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The Greek circumflex, which appears in the text as an inverted breve (^), is rendered here using a tilde (~).

Please note the publisher's decision to place footnotes at the bottom of each page, as well as the author's note on this topic in the Preface. In keeping with his intent, footnotes have been moved to the end of this file.

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QUINTUS CLAUDIUS

A ROMANCE OF IMPERIAL ROME

BY

ERNST ECKSTEIN

FROM THE GERMAN BY CLARA BELL

IN TWO VOLUMES—VOL. II.

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CHAPTER I.

The same day, which saw our friends in the country house at Ostia, and the bond of love sealed between Aurelius and Claudia, had been one of infinite agitation and annoyance to the Emperor Domitian.

The very first thing in the morning came vexatious tidings from the town and provinces. At the earliest dawn inscriptions had been discovered on several of the fountains, columns and triumphal arches, of which the sting was more or less covertly directed against the Palatium and the person of Caesar. "Enough!" was attached to the base of a portrait bust.[1] "The fruit is ripe!" was legible on the arch of Drusus. In the fourth, eighth and ninth regions the revolutionary question was to be seen in many places: "Where is Brutus?" and at the entrance of the baths of Titus, in blood-red letters, stared the appeal: "Nero is raging; Galba, why dost thou tarry?"

Domitian, who had heard all this from his spies, long before the court officials even suspected what had happened, received these courtiers in the very worst of tempers. His levée was not yet ended, when a mounted messenger brought the news, that a centurion had raised the standard of revolt on the Germanic frontier,[2] but that he had been defeated and slain after a short struggle.

At noonday the soldiers of the town-guard seized an astrologer, Ascletario by name,[3] who had publicly announced that ruin threatened Caesar. Before the moon should have twelve times rounded—so ran his prophecy—Caesar's blood would be shed by violence. The immortals were wroth at his reprobate passion for a woman who, by all the laws of gods and men, he had no right to love.

At first Domitian laughed. His connection with Julia seemed to him so dull and pointless a weapon for his foe to turn against him, that the stupidity of it astonished him. However, he commanded that the astrologer should be brought before him.

"Who paid you?" he enquired with a scowl, when the prisoner was dragged into the room.

"No one, my lord!"

"You lie."

"My lord, as I hope for the mercy of the gods, I do not lie."

"Then you really assert, that you actually read in the stars the forecast you have uttered?"

"Yes, my lord; I have only declared, what my skill has revealed to me."

The superstitious sovereign turned pale.

"Well then, wise prophet, you can of course foretell your own end?"

"Yes, my lord. Before this day is ended, I shall be torn to pieces by dogs."

Domitian looked scornfully round on the circle of men.

"I fancy," he said, "that I can upset the prophetic science of this worthy man. Carry him off at once to execution, and take care that his body is burnt before sundown."

The astrologer bowed his head in sullen resignation. He was led away to the field on the Esquiline, and immediately beheaded before an immense concourse; within an hour Domitian was informed that all was over. At this news his temper and spirit improved a little. He congratulated himself on the prompt decision, which had so signally proved the falsehood of the prophecy.

At dinner he carried on an eager conversation with Latinus, the actor[4] who, among other farcical parts, filled the role of news-monger.

"You are later than usual to-day," said Caesar graciously. "What detained you?"

"A most laughable occurrence," replied the comedian. "By a mere chance I passed by the Esquiline. There, in the public field, an astrologer had just been executed. The dead body was still lying there, when a stranger came by with three huge dogs.[5] Before the slaves could prevent it, the three hounds had rushed upon the carcass and had torn it literally to bits. The dogs were killed at once with loud outcries; the owner had vanished completely. Immediately after, Clodianus came up to me and asked me if I had not seen the fellow, with a long red beard. One thing led to another, till your adjutant quitted me to make farther enquiries. I hastened hither and, as it was, arrived later than I ought."

The narrator had not observed, that every trace of color had faded out of the Emperor's cheeks. As he ceased speaking, Domitian sprang up and, without saying a word, rushed out of the triclinium and into his own apartments. An intolerable dread almost deprived him of breath,[6] he

ran like a hunted deer from one room to another, now shaking his fists in impotent fury, and again stopping to look suspiciously round him on every side. In this wretched frame of mind he was found by Julia, who had been seriously ill ever since the return of Domitia. In spite of the Empress's commands, she had not yet quitted the palace. She came in, fevered and pale, to implore protection against her haughty rival, who had threatened to turn her into the street. The palace servants had tried to stop her at the entrance to Domitian's apartments, but she had thrust them aside with the strength of desperation. At the sound of footsteps Domitian started and turned round. She stood before him—young, lovely, wretched—the victim of his remorseless passion. But the sight of her, far from stirring his pity, roused him to foaming rage. Was it not she, the abandoned creature, who had brought down on him the wrath of the gods? Was it not for her sake, that his blood was to be shed, if the astrologer had prophesied truly? And he had prophesied only too truly! His own end had borne witness to the truth of his mission.

5

"Hussy!" yelled the Emperor. "Have you come to mock me? Are you plotting to murder me, that you come sneaking round me? It is your doing, and no one else is to blame if Caesar perishes in his blood...! Go, serpent! This very day quit Rome, or I will have you flogged through the gates."

The hapless girl drew herself up proudly.

"This," she cried, "to crown my misery. Are you not satisfied with having betrayed my youth, and poisoned my innocence? Is this the compensation for a life of horror?"

"Silence! It is a lie! It was your own vanity, that ruined you—your ambition, hoping to share a throne. Out of my sight, I say—you have no one to blame but yourself."

"Miserable coward! Are you frightened by the forecast of a soothsayer? Well, your fate will overtake you; but not for my sake—no; for the sake of Rome!"

"Go ..." shrieked Domitian, "or I shall kill you!"

"Well then, kill me. Add the crowning stroke to all your crimes! What do I care? I do not ask to stay in this world of misery and infamy, or in this proud Empire of Rome whose Emperor is an executioner."

6

At this instant the slaves, who were waiting in the anteroom, heard a dull sound as of a blow or push, a piercing scream, and a heavy fall, and the next moment Domitian called out in a hoarse, choked voice: "Phaeton!" When the slave entered the room, Julia was senseless on the floor.[7] She was lying doubled up in a convulsed attitude, and her face was livid rather than pale.

"Carry her away," said Caesar; "she is ill."

The senseless girl was carried away, and that same day she died of an internal injury.

Domitian spent a terrible night. In the course of the third vigil he sent an express to Norbanus, the general of the Praetorian Guard. For hours he sat up in torment on his couch, making his slaves sing to the lute. Now and again he asked for a weapon, or for drink, or sent all the attendants out of the room excepting Phaeton, his favorite slave, who was to bar the door, and guard it sword in hand.

At last the day broke. It was Domitian's birthday, the 24th of October.[8] During the first hour after sunrise the usual ceremonious reception took place of magistrates, senators, and knights.[9] Outside the palace there was a scene of confusion, such as was rarely seen even in Rome. All the suburbs seemed to have emptied themselves, and the people to have converged on the Forum. Instead of one cohort of the praetorian guard, two had been posted on guard, and the sentinels at the palace gates were also doubled. The officials, whose business it was to check the admission of visitors, straightly enquired of each individual as he crossed the threshold of the audience chamber, whether he had any weapon about him. It was many years since this had last been done, and the effect was paralyzing.

7

Domitian received the senators, not merely with reserve, but with evident repugnance, nor did he bestow on one of those who attended the customary honor of a kiss. A dull atmosphere of suspicion brooded like a vapor, and seemed to fill the splendidly-decorated room.[10] As the last visitors retired from the presence, it was rather like an escape or a flight. *Atra cura*, as sung by Horatius Flaccus,[11] seemed to have flung her dark robe over the palace.

8

At last three men were left in attendance on the Emperor: Clodianus, Parthenius, the high-chamberlain, and Norbanus, the general of the guard. This last was perhaps the only person, whom Domitian had received with politeness—indeed, so far as he was concerned, with marked attention. The tyrant, who, to every one else was cold and contemptuous, turned from time to time to the noble soldier with an engaging smile to assure him, half stammering, of his unaltered favor. The ruler of the world had altogether lost his command of himself.

"And you have found no trace, formed no guess?" he asked with a frightened glance in the general's face. "Your efforts too, Clodianus, have been unsuccessful?"

"Alas, my lord and god! I have offered great rewards, I have bribed dozens of idlers—all in vain; and to crown our ill-luck, when the slaves burnt the pile intended for the astrologer's body, they flung in, not merely the remains of Asclerario, but the dead hounds as well. Thus we lost the last clue to the discovery."

"Let them be crucified! idiotic fools!" shrieked Caesar, trembling in every limb.

"They richly deserve it," said Clodianus. "Still, I cannot comprehend the matter. The strange man, who suddenly appeared with the dogs, has suddenly vanished, as if the earth had swallowed him; and from among a knot of old women I heard a voice exclaim: 'It is Ahasuerus!'"

"Ahasuerus!" shouted the Emperor, starting up. "Then have Ahasuerus advertised for."

9

"Impossible," replied Clodianus. "Ahasuerus is a bogey creature of the Nazarenes, a restless spirit that wanders over lands and seas. I only mentioned the fact, to show you the impression produced by the apparition. There was something supernatural and appalling in his appearance...."

Domitian was more agitated every moment; he paced the room excitedly.

"Are all those infamous inscriptions torn down and wiped out?" he suddenly asked, addressing Parthenius.

"Can you doubt it?... Why, the very morning dew, disgusted at the crime, did its best to wash them away."^[12] "Why did you not tell me of the inscription at the baths of Titus?"

"My lord, you knew of it...."

"From Latinus, who came to me at break of day."

"My lord, I thought...."

"Silence. It was your duty to tell me the whole truth. Only by complete knowledge can an evil be met; a blind man falls into the pit."

"My lord, if you desire it...." said Parthenius, laying his hand on his heart. Clodianus also bowed in sign of utter devotion, and his eye was positively radiant with fidelity and reverence—only on his full underlip there was the faintest possible twitch of self-satisfied irony.

Again Domitian took to pacing the room, which was lined with mirrors. On every side he could see his pale, bloated face, here and there distorted and lengthened by some imperfection in the mirror. He shuddered.

10

"I am ill, my faithful friends," he said in a low voice. "I need rest and quiet reflection—but the good of the Empire is paramount. Listen and perpend." He sat down and went on deliberately: "The times are perilous; treason lurks in every corner. Rome relies on Caesar; I must act. Terror alone can suppress treason, and I will strike terror into the traitors. The law against the Nazarenes is a good beginning, but it is merely a beginning. It only attacks the Catilines among the slaves and lowest class. We must go farther. We must strike at Caesar's foes in the houses of the great and noble among the knights, and in the Senate. Numbers are suspected by us, and to be suspected is to deserve death. Our heart, in its tender mercy,^[13] has too often held our hand, but now the hour is come. In profound silence, but without delay, we must act—must strike the guilty with the swiftness and certainty of lightning. This very day vengeance must be planned. Once more, valiant Norbanus: how about the trustworthiness of your cohorts?"

Norbanus bowed. "They are Caesar's—heart and soul and body."

"The little gold Domitians have pleased the good fellows? Keep them warm, dear Norbanus, and if the two millions are not enough for you, say so without reserve. The soldiers, who protect my Empire, must learn to believe, that liberality sits on the throne of the Caesars."

11

"Many thanks, my lord, but greater largesse might weaken discipline."

"But the centurions?"

"They are without exception strict and faithful. At a nod from me they would ride through fire and water."

"Capital!" said Domitian with a bitter-sweet smile; for, without intending it, the general had given utterance to a painful sentiment, of which the Emperor had long been conscious: namely, that the praetorian guard would first obey their general, and at his orders only were devoted to their sovereign. This did not escape the keen insight of Clodianus, and again a subtle line of malicious satisfaction curled the lips of the man, who usually played the part of stolid honesty with the greatest success. As chance would have it, on this occasion the Emperor, looking up suddenly, caught the last quivering trace of this smile. He took no notice of it; he perhaps became a shade paler—but he turned to whisper to the prefect of the guard.

"Only let this cloud of disaffection and excitement pass over," he said, clapping him on the shoulder, "and, I promise you, Caesar will not forget you. Now, my friends, farewell, and await our commands."

The general received a farewell kiss, and quitted the room.

"What an age is this, by all the gods!" exclaimed Domitian, throwing up his arms. "To contend against the malice of the people, Caesar is forced to sacrifice the hours, which he owes to the happiness and welfare of the people. Woe is me, that the immortals should allow such things to happen! Up and to work then! That is the word."

12

As he spoke, he rose and, followed by Parthenius and Clodianus, he went into his private study. The chamberlain closed the door behind him; Phaeton was on guard in the anteroom.

While the founder of the reign of terror thus yielded to an ill-concealed attack of panic, and already, in fancy, heard the roar of revolt, knocking with its blood-reddened sword at his palace gate, the reign of terror itself was lording it abroad, apparently more splendid and firmly based than ever. The doubled garrison had increased the popular feeling of the Emperor's might, and the calm, impressive solemnity, with which the terrible edict against the Nazarenes had been discussed and promulgated, seemed amply to prove how strong the throne felt itself, and how completely it was master of the situation. The numerous sacrifices which the prime mover of that piece of legislature, Titus Claudius Mucianus, had, in his function as Flamen, offered up to Jupiter, were both favorable and auspicious. The lower classes, who streamed in merry troops to the Circus Maximus, rejoiced over the gifts of corn and the gratification of their passion for a spectacle. The shouting and chanting processions of the priests of Bona Dea and of Isis added to the solemnity of the festival. Not a word of disaffection, not a discordant murmur was to be heard in this universal jubilation, which rolled in a mighty flood through the streets, markets, and public places. Sorrow and discontent are silent on such occasions. In the temple of Saturn a troop of blooming youths, wearing to-day for the first time the *toga virilis*,^[14] sang a high-flown festal ode, composed by Marcus Valerius Martialis. The inspired verse sounded out through the Forum, borne on the wings of a hundred youthful voices:

13

“Hail! oh birthday of Caesar, day more bright and auspicious
Ev'n than the day when, on Ida, Rhea gave birth to Zeus^[15]
Hail! and return more often than erst to Pylion Nestor,^[16]
Ever as bright as to-day, or a thousand times more fair.
Many years yet may Caesar keep the feast of Minerva^[17]
Held on the Alban Hill; and confer the victor's wreath
Twined of oak-leaves, the prize to crown the worthiest singer.
Soon may he hallow the secular games with offerings and gifts!
Great is the boon we ask; but from the gods in heaven
Such a boon is due to Caesar, the god upon earth.^[18]”

The melodious strain soared up from the temple of Saturn to the towering Palatium beyond.

But he, to whom the homage was offered, heard it not. Shut up with Clodianus and Parthenius, he was writing down on a wooden tablet the names of those, whom he devoted to death.^[19] Parthenius read them out in a low voice, and the Emperor assented; then the chamberlain wrote down another list of names, and again they were discussed in an undertone. Domitian's face meanwhile grew more and more like that of a jaguar, lurking in ambush to pounce on his prey.

14

“And you, Clodianus,” he whispered, almost inaudibly. “Do not you know of any reprobate wretch, who deserves to die?” He fixed his eye on the soldier's face.

“No, my lord,” said the adjutant. “It seems to me, that you have not overlooked one.”

“It is well. You will copy out the list—at once. The tablet I myself will keep. When Rome is saved, I will hang it up in the temple of Jupiter.”

Clodianus took his writing implements out of the folds of his tunic.

“Perhaps,” the Emperor added with a meaning smile.—“Perhaps another name or two may occur to me.” And he hid the strip of lime-wood in his bosom.

“And now,” he continued, “make your plans. I will not listen to anything till you can say to me: all is over; the deed is done. You know how cautiously, how warily you must proceed. Remember, your existence too is endangered; when a tree falls, the branches fall with it.—Go, my friends. If you triumph, I will endow you with power above all other mortals, and in splendor and honors you shall be equal with myself. I will name you my brothers.”

He sank exhausted on to a chair; Parthenius and Clodianus left the room.

“Yes, yes!” muttered Domitian between his teeth, as the door closed behind the two men; “one is yet wanting on the list of the elect!”

He drew forth the tablet, and, with an indescribable grimace of hatred, wrote at the end of the long list of names: “Clodianus.”

15

“Wait awhile, my friend! This task you shall be allowed to finish—but then—it is not well, when a sapling grows too proudly skywards.”

CHAPTER II.

Early next morning Quintus made his way to the Flamen's house. The great sitting of the Senate, which was to determine the fate of the edict against the Nazarenes, had been fixed for this forenoon; until he should join it, Titus Claudius was spending the morning with his family. The weather was unusually mild for the late season, and Octavia had ordered that breakfast should be served in the peristyle, and here, comfortably extended on his couch, the high-priest was enjoying his favorite dish, fresh eggs with *garum*.^[20] The ladies, attended only by Baucis and a little girl, were sitting in easy-chairs, sipping milk cooled with ice^[21] out of pale, gleaming Murrhine cups. Perfect silence reigned in the cavaedium; not even a slave stole across the marble flags, and the very tree-tops, golden in the morning sunshine, were motionless in the mild autumn air.

As Quintus came in from the arcade, and saw this party of those who were near and dear to him, his heart sank within him. A longing, which even in his sleep had haunted his dreams, and had driven him from his bed before daybreak, came over him now with almost irresistible force; his impulse was to throw himself at his father's feet, and kiss the hands that had so often rested lovingly on his head and brow. But he controlled himself. He went up to the high-priest, and gave him an affectionate kiss as usual, pressed his hand warmly, and then greeted the rest of the party gaily enough. 16

The previous day Quintus had come to a conclusion, which must open an impassable gulf between himself and his father. At the very time, when Titus Claudius was putting the finishing strokes to the great plan of attack against the Nazarenes, Quintus had made up his mind, that nothing less than the doctrine of that contemned sect could quench the thirst of his yearning soul. This consciousness had started into being suddenly, like a plant which springs up in a night; but the soil whence it made its way towards the light was—as we already know—ready long since, up-turned, as it were, by the ploughshare of doubt and dissatisfaction. The germ of his new views of life had long been slumbering as a dim craving, a longing, deep but aimless, for some saving certainty; it had needed no more than a fertilizing shower to develop it. Quintus was not disposed to bring a critical philosophy to bear on each of the various mysteries of the new faith, which, indeed, were as yet only known to him in part; but he grasped the kernel of the matter, and the more he investigated it, the deeper his conviction grew. The grand principle of the brotherly equality of all men, impressed him as strongly as the simple and yet consoling metaphysics of Christianity. To a naturally-creative imagination like his, the doctrine of an universal spirit embracing all time and space in sempiternal love was intrinsically clear and intelligible. He found in it the happy half-way term between the bewildering superstitions of popular belief and the cold abstractions of systematic philosophy. Added to this, was the ineffaceable impression made on his feelings by the high-souled nature of the wounded slave. The figure of Eurymachus shed a heavenly light on the source, whence he could have derived his invincible strength and lofty contempt of suffering and death. 17

Late the evening before, Quintus had sought out old Thrax, and had told him that Eurymachus at last was safe. Then they had all sat together for a long time—Quintus, Thrax, Glauce, Euterpe, and Diphilus—and the old man had not wearied of talking of the carpenter's Son, of his wanderings through the land of Palestine, and the agonizing death he had suffered on the cross to redeem mankind. The impressive story of that life and passion, which has touched and stirred so many million hearts since, had an extraordinary effect on Quintus. And, in fact, Thrax told his story well; the glow of conviction seemed to sparkle from his eyes. His was not the calm inspiration of Eurymachus—it was the language of a vehement and excited nature, of a soul full of suppressed energy and enthusiasm; not John, who leaned on the bosom of Jesus, but Peter drawing his sword in passionate zeal.

