and I would not seem ashamed of my companions and of my faith. And the man told me to keep my silly tongue between my teeth and not to chatter thus if I wished to save my skin.

Now, more soldiers leaped from the rocks amongst us and, but for the torches flaring in that dimness, some women and children would have been trampled to death as the soldiers seized certain ones who were trying to flee and evilly entreated such as resisted. But, for the most part, the Christians said little, and the weaker ones seemed stunned by the suddenness and violence of the onslaught coming when they had least thought of it.

The man who had taken me kept his hold on my bare shoulder. But I could not endure the grasp of his great hand and, in the riot, I did contrive—I know not how—to twist myself away. I leaned me against a high rock in the shadow and, now, pulled my cloak over my head as many others were doing, and some were hoping to escape. But, every moment, the soldiers made more prisoners.

And then I saw Licinius Sura. He was taller than the rest and he stood by himself in a little open space; and at first they did not touch him, so busy were they with those that gave trouble. He stood quite still with his cloak wrapped round him and the hood over his head. Methought, he might have passed to one side and got away unnoticed. But he moved not and I heard one of the soldiers call out: 'Where is he—the man we have come to find? Amongst this rabble, who can there be of any consequence?'

Another two or three soldiers rushed forward and one called roughly: 'Whom have we here?' and plucked at his cloak. But Licinius flung it open and stood facing them and answered straight.

'Licinius Sura.' He gave his name proudly, like that. . . . And he asked:

'Is it I whom ye seek?'

Then the captain of that company—he who had spoken—went up to him and said a few words in a low tone.

Licinius nodded his head sharply and folded his arms but would not speak another word. . . . And then the soldiers closed round him and I saw him no more. . . . And I felt sick and sore afraid. The ground seemed to rock under me and I put out my hand to steady myself. But I should have fallen had not a soldier caught me—he who had spoken to me before—and he told me I must bear up and go along with the rest; and I had to go.

Oh, it was a very long way. . . . Thou knowest, the place was outside the city and though we could reach it by these wild paths I have told thee of—and by that secret passage by which I went to my baptism—they knew nought of those shorter ways and marched us round by the public road, which was far to go. . . . The soldiers put us in the middle and closed us in so that none might pass their spears. . . . I knew not how I stumbled along or whither I was going. . . . I had lost count of things.

There was an old woman—a kind old woman—next me in the crowd. I know not who she was. She held my hand and talked to me. . . . She said it gave her comfort to feel a young warm hand like mine. She said that she knew she was going to her death and that she would fain keep in touch with life as long as she could. . . . But meseems, there was not much life in me just then. . . .

We got into the town—I remember not into what part—I mind me that the stones seemed to rise up and strike my feet. . . . I could not walk.
straight... There was a singing in my ears and, methinks, I fell. ... I remember no more about that. ...

   Afterward, they told me that I had stumbled in the dark and fallen—
the soldiers hurried us so—and that a soldier had picked me up and carried
me. ...

   I knew not whither they were taking us, but I must have wakened some­
what when they got to the place, for I mind me of a great building stretching
out in the dim light and some knew it for a prison, and some did not. ...
And again I lost myself. ..."

   

   Nyria (resuming): "When I awoke I was in  prison—that was a long
time after—at least so meseemed. ... It was a cold, dark place—the
cold I minded not—in which we were crowded all together. The floor was
stone and very hard and there was naught to lie upon. My cloak was
under me—that grey cloak my domina had given me—and that was a
comfort ... all of us had not cloaks. ... My face was wet and my hair.
... They told me that the soldier who had carried me dashed water over
me when he brought me in.

   I know not the name of the prison1—I never thought about the name
of the place. ... I ought to know. ... They were talking of it among
themselves. ... I could get to know for thee. ... It was a big prison. ...

   All seemed to me dimness and bewilderment, down there. 'Twas a prison
that lay underground, but not very deep. There were gratings that went
up above the earth, and such light and air as came in did come through them.
Thus, it was fortunate to obtain a seat near a grating. And yet, at first,
the people did not think of that. Such as were friends or belonged to the
same family herded together and, of the rest, the women in one part and
the men in another. ... There were divisions of a kind—little rooms that
went one into another; many of them having no doors: and, in some parts,
there were dividing pillars, or bits of wall that jutted out and separated one
place from another. ... The men and women were put in all together, but,
in a manner, they separated themselves. ... Most of the women who
had husbands, clung to them, and some had children, but these were
few....

   Yet many had got quite separated. Afterwards, when other prisoners were
thrust upon us, sometimes they were relatives of those who had been already
taken.

   Most of the people were in great dread, and they kept calling to one
another to ask if their friends were there. And such as had left behind
those whom they loved, called for them also. Some had children at home,
and one man had left a young sick wife who was expecting her baby; and
he was sore troubled and desiring to know how she fared. But none came
to us from outside whom we might question.

At first, I scarce gave heed to what was going on around me.... All
my thought was to get back to my domina. ... I did not think then of
seeking some means of letting her know into what pit I had fallen. I was
too sick and frightened to think of anything—it had come so very suddenly
and it all seemed like a nightmare. ... I had only known—when I spoke
to the soldier—that I must not deny my religion. ... That was the one

1 Afterwards Nyria said that she thought it was the Mamertine. (Recorder.)
sensible thought I had. . . . There was nothing else clear in my mind. . . . But when dawn came, I began to remember a little. A faint light was showing through the gratings. I crawled near to one of them and laid me down in a corner by it because there I got more air.

And then I wondered about my domina. I expected that she would miss me at the morning-robing and that, when she heard what had happened, she would send and get me out, though I minded me that she had asked me no questions and had seemed to pay no heed when I had told her whither I was bound. But I knew that Aeola would tell her and I was sure that she would send and save me. I did not think there would be any difficulty, because my master always had a great deal of power and could do almost anything he pleased, and Valeria had but to ask him if she were not able to manage it herself. I knew that she would not mind asking him that for me, and I did not trouble very much except for the waiting in that dark prison.

Somewhat I remembered of Paulinus being at Albanum that night. Yet I felt sure that Valeria would send. . . . But the time went on and no one came, and then I thought that she might not know I was in prison and I hoped she would hear before evening, for she would wonder where I could be, and it would distress her.

I never thought then of Licinius or that the soldiers would have taken him. I supposed that they had just wanted him to tell them something, for the officer who had spoken to him was a friend of his and I had seen none lay hand on him save when the soldier had rudely pulled his cloak, not knowing who he was. I could not have believed that he, too, was a prisoner. . . . He was not down there among us—at least, methinks he could not have been. . . . I crawled around later in the day and, perchance, had he been there I might have seen him.

They brought in and set down for us jugs of water and some coarse brown cake—the country kind. There was nothing else; and some of the women were perishing for lack of food and were too weak to get it for themselves. I did what I could, but my arms were shaking so that I could scarce pour out the water and I ached all over me. Methinks, it was partly from the fever and partly from lying so long on the damp stones. . . . But we were all suffering together and my suffering was less, mayhap, than that of many others. . . .

And then the old woman made claim on my kindness, for she was feeble and had been injured in the struggle. One of the men had pushed her down and her poor old shoulders were bruised and sore, and she cried for some of those belonging to her though none had been with her when we were taken. Haply, I did comfort her somewhat, for she leaned on me and I made her drink a little water and eat some of the coarse bread. But, for myself, I felt to want it not, seeing that I had been well fed at the farm, and, in Valeria's household, we had all that we could desire and, verily, not one of us would have touched such food. . . . But, after a while, I made pretence to eat that thus I might encourage the others.

And all that day passed and no one came. . . . So dim was the prison that, at first, one scarce knew night from day and, at evening, the blackness fell quickly. They lent us not torches unless—as happed after a while—certain persons visited the prison. . . . But for me, as yet, none came."
NYRIA: "Thou understandest, my mind is greatly clouded concerning that time. It cometh to me in broken parts. Methinks, I lost myself between; and, verily, it be like unto an evil dream from which I awoke to sick confusion and pain and weakness, so that, oft, I could not drag my limbs or lift my head.

I will try to make clear to thee the order of certain happenings which I knew. But there be much that, even now, I know not. . . .

Thus, the days went on—methinks two or three or mayhap more—I know not. . . . And the number of us increased, seeing that every day fresh prisoners were thrown in among us. For many of those trying to escape had been traced to their homes and brought in. . . . I heard the people talking among themselves and they were wondering who had done this thing and if there were one false among us who had betrayed the rest. . . . 'Twas certain, they said, that some one must have given forth a clue to our meeting-place in the old Quarries—or how could the Praetorians have known where to find the entrance? . . .

And I heard men asking each other and some of the women among us, whether they had always been careful to keep everything secret as we had been taught to do. . . . And I felt very unhappy; and yet I knew it was impossible that harm could have come through me, because there was no one to whom I had told anything except Stephanus and my domina, and they, I knew, could both be trusted not to say or do aught to injure us. . . . Stephanus was ever wary in his talk and, besides, he had been himself to some of the meetings, and, for my sake, he would have been doubly careful.

And then, I could not doubt my domina. She could not have been untrue. I knew that she did not care really about things that concerned not herself and that she liked me to tell her about the Christians only just because she was interested in what was strange or new, and because, she said, I had a way of prating that did distract her thoughts from the life in Rome that she loved not. . . . And my domina was not a careless speaker—one of those who say things without thinking. . . . It was not only because of me that she would be careful. She knew that the Christians had been persecuted before and, mayhap, might be again. And she knew—for I had told her—that some of her friends, such as Clemens and Domitilla, were of the faith and she had said to me how strange it oft seemed to her to meet them and to know their doings and to say nothing. . . . Oh, never could my domina have betrayed us—I felt 'twas dreadful to harbour for a moment such a suspicion. . . . I hated the thought yet it would keep coming back. . . . Thou knowest, we had been told we must never tell anyone . . . and I had told her everything—always.

Now, there was the old priest—an Elder—him they called Gaius—who seemed sore disturbed in mind at what had befallen. . . . He sat in his own corner and muttered to himself. For the others pressed not too close upon Gaius, seeing that he was of note in the Church. Yet it was not long since his baptism and he had been but as ourselves. Nevertheless, was he considered a very godly man and, as such, had obtained preferment under Bishop Clement, and now all thought of him as better than the rest, he being an Elder of the Church.

Methinks that the hearts of many were filled with feelings they feared he would condemn. Yet, at first, they murmured not loudly nor shewed anger, seeming but as people in great tribulation—the women moaning and
the men questioning each other if there were aught that could be done. 
. . . But, thou knowest, we were all just like unto a flock of sheep.

Now Gaius presently raised his hands to heaven and lamented aloud that already the pains of hell had hold of him and that he feared the torments of death were approaching. Wherefore, he said, the Spirit of the Lord had come upon him and told him that there was a traitor amongst us—and which of us could it be?

And each looked at the other and murmured among themselves and asked:

‘Who is it. . . . Who is it?’

