of Licinius Sura. Enter by the smaller gate and speed thee round the house until thou shalt find the door with a trellis over it whereon a jasmine grows. There is a window set in the wall close by, and there thou shalt see a lamp burning. Rap thrice upon the door. A single soft knock—with thy knuckles—and to him that openest give this despatch. Wait then and see what answer there shall be and bring it back to me without fail.'

'Without fail, Domina,' I answered.

'Ay,' she said, rising and looking at me. 'Follow my directions, Nyria, closely, else disaster greater than thou dost dream may fall upon me—and so too on thee.'

'I will not fail, Domina,' I answered.

Then she, turning to her own room, brought out to me a soft grey cloak, which covered me to the feet, and she bade me draw it over my head.

'Be swift and sure,' she said, 'and seek me when thou dost return.'

I bent in obeisance and hastened away.

I had had no food, but all my hunger seemed gone, and I hastened through
the rooms and down the terrace steps and across the courtyard and so to
the little gate in the wall, speeding as fast as I was able along the road that
led down the Coelian and past the house of Julia, which was wrapped now
in darkness—darker than the night.

Then I reached the house of Licinius Sura,—thou knowest it stood a little
higher on the hill than Julia's and on a knoll that overlooked the valley, but
the road on either side, close to it, was thickly shadowed with trees. There
stood some evergreen oaks and a spiked thorn or two and a pine that thrust
forth great shadowy arms. 'Twas a dark night with only a pale light
of stars.

There were two doors leading to Licinius Sura's house—one greater than
the other. The one whereof Valeria spake was set within the stone wall and
opened with a latch. I closed it carefully behind me and found myself
upon a path that led straight to the house and then around one end
of it.

'Twas all in darkness here and I followed the path, looking for the
window that should bear the lamp, which presently I saw upon the farther
side, and stopped at a door beneath a porch where, over the trellis, grew a
plant that might have been a jasmine.

I rapped with one knuckle softly, as Valeria had bade me, thrice upon the
panel, and scarcely had I done so when there came a movement within. A
shadow crossed the lamp, and the door was swung open.

I stood upon a raised step and thus seemed taller, and just beyond me
stood a man's form. I had not time to distinguish who it was for the lamp
was behind him and his face in shadow. But on a sudden, he caught me in
his arms and thrust back the cloak that covered my head and there fell
kisses over my head and face so that I would have shrieked had I dared.
But remembering Valeria and her urgent prayer that I should be silent,
I strove to thrust him from me and draw back: and as I pushed him and
he held me in his hands, he drew me forward into the lamp, whereat I
suppose the light shone on my hair, for he laughed and dropped his
arms saying:

'Whom have we here? Verily there's some mistake.'

'Nay, no mistake, lord,' I said, seeing 'twas Licinius Sura, 'but a
messenger. I bear this to give to thee.' And I bent and offered him
Valeria's tablet, which he took from my hand, yet looked not at it but
at me.

'Verily a mistake, little Watch-dog: and yet no mistake,' said he. 'For
the gods ordained that those kisses thou didst scorn should become thine
someday: in truth thou hast had them in full measure—and with interest.
Say, is it not so?'

I made no answer, but bent again.

'Have the gods sealed thy tongue?' he cried. 'By Venus, they shall
not seal thy lips.' And with that, he put his hand beneath my chin again
and the other on my shoulder and would have drawn me to him. 'The kisses
I gave thee but just now were scarce meant for thee, sweet little maid.
Now, I pray thee, let me give thee some for thine own.'

But I bent my knees nigh to the ground and seeing that he did not hold
me tight, I drew myself away.

'Sir, I am Valeria's messenger,' I said, 'and as such I should be sacred
unto one whom Valeria deigns to honour.'

'Well said, Watch-dog,' he answered, dropping his hand from my shoulder.
'Verily, I see thou art a citadel which no common arts of love may win. And thou art right, child. He whom Valeria deigns to honour should bear himself in better guise. Is it not so, Nyria?' And he drew a step away and broke the silk that bound the tablet.

'Thou hast spoken, lord,' I answered, meaning that he spoke the truth. At which he laughed again.

'I'll not come to thee for a character, Watch-dog,' said he half-merrily, even while he scanned Valeria's tablet. 'This is an ill chance indeed,' he went on, turning it over. 'So, Paulinus hath returned. And the great god of destiny hath stretched an arm betwixt his villa and the luckless house of Licinius. Ah, well-a-day!'

And with that he sat him down and seemed to be in thought, while I remained standing by the door.

Of a sudden he seemed aware of me again. 'Seat thyself, child, seat thyself,' he said. 'Licinius may be over hospitable, but none shall say he is not hospitable enough.'

But I answered not, only still I remained standing.

He walked to a writing-table and took up a stilus thoughtfully, flicking it against his mouth, and then sat him down as though he would write: and then again he read Valeria's letter, and afterwards he flung the stilus from him, and, pushing back his chair, he turned him round.

'Tell Valeria, little Watch-dog, that Licinius fears to write. Nay, no offence to thee, child, 'tis Valeria herself who is not over wise: Licinius willeth not that any careless love-words of his should fall within Paulinus's paws. Now list to me. Say unto Valeria that which she doth already know. Licinius's love and loyalty are hers: and there standeth naught between save such as she doth thrust. Nevertheless, while Paulinus is at home, 'tis wiser that Licinius keep his distance, not only in person, but by note of hand. Nevertheless this house is open to Valeria, and she knoweth well the road. Bid her come when she will. The door and Licinius's heart are alike open to her. Wilt thou remember, Yellow-hair?' and he picked up a strand of my curls and pulled it forth. 'Verily, a love-lock,' said he. 'How many of these hast thou given away?'

But I shook myself free of him, for I liked not his change of manner.

'I'll carry thy message to Valeria, lord,' I said.

'Ay, and carry this word more. Tell Valeria to come while the road is clear, for Licinius may not be here long. Be sure thou dost not forget that last word. 'Twill bring her, I'll warrant.'

I answered not at all, save to draw my cloak over my head: and then, with a swift obeisance, I went out at the door.

'Thou mayst tell her too,' called Licinius softly after me, 'that she hath indeed chosen a speedy messenger—one who will not delay whatever the temptation be.' But I ran away, angry with him, angry with myself, and had Valeria been other than herself, perchance I had been angry too with her. I hastened up the hill as swiftly as I might, but even so, I had been long delayed. Still, I trusted to see no one, for though I knew not yet the habits of Valeria's household, 'twas unlikely there would be many slaves about at this hour.

When I had entered at the little gate in the wall, and sped up the terrace to her doors, I met Aeola coming flying from them, and in the light of the swinging lamps I saw that she looked frightened.
'Ah, Nyria,' she cried: and she caught and clung to me. 'I have been searching for thee. Whither hadst thou fled? But tell me not now-only come, come, I know not what to do.'

She seized my hand and ran within with me, scarcely freeing me to remove the cloak I wore, and suddenly on our ear there fell a sound of a voice loudly raised.

'Paulinus is in there,' cried Aeola, pointing with her hand to the door of Valeria's rooms. 'Paulinus—ay—'

'Well, what of that,' I said, for I would not let Aeola see that she had startled me.

'Nay, but Valeria desires him not,' cried Aeola, all a-quiver with dismay. 'The lady Vitellia and her lord have gone: and Paulinus followed Valeria into her rooms, and went not at her word of dismiss—ay, and said that he would not go—and when he saw me, bade me leave her. But Valeria bade me stay.'

'And why didst thou not stay?' I said.

'Why—how could I since Paulinus ordered me hence. Oh, Nyria, hark, what shall we do?'

'Do—I said, drawing myself up—'go thou to bed, 'tis all thou art fit for. I'll seek my lady.'

And I went across the room and through the antechamber, even though my heart beat loudly: and I entered Valeria's sitting-room, which was brilliantly lighted, and bent myself between the curtains and approached her, making another obeisance at her feet.

Valeria stood, leaning a little back beside a table, whereon were certain carved silver things and some little weapons from foreign parts, and, before her, stood Paulinus scarce a yard from her, with his face all red and angry and the veins swollen up in his forehead and his great arms held out looking knotted and fierce. I liked him not. He looked to me little like the kind Paulinus who had made me drink wine at table and pledge myself to Valeria's service. For this was some strange monster who would have snatched Valeria had he dared and beaten the life out of her—or so it seemed to me—and yet, even while I looked at him, I saw him tremble: and he began to speak again more gently. But Valeria drew back, not seeming to see me. Her hands straying over the table, had fallen on a little silver dagger one had given her as a gift, with the hilt chased and set with gems, but the point was fine and sharp and she snatched it up and held it to her breast.

'Come no nearer,' she cried, 'or I strike.'

'Thou art mad,' he said: and thrust out his hands as though he would have snatched the dagger from her, but she evaded him and swayed against the table, keeping the point of it to her breast.

'Dost think that I would see thee slay thyself, Valeria? he cried huskily.

'Thou art mad I say. Is my demand a wrong or unnatural one? Comes it not within the rights of a lawful spouse? Drop that weapon and let me still thy fears.'

But Valeria only answered him, keeping her eyes fixed upon his face, 'Come no nearer—come no nearer, or I strike.'

This was all in the space of half a minute or so, which, when seeing, I hastened to her feet and made a second obeisance, and my shadow flitting before her, she cast her eyes upon me. 'Ah, Nyria!' she cried, slipping swiftly to the floor, while she held out her hand to me. 'Nyria,' she said.
'Ay, lady—I am here,' I answered, springing to her and striving to hold her as she fell.

For she sank, half against me, and half against the table, so that I was forced to let her gently to the ground.

But she caught my hand and clung to it.

'Remain, Nyria, remain,' she said, and then she seemed to shiver and her head dropped back and I saw that she had fainted.'
Nyria tells of how Paulinus went forth in search of the doctor Archigenes, and how Stephanus, also summoned, showed a changed attitude towards herself: then of how Archigenes intervened between husband and wife and Paulinus promised not to press his claim upon Valeria.

Nyria continues her tale: "When first I saw my lady like that I was terrified—not so much of Paulinus—for I saw that, now at least, he meant to be kind—but she had been so lately ill, and now she was as one stone-dead. I had lain her gently on the ground and slipped a cushion beneath her head, keeping her very flat, as I thought was best, and would have striven to unfasten her garments, but that they were all loose, for Valeria was never tightly girt. Her heart scarce seemed to beat; and while I was yet wondering what I should do, Paulinus came and bent over her.

'By all the gods!' he cried, 'a man had better have married a statue. 'Twould have been easier warmed to life.'

With that I looked up at him and said:

'My lady hath but recently been ill. Valeria hath no strength as yet, lord. I fear me she will greatly suffer for this.'

He stood still a minute looking down at me in seeming thought. 'I ought to have thought of that, it appears,' quoth he, 'these nervous, tender women are not fit things for men to touch. One should deal only with such as are of stouter stuff.'