As Barbatus ceased speaking, Quintus started up, threw his arms round him, and exclaimed through his tears: "Receive me among you.... I too, am one of you!"

So it was agreed that Quintus Claudius, the son of the Flamen, Titus Claudius Mucianus, should, next day, be baptized in a quarry not far from the river Almo. 18

It was the thought of this privilege, and of the contradictory aspects of his position, which all through the night had pursued him in a thousand different forms, and now, in his father's hall, filled him with unutterable confusion. He felt that he must for a moment forget the abyss that lay between them, and once more hear his father's voice in loving tones, before their parting was an accomplished fact—forever.

The sense of an imperative duty was added to this sentiment. He felt that, hoping against hope, he must, even at the eleventh hour, try to weaken his father's position.—The final details of the edict, he knew, were virtually in the Flamen's hands. The Senate had long been accustomed to vote for whatever the Emperor wished, without any alterations, and Titus Claudius spoke in Caesar's name. Domitian, amply satisfied of his representative's inexorable temper, had not even taken the trouble to look through the sketch of the edict; the whole tenor of the law, in fact, lay in the high-priest's hands.

How gladly would Quintus have poured out his heart to his father, and have told him without reserve all that he held to be true, fair, and good! How willingly would he have gone up to him,

and have said: "Caesar's government is groping in darkness; these Christians, whom you are condemning to destruction, are not criminals, but noble, virtuous, high-souled men—as noble, and virtuous, and high-souled as you yourself, father, who persecute them with such vindictive fury."

But such boldness, alas! was out of the question; Quintus knew his father too well. He knew, that the rigid convictions of a mind like his were impervious to all that was new or strange, that even the logic of facts could only reach him by a long and circuitous route. His convictions had been the slow growth of years of unresting activity, and now they were immovable—a part of his very self. Thus Quintus had not the smallest doubt, that Titus Claudius, like a second Brutus, would not spare his own son, if duty and paternal feeling should come into conflict. So it was not his own peril only, which dictated moderation and silence, but regard for his father's situation; and he never had felt a more tender reverence for him, than in this terrible hour. He could not speak as an adherent, nor even as a defender of the persecuted creed; only as a looker-on from the point of view of abstract justice. In speech and in silence alike he must betray no impatience, and seem only to have acquired his more exact knowledge of the Christian creed by accident. He could do no more than represent the Nazarenes as harmless folks, who neither deserved persecution nor were worth the trouble.

When he had taken his seat at the table by Lucilia, like a man who has time before him, he asked, throwing his head back and clasping his hands across his knee:

"Well, father ... and to-day is the last meeting?"

"As you say," replied the high-priest.

"I must confess, that the matter has remained almost unknown to me.... I have been so absorbed in study, that I have hardly time to frequent the baths...."

"You are three-and-twenty, Quintus! When do you propose to take a proper interest in the great concerns of the Empire?"

"Indeed I generally follow them all with eager interest. It is only that just lately, at this moment...."

"This is the very moment, when all who are well-affected ought to cling together and show their zeal in action."

"It is said, that the decree you propose is excessively severe," said Quintus after a pause.

"It will answer its purpose."

"And will be issued unmodified?"

"Why should good sound sense be modified?"

"Well ... opinions might differ."

"They might, if the whole body of the Fathers^[22] were men of the same stamp as that Cornelius Cinna ... then sound sense would indeed be in danger!"

"Cornelius Cinna is a man of keen judgment...."

"I quite understand, that you should talk the language of the uncle of your betrothed; but, as I know him, he is devoid of all capacity for statesmanship. Now in this matter of the Nazarenes he has amply betrayed his want of judgment—I will call it so, since I should be loth to suppose that his opposition arises from mere personal aversion."

"What?" cried Quintus astonished. "Cornelius Cinna takes the part of the Nazarenes?"

"No, he does not take their part, but he does not regard them as dangerous. He laughs at them as visionaries and fools, who are no more to be held as reprobate, than the worshippers of Isis, or any other oriental sect. Mockery, contempt, are the only weapons worthy of a thinking man. When I pointed out to him, that the creed of the Nazarenes was undermining the religion of the state in a way which no other superstition had done, he dared to utter these audacious words: 'If your Olympus cannot take care of itself, it may crumble into dust.'"

"The words, I admit, sound audacious enough," replied Quintus, looking his father in the face; "but they cover a truth nevertheless, which, it seems to me, cannot fail to be self-evident to the priest of Jupiter."

"You think so? I can only tell you, that I see nothing of the sort. The rabble crowd of superstitious cannot, to be sure, destroy almighty Jupiter himself, but it can upset the belief in his divine rule. We may be deprived of our discernment of the truth, if a lie becomes paramount."

"Why then do you not resist the belief in Isis?"

"Because the religion of Isis has never dared to interfere in any way with that of the state. Besides, Isis is Juno; the name makes no difference. The symbol may vary—the essence remains untouched. You know, that even in my own house I have suffered Baucis...."

"Oh! merciful Isis!" cried the old woman in alarm, "am I too to be dragged under the dreadful law? Why, how often have I been to Barbillus? Four, or at most five times—or six or seven...."

"Hold your tongue, and leave us together," cried the priest angrily. "She is getting silly," he added, as Baucis vanished among the columns.

"She is growing deaf," said Claudia in excuse. "Since our return from Baiae, I have had more to put up with every day."

"You see I can be patient," Titus Claudius went on, addressing his son. "But in this instance we must take up arms against the attacks of a dangerous foe. The Nazarenes are working underground, day and night, like moles. Their passion for converts amounts to insanity; they are systematically undermining the state and society. I am determined to put a stop to these attacks. If we do not put our veto on them in time, we shall have a common porter on the throne of the Caesars, and all that wear the purple will be put to the sword. Some slave, whose sole employment till now has been to drag dead beasts to be buried, or carry plague-stricken wretches through the streets, will be sacrificing in the Roman Capitol as high-priest to the Nazarene! I know it all full well; there are unmistakable signs in the air. This, my dear Quintus, by the help of the gods, is what we must oppose, and I shall avail myself of the aid of all the terrors of the law. This very day it will be proclaimed to all men, that leniency is at an end: henceforth the punishment for the crime of belonging to the Nazarenes is death by wild beasts in the Arena."

22

The blood faded from the young man's face; his heart stood still. He could not utter a word.

"What is the matter with you?" asked Titus Claudius startled. "You are pale ... trembling...."

"It is nothing," Quintus said with an effort. "I was only horrified at the severity of the measure. What? The disgraceful death of the vilest criminals ... hideous butchery for the amusement of the mob...? Father, impossible!"

"It is necessary," replied the Flamen.

"I do not understand you. Is it necessary to punish with death a crime—which to me seems an error indeed, but a pardonable, a noble, a sublime error...? Father, you do not know these persecuted people; you have never studied their doctrine; you cannot imagine how completely you are entangled in delusions about them. The Nazarenes are not rebels; they are quiet, dutiful folk, who ask but one thing: to be allowed to worship their God. Their Master himself taught them: "To render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's.""

23

"Only a partisan of the sect could have poured such lies into your ear...."

"I was, by accident, witness to a discussion," Quintus stammered out. "And I will pledge my life and honor as to the truth of what I have said!"

"The truth!" laughed his father. "For the truth of your own view of the matter at most. By the gods, but I really do not understand how my son, of all men, should have come to be a defender of this accursed sect! However, be it so! I leave you the free exercise of your judgment; the course of events will soon rectify it. Meanwhile, you will perhaps allow me to carry out the line of action, which I have cautiously weighed with solemn appeals to my conscience."

"Then you want to conjure the age of Nero from the grave?"

"Yes, my son. The age of Nero was not so bad, though the unbridled Caesar himself committed many crimes. His fight against the Nazarenes wipes out all scores."

"Then you can praise him for having wrapped Nazarenes in tow and rosin, and set fire to it?"

"Those are mere foolish tales, invented by contemptible writers, who were at a loss for color in their pictures."

24

"What? Things that all the world knows, a fable!"

"As you say."

The blood mounted to the young man's brow.

"Then perhaps you will say it is a fable, that Domitian—a second Nero—has killed his mistress by a kick?"

"Who says so?" cried Titus Claudius starting up.

"All Rome. You only, Father, seem to be ignorant of what has filled thousands with horror."

"You heard it from Cinna."

Quintus shrugged his shoulders.

"Be easy," the priest went on; "I have it from Parthenius, that Julia died of her long illness."

"Parthenius!" laughed Quintus scornfully.

"I am not justified in doubting his assertion, particularly in this instance, when it is in contradiction to such an impossible calumny. I myself have been intimate with Caesar long enough to know his calm nature, his equanimity, and self-command."

"Yes, when he speaks to you; but every one knows that he wears a mask in your presence. You

are, in fact, the only man in Rome, who can command his respect.”

“I should be a fool indeed to believe such a thing. I know full well, that hatred and calumny never sleep. The higher their prey, the more virulent is their attack. Beware, my son, of propagating such disgraceful reports; do not break the law which threatens the detractors of the sovereign with heavy punishment.”

“Then, to be a worthy citizen, I must choke the truth?”

“Not the truth—only lies. The weeds have been allowed to grow too long, and now we must mow down the crop, which threatens to choke the good seed! Here comes the boy to tell us the time. In an hour the Senate meets. Let us enjoy the interval without vexing each other.”

25

“Then you persist in extreme measures? Every one who confesses the Nazarene must die?”

“Without reprieve, be he slave or senator.”

Quintus was fighting an agonizing battle; his lips trembled, already parted to cry in despair to the inexorable judge: “Father, you are condemning your son to death...!” but he controlled himself in time. He rose.

“Farewell,” he said in a low voice, and he held out both hands to his father. “I am very busy,” he added in a steady voice. “Important business—you need not laugh, Lucilia—requires my return. Father, when it is your turn to speak in the Senate, remember your son—perhaps the thought may soften your heart; the Christians, too, whom you doom to death, are fathers ... sons....”

He rushed away. He was on the verge of tears, but he set his teeth and clenched his fist.

“Oh! misery, misery!” he said to himself. “Father! Father! who could have foreseen this severance when I, as a boy, sat at your feet? Nay, quite lately, when you spoke to me so gravely!—How happy, how gay they all were; and he, so calm in the sense of doing his duty! If he only knew—it would kill him!”

He hurried through the atrium, almost beside himself; Blepyrus, to whom he had only yesterday granted his pardon, was waiting there with others of his clients and slaves.

26

His family looked after him in silence. Octavia was the first to speak.

“It is strange,” she said thoughtfully, “by all the gods, strange! What can have come over him? He always held the populace in such contempt.”

“It is impossible to count upon him,” said Lucilia. “But this time, it seems to me, he is carrying his whim too far.”

“You are wrong,” said her father sternly. “It was no whim that spoke in that mood of excitement, it was genuine enthusiasm. I have observed in him for some time, that this frame of mind has been growing to a height. It is the sacred fire of pity, which burns within him, a noble sentiment which discerns the man even in the criminal. He cannot comprehend, that the State must ignore all such sentiment, if the commonwealth is not to suffer. His impulse is a foolish one, but I love him for it; and many a Roman maiden who, with thumbs turned down,^[23] helps in condemning the stricken gladiator to the death-blow, might envy him his nobler soul!”

The high-priest rose and walked two or three times up and down, past the fountain where the sparkling water now gleamed in the rising sun.

“It is time to go,” he said, standing still in front of his wife. “What a pity! It is a glorious morning, and I feel as if I had never so thoroughly enjoyed the rest and peacefulness of this peristyle. Perhaps it is only by contrast with the storms outside, that toss the vessel of state.... The sitting will be a long one, if only on Cinna’s account, who never will refrain from words, even when the struggle is a hopeless one. I shall be thankful if it is all over by supper-time. And—did I tell you?—Sextus Furius is to be our guest.”

27

Claudia colored.

“He is welcome,” Octavia said.

“Oh! that odious man with a long-pointed nose!” cried Lucilia. “It is horrible always to have none but such weak-kneed old men at table with us.”

Titus Claudius was accustomed to allow considerable license to his adopted daughter’s audacity, but such broadly-expressed contempt was beyond all permissible measure.

“Lucilia!” he exclaimed almost angrily. “You sometimes allow yourself jests, which seem to me positively silly. Remember—do you hear me?—many follies, which we forgive in a child, sound shocking when uttered by the lips of a young woman. How dare you make any guests of mine the subject of your mockery? Sextus Furius is an honorable man, wise, experienced, and worthy of all respect. If his outward man is not altogether that of the fine gentlemen, who swarm and buzz from morning till night round the dressing-chairs and litters^[24] of fine ladies, in my eyes, at least, that is to his advantage.”

“My dear, good, little father,” said the criminal, “do not take a thoughtless speech so seriously; I cannot bear to hear you speak to me so ungraciously—and your eyes are not so kind and sweet as usual, and here on your forehead—just here—there is an ugly line that makes you look so much

28

older....”

She threw her round, rosy arms round his neck, and stroked his cheek lovingly.

“Come, be kind again to your little girl—and I will declare that your long-nosed—oh! I forgot—your excellent friend, Sextus Furius, is delightful.” Titus Claudius gently released himself; he could not help smiling.

“It is impossible to scold you, you little imp,” he said shaking his head. “I am afraid I spoil you.”

And he once more glanced up at the blue sky, as though he grudged having to exchange the airy peristyle for the senate-house. Then, waving them a farewell, he went off to his own rooms.

“But he is a perfect horror, all the same,” Lucilia repeated, when her father was out of hearing. “I can tell you, Mother dear, I could not kiss him for a thousand millions, much less marry him! And is this long-nosed, weak-kneed creature to be the husband of our Claudia?”

“Silence, silly child,” said Octavia with affected severity. “Your father’s will is our law. He has his own reasons for whatever he decides on.”

“You are only making believe,” said Lucilia. “You know you like him no better than I do, and you, too, grieve over the odious fancy....”

“Lucilia!”

“Well ... is one to bite one’s tongue out simply from respect of persons? My father often has fancies. What should Claudia have to do with that wooden simpleton? And he is as cowardly as a whimpering woman! Cornelia told me so—she heard it from her uncle.”

29

“It is not every one, that has the headstrong spirit of Cinna.”

“A Scythian, who simply cut down all before him, his wife into the bargain, rather than a milksop, that you can knock down with a feather!”

“You know nothing about it, child. But where is Claudia? Why has she left us?”

“She has gone to her own room, I daresay, to cry there. Since yesterday, when my father told her of his determination, she has practised such complete self-control, that her grief must have its way at last.”

But Lucilia was mistaken. Claudia had followed her father, and went into his room close on his heels.

“What do you want?” he asked in surprise, seeing his daughter stand before him, pale, calm, and stately.

“I have a confession to make to you, which has been on my lips ever since yesterday.”

“Well?” said the high-priest, hardly attending.

“Send away the servants.”

“Child, I have no time now for any discussions; in twenty minutes....”

“I will not detain you.” The Flamen signed to the slaves, who disappeared with an enquiring glance at the young girl’s unusually serious face and manner.

“Now—what have you to say?” he asked, when they were alone.

“Father,” said Claudia in a low, but resolute tone, “I cannot marry Sextus Furius.”

“Folly!”

“It is not folly—it is as I say.”

“Indeed! and why not?”

30

“Because I do not care for him.”

“An excellent reason! Why, you hardly know him; try first to understand his worth.”

“I solemnly assure you it is quite in vain. My heart is given away—I love Caius Aurelius Menapius.”

“What!” cried the priest sternly. “A provincial, a man of no birth or family!”

“He is a Roman knight.”

“A knight—and who is not a knight now-a-days? A man is a knight, if he is anything but a laborer or a slave. Besides, is not his mother descended from some barbarian tribe?”

“From the tribe, that could conquer Varus.”

“So much the worse. It grieves me to have to tell you, that I will never submit to such a vagary.”

“But let me ask you one thing: do you not esteem Caius Aurelius?”

"You know I do. From the first I have thought most highly of him. But, by Jupiter! To regard him as my guest is one thing—as a suitor for my daughter's hand is quite another!"

"Father, if you part me from Caius Aurelius, I shall never be happy again. He has my promise."

Her tone, and, yet more, the sparkle in her eyes betrayed such settled determination, that the high-priest was staggered. The thought flashed upon him that, after all, not everything in the world could be calculated by the inexorable laws of logic; the possibility of Claudia's choosing for herself he had never taken into consideration. And now this possibility—nay, actuality—stood before him so pressingly, in the form of a pair of tearful, suppliant eyes, that he at once lost his grasp of the situation. As for Claudia herself, her forced calmness was fast giving way before the storm of excitement, which shook every fibre of her slender frame.

31

"Claudia, my darling," stammered the Flamen, clasping his child in his arms, "you are trembling and tearful; but come, come, be reasonable. There, lay your head on my shoulder, and tell me, calmly and without tears, what is troubling your heart? I am your father, my child, and not a tyrant. Do you hear, my Claudia?"

She looked up like a flower after a thunder-shower—a radiance of a grateful smile lighted up her features.

"You are so good!" she said, tenderly. "Forgive me, if I cannot help causing you trouble."

"Speak, my child; tell me everything. But, no; for the present leave me. You are agitated, and time presses. We will talk it all over—this very evening.—Just now I have not leisure—I belong to my country. Meanwhile I must ask you one thing: do not be too abrupt with Sextus Furius. Promise me that, dear Claudia."

"With all my heart."

She kissed her father eagerly and left the room.

"No," said the priest half-aloud, "she must not and shall not be unhappy. I never before saw her like this; that anguish came from the bottom of her heart. I know her; I understand her! The dignity of my name! Yes, it is dear to me, and sacred as a gift bestowed by the gods—but at that price! Never. My heart swelled as she clung to me, crying in my arms. And yet what a joy to me, in spite of sorrow! Ah, my children! how you have grown to be part of my very soul! Every life-throb of my heart is doubled by your lives! I thank Thee, all-merciful giver, for so precious a blessing—every cloud of incense, that rises from thine altar, wafts up my fervent thanks to thy throne!"