Then Gaius said that, haply, the traitor had not been taken, but that, of a surety, his sin would find him out and the punishment due to one who had betrayed the Lord’s Elect would fall upon him; and, said he, the terrors of that man would be greater than any such as could come to us who had not committed this sin of Judas—he that had betrayed the Master Christ.

And these words of Gaius disturbed the people and the men said that if they could find that man they would fall upon him themselves; and the women said that if it were a woman they would fain themselves tear her to pieces. . . . But I held my breath, knowing naught, and waited all that day for Valeria to send for me.

Then, towards eve, Gaius, having somewhat recovered himself, came amongst us and commanded that we should draw together around him; and he knelt and prayed that if it were the Lord’s will, the finger might point to the betrayer, so that we might know our enemy and scorn him while yet we should take care to keep ourselves true.

Now I liked not the prayer of Gaius, for it seemed to me that one, having done such wrong, lieth in the hand of God to be punished: or—if the offender hath suffered and repented—to be forgiven, even as the Lord Jesus forgave those who nailed Him on the Cross. And that it was not for such as we are to scorn such an one, seeing that none of us can know his own weakness, but that rather should we pity him and pray for his forgiveness.

But Gaius, having prayed after his own manner, we all sang a hymn. Then they brought us in again jugs of water and the cakes of brown bread, and I took them round and waited on those who could not fetch for themselves, for there were many weak: and some, besides the old woman, had been injured by the soldiers though, afterwards, we heard that Caesar had given orders that none were to be struck down.

It was while the people were again asking among themselves concerning who might have betrayed us, that some named Licinius Sura, and questioned whether it could have been he. . .

‘Wherefore,’ said they, ‘did he come among us? Wherefore did he seem to spy out our ways and ask us so many questions concerning our worship?’

For it appeared that Licinius Sura, although he went forth in disguise from his villa, did not, among these good folk, conceal his name. But it had been his way to tell them all he was of the same blood as themselves and felt an interest in all that concerned them. But, now, many were angered when they spoke of him, and some doubted his Jewish blood, and some said he was a Roman spy, and most who knew aught of him did attribute the wrong to him. For it was proved that he had not wished to be admitted into the faith and had shrunk from converse with Gaius who often received, first, such as desired to come to the Bishop.”
**NYRIA:** “Methinks, it was the next day about noon—or it may have been more days—I know not—that Stephanus came among us, he having obtained a written permit which should allow him to visit the Christians in prison—and this not for his own pleasure but because it was Caesar’s will that such as were sick should be tended. For Caesar wanted no ailing ones to make sport for his Show—but this we knew not till later.

And when Stephanus stood there, I could scarce believe it—he looked so strange. His hair seemed grey in the dim light and his face so thin and drawn. A soldier came in with him who was on guard at the door. Now and again, one or two of the soldiers would walk through the rooms, and this was one I knew not. But he was not a bad man and, afterwards, he was kind to me. And Stephanus, when he saw me, gave a great sigh: and I ran to him and he took me in his arms and did embrace me, forgetting the rest of us. But they rose up from the stones where they lay and such as stood about turned and hailed him, for some of them he had tended when sick, and some others knew him.

‘Thou comest as a messenger from the outside world,’ they said. ‘What news dost thou bring?’

But he heeded them not and only clung to me, saying:

‘Verily, thou hast wellnigh escaped me. What shall I say unto thee, Nyria? Haply, Stephanus cannot be wroth with thee, seeing he hath found thee again. But wherefore didst thou do this thing? How should he have known that thou wast here?’

And then he told me that he had but overheard a chance word among the soldiery that Paulinus’s yellow-haired maid was among the prisoners. For, believing me safe at the farm, he had thought to himself that ‘twas well I was not in Rome.

‘Thou hast been unfair—unfair to a man all along,’ he cried. ‘Verily, thou hast served me ill... And I would have died, Nyria, to save thee this!’

But seeing that I clung to him and wept, he soothed me as one might sooth a babe. ‘There! There! Haply, thou hast learned wisdom. And thou shalt not be called upon to suffer, even though Stephanus stand in thy stead. Yet wiser wouldst thou have been, Nyria, hadst thou not placed faith in yonder fiendish-hearted woman. For, knowest thou not?—'Tis all over Rome that she hath done this deed? She—so that the man she hath grown tired of should be removed from her path... Ay, such is Valeria!... And I told thee... and thou wouldst not believe it.’

Now, the folks around had heard his words, and with one accord they cried her name, ‘Valeria!... Valeria? Who is this Valeria?’

But Stephanus seemed to hear them not, for all his mind was bent on me. ‘Thou hast been wiser to beware of Valeria, as I said,’ he persisted, and pressed my face against his shoulder. ‘Perchance it is through thy prattle that she hath learned enough to enable her to do this deed... There!... There!... Weep not, child. I say not that it is so. But well I know the confidence thou hast placed in Valeria. And well do I know, alack! how she doth repay them that fain would serve her.’

But the crowd clamoured to be heard. ‘Who is this Valeria? they cried again, ‘and what truck hath she with this Christian maid?’

And one or two of the men repeated the question and called on Stephanus to answer them; and he said:

‘Valeria is this maid’s mistress,’ and, holding me closer, he turned his back a little to shield me.
'Weep not so, Nyria,' he said. 'At least, my dear, thou didst mean no falsity.'

Whereon the men tried to lay forcible hands upon me. 'Hath the maid been false?' they cried. 'Let her speak and answer for herself.' . . . And others said:

'Of what use to ask her. If she hath been false, she will be false again.' .

. . . And the women cried: 'Lo! We have harboured a traitor.'

Then Stephanus spake them back roughly, asking, 'Would ye have the wisdom of sages from the mouth of a young maid?'

And as they clamoured the more to know the truth, he nodded toward the soldier. 'Ask him . . . he knoweth.'

So they called upon the guard . . . 'Tell us. Was it a woman who betrayed us?'

And he jeered, 'Ay, verily. When did a woman not betray? . . . When was there not a woman where there was mischief? . . . If men go forth to hunt, they go for sport, but women's sport is to snare. . . . Truly, ye were caught like rabbits in a hole. Never was there such a nest of rabbits as we took that night.'

Then still they questioned the guard, shouting, 'Tell us . . . tell us who did betray us?'

And, verily, they looked as though they would have fallen upon him, although he was armoured, so fiercely did they all press around him.

But he drew himself against the wall and thrust his spear before him, and said loudly, 'Back, ye vermin. . . . Back, ye bouncers. . . . Ye will leap no more upon your native plains, for when Caesar sets his quarry forth, Caesar himself doth quickly follow. . . . Back to your places, I say. . . . Crowd not thus together . . .'

And with the head of his spear, he drove them aside. Then seeing that Stephanus held me close, he bade us stand apart, lest, he said, Stephanus should give me some drug—to ease my punishment. . . . Yet, methinks, the man meant not unkindly to us.

Then did Stephanus draw me away, whispering that he had somewhat special for my ear alone. But because the soldier was looking at us, he dared not touch me, and he could only speak to me in a very low tone from behind his teeth, without moving his lips, so that the men should not see what he was saying. He had often done that with me when I was helping him tend those who were sick, that they, too, should not understand. . . .

And he told me that he was very much afraid for me—that it was all over Rome that the Christians were to be destroyed, and that he must make me escape before it should be too late.

He said that he would come at night and try to loosen the gratings and that then, if I could raise myself at all, he would be able to lift me out by the shoulders, but that I must try to sleep beneath the same grating every night, for he might not always be able to come, and he would have to be very careful because the soldiers were watching all round the prison. But everybody liked Stephanus and trusted him, and it was easier for him to get about among them than it would have been for anyone else.

He told me too that, very likely, there might be another way of escape—that some of the prisoners would be picked out for different parts of the Show—the men for games to try their strength and make sport for the people and that some of them might save their lives in that way . . . And that the women—the good-looking ones, thou knowest—might be kept and
not killed. . . . But he said he would rather they destroyed me than let me live in such fashion. . . . It was very terrible and he could not say much. But to that part I scarcely listened. . . . For I wanted to know about my domina—if he had seen her—if she had heard of what had happened, and did he know why she had not sent for me? . . . And then in his anger, he forgot himself, and threw up his head and spoke clearly, 'That woman! If I can once get thee out of here, thou shalt never go back to her.' And then he said that it was indeed Valeria who had betrayed us all that night. She had done it, he said, to serve some private end of her own, but what that was he understood not. . . .

And the people who had been quieted somewhat, though still murmuring together, heard him; and they shouted again, and pointed at me, and said that for certain I was the traitor who had aided this Valeria in her evil work. . . . And it made me go all cold and stiff, though I knew it was not true that she had done this thing.—Thou wouldst not have believed it, wouldst thou?—And I told them it was not true. . . . But they would have it so: they would not listen, and I think some of them would have killed me if they could have got hold of me then. . . .

Now, I spoke aloud and told Stephanus that he lied—that he had always hated my domina—that he had never understood her—that he was bitter against her because of me—that it had all been my fault he had felt like that—and that perhaps I had been unkind to him, and I was sorry, but that I knew her better than he did, and I was certain she had never betrayed us. Whereat, Stephanus did ask why, if that were so, she had not sent to have me released—she, whose word had so much weight that even Caesar would not have refused her anything did she but smile upon him.

Now, I knew that Stephanus's temper was roused, and there was a taunt in those words. But I let it pass. I said, perhaps my lady did not know where I was—that I was only waiting for her to send someone and that then all would know this story of her to be untrue. . . . And I asked Stephanus would he go to her and tell her I had been brought here and beg her to help me out.

But Stephanus swore that he would as lief beg the life of a lamb from a she-wolf who held it beneath her paw. . . . No, that was not the way to save me. . . . there would be no help there. . . .

And at that, I burst into fresh weeping. . . . I knew he was wrong, but I could not put him right, and I knew it was because of the bitterness in his heart against her and for the unkind way I had treated him. . . . But he was not to be convinced. . . . and, impatiently, he turned again to the soldier and asked him to say by whose doing the cave had been surprised that night and for what motive it had been done.

And the man answered, 'Thou hast said rightly enough—'Twas Valeria, Paulinus's wife, who gave the information, and gossip saith that this woman, who was reputed the proudest and coldest in Rome, had a lover who hath proved false to her and, he being mixed up in the Christian plot, she hath thought to avenge herself on him in this manner. For she would fain, no doubt, have him removed from her path that she might seek a better gallant as 'tis the custom of Roman ladies.' But to his mind, the soldier said, it was wicked work thus to wreak vengeance on others who had done her no wrong. But women had no mercy in their love-affairs, and this one, for all her coldness and her pride, was headstrong and vengeful as the rest.

And, with that, Stephanus turned to me and asked what now I thought.
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But I only shook my head. I could speak no more. I heard the people question excitedly who the man could be. 'For,' said they, 'we have no gladiators amongst us—such as might aspire to be the lover of so great a lady.'