And then, as I rose to my feet meaning to call help, he stayed me. 'What wouldst thou, Yellow-hair? Is there aught that I can do?'

'I would call help, my lord, to bear my lady to her chamber. She may not lie here, and then we will apply such restoratives as are possible. But I must call some aid to me.'

'It were not well that I should touch her,' he said, looking down half-fiercely, half-sadly, at Valeria. 'Twould like enough wake her unto horror again, did she feel Paulinus's arms around her. Do as thou wilt, Yellow-hair. 'Tis evident my wife's rooms are no place for me.'

And with that, he strode away. But as he went he picked up the dagger Valeria had let fall and tossed it to the other end of the apartment, where it lay embedded in a carved wooden stool that it had chanced to fall on.

He had not offered to call the slaves for me, and I was fleeing off to do so, when I bethought me of Valeria's whistle. 'Twas a small silver one, which she usually wore on a chain at her wrist or her waist for summoning the slaves. For Valeria was not like most Roman ladies and cared not to keep them always with her.

Aeola had told me about the whistle, and stooping down, I felt amid the folds of my lady's dress and found it. Putting it to my lips, I whistled and
Aeola came running in. She was full of lamentation, but I hushed her sharply and bade her bring me a bowl of water and then to call some who would bear Valeria to her chamber, and this they did. But when she had lain there some time, and we had placed hot bottles to her feet and poured some strong spirit between her teeth—or tried to, for they were clenched and the better part of the draught ran out again—and still she shewed no sign of life, I was terrified and, leaving Aeola beside her, I ran through to the rooms of Paulinus. He was pacing to and fro, talking to Gregorio who seemed to flutter beside him tossing the folds of his tunic and a long feather that he carried in one hand while he prated of many things to his lord—doubtless breathing mischief, I thought. But I hurried in and prostrated myself before Paulinus. ‘May it please thee, lord,’ I said, ‘to send for Archigenes, who is the doctor that hath attended Valeria and will know best how to treat her, for my lady hath not regained consciousness.’

Now did Paulinus pause in his walk and swore many times freely, looking at me as though he knew not whether to slay me or to pray my help. At last he found his tongue for ordinary speech, and asked me many questions: ‘Hath this Archigenes served thy lady long? How was she ill? What happed with her?’—and many others.

I told him all I could, for as he said, he knew but little—there having been none to tell him since his arrival, save only Gregorio, who had been absent most of the time.

‘This Archigenes is a foolish fad,’ said he, ‘one who hath many pandering ideas about women. Nevertheless, if, as thou sayest, he hath restored Valeria to health before, he had best see her again. Go thou, Gregorio, and summon hither messengers. Send them where this Archigenes may be found.’

And Gregorio drew back with a half-bow, insolent, methought, in his bearing. For he liked not to take an order and was ever showing that he would not be treated as a slave. His eyes flashed and he said sullenly: ‘I will send someone to take thy commands.’

Somewhat in his manner angered Paulinus. ‘I’ll send myself,’ he said—‘thou painted jackanapes, if thou dost not my bidding—and that right quickly. Dost think I keep thee for naught except to caterwaul? I hasten.’ And Paulinus struck his arm upon a table with such force that Gregorio jumped and bounded away, but his face was black as night.

I was leaving to go back to my lady, but Paulinus called me. ‘I’ll go myself for the doctor,’ quoth he. ‘Say, Yellow-hair, whither shall I seek this Archigenes: and if I find him not, who else is there I may command?’

Now, here I hesitated, for I cared not to name Stephanus, and still less did I desire that Symmachus should come, seeing that his treatment of Valeria was not like to prove comforting. But Paulinus, seeing my hesitation, said: ‘Go back, child. How should I expect thee to know? Attend to thy duties. I’ll find such as will serve Valeria.’

‘May it please thee, lord,’ I said, ‘I do know one, a goodly man and honest though he be not registered, who came to Valeria before, when we were in sore distress and knew not for whom to send—and, please thee, I can send for him.’

‘Ay, send for him—send; one of the others can go. I’ll seek this Archigenes.’

And Paulinus, not waiting to don his toga, hastened off. I know not who found Archigenes—whether twere he or another. Archigenes was found
at last, and the time, though it seemed long, could not really have been so. But now, I was still at Valeria’s bedside—having despatched Aeola to seek one who would summon Stephanus, and there, when Archigenes came, he found me.

His presence was goodly and did comfort my soul, for I felt faint with long fasting and sore anxiety,—for, thou knowest, there had been a deal to bear that day—with one thing and another—not knowing what might befall. I had not summoned Corellia, and by happy chance it was not Valeria’s custom that her head-woman should attend her at night: and the under-maidens who came for the unrobing—whereof one was Aeola, and the other one that I knew—did my bidding without much trouble. Moreover, thou knowest, they had heard Valeria’s command to me and dared not oppose it.

Archigenes looked grave, but he bent most kindly over the bed and, at first, it seemed he scarce could account for Valeria’s state. But he did not question me then.

‘I like not, as thou knowest, to let blood,’ said he, ‘nevertheless, at times it be necessary.’

And, with a sharp instrument that he carried, he made a puncture in Valeria’s arm and wiped away a few drops. Then again, he bound it quickly, seeing that she stirred, and all the while I turned the fan upon her and stood ready with whatsoever Archigenes might desire.

He wiped her lips with the distilled spirit and chafed her hands, and after a time she opened her eyes and seemed to be more herself.

But a long shuddering sigh shook her and she turned her head away and seemed like to sink from us again.

‘Speak to her,’ said Archigenes, ‘tell her all is well.’

So then I bent over her. ‘Lady—dear lady,’ I cried, ‘here is Nyria. Thou art not alone, Domina. Archigenes is here and doth tend thee. All will be well.’

Valeria opened her eyes, and looked at me: and then closed them again. ‘I do but desire to sleep,’ she said.

But, meanwhile, Archigenes had mixed a glass of strong cordial and bade me hold it to her lips, the which I did, and it brought a flush to her cheeks and she sank back and slept like a child.

When, seeing this, and that Aeola had come within, Archigenes signed to me to follow him.

Without, in the antechamber stood Stephanus, looking very dark and shadowy with a heavy toga round him and his bag in his hand.

Archigenes greeted him warmly. ‘Methinks thou art not needed, friend, for to-night, at least. Sleep will work wonders. Let the lady rest. I desire now to speak with this maiden who, I see, is here again and who will best carry out my directions. Do thou divest thyself of that wrapper, brother, and hear what she hath to say.’

Now I felt somewhat dismayed at having thus to speak, yet, trusting Stephanus, but not liking to speak before them both, I was yet forced to do so. Therefore, I told my tale—not saying Valeria had sent me on an errand but that Aeola had called me and I had found my lady like to faint. I was about to say, after high words with her lord—but this seemed too much of a breach of confidence. Wherefore I hesitated, but Archigenes seemed to understand. He shook his head gravely.

‘Thou hast spoken well, maiden. I need not detain thee longer. I go to
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see Paulinus. Lead the way, Nyria. Brother Stephanus, methinks I need not keep thee.'

Whereat Stephanus, seeming agreeably content, just nodded.

'I wait here till Nyria returns,' said he; 'like enough, while she hath been tending others, there have been none to tend her.'

And somehow I liked the sound of his voice, for, thou knowest, I had not seen him since he had turned from me without speaking in the slave-market that day.

So then I, running on before, led Archigenes to Paulinus's rooms.

My lord was evidently awaiting him and greeted him as one who must bear news.

'Well, what hast thou to say, Archigenes?'

'Somewhat that thou wilt not care to hear, I fear,' replied the doctor—'at least, if thou be like other husbands long separated and but lately returned.'

But I stayed to hear no more, for Stephanus waited for me. I ran into the ante-room and found him there. He had not taken off his toga though he had set down his bag, and when I approached he laid no finger on me, but only regarded me gravely, and asked, in what seemed to me formal-wise: 'How dost thou bear thyself to-night after the fatigues of the day, Nyria?'

'I told him that I bore myself well enough.

'And thou hast doubtless been fed and served well?' he answered. As he spoke, I remembered that I had had no food, and fatigue overcame me, and I swayed and would have fallen had he not caught me and placed me on a chair.

'Sit there,' he said, 'I may not support thee since thou art no longer aught that doth belong to me. Nevertheless, though thou wast some stranger-maid, I would not see thee faint and starve.'

Then going to the door, he called softly to Aeola, who hastened out.

'Bring food and wine,' he said; 'see that Nyria hath what she doth require—I have none with me to give her, and she needeth it sore. I will abide here till thou returnest.'

Aeola ran without, and came back presently with a tray well supplied, though where she had got it I know not.

Meanwhile, I was very faint, and yet, it seemed, only with fatigue, for afterwards, when the food and wine came and they had cut some morsels and fed me, I had like to grow strong again. But before it came, I put out my hand to Stephanus, who stood watching me, yet as though I were but a patient—and said: 'Thou art very kind, Stephanus.' But he answered not.

'Wilt thou have none of me now, Stephanus?' I said.

And he shook his head but answered not.

'Thou sayest I do not belong to thee'—and then I began to weep a little—the which seemed to stir him: and he made a sudden movement toward me, and drew back again, and still he answered not.

'Nevertheless, I am still Nyria,' I said, 'and thou canst not—thou wilt not ever be unkind to Nyria?'

But still he answered not.

And by and by, when I had had the food and wine, he signed to Aeola to take the tray away, and then he stood before me with his toga around him and his bag in his hand, and said he: 'Nyria, thou didst ask me whether I
would serve thee still, and I told thee truly that thou dost no more belong to Stephanus, seeing thou hast chosen thy mistress, and for me there is naught to do for thee. Nevertheless, if thou dost ever need a friend, thou mayest command Stephanus.'

And he said no more, but went without, and I—if I had not had the food and wine—I would have wept—for this Stephanus differed from him I had known always.

But seeing I felt better, I went into Valeria's room and laid me down to sleep.

Two or three days went by, and Valeria still was ill and scarce left her room. Archigenes came every day, but Stephanus not again, and there came a morning when Valeria was better—much better; and yet there seemed a constant dread in her eyes.

Paulinus had not been inside her rooms again, but he had questioned me daily concerning her, and daily, methinks, he had seen Archigenes—but of that I am not sure. He was out a great deal, and some said that Rome was agog with rumours of war and with many other matters of great import.¹

But of all these I knew naught, for there was none now to bring me talk, and I cared not to chatter with the slaves, save sometimes Aeola.

Thus the only means I had of hearing aught from outside was when Crispus brought some story to Aeola. But Aeola cared more that Crispus should say that she looked pretty than that Rome was in flames. Thus, though she told me bits now and again, it was not as though Stephanus himself or Crispus had told me the news.

And now, upon the morning when Valeria was better, I had myself, with Aeola, robed her in a simple white woollen stola. I had practised on Aeola's head the Greek way of hairdressing, for I wanted to be Valeria's tire-woman, and she, seeing that I was skilled in many ways that I had learned from Aemilia, permitted me to take the chiefest of her dressing—at least now that she was ill—and would tell Corellia she needed her not.