32

For a few minutes he stood absorbed in thought; then he called his slaves to dress him.

A quarter of an hour later Titus Claudius was at the temple of Jupiter Capitolinus, where the Senate was to sit.

Almost all the Fathers had met on this occasion. Here sat Nerva, a noble and reverend figure, mild, but majestic as Jove; there, bending over his rolled book and writing tablets, sat Cornelius Cinna, the chief opponent of the proposed law; there again sat Sextus Furius, shy and hesitating, but in earnest discussion with his neighbor, evidently endeavoring to display a feverish anxiety that the new decree should be passed. On every side were snow-white togas, grave and dignified faces, a strangely-excited air of suspense. The scribes—the writers of protocols—sat at tables prepared to write, while at the entrances stood the lictors^[25] with their axes and fasces.

The presiding magistrate—on this occasion a praetor, no doubt because the consul, Titus Flavius Clemens, was suspected of secretly favoring the Nazarenes, or even of having joined the sect—pronounced the sitting opened.^[26] He briefly set forth the occasion of the present meeting, and explained to the assembled worthies the main features of the edict, as drawn up by Titus Claudius.

33

When these preliminary statements—known as the *relatio*,^[27] had been got through, the collecting of votes began with the usual formula addressed to each senator: "*Quid censens?*"—"What thinkest thou?"

As almost every member present declared his assent without hesitation, and some with servile cordiality, in hardly more than a quarter of an hour it came to Cinna's turn to express his opinion.

He rose slowly. His by no means remarkable stature seemed to grow from the sheer calm dignity of the man. His eye glanced contemptuously round at the assembled multitude and rested, at length, on the grave face of Titus Claudius Mucianus. Then, in clear and audible tones, he began to contest the proposed measure which, in his opinion, was unworthy of the Roman name. It was a brilliant and memorable effort of political eloquence. At the same time his discourse was not framed on the ordinary models in any respect, it was not with the arid wisdom of a statesman that he spoke—no, it was the biting lash of the satirist that he wielded—the fiery invective of epigram, that gave glow to his words. There was not a province of human knowledge so recondite, that his subtle mind had not drawn upon it for drastic similes and ironical comparisons.

"Will you nail flies to the cross," he exclaimed in a voice of thunder, "erect cranes and levers, to lift a straw over a wall? Send me a hundred cohorts to my country-house; a mole-hill has been discovered there! Give me shears and scythes and a couple of wagons; I want to cut a rose-bud at

34

Praestum! Reef the sails, captain, the fair Lycoris is about to sneeze! You are really inimitable, you stern guardians of morals and most sapient defenders of the immaculateness of the State! Punish the sparrows, if you please; one of those traitorous villains but just now soiled my cloak. Away with the wretch to the field of blood! If you do not at once take steps, the Senate and the whole Roman people will be buried alive by cock-sparrows."

After thus gibbeting the measure as absolutely superfluous, petty and ridiculous, from the point of view of any cultivated and philosophical mind, he followed up his statement to its logical issues.

"This decree," he cried, turning towards Titus Claudius, "condemns the Nazarenes, because they regard the gods of the populace as unreal—as mere idols of the fancy. Well! And is it the right or the duty of the State, to take under its control any such matters of personal conviction? Where would you draw the line, ye assembled Fathers? Do you not perceive, that you are throwing away the last fragments of our liberties, if you assent to this law? What? You will kill the Nazarenes? Then you are equally bound to crush all, who refuse to acknowledge the love passages of Mars and Rhea Silvia as facts! And again I say, where do you draw the line? How far does the duty of a staunch citizen extend? Must an Athenian, for instance, give due guarantee, that he accepts the historical reality of Leda's eggs? Is he required to believe in Danae's golden shower, in Sisyphus^[28] and his tormenting labor with the marble mass that forever rolls downwards? Nay, noble Fathers! Nothing like this has ever yet been heard of in Rome. Never yet has the State ventured to put forward any article of faith as a test and standard, and require every Roman citizen to be persuaded of its truth or lose his rights and privileges. What is the meaning of our old, beautiful and truly Latin word '*religio*'?^[29] Nothing more than the holy dread, the heartfelt reverence of man before a higher power; but what that higher something may be, it contains no indication. It is left to each individual, to conceive of an idea which may satisfy his own soul and intellect. The measure now before you will drag this religion from the depths of men's souls into the public street, as it were, in defiance of the original deep-felt sense of the word, and of the spirit of our traditions and customs; it will create a State-religion, and condemn every man's opinions to wear at least the same livery. Assembled Fathers! Such a decree as this means ossification—spiritual ossification—of the age we live in, and for this, if for no other reason, it should be thrown out!"

35

He paused; a dull, uneasy silence filled the room. The senators sat in consternation at the unheard-of audacity of the man, who could dare to defy Caesar's omnipotence with such disinterested liberality.

"He is uttering his own death-warrant," whispered Sextus Furius. Gradually a low murmur arose and swelled by degrees.

"Have you done?" asked the President, seeing that Cornelius Cinna gave no sign of resuming his seat.

36

"Allow me a few words more," replied Cinna. "Do not be afraid, that my intention is merely to postpone your decision by digressions.^[30] I only want to touch on one other point, which has perhaps escaped the notice of the noble Fathers. This law, which in accordance with my every conviction I feel bound to oppose, not only threatens to cripple the public mind; it will destroy all the peace and happiness of family life. Tale-telling and dishonorable espionage, to a very grave extent, will be the inevitable out-come—and of these, as it is, Rome needs no increase! A law, which offers a prize, as it were, to the informer—such a law, I say, is death to the morality and mutual confidence of the people. I have warned you! Do not calmly lend a hand in forging a weapon, which threatens thousands of peaceful citizens with death. Can you foresee, that no conditions will arise to turn its point, even against yourselves? You are masters of the cast only so long as the spear is in your own hands. Assembled Fathers, I am convinced that you will unanimously reject this measure which, on one hand, is superfluous and undignified, and, on the other, to the last degree dangerous—reject it, I say, to the honor and glory of the name of Rome!"

The impression made by this speech—which derived from the dignified presence, the sonorous voice and the impressive manner of the speaker an importance far beyond the mere meaning of the words—was so profound, that it fanned into brief flame the few sparks of the old Roman spirit, which still lurked here and there in the assembly. Shouts of approbation were audible on both sides. For a moment the grave features of Titus Claudius wore an expression of anxiety. But the cries of assent were few and scattered. On any other occasion Cornelius Cinna would have triumphed, but now only one voice could gain a hearing—the voice of fear. The effect of its eloquence was visible as the next names were called; the members announced, not without hesitation, that there was much in Cinna's discourse which was amply justified, but that they must nevertheless cast their votes in favor of the decree, particularly as they felt assured that Titus Claudius, the real originator of the measure, would only have acted on a perfect knowledge of the state of affairs, and after the maturest deliberation. And indeed, the motives which the Flamen had assigned on former occasions, had by no means been nullified by Cornelius Cinna.

37

When four or five speakers had expressed themselves to this effect, in feeble and colorless language, it was the turn of Titus Claudius Mucianus himself. He rose with the lofty indifference of a man, who no longer has a doubt of the triumph of his cause. He abstained, almost too evidently, from all rhetorical effects. In a cold and strictly business-like address he recapitulated the points from which the government viewed the measure. Cornelius Cinna, he said, was entirely wrong, if he thought that its object was to fetter liberty of thought and belief. The whole matter bore a simply political aspect in the eyes of the government. He thanked the eloquent

speaker, who had thrown so much light on the subject from the other side; such a dissertation always tended to enlightenment. At the same time, he hoped that the assembled Fathers would allow themselves to be guided rather by the force of solid argument, than by the dazzling light of a brilliant oratorical display. Then, step by step, he proceeded to demolish Cinna's assertions, and it was with special emphasis, that he combatted the idea that the new law would conduce to espionage and informing; the measure—as the most superficial glance could detect—contained nothing to arouse suspicion on that score. Cornelius Cinna had altogether misunderstood its tendency. The speaker ended with a short but striking picture of the danger to society, which it was proposed to guard against, and appealed to the assembled Fathers, in the words of the old Roman text of warning: "Be on your guard, lest the Fatherland should suffer!"^[31]

A thunder of applause filled the temple. The remaining senators renounced all expression of opinion, and the praetor proceeded to collect the votes by a show of hands.^[32] The measure was passed against a minority of six. The exhausted senators rose and made their way homewards—only just in time for the usual supper-hour.

Quintus Claudius supped late and alone. He had spent the whole day in solitude in his room; gloomy and anxious forebodings tortured his soul. He eat but little, and then again withdrew—not even Blepyrus was admitted to his apartments. At about the beginning of the second vigil, Quintus threw on his toga and went out slowly into the moonless night. After a long walk he reached the coppice on the bank of the Almo, where Euterpe and Diphilus were waiting for him. An hour later the deed was done. Quintus was baptized by the eldest member of the congregation of Nazarenes.

It was nearly midnight, when he took his way homewards. The endless Appian Way was silent as he turned into it, and silent too was the busy city. It was not till he reached the Flavian amphitheatre, that he met any stir of life. There, standing by the fountain of the Meta Sudans, was a group of men, talking eagerly. They were discussing the event of the day—the edict just published against the Christians.

"There will be heaps and heaps of arena fights," cried one; "the Subura swarms with Nazarenes."

"Let them have it!" said another. "The last wild-beast fight was the most wretched affair; and when I sit there, in my newly-bleached toga,^[33] blood is what I want!"

"Merciful Lord Jesus Christ!" murmured Quintus. "From this hour my only God! To Thy keeping I commend my life. And ah! protect him—that dear father, who never dreams how fearful is the darkness that shrouds his sight. Preserve him—my dear, dear father; and forgive him, O God—him and his fellows—for they know not what they do."

CHAPTER III.

40

Domitian had not been present at the meeting of the Senate. He had gone to sleep late, and, not waking till long after sunrise, he remained in bed to receive his chamberlain, Parthenius, who came to announce to him that the plan of campaign against the proscribed sect was fully laid and ratified. This news entirely restored Caesar's lost composure, and he came to breakfast in the best humor possible.

His spirits rose still higher, when Parthenius reported the results of his overtures to Barbillus. The priest of Isis had expressed himself ready to meet the Emperor's wishes for a consideration of ninety thousand denarii. His co-operation was not to be had cheaper, since Barbillus had a tender conscience, and could not risk the wrath of Isis, the all-powerful, for less.

Domitian rubbed his hands, and a hideous, leering smile stole over his sallow face. His eyes sparkled scornfully under his lowering brow.

"By Cypris! a sly fox is this Barbillus! And will he pledge his word that the shy nymph...?"

"Do not be uneasy, my lord. Barbillus has planned such a piece of bewildering magic to play, that she will lose her head. You are to appear before her, mysteriously illuminated and with lightning flashing round you, in the form of the hawk-headed god, Osiris.^[34]—All sorts of mystical effects are to be introduced.—Rely upon it, my lord, she is yours, if ever a mortal woman was conquered by an immortal god."

41

"You have done well!" cried Caesar, enchanted. "How our noble Cinna would writhe, if he could know.... These conjurors are inexhaustible with their ingenious tricks. The strange thing is, that so much truth creeps in among so many lies. Who was it, that told you that Barbillus is a master of astrology?"

"Sextus Furius, to whom he foretold his brothers' death."

"I remember ... and the prophecy was verified?"

"To the very hour. The two men were in Gaul at the time, and no one here knew that they were ill. The elder died on the ides of February, and the younger two days later."

Caesar's face clouded, and he cast a sinister glance at Parthenius. Could it, indeed, be that the chamberlain did not know he was speaking treason?—could he so utterly have forgotten, what had happened to the soothsayer Ascleterio? Domitian had expected a denial from the courtier, not a confirmation of the facts. Truly, even Parthenius, it would seem, had ceased to care for his sovereign's favor! Even he was growing audacious and reckless.

42

Domitian involuntarily felt for the little wooden tablet which lay under his pillow; but Parthenius met his eye with a look of such perfect innocence, that Domitian felt a qualm of remorse. He held out his hand to the chamberlain and said, with an effort to be amiable:

"Thank you, my friend; your information will be useful. I have not yet decided whether I will appear at table, or indeed leave my rooms at all. But, in any case, do you be here in good time for the precious divine comedy in the evening."

"As my sovereign commands."

"Listen—stop!" cried Caesar, as Parthenius was going. "To-day, you know, Julia, my late brother's daughter, is to be buried^[35]...."

"I know, my lord!"

"Well ... I forgot to say ... her ashes are to be carried to the temple of the Flavia family;^[36] the dignity of our race requires it. I beg of you to omit nothing, that is due to the Manes of the illustrious dead—such as Julia. I would have the people know and tell each other, how Domitian honors the daughter of the divine Titus."

"I understand."

And Parthenius went.

"I will watch him," said Domitian to himself. "If he too.... No torture would be too severe for such a breach of faith.... Folly! His fate is so inseparably bound up with mine, that my fall must bring him down too."

43

He slowly raised himself from the pillow, leaning on his right hand, and a slight shudder ran through him; he was cold. "The consequence of yesterday's excitement," he said to himself, drawing the coverlet closer round him. By Castor, but it is becoming absurd! Always the same fabric of the brain—that foolish, hideous figure, with its ghastly face and gaping wound!" And he pressed his hand over his eyes.

"It is ridiculous. Must everything on earth repeat itself? Nero, gory shade, I laugh you to scorn! Have I waded in blood? Have I set the immortal city in flames, and struck my lyre while the people howled in anguish? Have I murdered my own mother? Nay—I am a mild and merciful sovereign. Compared with Nero—a child, a lamb, a dove! Away! Why stand grinning at me there,

horrid vision? You have long been dust and ashes.—Vanish, go, or I will strangle you!...”

He groaned and sank back on his cushions. His eyes were closed, but his hands were stretched out, stark, as if convulsed; his breath came hard and quickly, and his livid lips never ceased moving.

“It is he, it is he....” he stammered, sitting up again. “I see him, barefoot, his mantle torn, riding towards Phaon’s house.[37]—I hear the shouts of the soldiers in the camp close by.—They are cursing him.—His horse has shied—he is looking round—the Praetorians know his pale face.—Now he has leaped from his saddle, and is hiding in the bushes.—How he gasps! How thirsty he is—he is stooping over a puddle to drink!—They have reached the villa; there—he is trembling, his knees give way.—Here is a messenger from Rome bringing Phaon the news—the decision of the Senate. Traitors! Treason! Death by the hand of the executioner.—Hark! Horses!—the soldiers are coming out to take him.—Come, more merciful steel, and pierce this throbbing heart. Kill him, murder him, tear him limb from limb!—It is over, there he lies, stiff on his cloak, his eyes starting out of their sockets. His face is as pale as ashes.—Thus dies Nero!—Alas! and woe is me! Thus dies Domitian!”

44

A loud and piercing shriek; then the silence of the grave.

“Help, help!” cried the boy, who was on guard in the cubiculum. “Help—quick!”

It was Phaeton, Caesar’s favorite slave; he rushed forward to lift up the Emperor, who lay like one dead. His left arm hung helplessly over the edge of the bed; he had pushed aside his pillows, and with them, his wooden tablet which, as Phaeton pulled the cushions into place, fell with a clatter on to the floor. The lad stooped and picked it up, only just in time to save it from being trodden on by the other slaves, who came rushing in from all sides. He instinctively hid the piece of wood in his tunic. A moment later and the physician came in, who at once dismissed all unnecessary attendants, among them Phaeton, who was still trembling from the shock. Caesar, he said, must have absolute rest.

45

Phaeton, however, lingered; he wanted to know whether Caesar’s life was in danger, and it was not till the leech had reassured him on that point, that he was persuaded to quit the room and remain in the cavaedium close at hand. There he went to the south-western entrance, where two of the praetorian guard were keeping watch in shining armor. He sat down, squatting on the mosaic pavement, near a door which commanded a view over the Aventine. For a time he stared vacantly at the tall, stiff figures with their dazzling helmets and their calm, stern, weather-beaten faces. Then, with a yawn, he idly drew forth the wooden tablet. He could not read, and his eye wandered curiously down the close rows of curling or angular letters, which to him were signs far more mystical than the old Hebrew rolls of manuscripts, which he had seen his mother read. Then he fell to balancing the little board on his fingers, trying to support it on one corner, as he had seen Masthion, the famous juggler do, out on the Field of Mars.

At this moment the heavy tread of Clodianus was heard approaching.[38] He had been requested by the chamberlain to visit the room where Julia was lying dead. The boy, with a dim sense of wrong-doing in thus playing tricks with the property of his imperial master, hastily hid the tablet in his tunic again. But the very promptness with which he did so attracted the adjutant’s attention.

“What are you hiding there?” he asked, beckoning the lad to him.

46

“Nothing, my lord—a little board....” stammered Phaeton. “Our lord and god is ill—he fainted; the bit of wood fell on the ground....”

“Show it to me.” The boy obeyed, trembling, for the adjutant’s voice had a growl in it of distant thunder. At the court of the Roman Emperor any one might, at any moment, happen to offend the majesty of Caesar beyond all forgiveness. The quaking youngster fully expected that the next words he should hear would be:

“Go, and be soundly flogged!” or even worse. What then was his surprise when Clodianus, who on first glancing at the tablet had frowned darkly, suddenly lost his expression of angry defiance, and looked anxiously round at the sentinels.

“Have they seen this?” he asked, drawing the lad aside.

“No, my lord.”

“Where did you find this tablet?”

“It was lying under the great sovereign’s pillow.”

“And you stole it?”

“Nay, my lord. It fell out, when Caesar lost consciousness.”

“Caesar is sick, then?”

“I said so before. He screamed as if an asp had stung him; then he fainted. The leech says there is no danger....”

“Let us hope so, let us hope so.—Did any one see you pick up this little tablet?”

"No, my lord."

"Listen, then, to what I tell you. Replace it as soon as possible, and secretly.—Mark me well, very secretly—exactly where it was. If any one finds out that you brought it out here, you are a dead man—I mean well by you, Phaeton."

47

"Oh! my lord, if I could have dreamed that I was committing a crime...."

"Be silent, and do as I bid you. By our conquering eagle! I am not one of those, who make an outcry about every little stupid thing. An old soldier is not prone to tale-telling—only do not betray yourself."

"How have I deserved so much kindness?" said the poor boy, kissing the wily courtier's hand. "Perhaps I could slip into the room again now...."

"You can but try, my boy; and for the future take care what you do. Things that Caesar thinks fit to hide under his pillow, are not meant for the eyes of others, you may be sure. Do not forget that."