'Tis he whom they call Licinius Sura, 'the ill-begotten spawn of old Sura from his sojourn in that cursed Judaea whence the most of ye come,' replied the soldier. 'But now he be safe enough betwixt these walls and when ye meet again, verily, 'twill be a merry meeting, for, together, ye shall make sport for the gods and Caesar . . . . The gods alone know what he did amongst such as ye,' said the soldier. 'For Sura is a well-favoured man and hath a certain position, though no great riches . . . . Methinks there will be a striving for his villa, where an officer hath already taken possession, driving out a Jewish woman and her brat whom this Sura did harbour.'

'But ye will see naught of that.' 'Twas another soldier—one more cruel-hearted than the first—who spoke. 'For ere then,' said he, 'ye will have formed the bodyguard for the traitor Licinius, to speed him on his way to Hades.'

Then I heard one of us say, 'Mayhap 'twas Licinius Sura who did betray us. Haply, 'twas he who told this Roman lady the secret of our meeting-place.'

And I turned me round on hearing that, but Stephanus put out his hand and pulled me back. 'Hush . . . Hush. Let them think it,' he said. 'Like enough he did.'

But some had caught his words and pointed to me, and cried, 'If not Licinius, 'twas this maid. For if the lady be her mistress, what more easy than that she should be the traitress. Say, girl, didst thou ever speak of us to this fine lady friend of thine?'

Then before I could answer, Stephanus did swing me half-behind him and thrust his hand over my mouth, gripping my face so tight that I bore the marks upon my cheek and chin for a day after . . . . And now, Gaius, who had been saying prayers by himself in a further division of the prison, hearing the sounds did come forward.

'What meaneth this unseemly turbulence?' he asked. 'My friends, though trouble hath come upon ye, bear it with calm and fortitude as it is our duty to do.'

And yet, methought, he himself had not shown so great fortitude.

Then, half a dozen or so called upon him, saying:

'Thou art an Elder of the Church. Tell us, shall we not know the truth? The lot of falsity lieth between this maid and Licinius. Shall she not confess if she be the guilty one?'

Now Gaius liked not Licinius, for Gaius was of the people and his manners were not as those of Licinius. Methinks, he would fain the blame were laid on Licinius as, haply, it might have been had they not asked me that question.

But now, turning to Stephanus, he said, 'Friend, remove thy person from before the maid. I would speak with her.'

And as Stephanus sulkily obeyed, he said:

'Is it thou, Nyria? Surely suspicion hath not fallen on thee? Or if it hath, thou canst refute it? Thou wouldst not have done aught to bring thy brethren into danger?'

But I quavered, and before response came from me the men and women said to Gaius, 'Put thy question differently, Elder. Ask the maid straightforwardly whether she did ever tell her mistress where the Christians meet for worship?"
DEMETER
And Gaius, seeming to understand, turned upon me. 'Hast thou ever told her that?' he asked.

Now I had no mind to lie nor had I time to think. For though I had lied for Valeria, yet never would I have lied for myself; and so sure was I, still, that Valeria had not betrayed us but that, haply, it had been through some accident of Licinius, that I scorned to hide the truth, and answered:

'My lady knoweth that I am a Christian, seeing that she knoweth everything concerning me. Like—likewise—' I began. But again Stephanus stopped me and spoke instead.

'The maid knoweth not what she saith, for she hath had the fever and at times becometh light-headed, and she is sore distressed at that which hath chanced. . . .'

'Distressed! Ay, so are we distressed,' the people cried. 'And who but she herself hath brought about this evil chance?'

'Let the maid speak on,' said Gaius sternly. 'Answer, Nyria, the question that I put thee. Hast thou ever told thy lady of our place of meeting, what hours we meet, and who are like to be there?'

And just a moment I waited, and then I said straightly:

'Ay, sir—that have I done. . . . But Valeria would not betray thee—Valeria would scorn to betray anyone. . . .'

They listened not. They screamed shame on me and hooted at me, and not even Gaius could still their anger. It did need the soldier's spearhead for that. . . . And Gaius looked at me with his eyes like unto two swords. It seemed that they would pierce me.

'The Lord be merciful unto thee,' he said, 'that the eternal punishment of the betrayer be not thine.'

And I trembled all through me, thinking of hell-fire. But I knew I had not sinned of intention. . . . And all were against me. . . . Methinks they would have ill-treated me had not Stephanus taken me in his arms again and shouted at them that the maid was not right in her head and must be left in peace. . . . And he drew me away to a corner under one of the gratings and held me to his heart very tenderly and, while he made pretence of kissing me, he did whisper:

'Sleep thou here, to-night. Lie beneath this grating and watch for me. I will come above if it be possible. Every night will I come till I have set thee free.' And then he said that I must go right away out of Rome with him and we would be happy elsewhere. . . .

'Happy! . . . Couldst thou be happy if they had put a knife into thine heart?'

Poor Stephanus! He said his heart ached if he had made me suffer, but that he hated to see me stand there the blind dupe of a cruel, cold-hearted woman who had never really cared for me. . . . I knew it wasn't true but . . . but . . . it did hurt me so. . . .

I know not what happened then. The soldier talked a great deal and the Christians asked questions of Stephanus about Clement and the Apostle. . . . of whom Gaius desired to learn. . . .

No, methinks 'twas the next time they asked those questions. The soldier said the time was up and Stephanus went away hurriedly, and after he had gone they all fell on each other asking why they had not thought to question him about their friends; and the mother of Lucius was anxious to know whether he had escaped, and Gaius desired news, especially, about the Apostle who, he was wont to say, was a great friend of his . . .
They had all been too wroth against me to question Stephanus and they all abused me and blamed me. . . . They said they had doubted me before, but that now they knew me for what I was. . . . There was not one to stand by me and I went and sat by myself in the corner, and they kept on flinging hard words to me from a distance. . . . But I heeded them not. . . . The words did not seem to strike me; my head felt light and I knew not what they meant.

Then an old man, seeing me sitting alone, came over by me and took my hand. He said I must not mind what they said—that though I had done this thing, I had not realised it and that there was forgiveness even for such a betrayal. . . . But I could not tell him that I knew my domina had not done that evil; and it was right of them to blame me if I had been wrong in telling her. I began to see that I had been wrong. I ought never to have told her, and, mayhap—if it were possible she had done that thing—the fault was more mine than hers. So I said nothing. There did not seem anything left to say . . . and I was so tired. . . .

By and by, they brought in the jugs of water and the brown cake that was always given us. It was no use my going round to help anyone, because now, they would not have anything to say to me. One woman was very sick: she had fever on her and she was so weak that she could not lift her arms and I had been tending her, but now she would not let me come near her: and many drew themselves away and would not speak to me. . . . The old man brought me some water and a piece of the bread. I was glad to drink but I could not eat: it seemed as though the bread would have choked me. . . .

When he had gone, none else came near and I stayed there apart and tried to make things out. . . . But I could not think. I felt so puzzled. It seemed as though all the world were dark and there was no one I could trust. . . . And then I felt ashamed. For Stephanus had been here and I knew that I could trust Stephanus. . . . But my thoughts kept going round in a circle over and over again. I kept remembering all the dreadful things he had said about Valeria. And then I recollected that the soldier had said her lover was false to her. And the words of Salome about Licinius—though then I had not believed them—came back to me. . . . I hoped that, at least, that was not true. . . . But I could not be sure. . . . I never had been sure of Licinius. He always seemed to me the sort of man who would fail her at a moment of difficulty or misunderstanding. . . . And yet I knew he loved her. . . . Then I thought that if she had wanted to punish Licinius perhaps that was why we were taken—just because we had all been at the Meeting together. . . .

But oh, how dreadful of her! . . . How could she do it? But I felt sure she had not, because she loved him so. . . . And then, the next minute, when I remembered how she had looked that time I saw her—the last time—I thought that perhaps she had indeed done it. . . . And to say that she had never cared for me! . . . Certainly, she had not seemed to care much for me then.

Oh, how could she have done it! . . . And when I thought that perhaps she had, I hated her. And that felt worst of all.
CHAPTER XV

THE PRICE OF FREEDOM

Nyria tells of how, each night, she lies beneath the grating and of how Stephanus tries vainly to loosen the bars for her escape, while whispering news of the doings in Rome. Then, of how Paulinus visits her in prison and offers her freedom if she will give evidence against Valeria.

Nyria: "I laid me down that night, alone, under the grating as Stephanus had told me. But I could not sleep for wondering if he would come, and I felt faint for I could not eat the food and, thou knowest, I had lately been ill and needed nourishment. The water was stale and smelled, and the bread had worms when we left it an hour or two. . . . Haply, that was from the damp—I know not.

But, presently, I heard Stephanus's voice whispering very softly, and I put my hand up through the bars and he kissed it and then he talked with me.

He said I had been foolish but that he would strive to save me. And then he told me about loosening the bars. . . . He said he would lift me out and we would escape hence—I have told thee that. . . .

But I urged upon him that he should go to the Valerian villa and show my plight to Valeria for that she would at once send and save me and that was better than climbing through bars. . . . But he said that he would not go near her and 'twas then he said that about the lamb and the she-wolf. . . . Seeing that she had landed me in this plight, said he, he would ask naught of her. But when I prayed him, he said that he would seek out Paulinus, for that Paulinus was the better-hearted of the two and that he had shewn kindness towards me and might be moved now again.

So then I said I knew not whether Paulinus would bear with me if he heard that I had lied unto him. And I told Stephanus the story of my lie and wherefore I had lied, though I begged him not to betray Valeria. But I knew I could trust Stephanus.

He made a clicking sound with his teeth and said that was bad and he hoped it would not come to Paulinus's ears. Nevertheless, sooner, said he, would he face Paulinus's rage than Valeria's scorn, and he would ask my life of Paulinus when the occasion offered, but that, meanwhile, he should see what he could do himself.

And, all the time, he was working at one of the bars trying to loosen it, but had to spread the sand about the socket afterward to conceal his work.

He told me he must go before the watch was changed and that he could only come when one of the guard was there who favoured him. He had brought me food, and this I did eat thankfully: and also, in a flat bottle, a drink he had made me which was half-drug and half-wine, he said, and would strengthen me, and thus he fed me all the while. But he bade me hide the food lest the others snatch it from me, for the rest were starving.

This I did. I ate each night and would secure a portion in my robe that
I might eat on the following night if Stephanus came not. But in the daytime I went without food—of the which, when the Christians saw it, they said the devil did preserve me, for I was one of his agents and had betrayed them to their undoing. For, seeing they knew not I had means of sustenance, they wondered that I lived.

Now, Stephanus kissed my hand again and bade me keep up heart, for that none of us were like to suffer as yet, seeing that Caesar was anxious to take prisoners all the Christians in Rome and to make of them a goodly show and thus stamp out sedition.

There was to be a grand show, Stephanus said, wherein many of them would be called on to take part.