This, methinks, angered Corellia against me, but she could not oppose Valeria, and Corellia was one who would not loudly complain. Therefore, it was her way to scorn me in the slaves' quarter, not to scold.

Now, Valeria being dressed before Archigenes came, she did receive him in her sitting-room, and was better able to greet him like herself—'I scarce need thy services, good doctor,' said she when I gave him entrance.

'In truth,' he answered, making a spreading bow, 'I like to see that look upon thy face, lady, for there is the flush of health again which shews thou dost yet find somewhat sweet in life to live for. Verily I see that my visit is no more needed as a doctor. Yet may I say, Most Noble Valeria, that as a friend I would talk to thee to-day.'

Valeria glanced at him quickly, and there was a hurried, startled look in her eyes. 'I am pleased to count Archigenes as my friend,' she said courteously.

'And to a friend is permitted, perhaps, somewhat that a doctor dare not intrude upon,' he said.

Valeria seemed to grow stiff, though she still spake courteously.

'Frankly, I like not those that intrude,' said she. 'But few care to intrude upon Valeria.'

'Here is one who hath thy health's best good at heart,' said Archigenes,

¹ Doubtless the Dacian War. See Appendix i, Bk. III.
making another bow, and laying his own broad soft hand upon his breast, as he bent before her. 'I pray thee listen to my words, lady, for they be winged with all true kindliness and desire for thy well-being.'

'I grant thou dost thus endow them,' said she with swift courtesy. 'Me­thinks that Archigenes can say no word which is not kindly meant. Nevertheless, I would tell thee, sir, that such talk as cometh strictly within thy province is best appreciated by me. Methinks that of closer and more private things a woman's own heart can but be the truest judge,'

'Rightly spoken, lady,' he answered. 'Nevertheless, concede such experience, as is the natural fruit of his profession, to one whose dealings during a long and chequered life have chiefly lain with the tender feelings of fair and delicate women.'

'Hath it then been thine experience,' she asked, 'that any two women's hearts are alike? I trow, Archigenes,' and Valeria slowly shook her head, with a little, half-sad smile, 'thou hast not worked among them with thine own eyes widely opened.'

'Ah, lady, it is not for Archigenes to appraise his own perception. Yet deemest thou that I would dare approach the sacred precincts of such a sanctuary as thine heart, if I did not know that upon this altar there burns a different fire from that which lights the hearts of other women, even though its flame goeth up before the same god.'

Valeria scarce seemed to know what to answer. At length she sat upright in her chair.

'A truce to imagery, Archigenes,' said she. 'I tell thee frankly that I know not if in my breast burns a fire to any god at all. I know only that within it is some consuming waste.'

'So, so,' he answered gently. 'Here we have perchance a fire burned out because it was too early lit. In truth, Valeria, there be maidens who are by nature vestals ... it is they who should be permitted to serve the goddess rather than those who bind themselves by vows they will not—cannot keep—like perchance this unhappy woman of whom all Rome has been talking of late.'

'Thou dost mean Cornelia,' answered Valeria. 'Hapless soul! Yet better be like her—at peace——' and she said no more, and Archigenes spake. 'Ay, for her who is by nature vestal, better the darkness of the tomb than to be bound by law with shackles which may cut deep into the flesh but cannot bind the virginal soul.'

'Thou hast learned somewhat of women,' said Valeria, not looking at him but gazing out as was her wont through the open doorway, where the early spring was blushing in the garden. She took no heed of me though I sat upon the step leading to the court, within her sight, and Archigenes, me­thinks, though he must have seen me there, seemed not to mind my presence.

I saw Archigenes lean forward and he seemed to be searching her face.

'Wouldst thou that I did strike such bonds from thee?' he said in a low earnest tone.

She started and looked at him, and then drew herself back, once more the frigid Valeria. 'Sir—by what right,' she said, 'what meanest thou?'

'Ah, lady,' he said, and there was a sound half of sorrow—half of sympa­thy in his voice—'If a woman hath not bared her soul even to her own husband, there be two men in the world to whom she should so discover it—her priest, if she have enough of religion, and her doctor that he may heal

1 Fate of Cornelia, the Vestal Virgin. See Appendix 2, Bk. III.
Valeria still looked at him strangely, but made no answer.

"Body and soul—the two are so mingled, lady, that in truth the cleverest physician cannot cure one without striking at the roots of disease which exist in the other."

As she made no answer, he bent low again.

"I would cure thee, for it goeth to my heart to see thee plunged into such an illness as that in which I have saved thee recently, but from which, were it to come upon thee again, Archigenes with all his skill might not be able to rescue thee a second time. . . . Say, Valeria, wouldst thou have thy life unshackled by this bond which doth darken thy soul with so terrible a fear?"

"Ask the slave whether he doth desire his chains to be moved?" replied Valeria, bending forward with clasped hands. "Oh, Archigenes, if thou canst secure me against that from which I have dreamed death alone could deliver me, then wilt thou have—alas! What can I give thee save the gratitude of a helpless woman!"

She turned aside in her chair, burying her face in its cushions and seemed to weep. I saw her shoulders shake.

Archigenes rose and poured some cordial from a flagon into a glass and gave it her to drink. She took it, answering: "I am weak."

"Ay, thou art weak," he answered gently. "But thou wilt soon be strong again. Come, here is thy faithful little maiden. Take her out into the sunshine, Nyria. Let her walk a little upon the terrace. Shew her how the buds are bursting and how the crocus-gold is peering through the grass. Tell her that though the night of winter hath been long, the day of spring will shortly dawn again."

And then he bowed before Valeria, and folding his toga around him he withdrew. Following, to lift the curtains as he passed, I heard him call a slave to take him to Paulinus.

I walked with Valeria in the garden for some time. It was a beautiful morning. The sky was very blue and the marble of the terrace and the fountain shewed very white, having been newly washed in spring rain. The sunshine had brought forth the flowers on the crocus bulbs which thrust their heads through the grass, and a long strip of small white blooms on either side the path shewed thickly. Overhead, there was a soft blush of green, and many a myriad little buds of green pushing themselves forth. There was a soft silence in the air, and I longed that she should feel the beauty of the day. But she felt naught.

Then, by and by, as we turned back along the terrace, one of Paulinus's slaves came and said his lord craved speech with her—at which Valeria, seeing him coming, seemed distressed and stood watching as he approached. Then when he had given his message, she said: "Tell thy lord, Valeria awaits him," and a moment or two later, Paulinus came; but she clung to my arm and seemed to tremble so that I could not release her.

He stood upon the steps a few yards away and gazed at her at first without a word. Then he came nearer, giving his toga an impetuous shake as he threw it over his shoulder.

He was, it seemed, about to go forth, for he had on his outdoor toga and his boots were of the kind lords did not wear in the house.
"So, my wife," he said, 'my lady-wife, to whose presence I must request the favour of admittance like any stranger that calls upon thee, I trust I see thee better of thy nervous illness.'

And at his words Valeria seemed to grow stronger. 'I thank thee,' she said, 'I am better.'

'Ay, better, doubtless,' he broke forth, with a coarse laugh that had little of laughter in it. 'Better, doubtless, since thou knowest thyself free of thy husband's unwelcome attentions!'

Valeria answered, 'Tis scarce meet thus to gibe.'

'Thou knowest of what I am speaking,' he answered. 'Archigenes hath been with me. Thou hast made good thy case to him.'

'If such he said to thee, which I can scarce believe,' she answered, 'Archigenes misstated facts.'

'It is not likely that he would do so,' Paulinus said, and she answered, 'That which Archigenes carried to thee was of his own shewing, and since I know not what it may chance to have been, haply thou wilt tell me. Nyria, go.'

And then she signed me to leave her. But I, fearing for her weakness, put up my hands to my head.

'Will it not please thee to be seated, lady,' I asked. 'Thy strength is not yet great.'

'Thou canst bring me a chair,' she answered. 'I will walk to one myself. If it be thy pleasure, Paulinus, wilt thou follow me?'

And with that they both turned away. But I saw his eyes had fallen upon me as I spoke, and that he was not ill-pleased with my care of her.

I went then and waited on the steps, where I could not overhear what passed but yet was near enough if she should call me.

Their talk was not long. Paulinus bore himself somewhat sulkily, and when once he raised his voice as in anger, she put forth her hand and the gesture seemed to silence him.

Presently she called me up again to bring her a shawl, for the morning was chilly when one sat for long, and as I did so, I heard him say: 'It is my pleasure, and that at least thou'lt not deny me.'

'By no means,' she answered. 'Thou hast but to acquaint me with thy wishes and all such preparations that thou desirest shall be made.'

'Nay, I'd rather leave the arranging of such things to thee. Women know them best.'

'But thou wilt let me hear the names of those thou desirest bidden, seeing they are naturally more thy friends than mine.'

He looked at her again, half angrily, half tenderly. 'Why wilt thou thus persist in holding thyself aloof from my interests?' he said. 'Have I not told thee that if thou wouldst remain my wife in name, thou shalt grant me in the eyes of the world, at least, such favour as a wife should accord. That I may demand.'

'Tis at thy command,' she answered. 'I will welcome thy friends as mine, but let me know whom thou desirest bidden.'

'The usual set,' he answered—and ran over the names of a dozen or more of the lords and generals in Rome, who were his companions. 'I'll have this thing done to prove that though Caesar orders me hence, I am master in my own house, and no cost shall be spared—mind that, Valeria. But there's one thing I would demand of thee. Thou'lt bid this fellow Licinius Sura hither that I may shew unto Rome thee and him together with my sanction,
and thus stop their lying gossip. Likewise, would I see '—and here Paulinus laughed brutally—' how thou dost bear thyself towards him.'

Valeria hesitated a moment. Then she spoke quickly. 'Methinks thou scarce dost keep to the letter of thy bond. 'Tis needless, this.'

'Though, no. I've taken thy word, Valeria, hitherto, and I'll prove that I trust thee now. Thus would I shew my friends and thine that I have confidence in thee and silence their lying tongues. I would see this fellow here—ay, see him with thee, and since there be naught but common friendship betwixt thee and him, shew me as I shall shew the rest that thou art my wife in very truth—ah! there's naught in that that can offend thee if he be naught to thee....'

Valeria half rose. I saw her hand tremble. She had not signed me to leave her again and therefore I stood beside her. 'I'll bid him hither as thou desir'st,' she said, 'but I know not whether he will come.'

'Thou'lt have no underhand communication with him,' cried Paulinus hotly. 'Understand me this, Valeria, if he doth not come, I'll suspect thee, and though I be marching forth with Caesar's legions, I'll set scouts upon thy path, and if they bring me tales in which there's aught to question, thou shalt suffer for it—thou and that half-blooded deceiver of thine.'

Valeria rose here. 'Taunt me not,' she said. 'I repeat 'tis needless. Thou mayst leave the matter to me.'