The lad went; Clodianus looked after him, nodding his head as he said to himself: "A most fortunate chance! You write a plain hand, Caesar! I have seen this coming for some time. You insist on having none but foes, great potentate! No confederates! Well—I can but try to play the part."

Meanwhile Domitian had recovered from his swoon. An overwrought mind, the physician said, and anxiety for the weal of his beloved Romans had reduced the Father of his country to this condition; escape from all business, amusement, and enjoyment of every kind, were the only means of avoiding a recurrence of the attack. Domitian accepted this diagnosis with favor. The external application of Vesuvian wine, and a few mouthfuls of the strongest Samian, which he swallowed eagerly, had entirely restored his vigor; he did not even feel so languid as usual. He spent another hour in bed, by the leech's advice, and then he allowed himself to be dressed, and ordered his litter. Just as he was quitting the room he remembered the tablet; he hastened back and raised the pillow. There it lay—the register of death. He put it in his bosom.

48

"What are you doing here?" he said, turning sharply on Phaeton, who was standing by, pale and frightened.

"Whatever my lord and god may command."

"Then order Narcissus to wait in the cubiculum,^[39] and do you come with me."

Phaeton breathed once more. He obeyed with the swiftness of the wind.

The Emperor passed the hours till supper-time in one of the vast pleasaunces on the top of Mons Janiculus, and to Phaeton was vouchsafed the coveted honor of entertaining the ruler of the world, while the rest of the suite stood aside in reverent silence. Domitian was remarkably gracious to-day. He condescended to pinch the boy's rosy cheeks, and invited him to share the breakfast, which was served in a garden-house with every conceivable luxury. Then Phaeton must sing to him, and tell him once more about his mother, the beautiful, heart-broken Judith, who had been brought to Rome as a young girl from her home in Palestine, and had never ceased weeping till her large, flashing eyes were dim and blind. The boy knew how to talk, sometimes gaily, sometimes sadly—of the holy citadel of Jerusalem^[40] which, to him, included all that was sacred on earth—of the horrors of the siege—the Temple of Solomon—the hoary cedars of Lebanon. Then he would relate some reminiscence of his own experience—of the first time he threw the discus on the Field of Mars, and attracted the notice of Parthenius—of the pride and awe with which he had, for the first time, entered the imperial apartments—his delight at Caesar's approbation, when he returned from an excursion to Albanum.

49

As he listened to this simple childlike prattle, Domitian was moved to a guileless feeling of affection, which he had long forgotten.

"Tell me, Phaeton," he said, stroking the boy's long curls, "if base villains were to attempt your master's life, or try to hurt him, you would stand by him?"

"So far as I was able, my lord," said the boy heartily. "But who would dare to commit so monstrous a crime?"

"No one, Phaeton, by the gods! I only asked you to try your love for me."

When he was weary of Phaeton's chatter, Caesar had his bearers to carry him about in the gardens for a while, and at last back to the palace—almost exactly at the hour when the assembled Fathers were coming down from the Capitoline, after passing the decree against the Christians. He remained in his room till he went to table, and at the meal he was lively, almost excited, though he eat but little, while, on the other hand, he drank full draughts of Falernian unmixed with water.

When the *coena* was over, he retired to his private business-room. There he rushed up and down the room in loud and vehement soliloquy, fighting the air like a gladiator and exclaiming wildly: "Come on—only come on, you villains! my good sword shall cleave your skulls." Then he took to catching flies, as he had been wont to do as a boy,^[41] impaling them on his writing-stylus.

50

"Through and through!" he exclaimed in a tone of triumph. "Have I got you now, traitors? Aye,

writhe and wriggle—like mad things! you shall not escape me now, till Tartarus yawns to receive your souls.”

By degrees his excitement calmed down; still, when the chamberlain made his appearance, he was so vigorous and eager, that Parthenius allowed himself to make a somewhat broad allusion to the evening’s adventure.

“You are a precious witty fellow!” laughed the Emperor. “But I feel myself that you have, in jest, hit the truth. Up then to deeds of glory! I only hope that Isis, the celestial Egyptian, may be content with her new brother.”

CHAPTER IV.

Cornelia, meanwhile, awaited this evening with feverish anxiety. The red-gold shafts of light, thrown by the setting sun on the eastern wall of the peristyle, had never lingered there so long as they mounted to the top. And when at last—at last they had disappeared, how slowly the darkness fell! How long it was before the night-sky had decked itself in its glory of stars.

She gazed eagerly into the blue depths, seeking the constellation of Cassiopeia.^[42] From that spot the god, veiled in invisible clouds, was to float eastwards through the air. The stars seem to twinkle and smile at her, as though they were conscious of the favor the immortals were about to grant her. To-night! to-night at two hours before midnight—what an unfathomable mystery. So potent were the prayers of Barbillus, the initiated minister of the gods, Osiris himself, the incomprehensible, had vouchsafed to meet a mortal woman, to appear in all the glory of his divine majesty, splendid and radiant as he once stood, risen from the dead, when the man-headed bird, Amun, had restored him to life. His face, to be sure, must remain hidden from a creature of earthly birth—that divine face of the sun, before whose fires a mortal would melt away as Semele,^[43] in the Greek legend, had died in the arms of Zeus. Isis, the all-merciful mother, had made her brother swear never to appear on earth, without hiding the flaming glory of his countenance behind a hawk's head, which the people believed to be the real head of that inscrutable divinity, but which the initiated knew to be a benevolent mask.

51

Cornelia sighed—a sigh of longing ecstasy. Her reason was altogether lulled to sleep. A passionate desire for release from all earthly burdens, a vague but fervent craving for some spiritual rapture wholly possessed her lofty and ardent soul. Barbillus might well congratulate himself; the success of his fantastic arts was beyond all he could have expected.

52

It grew darker and darker.—“Go to bed, Cornelia,” said her uncle, rising from his seat. “It is late. Come and kiss me, child! I feel strangely this evening, sad at heart! Generally, when I see folly prevailing over truth, it makes me angry, the blood boils in my veins. But to-day it all makes me melancholy; I feel something like pity for the myriad-bodied sufferer we call humanity. Enslaved to all that is base, mean, and common—that is its eternal and pitiable fate!... Sleep well, Cornelia; I am weary of these struggles, weary with this day's work, weary with the weight of long years.”

He clasped the girl in his arms, and kissed her forehead; then he retired to his own room. What was that light-colored object in front of the iron lamp! A note! Again, at this late hour! It was strange.

“Charicles!” he called into the anteroom. The slave appeared.

“Who brought this letter?”

“The same stranger as before. I did not like to disturb you....”

“It is well; you can leave me,” Cinna undid the fastening and read:

“Fly, Cornelius. To-morrow at nightfall you will be seized. Your death is decided on.... Save yourself, friend of freedom, and save your country.”

The Senator looked closely at the page; the writing was the same as in the first letter. He thought and wondered, but in vain. He did not doubt an instant. The display of force at the Palatium yesterday was in itself suspicious; at certain incidents in the morning's sitting—particularly one apparently innocent observation made by Titus Claudius—had somewhat startled him; and now this letter.... It was beyond all doubt. He determined to take Nerva and Ulpius Trajanus into counsel the first thing at daybreak, and to have quitted the city by noon. The details could be left for future consideration.

53

He burned the letter in the lamp, and went to bed, calm, almost cheerful. After so long enduring the torments of uncertainty, the decision which forced him to action was, in spite of danger, far more welcome than a continuance of the suspense he had been living in.

As soon as he was asleep, Cornelia, accompanied by Chloe and the faithful Parmenio, made her way to the temple of Isis. The slave and the freedman were parted from her sooner than on previous occasions; they were left in a ground-floor room, while Cornelia was conducted up-stairs by a servant of Barbillus'.

The priest met her at the door of the antechamber. After putting off her cloak and her shoes, and saying a short prayer, she entered the sanctuary. Here, much had been altered since her last visit; the image of the goddess stood more on one side, and in the place of the black curtain, embroidered with silver, there was a sky-blue one, that fell in light, cloud-like folds. The soft floor was thickly strewn with white roses, which exhaled a delicious scent; and where formerly the altar had stood, a heavy tissue hung from the ceiling to the floor.

“My daughter,” said Barbillus, “you are indeed blessed above other mortals. Fear not, even if the majesty of the divinity should at first appal you; do not tremble, though its glory should dazzle you. All that is sent from heaven is gracious; infinite favor, even though it should seem strange and terrible. If you truly love the all-merciful mother of the universe and her divine brother—if you are in earnest in your efforts to avert the strokes of Fate from the beloved youth, to whom

54

you are about to devote your life, once and forever—be brave and steadfast! Submit to the inscrutable counsels of him, who rules heaven and earth. Give him truthful devotion and childlike obedience, and the wish of your faithful heart shall be triumphantly fulfilled.”

Cornelia stood motionless. Her light dress and snow-white feet—barely covered by the border, the pale roses and her face, paler still—in the dim moonshiny light of the hanging-lamp, made a weird, though beautiful picture. The charm touched even the calculating priest—for a second he forgot to play his part; a ray of ardent admiration flashed from under his lashes. Only for an instant, but long enough for Cornelia to detect it. She started and drew herself up. She tried to persuade herself, that the dim flickering light or her own excited nerves had cheated her into such an impossible fancy. But do what she would, a shade of suspicion, a breath of distrust, lingered in her mind.

“What am I to do?” she whispered.

“Kneel down there,” said Barbillus, pointing to a cushion close to the curtain. “Pour out your soul unceasingly in prayer, and wait till the all-powerful god shall hear you.”

He was quite himself again—the devoted minister, solemn, reverend and dignified in his sublime loftiness. Cornelia was reassured. Still, as if struck by a sudden idea, she went up to him trembling.

55

“My lord and master,” she said with some agitation, “I do not know what it can be, that so unexpectedly troubles my soul. Am I indeed worthy to behold the infinite and all-merciful one with these sinful eyes? Is it possible? Is it conceivable?”

“What—do you hesitate?”

“Swear to me by all the immortals, by your own life and your hopes of bliss...”

“Well, my daughter,” said Barbillus, raising his right hand to heaven, “I swear by Isis of the thousand names, by the happiness of my life and the future bliss of my soul; the ruler of the world himself will vouchsafe to appear to you, the mighty lord before whom all grovel in the dust, from the rising to the setting of the sun.”

“Oh! I thank thee!” cried Cornelia in a transport. “Let me kneel, holy Father, and wait in all humility till your words are fulfilled.”

The priest left her. Cornelia sank on to the purple cushions with a sigh, and bowed her head; her long hair fell in a waving stream over her face and down to the ground. She clasped her hands and prayed.

Then she heard once more that wonderful music, that seemed to come out of the ceiling and out of the walls, and yet sounded so distant, so appealing, so dream-like. Suddenly the lamp went out; a terrific peal of thunder shook the air, and the room quivered under her feet.^[44] At the same instant an intense and intolerable light, which gradually became milder, filled the room. When Cornelia looked up again, trembling, the curtain in front of her had been drawn back. Not far beyond she saw a magnificent *pulvinar*,^[45] as it was called; a stuffed couch, such as the priests made ready, when they offered the food of the gods to the sacred images of the immortals. Over the head of this couch hung a light cloud, which again flashed into vivid light, then gradually died out, till at last it looked merely like a mist, dim and ghostly. Then an icy breath fanned Cornelia’s burning brow, the mist parted, and the figure of some unknown creature slowly advanced towards the terror-stricken girl—mysteriously, shrouded in some sheeny blue drapery that made the outlines indistinct, like an image in a dream.

56

“Fear nothing,” said a voice in a whisper.

Cornelia looked upwards; the voice was soft like the murmur of waters, and seemed to come from above.

“Fear nothing,” it repeated. “Thy prayer is heard. Thou shalt be blest above all mortal women.”

The figure came nearer, and Cornelia, with an awe-stricken shudder, recognized the grotesque hawk-head that she had so often seen in images. Yes, it was the same guise that Osiris wore down in the temple, where he stood on his plinth of ivory and sardonyx, an inscrutable combination of hideousness and dignity. A god with the head of a brute creature! How could she so ignore her sense of beauty! How could she do such violence to the instincts of her nature? By degrees her pious delusions had gained the mastery; but now—now, when the statue seemed to have come to life, when the god himself in the hawk mask had stepped down from his pedestal, what a shiver chilled her blood! She shuddered, as if a snake or a scorpion were creeping towards her.

57

By this time the shadowy form—which almost seemed to float in the air, so noiselessly had it moved—was standing close before her. A hand was softly laid upon her shoulder.

“Fear nothing,” said the voice above. “The ways of the gods are wonderful.”

But this god, who appeared in such a questionable shape, now threw both arms round the excited girl and clasped her to his breast with a vehemence not usually attributed to the divine beings; at the same time the mysterious Osiris heaved a sigh, almost a gasp, which in the midst of all his grotesque paraphernalia sounded remarkably human. Enough—in the next instant Cornelia had

violently flung the god from her with a loud shriek, and, as he staggered backwards, she flew at him and seized him by the throat with the strength of desperation. A thunder-clap even, that broke close over her head, failed of its effect; after a short struggle Cornelia stood free in the middle of the room, with the hideous painted mask crushed and broken in her left hand, her right hand clenched and raised to strike. Before her, with distorted features, his eyes inflamed with rage and terror, was the sneering and repulsively-bloated face of the Emperor. From his cheek, where Cornelia's nails had torn the flesh, blood was trickling out. He groaned and panted.

58

For some minutes they stood transfixed, looking at each other.

"Divine girl!" he said at last, in a broken voice. "Nothing but the wildest passion—a soul on fire...."

He came a step nearer, and pressed his hand to his heart.

"Stand back!" shrieked Cornelia wildly. "Is this the field where Caesar, the ruler of the world, seeks a triumph? Are these the glorious deeds of a Flavian?"

"Hold your tongue, girl!" cried Domitian, furious.

"I mock at your contemptible anger! Rome may crawl and whimper at your feet—I, Cornelia, scorn you! You clench your fist—coward! Kill me then, as you killed Julia."

"How she stands there," muttered Domitian, "like animated marble! I had expected a different issue to my hour of immortality. You shall pay for this, Barbillus!"

Cornelia had made her way towards the door, her eye still fixed on the enemy, and she now laid her hand on the bolt—but the door was fastened outside. Domitian laughed. He saw that Barbillus had foreseen every contingency, and this restored his spirits. If cunning failed, force might still conquer. He felt for the dagger he wore in his bosom....

"You are wasting your trouble," he said scornfully. "Here you are mine, fair Cornelia."

The girl supported herself against a pillar; her head swam, and the dim blue light which shone into the room from the alcove, suddenly grew dark before her eyes. But she soon recovered the use of her wits. It occurred to her, that on the other side, where the Emperor had come in, there must be another door. She sprang upon Domitian like a lioness, and he could not stand against the unexpected attack. He tottered on one side, his foot caught in a fold of the curtain, and he fell to the ground.

59

By the time he had picked himself up again, Cornelia had disappeared.

"Barbillus!" shouted Domitian, in the darkness of the long corridor, which checked his pursuit. "I cannot see my hand before my face—Barbillus!"

The priest came up the stairs with a lantern in his hand.

"You have betrayed me, cheated me!" Caesar yelled, as Barbillus came towards him somewhat doubtfully. "Where is Parthenius?"

"Here, sovereign lord," said the chamberlain's voice.

"Wait here in the colonnade with Phaeton," said Domitian angrily. "And you, Barbillus, divest me this instant of all this foolery."

When he found himself alone with the priest, and had got fairly rid of the grotesque attributes of the divinity, he hurled furious abuse at Barbillus.

"What?" he snarled. "There is no such thing as a virtuous Roman girl? Liar—answer."

"I am deeply grieved," replied the priest. "How was I to guess that she, of all others, would be the girl to disappoint you! Her soft, credulous eyes—I would have risked my head on it."

"Here you see the traces of her tender submissiveness! She shall die—a wretch, that dared to lift her hand against her sovereign—why, the blood has run down to my shoulder."

60

Barbillus dipped a handkerchief in the cool fountain, and bathed Domitian's face.

"How it stings!" he exclaimed wrathfully. Then his brow suddenly cleared; a gleam of satisfaction dawned on his face.

"Listen, Barbillus; I believe this misadventure is of good omen."

"No doubt," said Barbillus, thankful for this diversion. "A wound from so fair a hand...."

"Nay, nay—you do not understand. Did you hear of a scoundrelly astrologer, Asclenario, who paid for his audacity with his life two days since?"

"Yes, my lord; all the world has heard of it, and bewails it."

"Nonsense!" laughed Caesar, in the gayest spirits. "Do not you see, that the prophecy is already fulfilled? Do not you perceive that henceforth I am safe? What were his words? That, ere long, my blood should be shed by violence, because the immortals were wroth at my love for a woman, who did not belong to me by any law, human or divine. Well—that blood has been shed."^[46] And he pointed with evident delight to his cheek.

"My lord, your wisdom is unequalled," said the priest. "Certainly, by all the laws of astrology it is beyond a doubt—the prediction is fulfilled."

Domitian grinned with contentment.

"So that, in fact, I owe a debt of gratitude to sweet Cornelia! By Zeus! I feel all my annoyance entirely vanishing and giving way to the tenderest regret. A girl like Aphrodite! And I, Caesar, the Lord of the universe, invite her, and she refuses to fling herself into my arms with rapture! It is preposterous! Ridiculous.... You must find means, crafty Barbillus, for you see"—and he laughed slyly—"the anger of the gods is brief."

61

"My lord, but how am I to find means?" exclaimed Barbillus in despair. "Do you suppose, that Cornelia will ever set foot across this threshold again?"

"You do not understand. I want no repetition of this solemn farce. It is not as a priest, but as a man, that you must find tools for your cunning."

Barbillus looked at the floor, musing.

"My lord," he said, "if I know Cornelia, sooner will she perish than break her faith with her lover. Nothing but a trick could give us the smallest chance of success, nothing but the mask of divinity."

"Curse him!—And is another man to obtain what Caesar cannot win? Is a boy, a maundering lover, to stand in my way?"

"Well, you know he is the son of the Flamen. If he were of any other family—Cornelius or Ulpius...."

"You are right. I owe special consideration to the Claudia family.—So much the worse for you! And do you mean to say that, in all your mystical lore, you know of no charm that can part two turtle-doves? Are there not women, who make it their business to entrap young men—or sapient tongues to wag away a young girl's reputation? Is not Lycoris a perfect mistress of all the arts of seduction—or Martial a writer, whose epigrams are poisoned shafts? Come, consider the matter; try, plot, scheme. I must clasp that incomparable creature in my arms!—I must—do you understand, Barbillus—or, to speak plainly, I will."

62

"Your will rules the world," replied Barbillus.

"To-morrow for the rest. I will send my chamberlain to you early. Domitian will not be slow to recognize your services."

He drew the hood of his lacerna over his head and descended the stairs, followed by Barbillus.

CHAPTER V.