Thus, did Stephanus come times again within the prison, bearing Caesar’s permit to minister to the sick, for, thou knowest, it was Caesar’s will that all should be kept in strength so that when the day came they might make better sport for the Court and for the people. And it was after this that the food was changed and better food was given us that health might be kept in the prisoners. Yet still it was of the plainest quality. And if any were feeble, Stephanus was directed to give them medicine to sustain them, though some would fain have had poison and died. Yet, notwithstanding, they shrank from death, for each looked for a way to escape. But some prayed Stephanus that, haply, if there be no hope at the last, then he would bring them poison, whereat Stephanus said:

‘Nay, that will I not, for I’ll not take on my head the death of one who hath not sinned against me. Moreover, Caesar would be sore wroth if he knew that I had thus abused his permission to come amongst ye. . . .’

But Stephanus cared not to come often into the prison, for he liked best to talk with me at night at the window, though he spoke very low lest anyone should hear.

Now, ‘twas when Stephanus came to the sick that he told such as asked him concerning Clement. How the bishop had withdrawn with the blessed Apostle into the chamber behind the chapel and how it was only in the dawn that Lucius had stolen forth and seeing a glimpse of soldiers—one or two—remaining in the valley—had gone back again and they had stayed in hiding three or four days till the soldiers, thinking that none more would come forth, had gone away. And thus they had escaped and were now in Clement’s house upon the Coelian.1 But that the Apostle kept himself within so that none might see him. This by Clement’s desire lest harm should come upon him. But that Clement was sore grieved and had offered up prayers in the house by the river for the saving of us who had been taken. For none dared go again to the chapel until this be forgotten. Likewise he told us that Clement would fain have come to us in prison but that he durst not ask for a permit till the Apostle be safe speeded on his way hence.

And the mother of Lucius was glad to hear news of her son. . . . I remember not about Lucius’s father.

The mother of Lucius was very hard upon me and would not let me give her drink and would not let me serve her though she was old and feeble. She said that her house had been harbourage for traitors and that I was one—and at that I mourned greatly.

And then, when they thrust me back after I had seen Paulinus—but of that I have not yet told thee. . . .

1 Nyria says that Clement’s house was on the Coelian hill. It is also stated that he lived on the Esquiline.
All is confusion in my mind and I know not if it were before or after this that Paulinus came. Methinks 'twas then that Gaius sat himself beside me again and spoke more kindly. But he said it had grieved him to see my proud spirit. For that I bore myself stiffneckedly who should have humbled myself before those whom I had thus offended. He said that though there was no hope for her whom we would not name, yet the thief on the cross had been forgiven at his pleading to our Lord, and that, if I prayed, I, too, might be heard and that he would pray with me.

Then, said I, that I grieved sore for mine own share in the mischance but that I liked not to hear him pray against Valeria—for so he began.

And he said that if he had not seen how they were all against me, and knew that I must suffer, he would upbraid me for my obstinacy and hardness of heart.

'For,' said he, 'none should screen a sinner.'

And I said I cared not what they did, so that they spake not against Valeria. For my heart was full of bitterness.

The people talked much together. Several had friends who came to see them, and all spoke of the betrayal and all blamed Valeria. But I sat, ever alone, in my corner and said never a word. . . . I could not. . . . Before, I had felt strong enough to deny everything they said, but now I was so tired, and I knew it might be true; and that began to take the spirit out of me. . . ."

NYRIA: "I know not how the days went. . . . I lost count of everything. . . . I used to hear Stephanus at the grating every night. . . . He dared not cut away the bars on account of the noise. He could only loosen them in the ground and he had to be very careful lest it should be noticed that the soil had been disturbed. . . . He always brought me food—anything that was thin and that he could slip down between the bars. And he used to bring me the drink and medicine, and I used to drink it and pass it back again to him. If it had not been for that, I know not what I should have done. . . .

Yet it seemed that, then, none thought of any of us escaping. . . . Every few days some of the prisoners would be taken away and many never came back. They were moved to other dungeons and we knew not what became of them, and I got to wonder if it would be my turn next. . . . I did not greatly care. I trusted Stephanus. I knew that he was doing all he could, but it was very difficult for him lest the soldiers should discover. And if he had been taken prisoner, there would have been no chance for me. He used to tell me at night that was why he was so slow and careful."

NYRIA (resuming): "Now, I mind me, Stephanus did tell us that Flavius Clemens was tried before Caesar and was in prison. . . . But his sin was against his sons, for, said Caesar—so told Stephanus—that he cared not what Clemens chose to do with himself but that the heirs were as the fruit of Caesar's own loins and that Clemens had offended against Rome. Thus, the boys were taken from him. . . . Yet Domitilla was allowed to see them.

Alas! Domitilla's heart was very sad. . . . Then, once, before the last day, Domitilla had the permit and came to see us, and did pray fervently with us so that she subdued even the soldiers who were in attendance. . . . For,
methinks, some of them were of Christian leaning. And I think not that harm came to Domitilla for so doing. But I knew not then.

Domitilla said that she came, likewise, as Clement's messenger, for that, at her earnest pleading, he had refrained from coming amongst us, seeing that his life was precious to the Church, and hers, she said, was of no account. . . . Domitilla was not angry with me, though I had not dared to draw nigh her for fear. But she came to me where I sat and said she had heard of my refusal to betray my mistress and, seeing that I was made to suffer for what had been without my intention, she bade me remember the words of the Master—how He had prayed upon the Cross: 'Father forgive them, for they know not what they do.' . . .

'Twas then she prayed that strength might be given to such as might be called upon to suffer—for it was not known which would be chosen. . . . Thou knowest, some had been taken away already—methinks 'twas to make room for those new ones that were brought in—but we knew naught.

Now, it was just before Domitilla came, that Aeola was cast in amongst us, and when I saw Aeola I grieved sore. And yet it comforted me to feel her near. . . . But the pain I felt was far greater. . . . Nevertheless, it could not be said that I had betrayed her. She knew not how it was that the harm had come to her. For she was but walking in the city with two or three others—having been to a prayer meeting at Clement's house—and they had all been taken and bound and brought to the prison. . . . She was sore distressed, fearing that Crispus might not know what had befallen; and when Domitilla came that day, I prayed the lady that she would seek out and acquaint Crispus of Aeola's danger.

Stephanus had likewise promised to do this. But there were many days when Crispus was away from Rome, and he only came back just before—and then it was too late. . . . And Stephanus told us that Licinius Sura was in the prison, and that Caesar willed he should make a fine show at the Games. . . . Then, to me, at night, he said—that none knew what Valeria suffered, for that she had shut herself up and would see or speak to no one.

But Stephanus was bent on seeing Paulinus. . . . Yet was it two or three days before Paulinus returned again from Albanum to Rome, and then two or three days before Stephanus could see him, and then I saw not Stephanus that night so I knew not that Paulinus was coming. . . .

NYRIA: "Now, 'twas towards midday when the guard called me, saying that there was one who would speak with me; and when I asked who it might be, he told me it was my master. Then did I feel sure that all must be well and that Paulinus had come to fetch me. And, in my joy, I turned me to those around, telling them that my master had come for me and that now was it certain Valeria had not betrayed them for, were that so, he would not have come. Then some of them cried, jeering at me—Did I think my master would come himself to fetch a slave? More like that he wanted to know somewhat fresh about us and was going to question me. But, said they, there was nothing fresh I could tell which would do more harm, for that enough harm had been done already. . . . And it was of no use trying to make them understand, and I had no time for talking, so I followed the soldier. . . . I mind me that I felt very much ashamed—my dress was so tumbled and my hair must have been rough and dirty from lying on the
stones. One of the soldiers had brought me a piece of comb, and I had tried to keep me as nice as I could but it was very difficult.

Paulinus was waiting in one of the upper rooms of the prison. A soldier took me to him and left me within the door, but methinks he stood somewhere outside, for he was there when I came out again.

Paulinus was alone. He had got an order to speak with me. He looked big and burly—just like himself: broad-shouldered and rather hot. He had his toga on, of course, but he undraped it and threw it half open.

Methought he seemed very strained. There was an anxious, worried look upon his face and his eyes watched me sharply. The beads of moisture stood all round his forehead and he kept wiping them off. He had a folded paper in his belt—I saw it sticking out lengthways...

I was very glad to see my master, but I felt a little frightened. He spoke kindly and bade me come near to him, where he sat between the table and the window, and, as I stood, he made me turn my face to the light.

Then he said I looked ill and that he was sorry to see how much I had been suffering. He made me feel nigh to weeping, so strange it did seem to hear words of kindness.

Then he said that he had come to me on a matter of great import: that it was necessary he should speak to me about it. He took the paper from his belt and asked if I knew what that was.

I shook my head. Thou knowest, I could not read save a few little words.

He pointed to my own name near the top. He said it was an order for my release.

Oh, if thou didst know what it felt like to see that! I could scarce believe it, though I had told the people that I knew all would be well. ... I suppose I looked very pleased and glad. ... And then, he said that before I could leave the prison there was something I must do—that he had got that order for me with much difficulty, and that now I must help him to do what he wanted. He only wished to ask me a few questions, and I must answer them truthfully.

Something in his face frightened me. I felt those questions would be hard to answer. I knew not what to say—so I just stood still and waited and, all the time, he kept watching my face with his little twinkling eyes.

He did not speak for a minute or two, and then he asked me if I thought it right—I who called myself a Christian and professed a strict faith—to deceive a kind master who had never said a rough word to me.

I knew then what he meant, and all down inside me I felt a sinking fear. He said that he knew about Licinius Sura. And when he spoke his name, he seemed to lose the quiet firm voice he had had, and spoke roughly and sharply and very quickly, saying one thing after another and tumbling the words on each other. ... He was angry and puzzled—I saw that. I knew well that he was not telling me what was quite true. There was something which leaped up in me and told me to be careful. I knew then that this was his way of trying to find things out, but he had not done it cleverly.

I waited because, still, I did not know what to say, and he was speaking so fast there was no need for me to say anything till he stopped. So I kept silent and faced him as best I could.

He said things about my domina and about Licinius. He said he knew that she had been untrue to him. He knew that she had been having a great deal to do with Licinius, for a long time past, and that I knew all about it—that of course it was natural I should keep quiet, for no doubt she had
paid me well. But he was my master and he was prepared to pay me better.

Now that was a hard thing to say to me and it was not a wise thing. . . . I knew it. . . . For it shewed me that if he were so anxious to get the truth out of me, that meant that he did not know all. So, still I said nothing and I turned it over in my mind as quickly as I could. . . . I hoped I should not have to speak but I knew that I must, and I knew not what to say. . . . I was frightened of him. Nevertheless, I felt not afraid in myself. I remember being brave enough to face him, but I could not bear to see him standing there and talking so fast and looking so anxious all the time. And yet I was sorry for him.