'Ay, I leave my name to thee, and the honour of my house. Lucky is it for thee that thou hast given me sons to make that name worth preserving. Else, notwithstanding the plea of that mealy-mouthed physician of thine, thou hadst like to have gone forth beggared. Bear this in mind, Valeria. I relinquish such claim to thy service as he advised so long as thou dost hold thyself fittingly before the world as the wife of Valerius Paulinus and the mother of his sons. But let me hear a whisper that another is that to thee which thou hast scorned to let thy husband be, and not the vengeance of Caesar himself shall equal mine.'

He turned and threw his toga over his shoulders and half strode away, but came back.

'I'm going now,' he said. 'I shall not enter these rooms again. For in a man's own house he cares not to be heralded like an ordinary visitor by a slave. When I seek word with thee, thou shalt come and meet me in the public rooms—these—these—are sacred to thee and to the name thou dost bear. See thou keepest them so.'

And with that, he went away.
CHAPTER III

THE DEPARTURE OF THE GENERALS

Here Nyria tells of the Farewell Entertallent which was given at the Valerian villa when Paulinus and Asiaticus went forth to the Sarmatian War.

NYRIA: ’Now, it was nearing the time of the great reception that Paulinus had desired to hold upon his departure. But a few days had yet to pass and Valeria kept entirely to her own apartments, occupying herself with certain small matters, though, methinks, she had a difficulty in holding her mind to a single object.

Nevertheless, she did somewhat concern herself about me, questioning how I was circumstanced in the slave-court.

Now, thou knowest that none of the slaves, save only Aeola, liked me, and Aeola had already a house-fellow, who looked not upon me with favour. Therefore, it was not pleasant for me to intrude much in the slaves’ quarter.

Moreover, I had had to deprive Aeola of a share of her bed and comforts, for there was not provision for more than two. Then the other one, desiring me not to be present, did address Chabrias as to what arrangement he would make for me. Chabrias answered somewhat scornfully, that seeing I was his lady’s favourite, doubtless she would make her own arrangements for my accommodation. Therefore, he would not concern himself in the case without direct command from the Domina.

Methought this was like to make matters very uncomfortable for me, seeing there was none to favour me and none that wanted me, save only Valeria, wherefore I slept most nights outside her bedroom door as I had been accustomed to do for Julia.

But Valeria was not used to having a maid there, and one night, being restless, she arose and was walking out to the sitting-room, when she came upon me and asked wherefore did I lie there as she was not now ill? I told her that Julia had desired it of me and that although I had received no directions, I knew not where else to sleep, seeing that no preparation had been made for me.

At which Valeria seemed vexed in mind, and did assure me I should be better done by.

‘But,’ said she, ‘why hath my steward not attended to the matter? ’Tis his concern.’ And thereupon, fearing to be brought before the notice of Chabrias and made to suffer harder things, I dissuaded Valeria from upbraiding him upon the matter.

‘For,’ said I, ‘he likes me not: and thinks I am an interloper.’ But though I wished not to tell tales, yet still it seemed to me that ’twas best to let her know something of the disfavour in which they held me, lest at any time I be prevented being at her service. For thou knowest that when slaves
are ill-natured, they think little of harming another so that she can do naught for herself.

Now, hearing this, Valeria said I was to bring a lamp and come with her, and with that she took me through the rooms to one of the lesser dressing-rooms where Aeola told me she had been permitted to keep a change of robes and other matters she might need if 'twere not convenient for her to be allowed to go out to the huts.

'This room is thine, Nyria. Provide it as thou wilt,' said she: 'and let the cost be sent in to Chabrias. He will at least not refuse to pay my tradesmen's bills.'

Now the room was generously furnished and it seemed to me that there was like to be naught lacking. So I thanked Valeria for her kindness, and said 'twould satisfy me, surely: and that 'twas much to bestow upon a slave.

'But,' said she, 'thou needst not consider thyself one of the common herd, Nyria. Thou hast been of use to me, and I prefer to have thee near me. If thou goest out to the court where these selfish folk be, 'twill be thine own fault, for thou needst not go thither for aught.'

Now, this little room was placed in a corner of the building, with a window that looked out upon a side of the house, whereof one road led round to Paulinus's rooms and the other to my lady's. There were two window-entrances, with the wall built out in a point between them, and a step upon the one where I might sun myself, which was joy to me.

The bed was a good one, and there were cupboards that I knew of, where Aeola kept her things, and there would be room for mine. So I thanked my lady, who said,

'See thou art always at hand, Nyria, and serve me well. 'Tis all that I desire.'

'Now the preparations for the big reception were going on apace. Thou knowest it was the work of the secretaries to bid the guests, but Valeria was fevered concerning the coming of Licinius Sura, not knowing whether he would do so or no. The mandate had not been from her and she feared lest Licinius should refuse yet feared more that he should come: and she was for writing to him yet feared that too, lest Paulinus should discover it. And I saw in her signs of impatience, for she knew that he would soon be gone. Thus, she said to me:

'Find out if thou canst whether Licinius hath received Paulinus's invitation and what is his will in the matter.'

And it chanced that one morning not long afterwards, I met Licinius strolling in the road. He had that woman Salome with him and the child. Her litter was being borne behind them as they walked. Then, seeing me, Licinius did excuse himself to his companion and came close up to me. But while her gaze was upon us, his manner remained courteous and distant though his eyes did shew much of what he thought.

'Well met, little Watch-dog,' said he. This was half beneath his breath, for Salome stood in the road some half-dozen yards beyond. I knew not her name then, thou knowest, nor what position she held to Licinius, though it seemed to me the child must be theirs. But that was of little account, for many lords had such children by slaves and freedwomen.

'Say, little Watch-dog,' said he, 'what means this sound of gay doings in mine ears? Wherefore am I bidden in state to the villa of Paulinus?'
‘Paulinus giveth a great reception, lord,’ I answered, making my obeisance very low, for Salome’s eyes were upon me. ‘Paulinus hath been ordered to the war; and ‘tis his will that his friends should see him depart.’

‘Oh, then, ‘tis naught to do with Valeria?’ he asked. ‘And yet the mandate was in her name likewise.’

‘May it please thee, lord, the most noble Valeria will receive her friends, also, at the same day and hour and ‘tis her desire that thou shouldst be present.’

This I said deeming she would have it so, and fearing that there might be trouble did Licinius not present himself.

Licinius seemed to take counsel with his own mind, then turning his back roundly on Salome, he said, ‘There’s no scurvy trick behind this, Watch-dog, eh?’

‘My lord,’ I answered, ‘Paulinus is not that kind of man. He doth desire a fitting send-off both from his wife and her friends.’

‘So—ay—’ said Licinius. ‘If this be Valeria’s will, I’ll come. Thou mayst tell her so . . . .’

And thus I told Valeria.

On the day of the great departure, Vitellia arrived early. She seemed sad and anxious at heart for, ‘twas said, Asiaticus would not take her upon this journey. Wherefore, she was to be left behind in Rome and she liked it not.

To-day, Valeria was most sumptuously attired. I myself had had the dressing of her though Corellia likewise was present. For Corellia wisely said I knew naught of draperies. But she let me tire Valeria’s head. Valeria’s gown was of pale mauve embroidered in large purple flowers raised like velvet in a thick border some two feet wide round the foot and lesser trimming for the bodice-broidery. She wore purple shoes set with green stones and her palla was thick with silver, having upon its edge a narrow deep purple border that likewise looked like velvet. Around her neck and on her arms she wore a set of sumptuous green stones which Paulinus had sent her that morning with a written slip of paper on which he said:

‘I do not pray thee to accept these: it is my command that thou dost wear them. Afterwards, thou canst throw them in the gutter if thou wilt.’

‘Wear them to-day,’ he meant. And the inner lining of her palla was likewise pale green.

Valeria put on the stones and greatly they became her, though she seemed to take no heed of their beauty or their value. But when she was dressed, her manner changed, and to me it seemed as though she were bent upon playing a part fittingly.

She went without beside Vitellia who was dressed in robes of dull rose with a quaint Eastern girdle set with pink stones and some gold openwork.

Vitellia looked sad and a good deal older than Valeria who, methought, was like one seen in a dream. When we came out, I followed in a new robe of white silk embroidered with white which Valeria had given to me; and Aeola, too, came and wore one like mine, the only difference between us being that Aeola’s head was bound with a red fillet and mine with a white one because I liked it best.

Aeola and I stationed ourselves behind Valeria as was fitting, and Paulinus came forward from his rooms looking very goodly in his armour. He had
not yet donned his short cloak or his helmet, and the plates of his armour shone like burnished gold so that Aeola and I could see ourselves in them.

Two or three slaves attended him, and also Gregorio, though Gregorio would not have had it thought that he was in attendance.

He wore the dress permitted to a minstrel—an embroidered tunic with a coloured scarf, and bracelets that had been given to him, and coloured shoe-thongs winding up his leg.

And his hair was thickly curled. Upon it, he wore a small round cap with a long feather of green and gold. This he thought well-looking, but to my mind it made him somewhat of a game-stock.

Paulinus approached with due order and saluted Vitellia, and likewise Valeria. Bending on one knee before her and taking her hand as she held it out to him, he said:

‘Verily, the gems become thee well. My choice hath pleased thee this time, Valeria?’

Meseemed she knew not what to answer and scarcely understood his mood. She looked confused. ‘I wear them at thy pleasure, lord,’ she said.

And now the guests began to arrive and Paulinus stood beside his wife and received them as if they were her guests: and during much of the time he held Valeria’s hand, as was the custom with a newly-wedded pair who received their friends, or a lord and lady who had met after long separation, or such as desired to shew their unity of heart and mind. And this I saw irked Valeria sorely. But she did not rebel. She bore herself with dignity and never once turned round to give any orders to us as Julia would have done—a thousand in a minute—and have kept us flying hither and thither as the fancy took her.

But Valeria had naught for us to do, so that we could look about us and see the goodly show.

Thou knowest—for I have told thee—that the atrium was very fine and the pillars had all been wreathed with white flowers, and, here and there, broad bands of mauve and green ribbon. Great pots of plants were placed about and blossoming orange trees in marble jars, so that the scent was sweet. And in two farther rooms beyond, on either side, were refreshments, laid for such as might desire them, with an army of stewards serving. Some were in Valeria’s personal livery of white and violet, and others with the cross-bar of two shades of crimson and the narrow lines of gold crossed between them like a sword, which was Paulinus’s sign as former Tribune of the Guard.

But the guests for the most part came not to eat and drink as they would have done at Julia’s house, save some who did go in groups and drink much wine together and laugh riotously. But with these Paulinus did not ally himself. He remained close beside Valeria.

Vitellia stood a little to one side talking to such as came her way, but Asiaticus went about amongst the guests and laughed his fill likewise. He too seemed eager to be gone. There was a look in his eyes and upon the muscles of his face, every now and then, as though he cared most for the signs of war, and some said to him in joke that the old lion was roused from his lair, and would go forth again.