The noonday bustle was at its height in the baths of Titus. A constant stream of men, for the most part belonging to the rank of senators or the class of knights, flowed steadily through the wide Corinthian portico to the *apodyterium*,^[47] where a host of slaves were busy in divesting the newcomers of their toga and tunic.

An equally dense crowd filled the *elaotherium*,^[48] where the body was anointed with oil, and pressed through into the gymnasium,^[49] where wrestling and discus-throwing were practised. One of the first laws of old Roman hygiene prescribed exercises of this kind before the bath. When the muscles had thus been thoroughly stretched, the bather wrapped himself in a light woollen garment and sat down to cool himself.

This quarter of an hour of cooling on the benches round the wrestling-hall was one of the pleasantest of the day. Nowhere else was the chat so humorous or so gracious; nowhere else were the events of the day discussed with so much wit and acumen. Here, Martial launched his most daring epigrams. Here, Parthenius, the chamberlain, retailed the most flagrant intrigues and richest scandals. Here the last triumph in the circus was discussed, the proceedings of fair Lycoris, the achievement of some great gladiator, the peculations of a provincial governor, the will of a childless senator,^[50] the suits pending before the centumvirate, the last recitations, banquets, deaths—but whatever the whims and humors of the loungers might bring uppermost, it was always cast in a form of easy grace, and discussed with a peculiar sparkle of light humor.

63

On the day in question there was the usual flow of free talk in the luxuriously-furnished hall, and the marble statues, which looked down from their purple niches, might have heard, if they could, many a cutting speech and many a peal of noisy laughter.

One of the most reckless talkers, in a group that had gathered round Martial, was Clodianus; his rubicund face beamed with Dionysiac excitement. The poet, wrapped over his ears in his sheet, had just delivered himself of an epigram, in his most pungent style, on an incident in the life of a certain attorney-at-law.^[51] This man, Sabellus by name, a perfect model of incapacity, was never chosen to conduct a case by any but people of the lowest class, and from the beginning of his career had never once been successful. At last he had gained his first cause. The matter in dispute had been a cart-horse belonging to a wagoner. His client had offered the triumphant advocate a honorarium paid in kind, and the worthy Sabellus, in the excess of his joy, was talking of the brilliant success of his efforts in every public place in Rome. The poet described with malicious glee, how Sabellus had already told the story of the great horse case eight times, and at each repetition held his head a little higher. Martial concluded with these improvised lines:

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“All these jubilant airs our friend Sabellus
Founds on half a measure of meal and lentels,
Three half-pounds of frankincense and pepper,
Falernian chitterlings^[52] and a Lucanian sausage,^[53]
A Syrian jug of black and muddy liquor,
A jar of Libyan figs that might be fresher.”^[54]

The whole story, told with a mixture of infinite relish and irony, was irresistible; but not one of the party laughed so immoderately, so long, and so loud, as the starch adjutant. He could not get over it; laughter as of a cyclops filled his throat; it was as though the honest clumsiness of the soldier stood revealed in this naive and noisy amusement. His demeanor was so frank and blunt, that it might have satisfied Caesar himself.

65

Still, this loud joviality was somewhat belied by the glances which Clodianus cast from time to time, when he thought himself unobserved, at a corner of the hall, where a man with piercing eyes and a strong aquiline nose, was beguiling the quarter of an hour spent in cooling himself, by reading. When the loud shout of laughter echoed through the room like the rattle of thunder, the reader raised his reddened eyelids.

“What, Stephanus!” shouted Clodianus, holding his sides. “You are once more to be seen here? You have neglected us too much these last weeks. Martial grows more audacious every day. He is a splendid rascal, this Hispanian bully; by Incitatus! but he makes mince-meat of our Quirites. The story of Sabellus is delicious, a thing to revel in! And what are you studying here, in the intervals of discus-throwing?”

He had slowly gone up to the steward, while the group round the witty epigrammatist were already drawn into the current of another story.

66

“You are too kind,” replied Stephanus. “But an individual can never be missed, where good talk is kept up by so many distinguished men. I am worried and out of spirits, and quite out of place among the gay and cheerful.”

Clodianus expressed his regret in a long-drawn “Ah,” but his eye betrayed no sorrow. He seated himself on the couch by Stephanus.

“It is very true, the air of the city is saturated with anxiety. I have my own little share of it. You know the old saying: ‘A scorpion lurks under every stone.’” Stephanus smiled.

“You carry your politeness—or your irony—too far.—You, the most fortunate man in Rome.”

"I might very well say the same of you. Except the little annoyances that Cneius Afranius can cause you, your life is that of a god on Olympus.—To be sure," he added in a lower voice, "that man's tenacity is beginning to look threatening. All the more so since...."

"Well, finish your sentence."

"Well, then, you know that until now I have found ways and means of parrying his attacks, but now...."

The freedman turned pale.

"But now...?"

"Now certain symptoms are revealing themselves—symptoms which make me suspect, that I shall not be able much longer to elude his thrusts."

He had spoken these words hardly above his breath. They distilled slowly into the steward's ear like poisonous adders, and seemed to writhe in his very soul.

"Impossible!" he exclaimed in a choked voice. "You, the influential favorite of Caesar...."

67

"It is as I say. Why, I cannot myself altogether understand, but I am alive to the fact. The wind is blowing keenly through all the Basilicas, and if you do not keep a bright look-out you may be wrecked."

"But, by Jupiter! why have I not heard this till to-day?"

"Because I fancied at first that I might be deceiving myself... Splendid! First rate, Duilius! That is what I call throwing. Look, look now—*Io triumphe*. A winner at Olympia could not beat that!"

"I implore you," whispered Stephanus, "tell me at once...."

"Keep calm," replied Clodianus. "The Baths are not the place for such a discussion. Where do you dine?"

"With Lycoris."

"Good, I will excuse myself to Furius, and go with you. After supper, in the park, we shall easily secure a few minutes.... Bravo, Septimius! bravo! What wonderful muscles! Praxiteles^[55] ought to have had you for a model! By Castor, but you will break every bone in Sempronius' body, sturdy as he is! Well, then," he went on, turning to Stephanus again, "we shall meet at the fair Massilian's table."

He rose with a friendly nod, and passed through the great door in the inner wall into the *frigidarium*.^[56] There he tossed his woollen wrapper over the head of a slave, and descended in all the dignity of stalwart corpulence into the vast bath. More than a hundred bathers were already sitting in it, up to their shoulders in the transparent water. Only a few swimmers were disporting themselves at the farther end.

68

Clodianus sat down too, thinking contentedly, and his gaze wandered round the noble hall. The light, which poured in from above through a circular opening, sparkled and twinkled so gaily on the dancing ripples—the splashing from the shells, through which the pipes were led which constantly renewed the water, sounded so soothing—the graceful forms of the nymphs in the fresco painting, and of the marble goddesses on their tall pedestals smiled so seductively, that any one might have supposed that the radiant expression on the adjutant's features was nothing more than a reflection from these bright and rosy surroundings.

But Clodianus saw much more with the mind's eye, than with the eye of the senses. Elaborate schemes were disentangling themselves in his restless, brooding brain; incredible events rose before his fancy in vivid colors.

And Clodianus looked better pleased than ever, when the tall figure of Stephanus appeared on the threshold. Sternly as the wily steward strove to conceal his feelings, Clodianus saw at a glance what an effect his revelation had had upon him, and he laughed, like a hunter who has had good sport in the field.

"You are as radiant as the sun-god!" said a little man, who went down the steps at this instant. "It is horribly cold this morning—pure snow-water."

His teeth chattered, and he shrugged his shoulders up to his ears.

69

"Ah! Sextus Furius!" cried Clodianus, a little startled. "I am glad to meet you. I wanted to let you know, as soon as I quitted the bath, that I am prevented dining with you to-day. Important business...."

"That is a pity," replied the noble Senator, who, here, in the frigidarium, was not by any means an Apollo. "I had a great many things to talk to you about."

"Business?"

"Concerning the chamberlain. You know we are in treaty over an estate at Baiae?"

"To be sure.—A most delightful residence. Made on purpose for the raptures of the honeymoon." And he winked significantly. But the little Senator pursed up his mouth and knit his brows in

displeasure, and flourished his elbows so vehemently that the water splashed up all round him.

"Furius, you are becoming a perfect Fury!" cried Clodianus. Then he laughed at his own precious wit and stirred his side of the bath into circling wavelets.

"You seem monstrously happy!" remarked Furius biting his lips.

"Monstrously! And if I only had a sweetheart as handsome and as hugely rich as your divine Claudia...."

"Pooh, nonsense, I have not got so far as that yet. Titus Claudius, at the eleventh hour, begged for time for reflection."

"You are in treaty for the estate all the same?"

"Certainly—what do you think now? If the affair with Claudius falls through, I shall carry my suit next day to Fannia, who is younger, or to Paula or to old Camilla. My honor is at stake. I have already made every preparation; dramatic and pantomimic performances, sham fights and races. I cannot possibly withdraw; I am compromised on every side."

70

And again he shivered and his teeth chattered. An instant later he sprang with one leap out of the bath.

"Good-bye," he said, "I am fast turning to ice. With regard to the estate.—Well, we can talk of that another time." He ran as fast as he could across the flags and flung himself into the warm water of the *caldarium* in the farther pillared hall. After warming his chilled limbs there for a short time, he submitted himself to the operations of the *tractators*^[57] or shampooers with brushes and strigils, and then, as red as a boiled lobster, betook himself to the dressing-rooms. He presently made his way home, anointed with Egyptian and Phoenician perfumes, and among the cushions of his luxurious dining-couch did his best to forget the chill of the *frigidarium* and the coldness of his coy Claudia.

Clodianus finished the processes of the bath with an air of profound satisfaction, that was observed by all the bathers and accepted as undoubted evidence of his security in his office. No doubt the impression that he left behind him, here and elsewhere, must have some effect on Domitian. Caesar's capricious and vacillating nature was often more easily guided by such trifles, than by well-considered and deliberate action.

From the baths Clodianus went on foot to the residence of Lycoris, talking as he went with the greatest affability to the clients and slaves who accompanied him. Nay, with one of his clients he exchanged blows in sham fight, regardless of the numerous gazers who respectfully made way for him, but who were greatly amazed at this rough jesting.

71

At the house of the Massilian he met a mixed company. Stephanus had already arrived, and he preserved his usual calm and easy indifference, when the adjutant came in. But he gradually made plans and preparations to involve Clodianus in a tête-à-tête conversation, while Clodianus showed great cleverness in ignoring and evading these attempts. They went to table and were entertained by flute-players and singers. The Lucrine oysters were relished with intolerable deliberateness; the succession of dishes was positively interminable—so, at least, it seemed to the freedman, who was quite exasperated by the soldier's huge appetite.

At last, at last, they rose, and, after a quarter, another quarter of an hour's manœuvring, Stephanus gained his point. He was slowly pacing by the gourmand's side through the splendid avenues, where the light west wind now and again lifted a brown leaf from the bough and wafted it to its rest on the ground.

"You see I am in the greatest agitation," began Stephanus, as his companion seemed inclined to continue a conversation begun at the supper-table. Clodianus suddenly turned quite solemn.

"To be frank with you," he said, "you have good reason. Why should I try to conceal it? The situation is most critical. Be on your guard, Stephanus; I fear you may need all your keenest wits.—Hark! some one is behind us; even here we are surrounded by listeners. Only one thing I must say. Afranius is attracting Caesar's liking...."

72

"That would be my ruin," gasped the freedman in dismay.

"Not yet—you must not lose all hope. It is true that, if I am not deceived, Caesar will not only allow, but will command Afranius to make the strictest enquiries.—However, you have a crafty brain. I only wanted to let you know the state of affairs; in the first place to warn you, and secondly to show you the reason why my interference is now at an end. Afranius indeed I might outwit, but...." He shrugged his shoulders, and his face expressed the deepest concern. Stephanus gnawed his lips.

"Then Afranius must be got out of the way," he said, frowning. "I have long thought I was too easy...."

"That would do no good. On the contrary; the sudden disappearance of Afranius would excite comment and remark, and every one would know at once to whom to attribute it. I tell you once more, it is not Afranius, it is Caesar himself.—Silence! to-morrow come and see me in my villa in the Via Praenestina—after sundown.—Nay, hold up your head, Stephanus. If it comes to the worst you can take ship and sail for Africa."

"I? Leave Rome! I would die first. Rome is the only place where one can breathe. I should die in a province."

"Well, we can discuss that later. See, Lycoris and the noble Norbanus have found us out—a well-matched pair! The conqueror of Dacian armies, and the conqueror of Latin hearts. Come, fair mistress, and decide the question; we are disputing as to whether the plane or the elm turns yellow first. Speak the decisive word."

73

Lycoris laughed.

"If you put me to torture, I do not know. They both turn yellow too soon to please me." She drew her cloak more closely round her, for the evening was chilly. They turned and went down the avenue together; Lycoris and the two soldiers in eager chat, Stephanus in the silence of despair.

When, after a short walk, they reëntered the house, Clodianus laid his hand on the steward's arm and looked meaningly into his eyes. "Hold up your head," he said with determined emphasis. "You may conquer yet, if you are a man."

The words seemed to work a miracle. Stephanus inferred from them, that Clodianus had not told him everything. This idea, and yet more the peculiar expression of the adjutant's manner, restored his confidence.

"To-morrow," he whispered, as he shook hands with the astute officer. Then the party gave themselves up to enjoyment—a gay party!

It was near midnight, when Stephanus set out homewards. He could now hardly realize how he had so utterly lost heart at a single blow. Had he not sailed with triumphant success round many a rocky shore? Had he not ridden with safety through every storm? The storm that now roared round him was, to be sure, a hurricane. But Clodianus, that stalwart pilot, was standing at the helm.—In short—the much-dreaded Caesar was but a man like other men.—It was folly to run his head against the troubles of the future! "To-day is mine, and I will enjoy the present."

In his bedroom he found his favorite, Antinous. The slave flew to meet him with eager eyes, and as soon as the others had withdrawn, Stephanus sat down on his couch, and called the lad to him.

74

"Well?" he said in a low voice.

"The game is ours," said the slave. "But it has cost much trouble and pains...."

"Ours? Do not sell the lion's skin, before he is in the net."

"But he is in the net. I have found out everything, and what I know, my lord, will be the death of him as surely...."

"Do not go too fast; the Claudians are powerful. Nothing but the most terrific stroke will fell him."

"But hear me, and then judge. Quintus Claudius has joined the Nazarenes."

"Impossible! A millionaire has thrown in his lot with the beggars! It is a lie, boy." Antinous laughed.

"It sounds like a fable, does not it? But it is the truth all the same. I pledge my head on it: before the week is out Quintus Claudius is taken and sentenced."

"Boy, you are a jewel!" cried Stephanus beside himself. "If all this proves true, by the gods, I will have you set in gold."

"My plan is most simple. To-morrow morning early...."

"That will do," interrupted Stephanus, who was quite incapacitated by delight, from attending to details. "I trust it all to you, and give you full powers to do whatever you think necessary. As I live, that would be a victory—a triumph such as never was heard of! Come here, lad, that I may kiss you." He hugged the boy as if he had lost his reason.

"Now go, be off—I must rest."

75

"Sleep well!" said Antinous. "You may rest on laurels." And he ran off.

"Capital, glorious!" murmured his master. "Now—now, fair Domitia...."

In the excitement of his feelings he hid his head in the pillows; a slight shudder shook his meagre frame. He clenched his fists, and closed his lips tightly.—Thus he fell asleep; and his deep and difficult breathing sounded loud in the still, dimly-lighted room.

CHAPTER VI.

After the frightful scene in the sanctuary of Barbillus, Cornelia had rushed blindly down the dark corridor, which brought her to a flight of steps in the outer wing of the building. She thus found her way into the courtyard, and from thence into the anteroom, where Parmenio and Chloe were waiting for her. "Fly!" she cried in desperate accents, and hurried on, past the ostiarius and out into the road.

As soon as she reached home, she went to her own room, evading Chloe's well-intentioned questions with angry retorts. She lay on her bed till morning, unable to sleep. Her whole being was unhinged. All that had, until now, seemed highest and most sacred, all the transcendental dreams of her ecstatic spirit, were suddenly shown to be empty and base, a miserable illusion, a sordid imposture. With her belief in the divine mission of Barbillus, she flung from her all faith in Isis the universal mother, and indeed, in everything supernatural. It was a sudden convulsion of her whole nature, that had rent and upheaved its very foundations.

76

Through that long and dismal night, when she lay awake and in tears, strange voices seemed to sound in her ears. How often had she listened, only half-attentive, to her uncle, as he and Ulpus Trajanus sat discussing of the Nature of Things, of the great secret of the Universe! She had never been able to understand how Cinna could dare to deny the existence of the gods, but now she recalled all she could remember of these discussions. In fancy she saw that frank face, full of bland and happy excitement, every feature bearing the seal of moral conviction. She reflected on the deep impression, which Cinna's words made on Ulpus Trajanus—a calm, reflective mind. And then again, she saw the ludicrously grotesque figure with its hawk-head, and the priest's insidious and hypocritical face. What a flagrant contrast! And if the priest with his debauched Osiris was the incarnation of a lie, then Cinna must be the embodiment of truth. The conclusion was not logical, but Cornelia philosophized from the heart.

The next day she stole about the house, like the youth of Sais after he had lifted the veil. To Chloe she did not speak a word; it was as though she felt her to be an accomplice and was ashamed.

Towards noon Cornelius rode out on horseback, accompanied by Charicles and one of the younger slaves.

"How ill you look, child!" he said, as he took leave of Cornelia; "order your litter, and be carried out to the Field of Mars, the fresh air will do you good. I shall be back as it grows dark.—I have some business to attend to at Aricia. Say so, if by any chance I should be asked for."

Cornelia dined in a little room opening out of her own, if a little fruit could be called a meal. As it grew dark, her lover came to see her. All day he had felt the same urgent craving for solitude and meditation as Cornelia. The consciousness, that he had crossed the threshold of a new and unknown life, and had sealed, solemnly and forever, a covenant with a new God, possessed him with irresistible force. He felt that he must clearly face and realize the fact, before he could go forth again into the wild turmoil of city life. Rome, which until lately he had considered as the element in which alone he could live, now watched him with the jealous eye of an informer. Every corner-stone, every column cried mockingly: "Quintus, be on your guard!" Every human countenance threatened betrayal and an ignominious death.—Aye, beware, Quintus, and hide your secret as a murderer hides his crime!

77

By degrees the young man arrived at a clear view of himself and of his position. All that was needful, was calm presence of mind and absolute silence. Not a soul must guess what, on the face of it, was so incredible; no one—if only for his father's sake. Cornelia alone, that dear one, whose lofty nature had always been marked by what was a truly Nazarene longing for something absolutely divine—Cornelia alone should, by degrees, be admitted to know the great secret, and be won over to the doctrine of Jesus Christ. The idea of not sharing every thought, to the inmost spring of his moral life, with the girl he so devotedly loved, was so intolerable, that he determined to try at once, at least, to sound the depths of her feeling, for some ground where he might, by-and-bye, find anchorage.