And then it went through me like a flash that mayhap this would be the way to make Valeria suffer for the suffering she had brought on us. . . . And the next moment I hated myself for thinking, even for an instant, that I could have wished to make her suffer. It seemed so strange that I could have such a thought: it was not like anything that I had ever felt before. . . . But that thought did come, pressing back and back. . . . I thought, too, how little she had cared for what she had done. . . . I thought of those poor people suffering in the dungeons and blaming me for their pain. . . . I thought of death on the one hand and liberty on the other. . . .

Then I went straight up to my master, and I put my hand on the paper, and I asked him if that was what he meant—that I was to buy my freedom by betraying my mistress?

He sort of laughed and gave his great shoulders a shrug, and said:

‘Thou hast no need for qualms. She hath betrayed ye all and careth not one sesterce for the lot. And I’ll warrant ‘twill be no pleasant thing for thee to go back and face her, child. But we’ll manage better for thee than that.’

Then he told me that he had made up his mind to divorce Valeria—that for years she had made him suffer by her coldness and her pride. But that now he had found her coldness was but a mask, and that, truly, the fire burned within, only that it burned not for him.

He did not seem to mind what he said. He spake quite openly to me. And then he said, ‘By all the gods, I like the front thou dost show, my child. There shineth the spirit of a brave woman—not of the puny, sickly thing thou didst look just now. . . . But we’ll change all that. Say but the word and thou art free as air—free to walk out of this place with me and I’ll take thee where thou shalt be tended and well cared for and regain all thy pretty looks. And then, perchance, a handsome husband will come along and steal thee from my care. But if that should be, we’ll make it worth his while. Thou shalt have a goodly’—I mind me not of the word—’to take with thee, and, though I think I need not say it to thee, thou’lt have no cause to be afraid of her, for she shall not set eyes on thee again.’

Then he waited to see what I had to say, and when the words would not come, he patted my arm, and said:

‘Speak up, child, I am not going to blame thee whatever there may be to confess. ’Twas not likely thou couldst help it—and, as I said, she paid thee well, no doubt; and she would have paid thee ill in other ways hadst thou not obliged her. Besides, I know the determined spirit of the woman and how she doth carry her own way through everything. If I could not do what I wished with her, was it like that thou shouldst have any power to

1 The Roman dowry. . . . *dos (res uxoria)*. See Appendix 29, Bk. III.
oppose her? . . . No, no. . . . By Jupiter, I'll forgive thee all, for it goeth to
my heart to see that little pale face. . . . Now speak up, my child, speak.'

Then I told him that I could not say much because there was not much
to tell. . . . I said that it did all sound very delightsome for me, and I thanked
him for his kindness. . . . But I said if that were the price of my freedom,
I must remain a prisoner, for I had not the power to buy it.

He seemed struck back for a minute. He looked at me keenly; and then
he threw his arm down on the table, and said, 'Thou liest; and thou dost
know it.'

I saw that he was fierce in his rage, but I felt not inclined to shrink. I
only kept silence.

Then he got up and took me by both shoulders and shook me as he had
done before, long ago, when he had asked me the same kind of question
about Valeria, and then I had answered him with a lie. . . . Now, he spake
in deathly fury. . . .

'Am I to be defied by thee—a wisp of a girl who will be thrown to the
beasts like a. . . .' I forget—the word hath gone—he meant something for
food.

I was afeard when he touched me. I never could bear a man to touch
me. But there was naught I could do.

Then he felt, methinks, that he had made a mistake, and he stood back
and spoke fast again and in a shaking voice:

'Look, then . . . I have told thee all—just what is at stake. The truth is
that certain evidence is lacking1 and thou canst supply it. I have my sus­
picions, but I can prove nothing. This woman hath been no better to thee
than any other mistress would have been. Why shouldst thou care for her?
Thou knowest what she hath done. It is no secret. It hath leaked out
somehow. . . . A lovers' quarrel. . . . A woman's desire for revenge! They
are all alike. But I thought she was different from the others. . . . She hath
taken it all too seriously and so hath brought herself to this! . . . Licinius
is in prison. Licinius will meet his death at the Games. Whatsoever shall
happen—whether thou dost own up to the truth or not, he will never be
anything to her, any more. . . . But think of all those years I have spent with
that woman for my wife—only to find out this! . . . Dost thou not think I
need my revenge? And I'll have it, too—whether thou wilt or not. But
it can be more complete if thou dost help me. . . . I have shewn thee how
I will make it worth thy while. . . . Now look on the other side. Thou hast
had enough of those dungeons to know what is before thee. Choose.'

But he had said something that made me feel the more for Valeria—I
could not have betrayed her. Oh, no—I could not. . . . I hated her. I did
not want to see her again. I knew what she had done. I began to under­
stand it all. . . . For a moment I had felt as though I could have killed her
myself. . . . But I could not—no, I could not give her up to him. . . . And
then, that minute when he said that Licinius was lost to her—that never
would she have anything to do with him again—that made me feel for her.
It seemed to me that she had lost so much more than I. For not only had
she lost her love, but she had taken all the burden of this dreadful guilt
upon her. . . . I could not forgive her—no, not yet. . . . I did not feel as
though I ever could. But I could not give her up, either.

Mayhap, it was that I had been so used to screening her in everything,
and I had learned how to do it as best I could. So I just shook my head, and

1 The law of divorce in Rome. See Appendix 30, Bk. III.
said to Paulinus that I was very sorry but I could tell him nothing... I said that I would tell him anything I could but that there was nothing to tell.

'I always thought the Christians spoke the truth,' he said: and that hurt me more than anything.

He turned back to the table and snatched up the paper as if he would have torn it across. Then there flashed across me all that that paper meant to me—and I gave a little sob.

He was back at my side in an instant, and put his hand under my chin and turned my face to him.

'Thou art a little fool,' said he. 'She is not worth it. Come, why should we care—either of us? Let her go.'

But I could not... I only gulped down the sobs and tried to push his hand away.

He seemed to be doing all he could to keep his anger back. 'Tell me,' he said, 'didst thou ever go out with my wife to meet her lover?'

'I shook my head again. I tried to speak... I tried to say, 'Never.'

'Didst thou never admit him to the house?' he said. 'When others were not there—to her private rooms?'

'Never,' I said, now quite clearly. The lie came stronger then: I could not think of anything but just how to lie so that it would make him believe—because I felt that I had done it badly.

He asked me a few more questions. I said 'No' to all of them... And then I scarce remember what happened... He crushed the paper in his hand. 'Am I to believe,' he said, 'that this be all that is to be got from thee? Wilt thou learn wisdom if time be given to thee?'

'I can say no more than I have said,' I answered... And I think that was all. I saw him tear the paper in a thousand bits and tread them under his foot. I could see that he was beside himself with rage and disappointment... But in myself I did not feel anything... At the last, he raised his voice and shouted at me, but scarce did his words take hold of my mind... 'The most obstinate little liar that ever deserved the Arena,' I heard him say. 'Go back to thy dungeon; and may the woman thou art fool enough to sacrifice thyself for, give thee some reward...'

And then he strode past me to the door and the soldier took me in charge again... But I was stupid... I did not seem able to walk or speak... He pushed me in front of him along the stone passage, and I heard Paulinus's tread as he went the other way...

The soldier shoved me down into the place underground. He was sorry for me, I think. He said something to me but I know not what it was. I felt all dazed when I got back, and just stumbled across to the corner where I usually sat, and they began hooting and jeering at me for returning thus amongst them.

Lo! they cried, this, then, was the fine lady who had said that one of the highest Romans in the city was come to fetch her away out of her dungeon and to make apology, no doubt, for any accidental mistake that had brought her there... But what was become of Paulinus? Had he forgotten to bring a litter for me, and had he gone back to fetch one? Or, perchance, a litter was not grand enough for me and he would come in a chariot with a team of the finest horses to take me to his palace. Meanwhile, of course I had to wait, and 'twas bad management on the part of the prison officers not to give me a better place to wait in... Why had I not waited
in the room wherein Paulinus had seen me? . . . Liked I not that room? Or was it because I was anxious to come back and see more of my companions, since it might well be the last I should see of them? . . . They were going to make sport for us in the Arena a few days hence. . . . Should I then not come with Paulinus to watch the Show? . . .

I know not what else they said. They went on jeering, but I heard not half of it at the time. I can only remember it in bits, now. . . . It did seem to me that they need not have gone on wasting their strength that way, for it mattered not what they said. Methinks, nevertheless, that it did, indeed, hurt me, for, presently, I found the old man sitting by me and holding my hand and bidding me not to cry. I knew not that I was weeping, but now I saw that the tears were dropping down into my lap. . . . I had forgotten to wipe them away.

I heard the old man speaking to me as it were in a dream. He said I must not mind—that it was very cruel of them to taunt me thus but that they were all so sore with thoughts of the danger they were in, and which they laid in great part to my charge, that they could not curb their angry speech. He said that he had tried to soften their hearts but had not been able. A few were sorry for me, he said, but I kept so much to myself that they were afraid to come near me and, said he, if I were not so distant and so proud, and did not hold myself apart, mayhap they would not stand away from me. He said I must not vex myself against them even though they mocked me, seeing that Christ was mocked by His tormentors and He had done no wrong, and yet could forgive them and pray that their hearts might be turned from hardness and that they might be forgiven. Therefore, should I feel, said he, that if Christ had so suffered, then could I suffer and forgive likewise; and that if there were any blame to me for what I had done, that ought to make the suffering easier, and that, mayhap, I had deserved it a little.

I told him that I could say naught about it, for I felt not nor understood enough of the matter. I said that I knew they were trying to hurt me but that they did not really hurt me. It did seem as though I cared not. . . . I said that I supposed I had done wrong and that, if I were to blame, it was right they should treat me so, but that I could not feel I had sinned greatly, for I had not meant to sin. . . .

And then he said that was true, no doubt, and that I had never thought my mistress would make bad use of the knowledge I had given her. But that I had been wrong to trust her and that I ought to have obeyed the instructions of the Elders never to speak of anything to do with the Christians among those who were not of the faith.

I said I knew that in this I had been wrong, but that I could not believe Valeria had betrayed us. Alas! I did believe it, now, but I would not say so. I told him that I could not talk about her to him, for he knew her not as I knew her and that, though I was very sorry for my own part in the harm that had come upon us, I could not say that she had any share in it.

Whereat, he said that he feared I still had in myself much of obstinacy and hardness of heart—that it was right to uphold one's friends but not right to screen the evil-doer . . . and that if I chose to range myself on the side of evil he could say no more.

I answered him not . . . there was naught for me to say: and I wanted him to go away.

Then he left me and I sat by myself in that dark corner. . . . And the
night came on. . . . Nobody brought me any water or bread that evening, and I was too much afraid of them all to go for my share.

So I stayed, and, by and by, when it was quite dark and I could see through the small clear space of window a star far up in the sky above, Stephanus came round and kneeled down by the grating.

I put my fingers between the bars and he kissed them, and told me to keep up heart though the days seemed long. Methought he was growing rather hopeless himself for he had not been able to come every night lately.