Whereat Asiaticus answered:

‘Ay, prowling beasts are feared and scorned in time of peace, but when the sounds of war ring out they will be put to take the foremost place.’

Likewise, he said, Caesar liked him better out of Rome.

Now Licinius Sura came in and, methinks, Valeria had feared lest he
should not come at all. But when his name was called she heard it, and I
saw her seem to stiffen and she held herself higher and drew a little away
from Paulinus who was talking to a lady beyond him in seeming right good
humour and joking her upon her looks—saying that soon there would be no
men in Rome for pretty women to apparel themselves for.

But as Licinius came up the hall, he turned to him, saying:

‘I pray thee excuse me, for her comes one of my wife’s friends whom I
would fain honour’: and, with that, he put out his hand and took Valeria’s
fingers, holding them closely while he extended his other hand to Licinius.

‘Greatly do I regret,’ said he, ‘that ere this, for long past, I have been
unable to welcome Licinius Sura. And now, alack! ’tis but for an hour
only, seeing that Paulinus is called to the wars: and Valeria must needs
mourn in seclusion at home as becomes one made, for a time at least, a
widow.’

Whereat Licinius, ne’er casting his eyes upon Valeria, bent low, and said:

‘Rome suffers from the absence of her best men: and such as there be
left in Rome must suffer too.’

And then again he bowed to Valeria, who answered him by a stately bow
and spake not.

‘Nevertheless, the time shall not seem long when we do return again,’
said Paulinus jovially: ‘and then, hapy, we shall all meet once more—the
better friends. There’s no union like the union of hearts that have been
disrupted—whether by distance or by difference. Eh, Licinius?’

Licinius seemed scarce to know how to answer.

‘But,’ said he at last, ‘Paulinus should know better than I, seeing that
near to him is that tenderest heart which should be his dearest possession—
Licinius, alas! is alone.’

‘Ho-ho, alone!’ cried Paulinus, and, forgetting himself for a moment, he
dropped Valeria’s hand and clapped his own to his side, laughing heartily.

‘What then hath become of Salome?’

Licinius looked at him. ‘Salome!’ said he. ‘Of whom speakest thou?’

‘Some slave, perchance. Hapy, she was a slave once—but gossip says
Licinius hath been hers,’ said Paulinus.

‘Like enough,’ answered Licinius. ‘Gossip says much in Rome. I listen
not’: and he drew aside as someone came up to speak to them.

But I saw Valeria gaze at him with a questioning look and whiten some­
what as she drew back but said naught.

Now, in the shifting crowd many came and went. Among them Plinius
and Antaeia who, while they were talking to Valeria, said to her that they
did greatly desire that she should come and visit them at Laurentum where
Plinius had a villa.

‘Not just yet, maybe. The season is scarcely enough advanced,’ said
Plinius, ‘for one to care to leave Rome. But when the thorn-boughs are
thick with bloom, then thou must come, Valeria. ’Twill be a joy to Antaeia
to shew thee her home.’

And Valeria was forced to smile kindly on Antaeia, and, while she yet spake
to her, Plinius’s eyes fell on me.

‘And thou too, little maid,’ he said. ‘There will be one to welcome thee.
Thy friend Aemilia doth set store on thee, I find—or so she hath told her
new mistress: and I would have thee come and see how well she and Antaeia
suit each other. Verily, thy choice has been a wise one for this little lady—
wife of mine.’
I made a deep obeisance and said my lord honoured me too much. 'I joy to see thee in such good keeping,' he said kindly. 'Twill be some time before thou art in danger of being placed upon the rostrum again.' And with that he turned to Valeria.

'Thou knowest I have much to concern me at present,' he said. 'There are several pleadings that will keep me in Rome, but thou must not forget thy word, Valeria. We'll spend a happy month together later on. As yet, the things I have to do are less pleasurable.'

I did not catch Valeria's reply and Plinius spake again. 'Cæsar is sore distressed in mind, for some there be who tell him that if this insurrection in Sarmatia is not quelled, others may spring up in Rome: and thou knowest'—Plinius dropped his voice—'Cæsar is never over-courageous where prognostications have been given him. He greatly fears some rising from a source he knows not. But there is none with whom he can as yet connect it: and had it not been for the name of Nerva there would be none with whom he might link the thought. And yet it seems to me from what I have known of Nerva, that the foretellers are somewhat out in their calculations. He is not the man to thrust himself forward, and if he be thrust forward by others, they have to bolster him up.'

Now, whilst they were talking I saw Licinius Sura standing a little aside watching them intently, and he seemed to follow that which Plinius was saying with close attention: and while the subject was yet upon their lips Paulinus, who had moved away—the guests having now all arrived, and he being compelled to walk among them round the rooms—came up, and placing his hand suddenly upon Licinius's shoulder, he said:

'How's this, my friend? Report has it that thou, too, art about to deprive Rome of the light of thy presence.'

'Ay, verily,' answered Licinius. 'For once, report spoke truly.'

Valeria had heard the question and the answer and, forgetting what Plinius was saying to her, she turned aside and, almost it seemed as though the words broke from her lips, she said, 'Whither art thou going?'

Licinius dropped his eyes and folded his arms before him, saying, with a courtly bow, 'I go, lady, to Judæa.'

'To Judæa!' Valeria echoed. 'Ah!' and she seemed to fall back so that Plinius, ever courteous, thrust out his arms to support her.

'Thou art tired, Valeria,' he said. 'Wilt thou not be seated?'

'Nay, nay,' she answered.

'Let me bring thee a cup of wine,' he said.

'Nay, nay, tis naught,' she answered. 'Heed me not, I pray': and her tone was so low and distressful that Plinius who was the only one that could have heard it, save I, close behind her, moved back.

Paulinus was still talking with Licinius, and I heard him say jovially, 'Tis but natural, man; make no excuses. All do desire to see the land of their birth and blood.'

Whereat it seemed to me that Paulinus was sneering. For thou knowest that Judæan blood was of small account in Rome. But Licinius retained his calm demeanour.

'It is no sentiment that calls me thither,' said he, 'but certain private matters of adjustment that must needs be done.'

1 "Domitian was afraid of him (Nerva) because certain soothsayers had predicted that he should be one day Emperor." See The Roman Empresses, Vol. I, Walpole Press, P. 459.
Ah! In these uncertain times,' cried Paulinus, 'a man does wisely to prepare the road for those that come after him. And thou, too, Licinius, if I remember rightly, hast a son, whom, like enough, thou wilt legitimise if he takes after thee and, thus, doth make it worth thy while.'

Whereat, Licinius seemed disturbed in mind, but turned it off with a laugh. 'Though the laws of Rome do make it worth while to count one's lawful progeny, mine need not thus be thought of. And were every man, Paulinus, to count the numbers of such little evidences as he doth leave behind him, he, haply, might inconvenience himself and render the division of his goods no easy task.'

And he said all this in a laugh, as though he turned it into jest. Whereat, Paulinus laughed again.

'Aham, man,' he said, 'such ill-timed jests do deal with the glad, foolish days of youth. But when thou hast taken thee a lady-wife'—and seeming to remember himself he turned back towards Valeria—'thou thinkest no more of such others.'

And then Paulinus, coming up towards Valeria and seeing that she looked not over-well, said to her, loud enough for others to hear:

'Hearten thee! The time is coming for our parting cup. . . .' At which Valeria feebly smiled and, even as Paulinus spoke, one could hear the sound of trumpets and the long, rolling tread of many feet; and 'twas the legionaries coming.

Paulinus delayed until two of the soldiers came and told him that the troops lined the portico. Those would have been two of the under-officers.

'Well said,' replied Paulinus. 'When Rome calls her sons to arms, they needs must leave behind them . . . and that not unwillingly . . . those fairer ones who would fain detain them.'

And with this he made a courtly bow to Valeria: and there broke forth much applause from many gathered round.

Paulinus walked around the circle, for the company had come in from the side-rooms and made a close-packed crowd.

'Good luck go with thee to Judaea: and better luck, mayhap, will keep thee there,' which seemed a joke, that puzzled some and made some laugh. Then, as he moved around, Paulinus had given an order to a steward: and his eyes falling on me, he had stepped behind Valeria.

'See thou serve thy lady well,' he said. 'I trust her to thee, Yellow-hair.' And at that I bent and said no word.

He nodded to Aeola, for 'twas in Paulinus's mood to forget no one: and then he turned to Valeria.

'The last, but not the least,' he cried. 'Of smallest account, mayhap, when Paulinus doth entertain his friends, and yet the sweetest far. Come drink with me a cup wherein loyal and faithful wives of Rome from ancient times have been wont to pledge their lords departing for the war.' And Valeria trembled a little. She clasped and unclasped her hands and glanced quickly at Paulinus and dropped her eyes, and then looked towards a steward who brought the bowl, and said no word.

'Thy heart is like too full for speech,' said Paulinus loudly. 'Quench not thy emotion, Valeria. For the tears shed upon the footsteps of a forthgoing lord shall surely keep the path prepared for his return.' And, with that, he took the cup from the steward's hand. It had two handles twined with serpents, and doves sat upon the brim just above. 'Twas chased in gold. He handed it to her and held it while she slowly put
her lips to it. 'Twas not the custom she should handle it. But the mouthful that she took seemed to choke her and she turned her head away and put her fan up to her face.

Paulinus held the cup high and kissed the place whereon her lips had rested; then, waving it round his head, he lowered it again and, holding it before his breast, he bowed to her, and said:

'By this cup I pledge thee, Valeria. None other lips shall come betwixt thine and mine until we drink together again.' And with that he quaffed it off, and handed back the cup.

And the moment afterwards, all seemed confusion. Valeria stood back looking very white and, beside her, Vitellia, who had been embracing her lord, though he seemed to like it not: and just beyond them stood Licinius, his eyes upon the ground and his arms folded on his toga. And Paulinus walked down between the throng with Asaticus behind him, and many of the lords crowded after them to the portico, where they mounted their steeds and rode away.

There are two things that I forgot to tell thee... One was that the lord Regulus was there near by. I had not seen him closely, and I liked not to speak to him, else would I have asked him about Thanna. But I could not: and then again I lost sight of him.

But when Paulinus went round saying good-bye to everybody, he paused before the lord Regulus, and I heard him say:

'And thou, Regulus, how wilt thou occupy thyself while so many of thy clients will be out of Rome.' He paused for a minute and then seemed to answer himself. 'I trow a brain like thine will never lack occupation, Regulus, even though Paulinus doth not afford it thee.'

And that was all... One other thing...

Him they called Martial... he was there, and, greatly to my surprise, I saw him in a corner talking to Gregorio. Not that that was any great matter, for Plinius spoke to me, but it was the manner of his talking—and Gregorio, who was an impudent fellow, as thou knowest, was leaning against the wall flicking the feather in his cap and seeming to speak as though it were to one of his own kind. Yet, I thought he was not wholly at ease. For the glance that he gave this lord now and again seemed sheepish. But Martial heeded it not for he was joking freely and made Gregorio drink wine with him.