The fact, that he found Cornelia alone, seemed to him of happy omen; he could talk with her undisturbed. The evening was too cool to allow of their sitting in the peristyle, and Cornelia received her lover in her uncle's study. Quintus was struck by her silence and uneasy looks; still, this seemed to him to be the very mood in which to speak to her of matters outside and above ordinary life.

78

Their surroundings too, suggested an opening. A number of book-rolls, and among them the works of the elder Pliny, lay on the large ebony table. Cinna had for a long time been engaged in writing a work on natural history which, in many respects, went far beyond Pliny; this led Quintus to speak of the wide difference between the views held by the uncle and the niece. How surprised he was then to find Cornelia's whole nature entirely altered, as it seemed to him, when she shook her head and smiled bitterly over his passionate eloquence, and finally declared, shortly and drily, that she was cured once and forever of the follies of her childhood, and would take every precaution to avoid a relapse.

Quintus was so astonished, that he dropped the subject.

"We will discuss this some time, when we are less fatigued and in better spirits," he said. "We both need rest; you are looking pale, Cornelia."

A deep sigh was heard from a corner of the room. It was Chloe filling up the brasier with a shovelful of charcoal broken small.

"That may well be!" she murmured in a melancholy key.

"What time is it?" Cornelia asked her, to stop her talking.

"Half-way into the first vigil."

"My uncle is very late!" said Cornelia. "He was to return at sundown. Hark! I hear steps...."

Parmenio come into the room announcing Caius Aurelius.

"At this hour!" cried Cornelia in surprise.

"He is in a great hurry," said the slave. "He must speak to my lord, he said, even if you were gone to bed. I told him my master was gone to Aricia; at first he seemed much pleased to hear it, but then he grew anxious again. Now he begs to be admitted."

"How very strange! Well, tell him he is welcome."

Aurelius came in, evidently bewildered and agitated. He greeted Cornelia briefly, and asked whether Cinna was expected to return that evening. Cornelia's reply made him thoughtful. Still, learning that Cinna, who was usually so punctual, was already nearly two hours behind time, his face beamed with inexplicable satisfaction.

"He may perhaps be detained for several days," he said emphatically. "Be that as it may, you will allow me to leave two lines for him. If he should happen to come in, give him the note instantly, everything depends upon it."

"You alarm me!" said Cornelia. "What is happening?"

"Forgive me, dear mistress, if I can tell you nothing more...."

He went to the table, hastily seized the first piece of paper that fell under his hand, and wrote as follows: "The Batavian to the noble Cornelius, greeting. Delay is danger. Remember Rodumna!"

He folded up the leaf.

"As soon as he arrives, before he has taken his cloak off—do you understand me, mistress? And if he should not return, tear the note into fragments, or throw it into the fire."

"If he should not return?—but what should prevent him?"

"I only mean, if he should not return this night."

Quintus drew the excited visitor on one side.

"What has happened?" he said.

"The worst, Quintus. Cornelius is watched, followed—but by-and-bye, my friend—just now I am as hard pressed as a stag followed by the hounds. Farewell! Who knows—by the gods! my brain is in a whirl."

"Must you go?" said Cornelia.

"Indeed I must. Farewell, the gods be with you all."

He rushed out to the atrium, where Herodianus and Magus were waiting for him in silence and darkness.

"Now, come—as fast as possible, to the high-priest's house; Claudia is expecting me. If she could dream, that I am about to take leave of her...."

The whole house was wrapped in sleep, when Lucilia cautiously unbolted the side-door. Claudia was standing in the colonnade, and her heart beat high as the Batavian softly went up to her.

"Forgive me," he said, "for daring to snatch an interview so late at night. Claudia, do you feel strong enough to cling to me faithfully through every change of fate?"

"What a dreadful question, Caius; and I have been so content to-day, so happy—the future looked so rosy.—Caius, my dear love, what has happened? Your hand is trembling—what have you to tell me?"

"I must go away, sweet Claudia—this very night."

"Impossible! Ah, Caius! say this is a jest."

"Nay, I will tell you all, only not now, not at this minute. You shall very soon hear from me, Claudia; but as to whether I shall ever return—that lies in the counsels of the Immortals. If you regret your promise, Claudia, if the remote and unknown future terrifies you, say so in time; you shall not be bound. But, if you love me with all your soul, Fate cannot divide us. You will find out the path by which we may meet again, and you will not be mistaken in the man you have chosen,

happen what may."

"Caius, you are breaking my heart! I do not understand it—but you will not allow me to ask.—Well, so be it then, I submit. Come what may, Caius, I am your wife, and when you bid me I will follow you. Oh ye gods! how cruel, how hard—in the midst of so much sunshine.—I cannot bear it!"

"Forgive me, forgive me," said Aurelius, himself hardly able to check his tears. "It is a shame to spoil your happiness, but I cannot help it.—Farewell, my Claudia. Love me, remember me, and trust to your protecting star!"

"Farewell," sobbed the girl. "And you will tell me all, everything, will you not?"

"All I can and may," said Aurelius. "Perhaps," he added tremulously, "I may be able to tell you that all is well, here, in Rome, in your father's house. But, if what I am planning and hoping, must fail—well, even then, I know that one thing will remain dearer and more precious than success—you, my Claudia."

He clasped her in his arms; then he tore himself away, and hurried off to the little door.

82

"A thousand thanks, good soul!" he whispered to Lucilia as he passed. The bolt was cautiously pushed back into the rings, and Caius Aurelius flew home, leaning on the arm of Herodianus. It was almost midnight by the time he reached home; the door-keeper was asleep, nor did he wake till they had knocked repeatedly.

"You may go now, Antisthenes," said Herodianus. "I will shut up the house; you are released for to-night." The ostiarius went off to his little room.

Herodianus not only bolted the door, but barred it too,^[58] with the strong iron stanchion which stood unused in the comer, slipping it into the staples on each side of the door; and it was not till he had made all fast that he followed his master, who had lighted the lamps in one of the large rooms adjoining the peristyle, and opened a brass-plated cupboard in the wall. While Aurelius and Herodianus were busy packing up all their valuables, and particularly large quantities of gold coin, Magus, in the garden behind the house and adjoining the pillared court, was saddling three capital horses.

He had just finished tightening the girths of the second, a fine Cappadocian, when three thundering knocks at the front entrance echoed through the house.

"What, already?" muttered the Goth. "Then indeed..."

He flung the saddle on the third horse with double haste, and then listened in breathless anxiety. Meanwhile Herodianus had gone to the door.

83

"Who is there?" he asked wrathfully. "Open the door," answered a gruff voice.

"By Pluto! My master only receives visitors in the day time."

"Open it!" repeated the voice. "In the name of the city-prefect."^[59] Herodianus just waited to make sure that the bar was fast in the staples; then he ran as quickly as he was able back to the peristyle.

"My lord, are you ready?" he said breathlessly to Aurelius, who was girding on a short sword. "The spies have come two hours too soon."

"Then may the gods befriend us! I thought it was a messenger from Cinna..."

"No indeed—from the city-prefect. Hark, they are shaking the house to the foundations..."

"I will speak to them," said Aurelius. "Do you meanwhile arm yourself and see whether the road by the garden door is clear. As soon as you are ready, give me a signal."

Herodianus flung the valuables they had packed, and five or six bags of coin, into a large leather sack, which lay on the floor; then he hurried into the garden, gave the sack over to Magus, who swung it lightly over his shoulder, bid him mount, and, with cautious steps, went to reconnoitre from the side gate. Aurelius had gone out into the ostium, which was still being shaken with the blows at the door.

84

"Stop that!" he cried, as loud as he could shout. "Who dares to use such violence here? I am a Roman citizen and will have you punished for your insolence."

"Open the door, or we will break it in," said a voice outside.

"It will be the worse for you if you do.—Who are you, that come to attack my house by force?"

"Hold your tongue. I am here in the name of the city-prefect."

"And what do you want with me?"

"That you shall soon know. Open the door, or by Jupiter...!"

"Very good, I will open it."

He went forward and took hold of the bolt; as he did so he heard that some of the men outside were on horseback; this discovery chilled his blood and almost paralyzed him. He stood

motionless with his hand on the bolt, which he had half thrust out of the staple.

Just then a shrill whistle from the atrium reached his ear; it gave him new life.

"In a minute—directly," he shouted to the men, who were again rattling at the door with their spears and swords. "This bar sticks—I will call the slaves."

With these words he flew into the garden, where Magus, who had whistled in the corridor between the atrium and the peristyle, was in the act of mounting his horse. Aurelius flung himself into the saddle; the side gate was open. Herodianus went forward slowly on the Cappadocian, which, since his misadventure in the Field of Mars, he had ridden pretty constantly. Aurelius followed on his often-proved Andalusian, and Magus came last. Hardly had the slave come through the gate, when the master's steed started and pricked his ears in alarm; at the same time they heard distant hoofs.

85

"They are riding round the hill," said the freedman.

"Then we must turn to the left, towards the Porta Asinaria," cried Aurelius. "Hurry! We are riding for our lives."

The horses rushed on like the wind. The neighborhood in which they found themselves, south of the Caelian, was a very quiet one, and the few passers-by, men on foot and chiefly of the lowest class, made way in astonishment for the cavalcade that stormed by. In a few minutes they were outside the walls of the city.

The night was bright and starry, and Magus, looking round as they turned a corner, could plainly see, at about three hundred paces behind them, a troop of horsemen pursuing them at full gallop.

"One, two—four—six," he said to himself. Then he laid his hand on his sword-hilt and struck spurs into his horse, which had fallen a little behind.

"Curse them!" said Aurelius. "We are going far out of our way; the nearest road is by Ardea."

Magus looked once more through the darkness and his keen eyes, accustomed to the gloomy nights of the northern seas, presently detected a cross-road at five or six hundred paces to the south-east and cutting across the plain to join the Appian and Ardeatinian Ways. He pointed it out to his master.

"Very good; let us try it."

The spot indicated by the Goth was reached in a minute. The horses heads were abruptly turned and they made a good pace across the open country, along an unpaved bridle-path. The hoofs of the pursuers rang out through the silent night—suddenly they ceased. The pursuers too had reached the turning into the crossroad.

86

"They ride like the Walküre!" exclaimed the Goth.

They galloped on, breathlessly, but with uncanny noiselessness, past huts and isolated villas, trees and hedge-rows, till they reached the wooden bridge over the Almo, across which Magus led the way and the others followed. An interminable line of houses, standing out in silhouette against the western sky, here marked the line of the Via Appia. From thence it was only a few hundred paces to the Via Ardeatina.^[60] Meanwhile the distance between the pursued and the pursuers had neither increased nor diminished perceptibly; only one of the city-prefect's horsemen had left his comrades behind and gained upon them every minute. They were just crossing the Via Appia, when this man threw his spear and it passed close by the head of Herodianus's horse. The beast shied on one side and reared; then it rushed on with increased swiftness after Magus and the Batavian.

Five or six minutes more slipped by. Neither of the fugitives now thought of depending in any way on the others; a glance backwards, a movement, might be fatal. The distance between the foremost horseman and his company might now be about two thousand paces, and he was close on the freedman's heels. They had long since struck into the Via Ardeatina, and could not now be very far from the Oracle of the Faun,^[61] where the road turned off that led to Lavinium and from thence to Laurentum^[62] and Ostia. The soldier urged his horse with a desperate effort to overtake Herodianus, and drawing his sword he drove it up to the hilt into the Cappadocian's flank. The horse fell as if struck by lightning, while Herodianus flew head foremost out of the saddle, and must have broken every bone in his body, if a hillock covered with soft turf had not lain in the way. The horseman, who could not at once check his pace, shot over the mound and some paces farther. This gave Herodianus time to pick himself up and draw his sword, and hardly had he got on his feet and made ready to defend himself, when the man sprang back upon him; desiring him to give up his sword and surrender.

87

"Not so fast!" said Herodianus, whose anger had risen as he got over the shock. "This hillock will serve for a fortress, and you may besiege me in it if you will."

"Idiot!" shouted the man. "I give you one more chance; throw down your sword, or I will kill you."

He put spurs to his horse, to take the mound at a leap and ride down Herodianus; but at this instant Aurelius appeared on the field, sword in hand. He was only just in time to save his worthy retainer, but he fell with such fury upon the mercenary that, after attempting a short defense, he hastened to withdraw; Aurelius had, however, given him a deep cut on the arm.

"Where is your horse?" asked he.

"There—by the ditch; the villain has killed it."

"Come and mount behind me," said Aurelius. "Hi! Magus—what are you doing?"

88

The Goth had dashed past with his bridle hanging loose.

"Magus!" shouted his master anxiously. "What are you going to do?" And then turning to Herodianus he added: "Well, make haste.—My horse can carry two."

"Pooh! Do you take your old friend for a shirker? Sooner will I fall into the hands of that gang, than bring you to destruction too."

"Here! Jump up here!" shouted the Goth. He held the soldier's horse by the bridle. The rider was lying in the dust about a hundred paces off.

"Hail to the victor!" cried Herodianus. "That is what I call prompt reprisal."

"He is a German like myself," shouted Magus, "and is not ashamed to run down one of his own kith and kin! But I was down upon him, by Odin's raven!"

Herodianus, with a gasping effort, threw himself into the saddle.

"On we go!" he exclaimed, as he settled himself and seized the bridle, and they started afresh along the echoing road. Only just in time, for they heard the little group check their horses as they came up with their comrade, who had become unconscious from his heavy fall and from loss of blood.

"Pick him up, Aeolus," cried the leader of the little band. "The dark mass down there behind the trees is Ardea. We can leave him at the tavern."

While one of the men stopped to rescue his senseless comrade, the others mended their pace and rode on after the fugitives. But their steeds were not equal to it. Before they had reached Ardea one fell, the blood flowing from his nostrils, and the others panted so terribly, that the captain saw that the chase was hopeless and gave the order to slacken. In about twenty minutes they reached the northern gate of the town and knocked up the innkeeper.

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Aurelius and his companions had meanwhile ridden at their original pace to a spot about a thousand paces beyond the little town. There they stopped; and finding that there was nothing to be seen or heard between them and Ardea, they allowed themselves a minute to breathe and to swallow a draught of Setian wine,^[63] after which they went forward at an easier gallop. Thus, in about an hour, they reached Antium, still in the silence of the night. The town seemed dead, there was not a human being to be seen in the deserted streets. At the north-west end of the harbor the trireme lay at anchor and, to his great satisfaction, Aurelius found the boat ready on the shore to carry him and his friends on board. He, then, was not the first to arrive.

"Ho! Chrysostomus!" he cried, turning his horse towards the strand. "How are things going on?"

"Well, my lord. We have been waiting here ever since it grew dark. Your friends have all arrived. Half an hour since the old man came, the one with white hair—Cocceius Nerva—he was the last."

Herodianus and Magus went forward, and Aurelius followed. The Roman's horse and the one Magus had ridden were left behind; Aurelius's Andalusian they took with them. The boat pushed off, cut across the dark waters of the harbor and carried the party safe on board.

90

CHAPTER VII.

On the following morning the frightful news spread like wild-fire through the city that several citizens, some of them men of high position, had been seized at dead of night by the city-prefect and carried off to the state-prisons; while others—and among them the Senators Cornelius Cinna and Marcus Cocceius Nerva—had only escaped sharing their fate by flight.

After Cinna's rash demonstration, in opposition to the law against the Christians, such proceedings were not considered very astonishing. Nerva, too, had long seemed ripe for destruction, from the point of view of the state-craft of the time. But that a host of individuals who, till now, had been regarded as blamelessly innocent, nay, that such a man as Furius should be apprehended, produced a painful impression on the public mind. Every one, who did not feel himself protected by his modest station and personal insignificance, began to quake, and even the humble population of the Subura seemed to be dragged into sympathy with the anxiety of the higher classes. The cries of the wandering dealers and street pedlars were subdued, and though the cook-shops and barbers' rooms were crowded, the talk was in low mysterious tones. On every hand suspicious and anxious looks prevailed.

What most agitated and puzzled the citizens of Rome, was the fact, that the confessed enemies of Caesar had been able to escape; this revealed a regular and well-organized plot; nay, from the high rank and wide influence of the fugitives, it was almost an open declaration of war. It was self-evident, that Nerva and Cinna would not have retired so promptly into exile, but that they were about to strain every nerve in order to return victorious. Much was said about the connections they both could count upon in the provinces, and particularly in the Gallia Lugdunensis. These allies, judiciously treated, might, in the present state of public feeling as to Domitian's tyranny, combine for some crushing catastrophe. If no more than two or three legions should raise the standard of revolt, under the guidance of a commander bent on death or success, the Emperor's rule would be in serious danger, to say the least. Men recalled the days of Nero—how rapidly the flame of revolution had spread in every direction, when the mass of combustibles had been piled sky-high, through many years of misgovernment. The praetorian guard could only be trusted conditionally. Their loyalty was simply a matter of price. As long as they were splendidly paid they would be for Caesar, and this sort of fidelity could easily be corrupted in a single night.

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On the other hand the noiselessness, with which the arrests had been managed, and the calm unforced regularity, which prevailed in every department of public life, seemed to guarantee the unwavering stability of the government. The palace was to-day guarded by a single cohort, as usual. The morning audience had been duly crowded. The Senate met at the usual hour, and Domitian joined them, carried to the sitting in his litter, and escorted by only a small portion of the praetorian guard. Races were announced for the following day in the Circus Maximus, and at the same time the *Acta Diurna*,^[64] the official sheet of Rome, formally proclaimed Caesar's intention of edifying and delighting his beloved Romans, by the celebration of magnificent centennial games, never yet equalled for splendor and variety. In short, within the precincts of the Palatium such security and indifference prevailed as could not fail, if thoroughly carried out, to exert great influence on public feeling. Added to this, a vague report got about that the birds had flown in consequence of a warning, to which the government had been accessory, since Caesar had been willing to avoid the painful necessity of arraigning such men as Cinna, Nerva, and Trajan before the Senate. Thus it was not to Caesar's dilatoriness or clumsiness that they owed their escape, but to his magnanimity.

92

Though no such magnanimity had ever before been seen at the palace, this view was warmly encouraged.

Clodianus swore to Caesar by all the gods, that the treason which must evidently have been at work, should be tracked to earth and avenged. The guilty party must be some one in the Emperor's immediate service. Was Domitian absolutely certain that the tablet, with the list of doomed names, had never been out of his own hands? To this Caesar replied, that he had kept the tablet about his person day and night; but Clodianus reminded him of the hour when he had swooned, throwing out a dark hint which served to cast his suspicion on the physician. Domitian, however, was more inclined to look for the traitor among the employés of the city-prefect, than in the palace itself. At any rate, the zeal shown by Clodianus in these circumstances made an admirable impression in his favor. The Emperor began to think he might have been mistaken, and to consider whether the last addition to the list on the tablet should not after all be erased.