He had told me the soldiers were beginning to suspect him and that he was obliged to stop and talk to them and to pretend he only came for that: and he would try to get them to stand aside and to have something to drink with him and so to pass the time in chat lest they might think he was watching for any of the prisoners. . . . Because most people who knew Stephanus knew that he did hold me dear, and though, mayhap, the guard did not all know I was in the prison, some might have heard it.

He had worked to loosen those bars, but they were very firmly wedged with cross-pieces into the earth on either side, and some were fastened with clamps to the prison walls. He had loosened one or two, but not sufficiently, and he was trying all the time, he said, to think if there were no other way by which he could get me out.

But to-night he was very sore and unhappy and even angry with me. He had met Paulinus leaving the prison, for Stephanus was always hanging about the place—waiting round about in case some opportunity should come by which he might get near me. To-day, he had seen Paulinus coming from the prison, and guessed it might have to do with me. He had been trying to see Paulinus and had been up, once or twice, to the house but never could find him there. Now, he stopped him and prayed him for the sake of my service in his household to save me if he could.

At first, not knowing what he wanted, Paulinus would not stop. Then when he saw who it was and heard Stephanus's request, he said that he had just come from me and that he had offered me life and liberty if I would do his bidding in one little thing and that I would not, and had thus thrown away all my chances of escape.

Stephanus told me that he could not at once believe Paulinus's words, but when he heard that it was true and that I had really done this thing, he said he felt that I must be mad and not know what I was about. It seemed to him then, he said, that the only chance he had was to snatch me by sheer force out of the dungeon since, when the door was opened for me, I would not go.

I told him that I could not go and that even he would not have me betray one whom I had served and to whom I owed everything.

But he said that what Valeria had done had changed everything, and that I should be committing no wrong. And that even a great crime might be excused me at that price.

But I said I could not—and there was an end.

He said he had proved that I would not—not that I could not, and that he feared this was indeed the end, for it was not likely that Paulinus would come to plead with me again. And he said that it was strange I should be such a little fool when there were none among my fellow-prisoners that would not thankfully release themselves if such means were offered them.

I could not bear to talk about it but I had to answer Stephanus.

I said, mayhap, they were made differently and that, mayhap, I had
done a very wicked thing, for I had told many lies, but that I should tell
them all over again and I could not help it if I were wrong. I said that
I had not denied my faith, and wherefore should I deny my friend? And that
I thought, even if it were a sin, Christ would understand and would forgive.
And that, in any case, the thing was done—the moment had gone and I
might not call it back. . . . Nevertheless, I could not make myself sorry,
for I knew that I should have hated myself if I had betrayed Valeria, and
it did not make it any more right that I should betray her because she had
betrayed us—if indeed she had. . . . I said that I could not help what
others did, but I could help being a traitor, myself.

And then I prayed Stephanus not to be angry with me, for I was very
lonely and unhappy, and none of them would speak to me, and none of them
would understand and, if he failed me, what should I do?

He swore then that he never would fail me—that he had not meant to be
unkind, but that it made his heart sick and his whole spirit feel at war with
man, when he saw what I was put to and how much worse things might
be coming—that, indeed, he meant not to say a word the which should add
to my burden—that he would lighten it if he could. But how could he
help me if I would not help myself? And that when such a chance was
given, it was like opening wide the prison gates and yet I would not come
out.

Now Stephanus spoke very low—in whispers—with his lips close to the
bars, and I was nearly as high as the grating so it was not very far. And,
even if the other prisoners had heard us, it was not likely they would tell
against another, because it might be one who had a friend coming and who
—if he did make his escape—might help the rest. Still, they all seemed so
ill-disposed towards me that I did not know what they might do and I dared
not run a risk.

Therefore, I told Stephanus he must go. And I put up my hand once
again through the grating. And he prayed all the gods of Greece to keep me
—for he said the Roman gods were as the Romans themselves and liked only
to take their pleasure in the torments of others. But, he said, there had been
strength and power in the Grecian gods of old and, if he had never prayed
before, he prayed now, night and day, that they would protect me.

But I told him that I trusted only in the Christ—that He could save me
if He would and that if nct, He would give me the strength that I needed.

Then Stephanus said a dreadful thing. . . . He said he heard men say
that if that man had been the Christ he could have saved himself and he
would have come down from the Cross. . . . And was it likely, if he had not
saved himself, that he would trouble much about one poor little maid away
in Rome?

Stephanus said that he had no great pride in his own powers and that he
felt he could not do much, but he'd liefer trust his own arm to save me than
any god. He said he knew not whether the gods we believed in—supposing
they were there—stood not too high up—to hear us call. But, at least, there'd be no harm done in praying. So he prayed to those
he knew; and I could go on praying to the Christ. But because I had lied
and Christ was a god of truth, mayhap, he would not listen to me. Never­
theless, whatsoever might hap, I could believe that Stephanus himself
would never fail me while he lived. Gods might be false or true—he could
not say—but a man that loved a woman as he loved me could never be
untrue to her.
Then he went away. . . . I tried to sleep but I could not. I was very unhappy—because, thou seest, nobody could understand: nobody could think I had done right: everybody did blame me and everybody said I ought to have done something else; and yet it did seem to me that there was nothing else I could do. . . . Then, when I pondered upon his words, I saw that, haply, Stephanus had spoken truly—I had lied—I had told dreadful lies, and I was not at all sorry. I could not have betrayed my domina. . . . Nevertheless, for those few minutes when I was with Paulinus—Oh, I had wanted to—I wanted to, badly, then. . . . It seemed so easy. After all, as he said, she would never know—and it would mean so much to me and to Stephanus.

Poor Stephanus! I began to feel that perhaps I had not been quite fair to him. . . . And yet, what else could I do? . . . He was a man and strong enough to stand alone and he had not needed me—not in the way she had needed me. And I had not felt for Stephanus in the way I had felt for her. It seemed to me that his not having me never did him any harm. It was not as though things would have gone wrong with him without me. But with her, it was so different. She was always doing things—if she were left alone—or wanting to do things that she would be sorry for afterwards. . . . I saw that now, and I saw that, mayhap, it was because she had been left alone that she had done this thing. . . . I knew that if it were true, Licinius must have done something terrible—terrible—to make her thus turn against him. I knew how she would suffer and mourn. I knew, too, that if I could get away and be free without doing her an injury, then I might go back and help her. . . . But if I could only get away by being false to her I should be ashamed to see her any more. . . . Thou knowest. . . . I could not. . . ."
CHAPTER XVI

DOMITIAN, OR THE LIONS?

Nyria tells of how Paulinus again visits the prison and of how he takes her to the palace of the Emperor, there to receive the promise of release and of future rich living if she will consent to become the slave of Domitian.

NYRIA: “Now Paulinus came again afterwards. . . . I know not how soon. . . . One day they told me he was there—— No, at first, they told me naught. . . . They but called me out and the guard led me to where was a woman who had got a clean change of clothing for me and who told me I must wash and dress myself. There was a new white dress and a cloak, and, first, I was given some food and wine.

I wondered what it all meant. I thought it could not mean that I was to be free. I had got past thinking of that.

I was taken to the rooms belonging to the woman—she was the wife of one of the men who had charge of the prison. She helped me to dress and combed out my hair. . . . she said it was a fine thing to have a white skin and yellow hair like mine that made men think it worth while to save me. . . . But for her part, she wondered what they saw in a milk-faced maiden like that. She would rather have one of a healthy red and brown cheek, and she said that I only looked fit to stand instead of one of the sculptured figures in the temples.

I was so tired I did not care what they did with me. . . . And then Paulinus came. When I saw him, I was very much surprised and rather frightened. I wanted not to go through all that over again and I wondered wherefore he had sent for me.

But he came in half-smiling and saying that he was glad to see me looking better. . . . No doubt, he said, the prison fare was not such as to make one strong and that, mayhap, he had over-tried me the time before. . . . And then he said that he had thought a great deal about our conversation and he could not help feeling that——399 (the rest inaudible).

RECORDER: The voice of the Instrument had grown fainter. . . .

Nyria drew a deep breath of exhaustion and, presently, she said:

“It seemeth as though all strength were taken out of me. . . . I cannot lift myself . . . and the words come not. . . . But I will get them. . . . I am trying. . . . Wait. . . .” After the lapse of a minute or two, she resumed in her natural tones.

Nyria: “Paulinus said that he felt he had not been wise to speak to me as he had done, but, at least, I had shewn him that I was not to be moved aside. But he said, now must Nyria see for herself that there was a great deal on his side, and that in coming to me for my help he had come but to ask me for what he thought would be most welcome to me, since it meant liberation. He said that he had succeeded with great difficulty in getting that promise of freedom for me—only because he had been able to represent
to those who were in power that I was needed—that my evidence was necessary to his case and that it would not be withheld. It was for this I was to be freed. He had no power otherwise.

I thanked him for his kindness but again I told him that I could say no more. He said that he would now ask me no more. That I was to learn what other persons thought of the matter. That he had not been alone in demanding the justice of my evidence and that now I should hear what the Emperor had to say in the case. . . . That I was to go with him to the Palace and see Caesar. . . .

When I heard him say that . . . my heart went like water inside me, and I felt that I could not go. I could not fight any more. It would be better to meet death at once than listen to any more people . . . and all my old fear of the Emperor came back upon me and I seemed to see the great Palace with its many pillars like the teeth in the jaws of a huge beast, opening to crush me . . . and I had to go into them . . . and I could not. . . ."

Recorder (from a note made at the time): She seemed so exhausted that I bade her not go on, and tried to concentrate upon getting strength for her, but my efforts seemed of no avail. . . .

Nyria (faintly): "It's like a pulse beating slower every time—life-beats—getting weaker . . . pumping . . . and there's no more power. . . ."

Recorder: I made a great effort to reach that higher level from which I had found that vital force is supplied. But this effort, too, seemed fruitless. In vain, my fervent desire for her escape from the Nyria surroundings to that clear, silvery region whence the Instrument had before brought me messages from our Friends upon the super-physical levels.

But now, in her terror, as upon a former occasion, she sobbed and clung to me like a frightened child, crying out that there were beasts around her. . . . Would they see her? . . . Could they get at her? . . . This time I felt powerless to deal with what I realised to be a foretaste of the martyrdom in the Arena towards which Nyria was approaching. . . . I set all my will-force upon her return to present-day consciousness. In a minute or two, she came back to our world, seeming at first a little dazed, but remembering nothing of her terror of the beasts or of Nyria's painful condition which had really frightened me and had made me feel that I might be dealing with forces beyond my power of control. I felt that I could never bear to take her through the harrowing experiences leading up to her martyrdom. . . . I feared ill effects upon her physical body. . . . I feared that my own courage might fail me and disaster result.

But as soon as the Instrument had doffed the Nyria vestment she became her usual calm self: and, when I told her of the scenes she had just described, was not at all perturbed, but seemed to regard the whole Nyria experience as a curious psychological phenomenon in which her living personality was scarcely concerned.