I would tell thee that I myself saw nothing of Paulinus's departure, seeing that Aeola and I remained near to Valeria. It was not Valeria's will that we should always be close behind her as Julia would have had me, but so that we were within sound to summon. Thus, we stood a little apart and talked, and I noted the face of Gregorio watching his master as he went. But it did puzzle me, for I knew not what it meant. There was no great grief for the going of Paulinus—and yet Paulinus was always very good to him—but rather a keen interest in Gregorio's manner: and he looked from his master to Valeria and back again twice or thrice, and looked, too, at Licinius Sura as though he would fain have spied upon him.

But Licinius stood a little distance apart and did not look at Valeria. Likewise, his gaze seemed chiefly fixed upon friends he was talking to... the whom I knew not: and he did not pay much heed to the departure of Paulinus. Only once—quite towards the end when the sounds of the saluting
had almost died away and the tramping feet were getting fainter in the
distance—Licinius turned him about and looked a long minute at Valeria.
But she looked not at him.

He whom they called Martial stood near by Gregorio with his thumb and
fingers spread apart on his chin which was bent down over his chest, and his
eyes, that were dark and piercing, lingered long upon Licinius. His eyes
were as of one who had some secret amusement and, when he had satisfied
himself, he laid his hand on Gregorio's shoulder with a low laugh and drew
the boy away, whispering to him as though he were his friend. At the which,
I saw Gregorio flush with pleasure, one minute looking upon the ground and
the next towards my mistress who observed him not.

For Valeria stood as if she saw not what went on about her; and as, one by
one, the guests filed before her bowing their farewells, she did return to each
a graceful courtesy, but her smile was stiff and she scarcely spoke.

Many a lord had followed Paulinus to the door and shouted cheerily after
him. The last I saw of my master was as he stood upon the top step leading
down under the portico from the atrium... a goodly figure amid the crowd
which pressed not very close upon him—for that would not have been
seemly. Paulinus raised his arm and waved it cheerily to them all and then
disappeared after Asiaticus who had strolled before him, his hand upon his
sword and a look upon his face as though he thought of naught but war.
Methinks Asiaticus was gladder to go than Paulinus, for as Stephanus had
told me once before, when Asiaticus had the smell of war in his nostrils, he
scented naught else but followed it as a hound follows his quarry.

To-day there was no music, for that Paulinus would not have suffered.
It would have partaken too much to him of the festival-keeping of women
and courtiers, and 'twas Paulinus's way to think small of such things. But
there were many trumpeters which blew loudly while he went down amongst
them. These, too, lined the portico, and went before the generals as they
departed."

1 For the War in Moesia see Appendix 3, Bk. III.
CHAPTER IV

"DEMIETER! COMFORT ME!"

Nyria tells of the farewells between Valeria and Licinius Sura and of the despairing supplication of Valeria before the shrine of the goddess Demeter:

Then of the days of sadness which followed and of the visit of the poet Martial to the Valerian villa.

Nyria: "And then, the atrium, where had been so great and goodly a company, was not long of clearing... I saw not which way the lords went, nor much of the guests' departure, for 'twas my duty to attend my lady: and when the greater number had passed her in farewell she stayed not for such as had delayed upon the steps, but led the way to her own rooms, Aeola and I following. Something told me that my lady would rather be alone, therefore I stayed Aeola in the slaves' antechamber where others of the women were congregated eager to hear how all had gone, and, for the most part, full of jealousy against Aeola and me. But Aeola never saw such things and chattered to them freely, and I, standing at the door, waited till my lady should call me.

But there came a rustle of skirts from the other way and Vitellia passed alone. Seeing me, she asked where was Valeria; so then I told her and preceded her to Valeria's sitting-room, where my lady stood in the middle of the apartment as one who had been struck to stone. No motion stirred her. There was no look, whether of suffering or of joy, upon her face and, at first, she heard us not, until Vitellia cried softly:

'Lucia,' and again 'Lucia.'

Valeria turned her round, then, and a sort of tremor seized her from her neck unto her feet—one long shiver—very slight; but I, seeing it, fancied she might be cold and stepped forward to arrange her green and silver palla, which had fallen low upon her shoulders.

'Ah, it is thou,' she said: and putting up her hands, she began slowly to remove the chains of glittering green stones.

'What doest thou, Lucia?' asked Vitellia advancing.

'What do I?' said Valeria slowly. 'I am taking off my chains': and with a sudden gesture, she threw the necklace from her.

'Oh, prisoners of Hades!' she cried—'hopeless souls bound for ever in realms of darkness, which of ye do fare worse than I? Take off my chains, I said. Alas! that may not be.'

I caught the necklace as she flung it from her and laid it on the table.

'Thou art sad and disturbed in mind, Lucia,' said Vitellia tenderly. 'And, in very truth, well thou mayst be. My heart beats with thine, little sister. But Paulinus made a brave show as he went, and he has gone to fight for his country. Art thou not proud of him?'

'Proud—proud—' said Valeria, turning round. 'Proud of what? Oh—ay—Paulinus made a brave show.'
'But thy heart is sad,' said Vitellia again.

'Nay—nay,' said Valeria, turning sharply and facing the room with one hand clutching her throat as though she would have choked herself. 'My heart is not sad. My heart is proud, as thou sayest, Vitellia. What, what can sadness and Valeria have to say to each other, when Valeria's spouse goes forth thus richly prepared to overcome the enemies of his country?'

'I understand thee not,' said Vitellia, calmly yet in an injured tone, glancing at her sister and then averting her eyes. 'Trouble should not thus derange thee, Lucia. Thy heart may be sad, yet not like this. Nevertheless, it should be sad. Is not mine sad, too?' And she followed in Valeria's steps, who paced even more rapidly as though to escape her. 'Hath not my lord gone forth likewise? and alack! who knoweth that he hath a better chance to return.'

'The gods have not been thus far good to thee, Vitellia, that they should check his coming back,' answered Valeria, stopping suddenly in her walk. 'Oh, the gods would be good to thee, Vitellia, if they slew him nobly on some battlefield.'

'Nay, nay, oh, speak not so,' cried Vitellia covering her face with her hands. 'He is my lord.'

'Am I hard to thee?' said Valeria more gently...

'Am I indeed too hard, Vitellia, because I speak the truth. Why should we hide from each other that to-day—at least—we are blest in so far as that they have gone from us.'

Vitellia thrust out her hand as though she would have stayed Valeria's speech.

'Peace, peace,' she said. 'Speak for thyself, Lucia. If thou darest thus blaspheme the sanctity of marriage vows, for myself I will neither listen nor agree. Asiaticus is my husband, and since I may not be with him, it will be my duty and my sole joy to plead with the gods daily for his protection.'

Valeria laughed a low scornful laugh and pointed to the door, saying, 'Go, then, Vitellia. Plead with thy gods. I would not retain thee. Haply, they will hear thee. Indeed, my heart tells me that those whom the gods do favour and keep nearest to the women of their choice be those from whom the women shrink.'

Vitellia dropped her hands and looked fully at her sister. Her face was sore troubled. She seemed not to understand Valeria: and, in truth, I, crouching on a stool at a little distance, since they had not sent me hence, did think the face of Vitellia was fairer and softer than that of Valeria.

'I may not go till I have said somewhat unto thee,' she said. 'Thou knowest, Lucia, when lords be absent, gossip is ever more rife in Rome about those they leave behind. Paulinus hath chosen of his noble favour to extend confiding courtesy to him whom perchance some would say he had done better not to receive here. Do thou reward his faith in thee, Valeria, by loyalty in his absence.'

Valeria did not answer. Only, she looked at Vitellia with her eyes flashing in her strained, white face.

'Thou knowest,' persisted Vitellia, seeming somewhat confused—'he who was here to-day—with whom some in Rome have coupled thy name. Oh, Lucia, thou wilt not bid him welcome in thy husband's absence?'

'Of whom dost thou speak?' asked Valeria.

At that moment there was a sound at the curtains and Chabrias lifted them with his arm.
‘The Honourable Licinius Sura,’ said he, and behind him we saw Sura’s face.
‘I crave thy courtesy a moment, lord,’ said Valeria suddenly in clear, ringing tones. ‘Will it please thee to wait without. I am engaged just now.’
Chabrias dropped the curtain and Licinius withdrew, but I had seen a look upon the steward’s face and knew it was of malice that he had thus announced Licinius without warning.
I moved nearer to the door to make sure that none listened without. Valeria turned to her sister, who, still seeming startled and confused, was drawing her palla round her shoulders as if about to depart.
‘Explain thyself, Vitellia,’ she said. ‘No one—not even my own sister—shall speak as thou hast spoken to me without substantiating their words. Of what dost thou accuse me?’
‘Nay, I accuse thee of naught—of naught,’ cried Vitellia: and then she suddenly changed her tone. ‘Nevertheless, Lucia’—drawing nearer and holding her palla together with one hand, she held out her other pleadingly and bent towards her sister—nevertheless, thou knowest—oh, thou must know that there be some grounds for that of which others have accused thee.’
‘Explain thyself,’ replied Valeria with white lips, standing very slim and tall as Vitellia bent before her.
‘Dear, I say naught of this which others say. They misjudge thee. Oh, it must be so. Yet how shall I discredit that which mine own ears have heard?’
Valeria flushed a little and her face changed.
‘Speak,’ she said more gently. ‘What didst thou hear?’ And Vitellia made answer.
‘When thou wast lying on yonder bed of sickness—not knowing what thou saidst—thou didst cry aloud for one—Marcus—who, it seemed to me, must be, in very truth, this Marcus Licinius Sura.’
For a minute, Valeria seemed at a loss what to say. Then she answered, speaking quickly and with more lightness in her manner:
‘It doth please the gods sometimes to send madness on sick people. Haply, it was my case then. But the madness hath passed, Vitellia.’
Vitellia searched her face with tender, anxious eyes.
‘Is that so?’ she said. ‘Oh, Valeria, I ask it of thee as thy sister. Tell me that this man is naught to thee save as thy husband’s friend.’
A slight smile curled Valeria’s lips. ‘Nay, not my husband’s friend. Methinks he is scarcely a friend to Paulinus notwithstanding his greeting of him to-day. I know not the purport of it, for Paulinus’s moods have long been past my comprehension. But, that thou mayst know that he is naught to me, remain, Vitellia, whilst I receive him. Then thou canst go forth satisfied.’
Valeria struck the silver gong upon the table and instantly Chabrias answered it.
‘Bid Licinius Sura enter,’ she said. Then, as the curtain dropped again, Vitellia caught her hand and pressed it.
‘Oh, thou hast made me happy,’ she said. ‘Little didst thou think, Lucia, how the thought of this hath rankled in my breast. But thou hast swept it now away. Ah! I am happy,’ she murmured again.
‘In truth,’ replied Valeria, ‘it takes not much to make thee so—even though Asiaticus be gone.’
And her tone was sneering. But Vitellia heeded it not. She had sunk into a chair, drawing the folds of her palla about her as though she had been chilled, and now, she sat with her hands loosely clasped in her lap and her eyes fixed upon the door.