93

Clodianus detected this revulsion of feeling with the eye of a clairvoyant, and it gave him extreme satisfaction, for it opened out the prospect for certain schemes, though he was not clear himself yet as to the details. When the pressure of business should allow him leisure, he would go to the villa on the road to Praeneste, intending to settle and confirm these details in concert with Stephanus.

In the course of the afternoon it was reported that Caius Aurelius, too, was one of the fugitives. Baucis brought this news to the high-priest's house, when she returned from market in the Field of Mars.

Not long before Claudia had received a note from Aurelius. It was dated the day before, and had

been written before their last meeting. It contained the explanation, that Aurelius had thrown in his lot with those who were scheming and hoping for liberty. Their schemes had been betrayed. He was flying now like a criminal, but he hoped, ere long, to return and find Rome free and happy.

Claudia had escaped with this letter to her own room, she knew only too well all it implied. She fancied she could already hear her father's verdict, for his tenderness to his child must now inevitably give way to the inexorable severity of a state-official and Caesar's faithful adherent. 94

The rest of the family had meanwhile rushed into agitated discussion of this utterly unexpected departure. They were sitting in one of the larger rooms opening out of the court-yard, not far from the very spot where Aurelius, the night before, had torn himself from his Claudia. Quintus and Cornelia were present, as well as the parents and Lucilia. They had waited till long past midnight for Cinna's return, and had then parted in the utmost anxiety, for Aurelius' hasty visit, and the mysterious warning he had written, left them to surmise the worst. Thus they met at an early hour at the high-priest's house, whither each had come hoping for news and good counsel. Titus Claudius had, in fact, been informed of all that was known by Parthenius, and actually before he was up. He received Cornelia, who was in the highest excitement, with a mixture of severity and sympathy.

"I do not know all the motives," he said solemnly, "that may have led to these measures on Caesar's part. But so much as this seems to me certain: that this step was prompted by necessity for the preservation of the State. As an officer of State myself, and as the father of your betrothed husband, I can only advise you—and I mean it well—to have nothing farther to do with a proscribed man. I promise you I will do my best to induce Caesar to give up all farther pursuit of the fugitives, and to consider banishment from the Empire, or perhaps only from Italy, as sufficient punishment."

So spoke Titus Claudius, and then no more was said about Cinna. In the discussion as to Aurelius, Cornelia could take part more calmly than the others. Her pride had been roused by the Flamen's speech, and when this was the case, she was mistress of herself in all respects. 95

When Claudia, having recovered such composure as she could, returned to the sitting-room, a single timid glance at her father's careworn face showed her, that his mind was already made up on the matter. His features revealed all the keen struggle and pain it cost him to inflict suffering on his daughter under the irresistible stress of circumstances; but, at the same time, she saw with perfect certainty that nothing—absolutely nothing—could change his idea of the necessity. His eye, which he kept calmly and immovably fixed on her, was so eloquent, that her cheek tingled, and she could hardly control herself so as not to throw herself sobbing into Lucilia's arms.

"Forget that you ever loved such a man as Aurelius!" was what that sad gaze said to her. "I might have condescended to set aside the glory of my many centuries of ancestors and the dignity of my house, but never my honor as a guardian of the State. I might have sacrificed my pride—but not my duty. I could have borne to give my daughter to a youth of no renown, a mere provincial of obscure origin, hard as that would have been—but to a traitor! No, not if he wore the purple. Caius Aurelius is dead—dead to you, to me, to his country!"

The only person, who in this depressing atmosphere did not lose her good spirits was Lucilia.

"Who knows how all this hangs together?" she said consolingly. "Has not Sextus Furius been arrested? He surely is the very incarnation of peaceful civic virtue. Some low informer has slandered him secretly, and it is the same, I make no doubt, with Aurelius. I can quite understand, that he should have no fancy to exchange his pretty villa for a residence in a state-prison. But his innocence may yet come to light." 96

"Nay," said the Flamen, "only those who are conscious flee. The man, who knows that he is falsely accused, stays where he is to justify himself."

"I should think so indeed!" exclaimed Lucilia. "As if no innocent man had ever been condemned! I may say honestly, I should have done the same in his place. It is particularly unpleasant to watch a game, where one is oneself the stake played for. Only let us set to work at once to get at the bottom of the matter. If Aurelius were in truth a rebel, would not the chamberlain have mentioned him to you this morning, when he told you the names of those who had escaped and those who had been arrested?"

"Parthenius was in a desperate hurry. He only mentioned the worst, the ringleaders. It may be indeed, that Aurelius has been led away...."

"You see!" cried Lucilia, "and those who have been misled must be forgiven."

"Forgiven!" echoed Cornelia. "Those may accept forgiveness who choose!"

"Oh, you, with your everlasting Roman pride! That was all very well under a Republic. For my part, sooner than wander about the world an outcast and in misery, I would admit what a fool I had been. You must progress as the times advance. The Empire is firmly established once and for all...."

"You are wasting your breath, in trying to make a jest of what is grave earnest," said the high-priest. "I have been greatly deceived in this Aurelius. I took him to be frank and trustworthy, a 97

man of character....”

“Father!” cried Claudia, trembling from head to foot, “I will not bear to hear you speak so of the man, whom I regard as the noblest and truest on earth.”

“What, daughter? Even now, after his flight as a criminal?”

“Even now.”

Quintus and Cornelia looked inquiringly, first at the priest, and then at the girl.

“Why should I conceal it?” cried Claudia. “You may hear me say it—and all the world may know it—I love him, he is mine now and forever!”

“Poor child!” said her father, and Lucilia went up to her and led her out of the room. In the solitude of her own room the strength, that had kept her blood at boiling point, gave way entirely. She flung herself into her sister’s arms, and cried long and bitterly.

The high-priest too retired, and shut himself up in his study till dinner-time. The information brought him by Parthenius, and the flight of Cinna and Aurelius more particularly, had been a great shock to him. And then the sight of the young creature, who stood up so bravely for her love—and yet—he could not hesitate—who must give it up forever. That had been a dagger-thrust in his heart. He struggled for firmness, for cold and stern resolve. He told himself that true kindness, in this case, lay in severity and outward hardness; every sign of wavering, every expression of tender impulse, would only make the inevitable harder for his child to bear. The human heart can better endure the sudden extinction of its happiness than its slow decline, fanned by the breath of a faint hope which is too weak to revive the flame of life, and yet too strong to allow it to die out.

98

For many hours this man, who was usually so prompt and decisive, sat bent over his table as if in a trance. If Sextus Furius had not been one of the victims of this nocturnal raid, Titus Claudius would, even now, have arranged his daughter’s betrothal to this suitor before the week was out. The very cruelty of such a proceeding seemed to him wholesome and bracing. But, as it was, Furius too—for some unimaginable reason—was an inmate of the Mamertine prisons. What was to be done? He considered the possibilities of a journey, and remembered that Quintus, the year before, had expressed a purpose some day to pass a few months at Athens. The house of Claudia had many illustrious friends in the Attic capital, who would have welcomed the brother and sister with the greatest pleasure, and have treated them as lovingly and as liberally as their own. But the plan was rejected as soon as it was made. The unfavorable season was at hand; the south-westerly gale, which a few days since had swept over the whole coast of Latium and Campania, had devastated the country south of Antium. Sea-voyages were at an end for the season; no one would venture out to sea but under pressing necessity.

Finally, the priest came to the conclusion, that Claudia would best and soonest get over her grief in her parent’s house and the old familiar habits of her daily life; he, therefore, decided on leaving the poor child in peace, when once he had explicitly impressed on her that Aurelius was lost to her forever, and then tacitly treating the matter as settled once for all.

The whole family eat their meal in conscious silence: Quintus and Cornelia remained as guests. Claudia begged to be excused; she would join them later, in the sitting-room.

99

When they rose from table, Lucilia, Octavia, and the betrothed couple went to walk up and down the peristyle, and Titus Claudius went to his daughter’s room. It was not without an uneasy feeling about his heart, that he desired the slave-girl who sat outside the door to raise the curtain, and he felt sad enough as he entered the room, which was one of the prettiest and pleasantest in the house. Claudia had made it a charming retreat for her studies and favorite pursuits. To the right lay the apartment she shared with Lucilia; but here she alone was mistress, and everything in the room seemed to have taken the stamp of her individuality. The unpretentious and tasteful furniture seemed to proclaim her frank simplicity. On the wall hung her gilt cithara with its red ribbon, the confidant of her hopes and dreams. There lay her favorite authors neatly arranged in ivory cases,^[65] the Greeks to the left, the Latins to the right—above all Homer, Sophocles, and the odes of Sappho. There were a few costly vases of sardonyx, statuettes in Parian marble, and in a purple-lined niche a head of Jupiter, copied from the world-famed work of Phidias.^[66] There were too a silver-mounted spindle and a small hand-loom, besides all sorts of toys and baubles, such as young people were wont to give and receive during the Saturnalia. In short, the pretty bower betrayed itself in every detail as the retreat of a bright-natured, busy and happy girl.

100

And now?

But what was the priest’s surprise when, instead of the crushed and weeping child he expected to meet, Claudia came towards him with gentle pride, grave, but mistress of herself, calm and almost radiant with a half-sad, but half-happy confidence.

In the silence of her chamber Claudia had thought out the course of events and the issues they must lead to; she had questioned her own heart, and taken stock of her duties. The tangle had come straight, light had dawned in the darkness. It was useless to weep and puzzle herself over what could not be altered; it mattered not now to wonder whether Aurelius had acted wisely in taking part in the rash attempt of the conspirators. Nay, the right or wrong of the attempt itself was of secondary importance. One thing only Claudia was sure of: she loved him, and she was

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pledged to him. This had sealed her fate. As soon as this certainty stood forth clear and confessed in the midst of her sorrow, her peace of mind returned as if sent from heaven. She knew now how she must act, come what might now or in the future; she saw the goal towards which her whole existence strove, and she could wait in all submission, till the gods might point out a way in which she could walk. But that she would never look aside from that goal, that no power on earth could tear that love from her heart—that was as clear to her as her belief in love itself. Every blow, which could now fall on this hapless heart, would be the inevitable dealing of Fate, which neither gods nor men could evade. Claudia still hoped for some happy issue, even with her father; for the hopefulness of love is inexhaustible. But, if Fate would have it otherwise, it was quite clear to her that the issue must be worked out without her father—nay, if it came to the worst, against her father; and the sense of this possibility gave a melancholy undercurrent to her confident resolve.

Titus Claudius misunderstood the signs of her face and manner; her calm decisiveness he took for the submission of an obedient daughter; her silent melancholy for the anguish of resignation. He went up to Claudia with an impulse of deep tenderness, took her in his arms, kissed her, and loaded her with tender commendation; she, ashamed and feeling almost guilty, submitted to his embrace. Then she raised her eyes in tearful entreaty to his face.

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“Let us speak no more of all this,” she said in a low voice. “Time will show, whether he is guilty or not. You shall never hear a word of murmur from me. I will command myself; I will be just what I have always been—a little graver perhaps, but not lackadaisical and pining. Only never speak of him, do not speak harshly of him! I cannot bear it, Father!”

“You are my own good, wise child,” whispered Claudius, holding her more closely in his arms. “I know you by this for my own flesh and blood. May Jupiter, in his goodness, give you strength to cast this luckless love out of your heart. I know, my child, we Claudians have a deep heart, and what has once sunk to the bottom there is apt to strike deep root in the soil. But nature has also given us a strong will, and a defiant spirit that fears no struggle. If you ever feel too miserable, if the fight is too much for you, then fly for rest to your father’s heart, Claudia, and do not forget, that every grief that troubles yours I feel two-fold and three-fold in my own.” Claudia wept aloud; overcome by her grief, she clung to that loving father’s sheltering arms. Then, collecting all her firmness, she freed herself, looked up with a smile, and said, as she dried her tears:

“Now—I am myself again. Go to the others, pray, Father, and I will follow immediately.”

The Flamen left the room. Claudia threw herself on her knees, and after kissing the spot on the rug where he had stood, threw up her arms and her slender figure in passionate prayer to the gods.

“Do not crush me, Immortals, if I am sinning!” she whispered with trembling lips. “For you know, ye all-merciful and all-wise, that I cannot help it.”

103

CHAPTER VIII.

It was past midnight. The Christians of the Subura had once more assembled in the quarry between the Appian and the Labicanian Ways. Among them stood Quintus, who had joined the congregation to-day for the first time.

The subterranean hall—not the small square vault where Eurymachus had taken refuge, but a large oval space, whose natural roof was here and there supported by pillars of artificial construction—was lighted by a lamp with five arms, which hung from the smoke-blackened vault. On each side, close to the wall, a natural ledge of tufa served for seats. These were given up to women and girls, mostly very humbly dressed, while the men occupied the farther end of the hall, some standing, some sitting on wooden stools, and some squatting on the ground.

Quintus was leaning, with eager, glistening eyes, against a pillar that was so built into a wall as to form a semicircular niche at one end of the hall, and opposite to him, against the corresponding pillar, stood Thrax Barbatus, his sinewy arms crossed over his breast.

The attention of the congregation had at first been centered on Quintus—who was welcomed with astonishment as a member of the little band—but it had gradually been diverted to another object. Behind an arm-chair stood the tall and commanding figure of an old man, who looked ninety at least. His still upright bearing and his weather-tanned face showed him to be a soldier; and yet an expression of touching gentleness and benevolence marked his features, a melancholy and tender gleam, as it were, that played round his expressive lips and half-closed eyes. Those eyes were blind, darkened by the unwholesome gloom of the Sardinian mines,^[67] where, for three years, the old man had been buried alive. They were used to light, and to the free airs of heaven, those bright, bold warrior's eyes; and when Tigellinus,^[68] Nero's favorite, had thrust him into blackness, because he had refused to tender false evidence, they grew fevered and dim in the twilight depths, and at last had darkened into endless night. The fall of Nero restored him to liberty. He had been taken on board ship by some kind-hearted mariners, carried first to Athens and then to Corinth, where his brethren in the faith received him gladly, and took charge of his maintenance. For some years he lived thus, a zealous member of the infant congregation, and a faithful guardian and preacher of the gospel. But at last he could contain himself there no longer. His homesickness for Rome, his native city, which he loved in spite of all her sins and crimes with the passion of a true-born Roman, grew more irresistible every day. An Egyptian merchant, who esteemed him highly, after taking him a long sea-voyage, brought him at last to the harbor of Ostia. For many weeks the venerable stranger had wandered in vain through all the fourteen regions of the city, hoping to find some friend of his early years; they were all without exception dead and gone. One day he sat down, sadly leaning on his staff, on the step of a fountain not far from the temple on the Quirinal. Here he was found by Euterpe, who, filled with pity, addressed the blind old man. They soon made the discovery that they were of the same faith, and now for five or six days he had been sharing the home of Diphilus; and though, at first, this had been somewhat of a burden to the carpenter, the liberality of Quintus Claudius had relieved him of all anxiety.

Calenus was now telling the assembled Christians some of the adventures of his youth, when he was fighting in Palestine. Eager devoutness was stamped on every face that watched him.

"Yes, my beloved," he said, and his voice sank to deeper solemnity, "I can remember every detail as if it were yesterday. But I knew not what I was doing. My heart was holden, and my soul was darkened. It was not till long, long after, that the grace of God enlightened me.... It was at the time when the Jews keep their Passover. Our division had been sent to guard the state-prison, but I and a few of my comrades had been warned to keep ourselves ready to march at any moment, and within an hour the word was given to set out. We joined a noisy procession, headed by the Roman eagles, which flowed on up the hill where criminals are executed, outside Jerusalem. We could scarcely see or hear what was taking place, the people shrieked and howled so incessantly, evidently inflamed to the highest pitch by their priests and the scribes. However, we were ordered to let them have their way. At last, when I asked a woman what all the tumult was about, she replied: "They are going to crucify Jesus, the King of the Jews.""

He ceased and bowed his head, as one self-convicted, and a death-like silence reigned in the room.

"Ah, my brethren!" he went on presently, in a tone of deep sorrow. "Would that some angel of God had been near in that awful hour to open my heart! In the ear of a heathen soldier, that name sounded like any other. Darkened and in ignorance, I kept guard on the spot where my Saviour was to die."

Again he bowed his penitent head. But soon looking up again with renewed and joyful eagerness, he told them he had been mercifully permitted to see from afar the sublime face of the man, whom he had learned, years after, to recognize as the Redeemer of mankind. The pale features which had looked down on him, as in a vision, had been indelibly graven on his soul, and later, when the tidings of salvation had come home to him, the image had risen to new life, and shone radiantly upon him, like a star of promise, through the darkness of his sufferings and sorrows.

When Calenus ceased speaking, no one for some time ventured to break the silence. Glauce, who was shedding quiet tears and recalling her dear Eurymachus, mixing up in her fancy the vision of

the Nazarene with the picture of her lover, looked up at the speaker like a worshipper at his divinity. To the rest, indeed, the hoary old man, on whom a ray from that Sun had once fallen, appeared as a superior being, and presently, when the spell of silence was broken, they all crowded round him to kiss his hands with fervent devotion, or even the hem of his garment.

The wonderful tale had made an almost weird impression upon Quintus. His fancy was haunted by the face of the pale sufferer, who, at that first meeting in Domitian's park, had stirred him to such new and unwonted feelings. A shudder, such as he had never felt before, shook him from head to foot, and his whole nature seemed to float away into the rarer air of incomprehensible mysticism.

While the band of Christians sat listening in absorbed silence to the words of Calenus, a troop of armed men were setting forth from the Esquiline—twenty stout fellows armed with spears and short swords. They were led by a stalwart veteran, who had won the rank of centurion on the battle-fields of Germany; on his left walked a torch-bearer, on his right a handsome, active stripling—Antinous, the steward's slave. They marched to the south-east along the Via Labicana, and their regular tramp marked time on the pavement. Now and again a sword rattled or a piece of mail; now and again the leader muttered a short, sharp question, which the slave hastily answered. The ruddy light, that fell on his pretty girlish face, lent a witch-like effect to his features. It was thus that the Greek myth represented the beguiling Sirens: beautiful but fateful. The centurion himself was not quite at ease in the company of the supple youth, and he betrayed it not merely by the roughness of his address, but, even more, by his lowering brow, and the expression of aversion and contempt that curled his lips.