Nyria (after a pause): "Yes, I can do it. . . . Let me stand away for a minute. . . ."

When Paulinus told me that I was to go before Domitian I felt that this mattered more than anything else that had gone before. I was too greatly afraid to feel anything but just that. . . . I knew not what to do or what
to say. . . . And then, while I was thinking how I could escape from it, I got that dreadful singing in my head and the room went round . . . and then I remember not what happened except that the woman was by me when I opened my eyes again, and they were giving me some wine to drink and the woman was scolding me.

But Paulinus looked worried. He seemed rather sorry for me, but he was in a hurry. He asked me if I felt better and said that if I did we must make haste.

Then I pushed the wine away and I thought I would try to tell him. . . . I said I should be quite well if only I could be left alone—that it was the fear that had made me faint—that I wanted most of all not to go to the Palace. . . . I told Paulinus that I had always been terrified of the Emperor. . . . I did not say why, and Paulinus thought it was only because he was the Emperor. . . . But that was not the reason.

He said that I need not mind—that I had often seen Caesar quite close—that he would not seem any more terrible now than he had seemed then—that Domitian had ordered me to go and that I must obey. . . . Paulinus said that he thought, too—he did not want to raise any foolish hopes in me—but he thought it was just possible that this might mean a chance for my life if I would be good.

I knew not what chance there could be. I felt sure the Emperor would only tease me, and he had always looked so cruel. . . . But I began to see that there was no hope for me with Paulinus and I did not want to go on asking. I always hated to ask for anything I could not have. I would rather have endured than be refused. . . .

I had to walk, and I tried, but my body shook so that I could not get along. . . . Paulinus was so strong—and he walked so quickly. He had his litter just outside and, when he saw that I was not able to go afoot, he waited while they got a litter for me. . . .

I remember being carried along over the heads of the people, feeling very strange and far away. The sun was shining: it was very hot but I did not feel as though I belonged to any of it. I seemed to be slipping out of it all. . . . And yet I knew that it was me—myself—being carried along.

We seemed to take a long time getting to the Palace. I was thinking all the way and, always, it felt like a bad dream. They carried me up those steps where I had so often walked behind Julia’s litter. But we were not carried so far as she used to be: they put us down at one of the outer entrances and we walked through the corridor till we came to the door of a room—I knew it: I had been there with Julia. It was not the big room where the Emperor received most of the people, but a smaller one where he sometimes saw anyone who came specially.

I was left outside with a guard of soldiers and Paulinus went in. He was not gone very long, and then the door opened again and two more soldiers came out. They took me in between them and we stood a little way off—at the end of the room. Paulinus stood near the Emperor but, presently, he called my name and I had to go nearer while the guard stood back.

And then I felt that haply it was not right nor wise to hold myself so lowly: it might look as though I were ashamed of being a Christian. So, when I had made obeisance, I tried to lift my head and to look at Caesar as though I were not afraid of him.
He smiled a little and seemed to be quite kind. He said he was sorry—not to see me there—but that I should have been obliged to come on such a business as this—and that he hoped it was all a great mistake and that he should find I had not been faithless to the gods.

I did not answer but looked down again. Methought I had better not answer unless he asked me a question.

And then he put it a little differently. He said—Was I faithless to the gods? And I said that I knew no god but one.

He said then, and frowned a little, that he supposed it was true I had been fool enough to join that sect which called themselves Christians, but that perhaps it had been through ignorance—How could I know—a child like me?

I answered humbly—might it please Caesar, but, in truth, I had known a good deal about the Christians before I had been allowed to join them: otherwise, I should not have been fit to do so. And that I was no child but old enough to know my own mind, and that I had done what seemed right to me and I was prepared to abide by it.

He laughed a little and said that that was quite a long speech for me to make and that he liked to see I was no fool but knew what I was about. He said he had forgotten I was no longer a child—I looked so young—but that he felt I did not really know what I was doing or what would be the outcome of it all.

He spoke to me then a great deal—methinks, he meant it kindly. ... He said a great many things. ... I remember not much about that part. ... He was telling me how very foolish I was and how wrong ... and of all the harm that the Christians did—things I knew were not true; and I knew he could not understand or he would not have said them. ... He asked me if the gods of Rome were not good enough for me to worship? How was it that I knew better than those who were so far above me?

I answered very little. ... I said that I knew I had not much knowledge, but that I felt it was all true for me and that I must live by it, because it was the only thing that was true.

He stopped then and just looked at me. Paulinus seemed impatient. He struck the ground with his foot and said to the Emperor ...

RECORDER: From the strain of emotion, the Instrument's voice had weakened to a whisper: but when asked if she was too tired to continue, she answered: "No. ... I cannot explain. ... 'Tis the thoughts that come and the things which do press in between, that confuse me. ... Wait. ... I can tell thee what thou wouldst know. ..."

NYRIA: "The Emperor seemed to be thinking what he should say next when Paulinus told him how obstinate I was and how I would not let myself be moved, and Paulinus added that torture was the only thing which could shake such a little rock.

But Domitian said No; that was not the way to deal with women—that I had often shewn myself to have brains above the run of them, and that it was worth while to argue with me if only to see what I should say. And, with that, he turned to me and said:

'Thou seest, I am interested to know thy reason. I cannot think that thou wouldst act thus unless thou hadst one.'

Then, he asked me why I would not worship the gods which other men thought good enough?

I told him I knew very little of those gods, but that men made them out
to be not much better than themselves and I wanted something higher
and something that I could know more of before I could render worship.
And then he said that men did worship himself. . . . Would I take him
for my god? Would that satisfy me? He could understand, he said, that
one, with intelligence such as mine, would like to know more of that which
she worshipped and that if I would choose to worship him, he would see that
I had enough knowledge of him to warrant the worship.
I knew not what to say and again I held my speech. . . . But he pressed
me for an answer and bade me draw closer.
'Come,' he said, 'tis no great thing for thee to do. Men say that thou
hast been faithless to our religion and hast joined a false sect. Justice in
Rome doth demand that those who do this should suffer for it. Even
Caesar cannot acquit thee without some proof. Give me but this. Kneel to
me here—before Paulinus—and hail me as the Lord thou dost worship,
and thou shalt be free.'
Then sore did I tremble, for I saw that he meant what he said. But I
told him that I could only kneel to him as the Emperor; not as a god.
That I would kneel to him most gladly, seeing that he was the great Caesar
and I a slave: but that there could be no worship in my heart for him because,
although he was Caesar, I knew he could be no more than a man. . . .
Paulinus was very angry, then. He begged to be allowed to take me
away to be whipped. But the Emperor said again that was not the way
to treat women. . . . He put out his hand to me and looked at me very
strangely and as though he were thinking deeply. Then he turned to
Paulinus and said:
'I will deal with the maid alone.'
Now was I most sore affrighted, for I knew not what he meant to do.
He bade Paulinus go without and wait and then he sent all the men from
him—even the lictors—and they shut the doors.
There was a stool near the Emperor's feet and he pointed to it, saying
kindly: 'Come hither, Curly-locks, and be seated,' as had been his wont
at times when I was in attendance upon Julia: and I answered:
'Craving Caesar's permission, I would rather stand.'
Whereat he frowned and then seeing that I trembled from fear, he spake
with gentleness and bade me not to be afraid. For, he said, though it might
seem that I had been brought there to plead with him for my life yet that,
verily, he felt it was he who pleaded with me. He did desire, he said, to
make all things easy for me, but I would not let him. Now, there was but
one way. He had tried all he could that might be done publicly. Now
he would speak to me himself in private.
He asked me then if I did not wish for liberty—if I cared not for my life?
He asked me what my life had been—had I found it unhappy? It was by
my own will, he had heard, that I did enter the household of Paulinus.
There had been another of the blood of Julia's husband who had the right
over me and who would have kept me. He said 'twas of himself he spoke.
He had forgotten at the time, for other matters had put it out of his mind.
But he had often thought of me since and of how good and faithful I had
been to Julia. Perchance, I thought, said he, that he had forgotten. But
he had always remembered. He could not really forget although there had
been affairs of State to occupy his thoughts. . . . Haply, it might seem
strange to me, he said, knowing myself to be but a little slave-girl, that he,
the Emperor, should speak to me thus. . . . But there was no strangeness
in it, for he had always seen much more in me than I had supposed and had always cared for me a little and but for untoward happenings would have taken me in possession.

And now, he said, he beheld the child grown a woman and knew the strength and beauty which lay in her character, having seen that she was strong enough to stand up and answer even Cæsar in defence of that which she held dear. Oft had he doubted, he said, that women could be loyal. But now was he certain that one woman, at least, could not be untrue. And he had felt that would I but do for him as much as I would do for my faith, then might he indeed count upon one loyal heart to serve him. . . . Nor would he ask me to abandon my faith but only that I yield to him an equal fidelity. Then would he see that I was safe to practise my religion as long as I might wish to do so. For the rest, he swore by the gods that he would take me as I was and keep me—that at once, he would order Paulinus to give up claim upon me.

'Knowest thou not,' he said, 'that Cæsar's word is law. And yet, shalt thou likewise understand that Cæsar, the all mighty, doth stoop to ask from thee, a slave, that which no great Roman lady would dare refuse him?'

Thus he spake. . . . But I understood him not—so strange did it all appear. . . . And within myself I wondered—was this a wooing, or did I still dream a dreadful dream?

Naught did I know of wooing, save that Stephanus had always told me that he loved me and desired me for his wife. . . . And, verily, I had seemed to belong to Stephanus, withal I had never loved him—if that were love of which he spake . . . and this I know not. . . .

But Domitian stood apart. 'Twas like into some great, grand beast. . . . Not handsome—ugly more like—and terrible, methought. . . . Yet fine in fearsome fashion. . . .

Yet, now—in man-guise, he did show much eagerness and, mayhap, sincerity in his speech . . . and all the while, he strove, meseemed, to be very gentle.

And then I thought of Cæsar as men said he was—a man like unto some fierce wild brute who snatched at the prey he wanted and when he had devoured it, called for more. . . . And I knew not wherefore he should speak to me thus—in gentle voice and even, meseemed, with tenderness.

Yet, was I afeard, for I felt that behind the man, there lurked the beast ready to spring. . . . And when I stopped to think, the more was I afeard.

But, one thing was clear in my mind—compelling me—that I must make him know 'twas impossible—that which he asked. . . . And I knew not how to tell him, for though he stooped to plead, yet did I see most plainly that pride of power did lift him up, wherefore he questioned not my gladness that he should favour one so low as I who am but the slave, Nyria.

And when he saw me still mute before him, he cried, part angered, part jesting, and yet part tender:

'Art thou then tongue-tied before my greatness? . . . But have no fear, Nyria. Thou didst say truly that though I am Cæsar and many worship me as their lord and god—yet, nevertheless am I a man: and 'tis as a man, and not as Cæsar, that now I would thou shouldst regard me. . . . Hast thou no answer to give me? . . . Come nearer to me, Nyria. . . .'