Valeria had drawn a little apart and stood cold and calm and very dignified. Suddenly, she made a movement to my side and picking up the necklace she had thrown off, hurriedly fastened it again round her neck.

Just then Licinius Sura entered.

' I crave thy pardon, lord,' said Valeria greeting him with courtesy, 'for having prayed thy grace this moment past. My sister and I had much to talk over and arrange, seeing we both are left, for the time, widowed.'

Licinius glanced at her sharply. Then with his arms folded before him he bowed very low.

' Nay, it is I, most noble Valeria, who should crave thy courtesy in the matter and thy pardon, for my intrusion,' he said. ' Nevertheless, seeing that I had not the chance just now to bid thee farewell and, as urgent matters call me upon a long journey, I liked not to leave Rome without a word from one who hath extended me so much favour.'

And with that, he glanced very sharply at Valeria, seeming to watch whether his words went home.

Valeria drew back a shade and returned his look, in which I seemed to see the pain and yet with it the outward coldness. She bent her head, but said naught.

' To-morrow,' he added, ' I start hence for Judaea.'

Now, it seemed as though this were a sword to pierce Valeria's breast, and I looked to see her tremble and cry out. But she did neither.

Again she bent her head. ' A long journey, in truth. And do thy wife and son go with thee?'

Licinius seemed confounded. He answered not for a moment. Then he returned her speech with a half-smile.

' The Domina is pleased to jest,' he said. ' Such journeys are not fit for women or for babes.'

' And yet my sister here,' rejoined Valeria, ' thinks naught of wandering twice as far in the wake of her devoted lord. Vitellia hath made many a journey with Asiaticus.'

Licinius bowed as courtesy demanded and Vitellia rose. She seemed eager to be gone, for now she was sure and satisfied—and perchance she may have felt the interview an awkward one. Yet she would fain have had another word with Valeria and, as she bade her farewell, she drew her with her to the door.

' Why didst thou not tell me he was wed?' she murmured as Valeria kissed her farewell.

Valeria returned her embrace and then turned towards Licinius, smiling, but her look was hard.

' In truth, I do not know,' she said and added as Vitellia passed without, ' Methinks, because to me it hath never seemed that marriage is such a bar to disloyalty and unfaithfulness as thou dost deem it, Vitellia.'

' Of what speakest thou?' asked Licinius as the curtains closed behind Vitellia.

Valeria sat her down and signed him to a seat. I looked towards my
mistress not knowing if it were her pleasure to dismiss me, but she made a
little motion of her head that I should remain where I stood within the
doorway: and then she answered Licinius.

'My sister was expressing surprise that I had not ere this thought to
mention to her that thou wast wedded.'

'Hadst thou done so,' said Licinius firmly, crossing one leg over the
other, 'thou wouldst have told an untruth.'

And then he threw his formal manner aside and bent forward.

'What means this, Valeria? To-morrow I leave thee. The gods alone
know when I shall return. Wherefore art thou cold to me?'

'Cold—wherefore am I cold?' said Valeria, gazing at him and drawing
a little back in her chair. 'How can I be aught but cold? What of—
Salome?'

'So thou didst hear,' cried Licinius. 'A pest on that loose tongue of
Paulinus. His untimely banter is like to raise a whirlwind if it had been of
any account. But it was not. Thine own heart might have told thee that,
Valeria. Why hast thou judged me thus unheard?'

'Why hast thou remained unheard?' she said. 'Why didst thou not tell
me thyself of this Salome, and of thy son?'

Licinius rose and shrugged his shoulders vexedly. He took two turns
around the room and then coming back stood before Valeria, one foot thrust
out, his arms folded, a frown upon his handsome face, and yet a look of
tenderness round his lips.

'Why should I have told thee?' he asked. 'Is it to such as thee, Valeria,
that a man would bring his stories of the foolish passions of his youth?
Come, then, I should be like Paulinus himself who pollutes the ears of his
latest love with vile tales of those that have preceded her. This Salome—
shall I tell thee who she is and what she hath been to me?'

Valeria slowly nodded. Her eyes were cast down and she said no word.

'A freedwoman with a tinge of Jewish blood like myself, who took my
fancy when I was a young, impetuous boy—scarce more; a woman older
than I and with wiles enough to captivate a dozen such fools. I bought
and freed her—wherein I was as unwise as many another. The child—well,
yes—there is a child—she calls him my son, and so I suppose he is. But
he—well, he's a nice little fellow — Why need we talk of him? The
woman alone—Valeria, dost think she has been aught to me since I have
known thee?'

'Verily, my vanity would say no,' she answered. 'And even now I'd
fain believe thee. Yet how may I? Did I not tell thee in those early days—
she paused and a sweet flush came over her face—'Did I not tell thee that
Paulinus himself had spoken of this woman and her boy—and thou, to me,
didst deny their very existence?'

'Like enough,' replied Licinius smiling as he kneeled at her feet. 'Thou
wouldst not have me remember, Sweet, wouldst thou—every lie I have
uttered to cover my folly?'

But Valeria drew back. 'I would have thee truthful,' she said—'at least
in thy dealings with me.'

'And so I have been,' he replied, 'since I have desired naught but
thee. And if I had ever lied about Salome it was no great matter save to
thrust her out of my sight and out of thy thought. But I spoke truly,
Valeria, when I said that she was naught to me. 'Tis long since she hath
been—and, Sweet, since first thou didst agree, even when thou didst lie
in mine arms here, that thou wouldst, in heart at least, be mine—that
night I bade Salome leave my house. She hath not been there since,
save on trivial matters dealing with the child. The woman is naught to me.
Believe it, oh, Valeria. She was never my wife. Dost think, thou dear,
unwise lady, that Licinius would link his fate with such as she?
‘I think naught—’ replied Valeria. ‘I know naught—save that all the
world is against me: and that thou, too, Marcus, dost not give me much
support to lean upon.’
‘Nay, now—have I not said that mine arm and my heart wait for thee?’
he said.
‘Ay—ay,’ cried Valeria, rising and pushing him from her. ‘Thou wouldst
silence me with kisses, Licinius, but when hast thou offered to play the part
of a noble lover and take me from the protection of Paulinus so that the law
may make me justly thine?’
Licinius rose, too, from his position and a vexed look crossed again his
dark, handsome face.
‘It is impossible,’ he said. ‘Valeria, thou knowest not what thou dost
demand. Blame not my love, Sweet, for that is altogether thine. But,
for the rest of me, Licinius is not wholly his own. Licinius belongs to such
as are bound up with him—their interests his—their aspirations and
ambitions his—their hopes, their fears his—inextricably mingled. How
can Licinius desert those who thus rely upon him?’
‘Tis not the first time thou hast talked in this way, Marcus,’ she said;
‘and I would fain understand thee. What is this in thy life in which I may
not share? What are thy ambitions and thy projects? Who are these
with whom thou art thus bound? Doth not Valeria stand closer than
they?’
‘Valeria stands closest of all,’ he said, drawing her passionately to him
till her head rested upon his shoulder. ‘Valeria is to Licinius dearest of all.
She rests within the very centre of his heart as he would fain rest in hers.
Let Valeria be to Licinius that haven from all these worldly projects and
plots whereof he may not now speak. But let her not demand to know more
of them, for that, alas! Licinius may not yet tell.’
‘I would not ask it of thee,’ she answered, clinging to him. ‘But am I
not prepared to give up all for thee, Marcus? Thou hast complained —and
she dropped her face and half-hid it on his breast—‘that I will not give thee
that which thou dost demand—love’s dearest, last, best pledge of all. Yet
have I told thee that I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest and will
become wholly thine if thou wilt but pledge thyself in like manner unto me.’
He stooped over her and his lips seemed lost in the waving tresses of
her hair, which, half-loosened, lay against his shoulder.
‘Tempt me not, Valeria,’ he said. ‘If this be the price of thy favour,
how shall I accept it—seeing, as I have told thee, that my word is not mine
to pledge? I am bound, Valeria, by ties of honour which I may not even
name, to give my first services to those who now demand them. These be
evil days wherein to fail in obligations which are farther reaching than the
embraces of love. None can tell what ill may chance by the breaking of a
bond, by the failure to be in readiness when the time is ripe. Valeria,
I may not listen to thee—‘tis no idle matter, this. Believe, my dear, how
great is my pain when thou dost force me thus from thee. Give thyself to
me ungrudgingly and thou shalt not regret it.’
‘But thou wouldst leave me, Marcus.’
"DEMETER! COMFORT ME!"

'To-morrow, duty calls me hence. But to-night is our own,' he answered, bending his head again on hers.

She trembled sorely as she lay in his arms, and then slowly, with a movement of infinite regret, she withdrew herself from him.

'Nay,' she answered, brushing back her hair with hands that shook, and looking piteously in his face. 'Thou hast said it is impossible to take me hence as the law doth permit. And I . . . But think not that I could accept any lesser seal of thy love. Haply, I am not as other Roman matrons, Marcus. Some there be that do still regard the sanctity of marriage ties—as doth Vitellia, who left me but now, rejoicing in my fealty to Paulinus. But I, though I think not with her and deem unholy all ties that be not bound with love, yet am I not as other Roman women in that I would pledge myself to one who scorns to grant me such action as were seemly on his part.'

'Speak not so, beloved,' he answered. 'We are at cross purposes, Valeria, when our love should make us one. Give thyself to me. Be wholly mine to-night, in pledge of that which thou hast given—for thy heart I know is mine—and of that which thou shalt give, and I'll vow myself to thee eternally. And perchance, when these matters, with which I must now concern myself, be favourably settled so that brighter days shine upon my fortune and upon Rome itself, then may I make thee mine in the eyes of the world.'

Valeria answered not at first. Then she shook her head, and then held out her hand.

'Come back to me, Marcus, when those days have dawned,' she said. 'Take me then, and Valeria will give herself utterly unto thee.'

He caught her to him almost fiercely and kissed her face over and over again, folding his arms round her and snatching her to his breast.

'Thou dost ask too much of a man, Valeria,' he said. 'Thy sweetness would madden a saint. Wherefore should I wait. Why shouldst thou thus keep me on the brink of bliss for long months—we know not how long. We are alone here together to-night. What stands between us? What shall prevent me now from making this farewell of thine, which we may not forego, the sweetest that ever yet has been?'

'Why not,' she said. 'What is it that stands between us? Wouldst thou know, Marcus?' and she withdrew herself and glanced sadly around the chamber. 'It is this. Until thou takest me hence, I am Paulinus's wife—not thine. And, while I do here remain, his last words as he left these rooms spring in mine ears. "They shall be sacred to thine honour and to my name."'

Licinius listened to her, eagerly at first, and then as she ended with that strange, fixed look upon her face, he turned from her angrily.

'Choose thou, then,' he said. 'Paulinus and thine honour, or thy love and me.'

'I have chosen,' she answered mournfully. 'Thou canst say naught to move Valeria. Alack! I dare not even desire that thou couldst. My love thou hast, as thou knowest, Marcus: and whether thou comest again or comest not ever, Valeria will be true to thee. Paulinus is my lawful spouse—in name, and in name only. In heart and mind I am wholly thine. But if thou wouldst ratify that pledge by the ordinary means of marriage, it must rest with thee to do so as beseemeth one of thy gens to one of mine.'

She stood back, her hands held out, but, as he took no heed of them she
dropped them to her side. Licinius angrily slipped his toga over one shoulder and strode towards the door and there he paused and turned.

' Prate not of thy gens,' he cried. ' Tis the pride of thy gens that stands between us—not this nonsense of Paulinus's honour. I had been wiser not to seek warm blood in such as thee. Thou art graven in stone, Valeria, whilst I have poured out all that man might give before thy feet. Remain thus cold and proud if thou wilt. Thou'lt have time enough to think whether thou wouldst not have done better to warm thyself at my love. I go now: and, as I said, the gods alone know when I may return. If ever thou shouldst cast a thought my way, let it not I pray thee be thus coldly lest I feel the iceshaft even on the sun-baked plains of Judea. I have my duty to do there, and much to fulfil before Rome shall see me again. Do thou as fate willeth. Fulfil thine."

There was a sneer in his voice as he turned away. Valeria stared after him with wide-open eyes, seeming not to believe that he was going. She held out her arms and cried softly, scarce above her breath:

' Marcus—oh Marcus, leave me not thus.'

He paused upon the threshold and turned and took three steps back to her side.

' Nay,' said he, ' if I leave thee at all to-night, I needs must leave thee thus. I am of flesh and blood, Valeria, though thou art of stone. Nay, nay, touch me not. Stand back. Thou hast bid me go and I had best begone.'

Again he swung his toga round him and strode to the door. This time he disappeared.

For a minute or two, Valeria stood where he had left her, while I scarce dared breathe. Methought she had not known that I was there. Presently, she lifted one hand and brushed it across her face, pushing back her loosened hair. Then with slow steps she turned and went towards her bedchamber.

I dared not follow her. I waited till the minutes grew too long and the silence was more than I could bear. Then again, I took my courage in my hands and went after her.

A light was in the bedchamber and, as I approached, I saw that she had lit a swinging lamp above the alcove. The voilet silk curtains with their silver fringe were drawn apart and Valeria stood at the side within them, one hand holding back a curtain. But I thought not of her, for I saw, above the low altar beyond, a marble image of a loveliness surpassing any such that I had known. 'Twas the head of some female divinity, her head of stately poise yet with an appearance of a very gracious simplicity. The hair was parted at the middle height of the forehead, and waved on either side down over the ears. The lips were as though shaped to a smile, grave but mother-sweet, and the whole face was of an exceeding tenderness and seemed to bend upon Valeria a look of love in most wondrous human-wise.

And as I watched, I saw Valeria cast herself in abasement before the image, all her loosened hair about her shoulders and her green and silver palla spreading behind her.

' Mother,' she cried. ' Mother Divine! Thou, who by the anguish of thine own tender heart, dost know the pangs which assail the souls of women, look down upon this suffering soul of mine. Thou, who didst search all the world for thy young daughter snatched from thee by the lawless passion of him who stole her into slavery—Thou, who hast learned how bitter can be the bondage where love is not, yet who, in thy supreme wisdom, dost

1 Statue of Demeter. See Appendix 5, Bk. III.
comprehend the more bitter thraldom of love itself. Oh hear! and in pity soothe this heart which bleedeth at thy feet. Demeter, hear and comfort me.'

Then, being sore distressed at the sight of my lady in such case, and yet there being naught I could do, for I dared not show myself, I turned me away without sound and waited in the antechamber till she should summon me.

This she did after a long time—or so it seemed—and I found her in the bedchamber, she, herself, having begun the unrobing.

The curtains before the alcove were drawn and the lamp above them extinguished and my lady spoke calmly, giving me command that none others of her women should attend her that night, and bidding me fetch her food and drink. Of this, when I had brought a tray, fair-set, she partook sparingly but in sufficient quantity to sustain her strength, and when the unrobing was ended and she lay in bed, her face turned to the wall, a great sigh escaped her.

And then I bent me down and kissed her feet as they lay beneath the coverlet and Valeria put forth her hand.

'Thou art a good child, Nyria,' she said. 'Thou at least art faithful.'

And I said naught, for my heart was full, but went to mine own little chamber."

NYRIA: "Now, for a time after the departure of Paulinus and likewise of Licinius Sura, all was quiet at the villa and I suffered naught save from the wrath of the slaves against me, in that Valeria would admit few but myself to her close attendance, which caused great jealousy seeing that I was regarded as an interloper. But for this I cared little, so only that I might serve my mistress.

In those days, Valeria scarce left her apartment and no news came to me from without but for what Crispus sometimes brought to Aeola.

Oft my mind dwelt upon those with whom I had been in the service of Julia and I did promise myself to visit Aemilia in the house of Plinius at such time as I could be spared. But that time came not. Concerning Stephanus, I was ill at ease, for I could not understand his harshness and it seemed that he had forsaken me. Yet my chiefest thought beyond Valeria was of the lord Clement and his promise that he would see me again, and I wondered that the Domina Domitilla seemed also to have forgotten me and that, seeing she must have heard of the sale of Julia's slaves, she had made no sign to buy me.

For, I knew not then that there had been talk between her and her husband, Flavius Clemens, on the matter and that they had decided it were not wise to rouse, mayhap, the anger of Domitian, since all that had belonged to Julia was now in the possession of Caesar though, by right, it should have come into that of Sabinus's brother.

Yet methought that sometime I should see Domitilla at the house of Valeria, for I had watched them in converse together in Julia's house and in the houses of others and I knew that Domitilla doth favour my domina.

... Of Valeria, at first, I was not sure. ... 'Tis curious to note toward whom my domina hath favour and whom she doth not favour. Thou must not think she is untrue. But she hath a way. ... She is very courteous, very gracious, as besemeth her state; but there is a little smile behind—somewhat of her self held back all the while. It doth amuse me sometimes
for I seem to know what she is thinking and mayhap afterward she doth
tell me of it. But I knew that Domitilla did touch something at the bottom
of her that is real. . . . Yet, though my domina hath a certain interest in
the Christians—she hath read the Letters of Peter and Paul, treating all
such things as new and like to be amusing—she would but smile if Domitilla
said aught to her of that faith which is all to Domitilla. . . .

Now, Domitilla and Clemens like best to visit my domina when she is
alone. They are not clever—either of them. They care not for Greek
learning or philosophy. . . .

But, thou knowest, I am the last to speak of such matters. . . . I know
naught of learning. . . . I can but tell thee what I think and I would not
have thee regard my impressions as being quite true unless thou wert sure
thyself. . . . I cannot bear to say things about persons which may not
be really true. It is a matter I am particular about. Now, most of the
slaves are not so, and in answering questions they often make people out
as not quite what they really are.

Thou knowest, my heart did yearn to comfort my domina, who—well
I knew, though she spake not his name nor did I dare to utter it—grieved
most sore for the loss of Licinius Sura. Silent she would sit brooding heavily,
refusing to see her friends and having no taste for her former occupations
nor even for the studies in which she had been wont to interest herself.
She was ever dreaming, and when, as did sometimes hap, I saw her writing
I knew it was to relieve her bursting heart by thus communing in thought
with Licinius. Alas! a useless commune, to ease herself alone. For, of a
truth, she knew not how to send the letters or where in Judaea they might
have found him or might perchance have fallen into other hands than his.

Once or twice did the secretary present himself for orders—a middle-
aged man, a Greek, by name Phileros. But she would shake her head and
once I heard her say that he might finish the tragedy himself if he were so
minded. And that she who was living tragedy had not time nor thought to
write it. 'Twas her belief, she added, that could anyone among the great
characters in those Greek plays which she loved, step down from the page
in human guise and be bidden to write his story, verily he would shrink
from so doing if he were indeed true flesh and blood. For that only one
made of parchment and with no real blood in his veins would consent to
make himself a show for the world.

And the secretary bowed and answered it should be as she might please;
and he went away muttering to himself and with a sad look upon his face.

Yet I mind me that one day, to my surprise, the poet Martial obtained
admittance. At first, she had bade him nay. But Chabrias bore her a
scroll which Martial had bidden him place in her hand and which was sealed
with Paulinus's signet.

I saw her face change as she read it and laid the scroll down beside her.
With her brows drawn together, she seemed to be considering the matter,
then bade Chabrias give the poet entrance.

Martial came forward and made a bow, exceeding courteous yet, meseemed,
savouring of servility.

'I will not crave thy pardon for my intrusion, Most Noble Valeria,' he
said, 'since I have Paulinus's permit to visit thee. Thine illustrious husband,
whom it hath been my privilege to call friend and who doth honour me by
recalling that I am in somewhat distant connection his cousin,\(^1\) upon that

\(^1\) The poet's name was Marcus Valerius Martialis.
last day when he took of thee so tender a farewell, did commend thee to my
care—inasmuch as one so lowly placed may venture to offer a measure of
friendly service to the Most Noble Valeria.'

My lady signed him coldly to a seat.

'I also am indeed honoured,' she said, 'to have been at once the subject
of interest to two such minds as those of my noble spouse and the poet
Martial. Since thou art here, sir, I pray thee wile away somewhat of these
long hours whereof my husband speaks, by amusing me as he says thou
wilt.'

'Tis that for which I have come, lady,' replied Martial, whose wit,
measured, was truly the ready wit of one not over-scrupulous in his means.
'I have here one or two little poems which perhaps thou wilt allow me to
recite to thee later on. Now amongst thy household I have discovered a
goodly youth with a wondrous gift of music who, like myself, hath no desire
but to serve thee. It hath occurred to me that it would be a pleasing
occupation for the youth Gregorio if he should sing to some tunes of his
own these lines which I have composed in thine honour.'

Valeria smiled a little sneeringly but spoke courteously as was her wont.

'Thou art very good,' she said. 'The boy Gregorio hath, as thou sayest,
a fine gift of music. If thou wilt, Martial, he shall sing me some of thy
songs.'

Whereat, Gregorio was summoned and bidden to string his lyre and to
pick among such melodies as he had conceived within his brain any that
might fit the songs of Martial.

And, as I watched the two and perceived the ill-concealed pride and
satisfaction of Gregorio, it seemed to me that of a certainty the boy had well
practised with Martial upon those self-same songs and now found small
difficulty in fitting them to their several tunes.

Thou knowest that I had no liking for Gregorio nor he for me. He was
jealous of Valeria's favour towards me and oft had it entered my mind that
the boy might work mischief were he ever to guess the truth concerning my
domina and Licinius Sura.'