I saw him stretch forth his hand to draw me closer. . . . And then, I know not. . . . For again the dizziness overtook me. . . ."
DOMITIAN, OR THE LIONS?

RECORDER: At this point, Nyria ceased speaking. Then, after a short period of unconsciousness on both planes, the Instrument returned to ordinary life and did not continue her account of Nyria's interview with Domitian until the following day. But when she resumed the narrative, it was as though Nyria had herself been expelled from the Roman body, and, for a little while, seemed to be describing the scene in Domitian's palace as an observer instead of as the chief actor in the drama.

THE INSTRUMENT (taking up the story): "Men of the body-guard are standing—some by the doors and others at the foot of the great marble stair outside the room where the Emperor was with Nyria. . . . Paulinus, thou knowest, did wait in an antechamber at the other side—methinks—of the corridor. . . . No, I am not within the throne-room. . . . Thou didst bid me go straight back and I am telling thee what I see. . . .

There are lictors there, also. . . . The men are laughing and talking among themselves. . . . I cannot hear what the lictors are saying; they stand down the stairs a little way off and the soldiers would not talk to them, for those of the body-guard do think themselves very superior. . . .

Of these, there are about eight or twelve. . . . The soldiers are in armour and have shining breastplates—thou canst see the tunics beneath, at the knee: and they have great gold helmets on their heads with pieces that come up in a curve at the back. . . .

They are talking about the Emperor and saying it is just like Domitian. And some are wondering that he can care to take up with another man's slave-girl; and some are saying that it is because she is fair and because of her pretty face and the little proud way that she hath with her. . . .

And then a man among them says that Domitian did always admire that girl, and that he remembers, when Julia used to come to the Palace, Domitian looked more at the maid than at the mistress. . . . And some wonder what will be the outcome of it and others say, 'Of course she will be glad enough to buy her life at such a price—and to get her liberty too! Truly, may she think herself well-favoured of the gods. . . .'

But there is one soldier among them—a thin, fair young fellow. . . . I think he is a Christian . . . but he is not suspected—who doth declare that Nyria will hold to her faith at any cost. . . . And who, when they ask him why he is so sure, answers that he has heard that the Christians never deny their faith, but ever hold to their word. . . .

This man has cared for Nyria but she does not know it. . . . He has tried to make her see, but he thinks she is too pure and spiritual to understand these things. . . . And now he is wondering and trembling for her. He knows what Domitian can do. . . .

And lo, behold! Now, I can see right through the wall of the corridor, which leadeth by another door to the room wherein is the Emperor.

I can see servants who hurry along carrying fine robes of lovely white and coloured silks—all gold and embroidery. Can these be from the Empress's wardrobe? For no one else could have such beautiful robes. . . .

And there are long chains of pearls, and I see many jewels shining brightly. . . . Now, there comes one bearing a golden box full of gems, and here are two little slave-boys carrying peacocks' feathers—lovely pearl-handled

1 Here arises a question as to the complete mergence of the Instrument into the Nyria personality. For the young soldier—doubtless Alexamenos—would have been well known to Nyria.
fans—great things to swing to and fro, and smaller ones studded with jewels.

Then all these things are spread out on the floor of the room where the Emperor is with Nyria. They have been sent for to bribe her... Domitian picks up first one and then another and holds them out before her. ... But she stands silent and, on her face, there is a look of misery.

Yes, I can see Nyria. ... She looks very white and thin and her eyes are red and seem full of tears. ... The face is very earnest. There is no wavering in it... The Emperor does not understand that. He looks like a great stupid animal—half-man, half-beast—as he bends towards her stretching forth his huge bare arms and, with his hands shaking a little, holds out the pearls on his thick, strong fingers. His scarlet and gold-embroidered toga, which he has thrown back undraped, hangs loosely from him, showing the tunic underneath, and he shows the great bare knee and leg and the gold thongs of his shoe binding his foot. His face keeps flushing and then turning white—it is always like that when he is excited—and his head is poked forward—there's something gold round it above the little fringe of his reddish hair. He is speaking and his manner seems gentle in a curious, restrained way. But his voice is hoarse and rough and there's a sense of fierceness underneath that he is trying to hold back.

The girl has said something but he would not listen. Though her mind is fixed, she is afraid of hurting and angering him and has not spoken plainly, and he thinks she is hesitating and that he may tempt her to his will. He is urging her—talking fast, eagerly. ... Now he takes a long chain of pearls and throws it over her head. It has caught in her hair. ... A startled look comes into her eyes. ... She draws back ... puts up her hand to pull the chain away. ... But he checks the movement, and takes her wrist firmly in his hand. ...

RECORDER: Here, the Instrument shudders violently and it would seem that contact with the man's hand has roused to full consciousness the very soul of Nyria. She cries out in a tone of fear and intense repugnance, but in which, through the terrified pleading, there is a note of contempt, even, of command.

NYRIA: " ' Touch me not. ... Take thy hand from off me. ... I would give thee back thy pearls. Send away these fine robes and jewels. ... I want them not. ... Haply, it seemeth strange to Caesar that I like not this splendour. Of what use to Nyria would be that which Caesar of his bounty doth offer her? ... No ... no ... I pray Caesar that he will order their removal.'

Now he hath sent the slaves out with all the fine things ... and I am alone with him again. ..."

NYRIA (after a pause, in a tone of deep distress mingled with horror, and as though speaking her thoughts aloud): "I am so afraid of him. ... What can I say? ... I have only told him the truth—that I could never feel for him in that way. ... How could I? ... I told him that I could not feel for anybody like that—that I know not what it means. ... Thou canst not make thyself do what is impossible. ... But he says that I can. ..."

A long pause.

NYRIA (with a shuddering sigh, takes up again the thread of her thoughts and of Domitian's pleading): "I know not what to say. ... He doth frighten me. ... I know not what the love is of which he telleth ... but
it doth sound like something terrible. . . . How could he love me? . . . He hath not seen me for a long time—I have kept me out of his way. And when he did see me, he scarce ever spoke to me except to tease. . . . He says he hath always cared. . . . But methinks it is because he cannot have me. . . . And why doth he want me—he—the Emperor, who can buy any number of slave-women if he desireth them . . . ?

But then he sayeth that he cannot buy a woman’s love though he can buy her service. . . . But what were all those pearls and silks and feathers! . . . Was it not that he was trying to buy mine? . . . Oh! I want none of those things. . . . I care not for them. . . . And if it were for him that I did care, then, would it be naught to me that he should give—or that he should not give. . . .

And he sayeth that I may keep my faith—only that I must let the world think that I have worshipped him. How could I worship a man? . . . They do that—the Romans, I have heard. . . . He sayeth that I need only kneel to him once—before Paulinus and the Guard—that they may bear witness. . . . And that then, I need never do it again—and I shall be free.

But I must give myself to him, and, oh! . . . , That is more horrible than all. . . . I know not what it would be, but I know that I hate him to touch me. . . . His hands are so great and strong and thick—and though he be gentle, I feel that they could crush me at any minute. . . ."

NYRIA (suddenly and sharply): “No, I cannot. It is impossible.

He sayeth now that I am mad. . . . Yet would I rather have him speak like that than as before. . . . But I would that I were not alone with him. He doth make me tremble with fear. . . . All the gentleness seemeth gone from him. . . . But still he doth try to get it back. . . .

He sayeth that I know not what I am doing—that it is mad and foolish too—that never can I have such a chance again—that he will not give it to me—that he was wrong to stoop to me—he who could have had me whipped till the blood ran—and when he could keep me if he choose—and fling me to the beasts if he choose. . . . There! . . . Do I know? He asks. . . . That is the truth—and that will he do if I do not yield me to him. . . ."

NYRIA (her voice faint and agonised): “How can I help it! There is no choice. . . . Of what use is it to press me? . . . Oh, I am afraid. He doth look so furious—not like a man—but like a great red animal. . . . There’s foam on his mouth—and his big hands twitch. . . .

He sayeth he will kill me if I do not do his bidding. . . .

Now he is coming close to me. . . . I can feel his breath—hot upon my cheek. O-o-h! . . . He says that what I would not give by choice he will take by force and then kill me himself if he so willeth. . . ."

RECORDER: The Instrument is trembling with agitation and her hand quivers convulsively. . . . There is a long silence—a sense of extreme tension. . . . Then a curious change comes over her. Her body is motionless. . . . But now, as she opens her lips, the note of wild terror has gone from her voice. . . . She speaks in firm, calm tones, giving an impression of exaltation and of distance.

NYRIA: “Oh, no. He cannot touch me. I know that he cannot. I am not afraid.”

RECORDER (after a silence): “Why cannot he touch you, for you are alone and in his power?”
NYRIA: "I know not why . . . I never moved. I was standing a little way back from him. . . . I thought he was going to choke me. . . . But I was not afraid. I only looked at him and he stopped—quite close in front of me, and his great hands dropped and hung down at his sides. . . . And then he said that it was an evil god (speaking very slowly) . . . some evil power of the Christians that did protect me. . . . And he seemed to be afraid. . . . And he winced and moved restlessly and would not look at me.

And then he bade me 'Begone.' That if I would not come to him willingly he needed me not—there were plenty who would.

And he turned back to his seat and struck the little gold gong on the table beside him. . . . And then I know that I trembled; yet still my strength upheld me . . . and still I did not fear. I knew that he could not touch me. . . .

And the doors burst open and the soldiers came in. And Domitian signed to them. . . . His face was purple: he had not power to speak. They took me by the shoulders and marched me out. . . ."

NYRIA: "I mind me not of any more just then. My head seemed to grow light. . . . I suppose I went down between the soldiers. . . . Yes, methinks they took me to a little room near the entrance and there they waited for orders from Caesar. . . . And when these came, I was taken back to the prison. . . . I know not how I went. . . . The sun was very hot—and it doth give me such a pain in my head—I can feel that—but I remember not anything else—except, now—the prison walls—they are thick and high and of grey stone, with carving round the entrance. . . . And soldiers who walk up and down, and many who stand in lines all round the prison—they say there hath been some talk of the prisoners escaping and so they have brought more of the Praetorians. . . ."

THE INSTRUMENT was now told that she might take off the Nyria garment and that she would not be asked to put it on again. She gave a sigh as if of relief.

"Is it over? Oh, shall I never have to go back again. . . . Sometimes I have thought that going back will make it all return and haunt me."

RECORER: Those words were the last spoken by Nyria through the Instrument—as nearly as I can fix the date, in the early part of 1903. Though on coming to herself the Instrument had no remembrance of her experiences in the Nyria personality, and though I had been assured that no harm would result from them to the physical vehicle, Nyria's terror and suffering had seemed so utterly real, that pity forbade me to prolong the ordeal.

The conclusion of her life-story was then supplied by the Commentator on superphysical levels, in vivid touches of description which I have done my best to connect and embody in the following section.