At the spot where, on a former occasion, Quintus had come upon the road with Eurymachus in his litter, the party halted. The centurion glanced keenly across the fields in the direction pointed out to him by Antinous, and he knew the country better than the Greek, whose only idea was to go in the same line as he had then come by, like a wild animal. After closely cross-questioning the slave, he made his men go forward by the road about five hundred paces farther, and thus reached a fairly-beaten bridle-path, nearly parallel to the line which Quintus had taken across hedge and ditch. They passed under the arches of the Aqua Marcia, again, soon after, under those of the Aqua Claudia, and then they were in view of the pine wood, which looked like a black, fantastically-shaped cloud against the sky.

When the file of men were within a few paces of it, the torch was extinguished, as the uncovered light could not be carried through the brushwood, and a small horn lantern was lighted instead. The centurion doubted whether he had not better leave some of his men outside. However, as the wood extended for a considerable distance to the south-east, there were objections to this plan. It would have taken half a legion to guard every possible exit as far as the spurs of the Alban Hills, and besides, Antinous asserted positively that they could reach the entrance to the quarry without any fear of discovery, as it was so effectually screened by the thicket, that the Nazarenes believed themselves to be in perfect security. In fact, they never even set a watch; so that he had lately ventured fifteen paces or more into the wide cross-gallery, without being detected.

One after the other, the armed men entered the wood. Antinous had taken the lantern; in three minutes they were at the laurel bushes which screened the opening of the quarry; Antinous triumphantly parted the boughs.

"Here!" he said proudly, "with a twist of your thumb you have them all as safe as hares in a trap."

The little band of Christians, who were thus overtaken by their fate, were in the act of kneeling for a common prayer, when heavy steps and the rattle of arms were suddenly heard in the passage. All started in terror to their feet. A few instantly dropped on their knees again, wringing their hands. The women and girls clung to each other in despair. Some of the younger men, and with them Thrax Barbatus, assumed an air of sullen determination, which threatened desperate resistance on their part, while others stood motionless and unmoved in dull resignation. Among them there were a few faces that beamed with the transport of sacred ecstasy, and Quintus and Calenus were perhaps the only two, who betrayed no sign in their faces of what was passing in their minds. Before it was possible even to think of flight, the old centurion was standing in the door-way, his drawn sword gleaming ominously: behind him shone the helmets of his men-at-arms.

A loud cry rose from the congregation; Thrax Barbatus flung off his cloak, and drew the dagger he had concealed under it.

"Whoever tries to escape is a dead man!" shouted the soldier, giving a sign to his men. In a minute they were ranged round the hall to the right and left.

Quintus, who was likewise armed, grasped his sword-hilt convulsively. He glanced round at the little congregation; the fight would be too unequal, simply ridiculous, but he felt he must attempt it. His sword flashed from its sheath; but at that instant Antinous sprang upon him from one side and, with the strength of desperation, clutched his right arm. Before Quintus could shake him off he was surrounded by soldiers, his weapon was wrenched from him, and six or eight sinewy hands held his arms and shoulders with the grip of a vice. The centurion came up to him with his sword point downwards.

"My lord," he said, "you see—resistance is hopeless."

"What do you want of us?" asked Quintus, with a defiant sparkle in his glance.

"My lord, you know."

"And do you know me?"

"Who that lives in Rome, can fail to know the son of Titus Claudius?"

"Well—and yet you seize me as if I were a thief?"

"I am doing my duty—I am seeking the Nazarenes."

"And you have found them!" exclaimed Antinous, still breathless from his exertions.

"Who is this boy?" asked Quintus, with a feeling of unutterable loathing.

"I? I am Antinous, Stephanus' boy," he answered audaciously. "I bring you my master's greetings, and"—he added in a whisper—"those of your imperial neighbor, the lady of Baiae...."

"Silence!" said the centurion, sternly. "You have done your part! Take yourself off—instantly." 111

Quintus breathed hard and deep. He understood only too well all that the impudent young villain's words conveyed. The captain did not give him much time to indulge his feelings.

"My lord," he said, "you are my prisoner. If you will swear to me not to attempt to escape, nor to lay violent hands upon yourself, I will take the risk of leaving you unfettered. This one, however, I must put in chains, and if you have any influence over him, advise him that he had better submit quietly."

"Never!" roared Thrax Barbatus, flourishing his short sword. "Let us fight, my brethren—fight, and die fighting. The martyr's crown awaits not those alone who suffer, but those who fight too."

"Cease!" said old Calenus. "Who dares to speak so blasphemously here? Will you sin as Peter sinned in the garden of Gethsemane? Will you shed your brother's blood like Cain? Woe unto ye blind! Not thus may ye win Heaven, but eternal punishment!" The blind man's words, spoken in a sort of prophetic exaltation, made a deep impression. Those who a moment since had stood forth in defiance, now bent their heads. Thrax Barbatus alone stood his ground.

"Do you think," he shouted in a voice of thunder, "that the Son of God, who lashed the dealers and money-changers out of the Temple with a scourge, was a lamb? He was a lion, that only force could overcome! The Saviour preached to slaves, that their lives and their rights are as precious as those of their tyrants! He, who breaks the chains of the prisoner, will have nothing to say to cowards and fools. Glauce, come close to me—your tender body shall never be meat for the lions of Gaetulia! Pray, Glauce—pray.—And may the Lord Jesus Christ have mercy upon us!" 112

He held the girl tightly clasped in his arms.

"Give yourselves up to the inscrutable counsels of God!" said the solemn, prophetic voice of the blind man.

"Amen," rose from the lips of the congregation.

"Put them in chains," the centurion said. But Quintus, with calm dignity, requested a hearing.

"One word," he said, turning to the centurion. "That scurvy slave has misled you. I swear to you on my honor, centurion, this nocturnal surprise was only intended for me. Here I am, take me with you! I will follow you; carry me in chains to the city, and you may be perfectly certain, that you have all the prey you need show. But these poor wretches, who stand here trembling as to their fate—let them go free; let them go on their way unhindered. They only came here to see for the last time the halls where they have, until now, celebrated the rites of their faith. They have no intention of defying the law."

"Who is there here that will deny his Saviour?" Again it was the blind prophet that spoke. "We are faithful to confess Christ crucified. His name be praised and blessed forever!"

Quintus was silent, and a shade of deep trouble fell on his face.

"Well, then," he said, turning away, "do your duty."

The mercenaries pushed forward. The Christians, none of whom were armed except Thrax and Quintus, submitted at once. Thrax alone withdrew farther and farther into the niche; his left arm still held up Glauce, who leaned only half-conscious on his shoulder, and in his right he still clutched the dagger. The soldiers came up with him. 113

"Come, old man, make short work of it!" cried the foremost. "You see there are a score of us."

Close to Thrax and Glauce Euterpe was kneeling by a pillar. In her wild anguish she had thrown her arms round the cold stone, and was murmuring vehement prayers. Now, looking up a moment, a shrill and piercing shriek broke from her lips, and she fell backwards on the earth, where she lay senseless. Instead of answering the soldier, Thrax Barbatus had raised the dagger, and thrust it to the very hilt in Glauce's side. The two men, even, stood petrified at the sight of such a deed, while Thrax gently laid the slender body on the ground. Tears streamed down his rugged cheeks. Even in death the poor child smiled—shivered.—All was over.

"Good-night," muttered the miserable father. "No executioner will ever harm you now. Come on, accursed crew, and lay me by the side of my sweet Glauce."

He rushed headlong on one of the men, who avoided the stroke, and tried to seize his assailant round the body. But in vain; a mightier blow fell upon his helmet, and stunned him. He staggered backwards.

“Old fool!” cried the other soldier. “Fling away that dagger, or by Hercules....”

“Thrax, miserable man! For Christ’s sake!” A score of voices appealed to him at once. But Thrax had raised the blade again, and charged the foe like a lion.

“Well, he will have it!” said the soldiers, now falling upon him from all sides.

The next instant Thrax Barbatus fell, pierced by three swords at once, on the ground by Glauce’s side. Not a groan of pain parted his set lips, not a throe, not a sign, betrayed the pain of such a death; only his hand feebly felt for Glauce’s.

Quintus gazed down at the dead.

“Would I might have died so!” he said to himself. “Almighty God, Thy will be done.”

“Now, men—are you ready?” cried the centurion, sheathing his weapon.

“As you say.”

“Very well, then; away to the city! Give over crying, you women. A crime was never yet atoned for by howling and wailing. Onwards—march!”

And the long and melancholy procession set out. None remained behind but the dead—the free and happy dead.

CHAPTER IX.

The company of soldiers, who had been sent by the city-prefect in pursuit of the Batavian and his companions, had given up the chase at a short distance from Ardea. They rode slowly into the town, and rapped with their sword-hilts at the door of the little old tavern till the innkeeper crept grumpily out of his bed, and let them in. A stable boy unsaddled the horses, while Ciconia, the host's unprepossessing wife, brought out a dish of smoked cheese,^[69] some loaves, and a jar of red wine from Veii.

115

While his men sat round the stone table and burned their parched throats with coarse liquor, the captain walked up and down the room reflecting with little satisfaction indeed on the events of the night. He wondered why the fugitives had selected the road through Ardea. The Via Appia would have been wider, more convenient, and safer for strangers unfamiliar with the district, while the road to Ardea, with its many inequalities and turnings, would seem to give the pursuers, who were more familiar with them, an appreciable advantage. The more he thought of it, the more convinced he became that Antium must have been the goal of their hopes. But, in that case, the refugees must have intended to sail from Antium and reach one of the neighboring islands, or perhaps even Sardinia or Corsica. And in that case it would not be difficult to find out who had undertaken to convey them. Thus all was not yet lost. He took up a cup of wine and emptied it at a draught. Then, turning to the hostess, he asked in great excitement:

"Ciconia, have you a horse?"

"No, my lord; what do you want it for?"

"I must get on to Antium immediately, and our beasts are tired to death."

Ciconia reflected.

"Well," she said, "there is a horse, no doubt, in the stable—standing there since noon. It belongs to a trader out of Metapontum^[70]—but I do not know whether he would allow it."

116

"He must; or, better still, why should he ever know it? I shall be back again in a few hours. I will leave all our horses in pledge with you, and pay for your nasty verjuice as if it were Falernian. Make no ceremony."

In five minutes the Metapontine trader's steed stood saddled and bridled at the door. It was a small, square-set brute, but strong. The soldier mounted, desired his men to await his return, and set off at a round pace.

Shortly before reaching Antium he met two riderless horses, one of which he at once recognized as that of his wounded comrade. There could no longer be a doubt; the fugitives were trusting to the sea. With renewed energy he struck spurs into his horse, and had soon got over the few hundred paces, that still lay between him and the harbor. Here, however, there was nothing to be seen or heard. He rode all round the bay and back again, keeping a sharp lookout. The ships lay motionless by the mole—the barges and shore-boats in the middle, farther out the larger merchant-vessels, and away to the left the imperial trireme, which through the summer months had cruised in search of pirates about the coasts of Egypt and Cyrenaica.^[71] All was as silent as the dead, excepting when, now and then, the night-breeze whistled through the cordage.

Then he stopped awhile, and gazed out to sea—not a speck was to be seen on the starlit expanse so far as the eye could reach. He was beginning to think that he had been wrong in his calculations, and was about to take his way back again in a very provoked frame of mind, when an unhoped-for incident arrested him in the very act. Was it the uncertain twilight that cheated his sight? The large barque at the farthest end of the harbor seemed to be slowly moving, and then he heard the distant stroke of oars. At the same moment he sprang from his saddle, and thundered with a powerful fist at the door of the nearest house.

117

"A boat!" he shouted as the bewildered door-keeper opened to him. "In the name of the city-prefect I must row at once to the imperial guard-ship."

"My lord, you are under a mistake," said the slave not very civilly. "We are neither boat-keepers nor oarsmen. Euterpius lives here, the harbor-master."

"So much the better. Take me to your master immediately, if you want to keep your head on your shoulders, fellow."

Such a mode of address admitted of no denial; the harbor-master himself understood that the case was no common one, and in ten minutes he and the soldier were seated side by side in a light boat. They soon reached the imperial trireme, which at once took them on board, and the soldier explained in breathless haste how matters stood. The captain of the ship, a man of prompt determination, at once gave orders for sailing after the fugitives. While the soldiers made ready for a fight, the sailors weighed anchor and hauled in the chains. The oarsmen took their seats, the coxswain's hammer gave the stroke, and they were off in chase.

The Batavian's trireme had a good start; it was now but a speck, motionless as it seemed, on the north-western horizon.

118

It was not till nearly an hour later, that any one discovered on board the *Batavia* that they were being chased, and it was Magus' eagle eye that made the unpleasant discovery. Keeping a bright lookout landward from the stern, he perceived that a dark object, which he at first thought to be part of the buildings above the harbor, was a vessel in motion. Its starting at so unusual an hour, and still more, the direction it was taking, roused his suspicions. Magus confessed his fears to Caius Aurelius, and, in the dawn which was now breaking, his master saw clearly the danger of their position. The conspirators—who after exchanging greetings had separated, some to rest, and some, wrapped in cloaks, like Aurelius himself, to pace the deck—were soon assembled to hold council in that centre-cabin, which, to Aurelius, had a peculiar sanctity, as having been the scene of his first meeting with Claudia. The steersman was called in, and Magus remained on deck to find out what more he might.

"Forgive me," the Batavian began, "for having, under stress of circumstances, disturbed your slumbers. You have heard of the new danger which threatens us. It is a trireme, and, to judge from the speed she is making, well manned."

"Then we must pull for our lives," said Ulpus Trajanus. "A fight would be useless."

"I know the ship," said Cornelius Cinna, addressing the Hispanian. "It is the *Charybdis*, which has been in chase of pirates all the summer, off the coast of Cyrenaica. It was the only imperial vessel lying off Antium. She is well manned—no doubt of that; but only when she is on service. At the end of the season the soldiers go on shore to do other duty, or take leave of absence. There are very few left on board during the winter."

119

"If I understand Aurelius rightly, he spoke of the rowers, not of the fighting men," replied Trajanus. "And as the oarsmen are in full numbers, leave has probably not yet begun."

"Nay, you are mistaken. The oarsmen work at day in the harbor, but the law compels them to pass the night on board. I do not wish to fight! I only meant to say that, if it came to the worst, the battle is not so hopeless as you think, particularly as Caius Aurelius has arms on board for half a cohort of soldiers. So, if Fate will have it that we are not to escape scot-free, we can, at any rate, give the foe a warm reception."

"Of course, of course," cried Trajanus. "None but a coward yields without a struggle. However, our surest hope, I believe, is founded on the strength of the oarsmen. We must not forget the sheathed rostrum! Our *Batavia* is a splendid ship, and, Aurelius assures me, has a three-fold coating of timber, but how often has it happened that the strongest vessels have been pierced and sunk by a well-directed thrust from the prow of the enemy—and the imperial guard-ships are admirably armed. What will the most splendid courage avail us then? I would propose, therefore, that the rowers' seats are at once manned by the very best of your oarsmen."

"That has already been done, my lord!" said the steersman. "And as regards the foe's rostrum, I confess I do not share your fears. If we fail to escape, we can but turn round. Then, prow to prow—two can play at that game, and we shall see who is sunk first. We are not accustomed, it is true, to manœuvre like a man-of-war, but the *Batavia* answers her helm as a fish turns with its tail, and that is the great thing."

120

He had hardly spoken, when Magus appeared.

"They are gaining on us. As I reckon, they have twenty oars more than the *Batavia*."

"You hear!" exclaimed Cinna, springing from his seat "There is no farther time for deliberation. Let each man be assigned his part at once."

"You then must be general of the forces," said Nerva quietly. "Many are better at laying plans than you are, but in carrying them out you are unequalled."

"Agreed," said Cneius Afranius. "Our new Rome, met here on board the *Batavia*, invests Cinna with the dignity of Dictator."

"I accept your jest as of good augury," replied Nerva. "Our new Rome is indeed in the hour of its birth, and it is our part to see that it shall thrive and grow. Good! Now, Dictator, summon the troops."

Cinna's orders were soon issued. All the oarsmen were armed; those who were rowing, as well as those who were resting below till their turn came at the oars. Nor did the trireme lose ground while these preparations were being made; a sword and a small round shield were laid at the feet of each rower, without stopping him in his pull; they could not yet give up all hope of escape. If it became hopeless, the rowers were to cease at the word of command, to rest till the enemy was close upon them, and then pull again till the *Charybdis* was within grappling range. At the instant when the enemy's boarding-planks were thrust across over the grappling-hooks,^[72] the men were to seize their arms and await the commands of Ulpus Trajanus, who would lead them on deck.

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Nerva himself, stepping from bench to bench, issued these instructions to the rowers. Dimly lighted by the ruddy gleam of a flickering lamp and by the twilight of dawn, the tall, majestic figure, with long silver hair, made a singular impression on the crew.

These men, who sat and steadily dipped their oars, were for the most part of Teutonic origin, natives of the Rhine provinces and the north-east of Germany—rough and primitive creatures, hardly understanding the Latin tongue—indeed Magus had to interpret to them their illustrious

commander's orders. But one thing they perfectly understood, their beloved master, Caius Aurelius, was in the utmost peril, and the proud but gentle old man, who passed down their ranks, was a friend of Aurelius and a partner in his danger. This was enough. They glanced down at the weapons, and were almost glad to think their strength would be tested at some other toil than pulling their oars. And then it was for Caius Aurelius! Was there in all the Roman Empire a knight, who treated his people with so much kindness—nay, with so much friendliness? What a jolly time they had just spent at Ostia! The long voyage from Trajectum, to be sure, had been a severe pull, but how handsomely he had rewarded them, and what perfect liberty they had enjoyed while the Batavia lay at anchor. Well, he took after his worthy father—stern when duty was to be attended to, but, though strict, never hard; open-handed, and never without a kind thought for the humblest of his slaves. That was what the old merchant had been, and his son was the same....

122

While the rowers were indulging in these reflections and expressing their views in whispers, the men off duty were posted ready for action on the forepart of the deck, with Cornelius Cinna himself at their head. He desired the Batavian to remain with the ship's servants in the cabins till the moment of attack. Nerva—and this was unanimously agreed to by all the conspirators—in consideration of his advanced age—was entreated to remain in the hold of the vessel, till the battle was decided. But the old man stoutly refused; he still had vigor enough, he said, to wield a blade, and a man was never too old to die for freedom by the side of brave comrades. So Cocceius Nerva was told off to the division under Aurelius—only as a private soldier, for he positively refused to command. Cneius Afranius and the old, one-armed centurion took their places by Cinna, somewhat as his adjutants or lieutenants.

All this time they had rowed steadily ahead. To the east, over Latium, it grew lighter every minute. The elaborate rigging of the imperial trireme was now distinctly visible, for its sails, like those of the Batavia, were close-reefed, the wind being contrary. The three ranks of oars on each side rose and fell like broad black wings. There was no longer any doubt. She was gaining on them. Her oarsmen outnumbered those of the Batavia, not by twenty only, but by thirty or more. Aurelius measured with his eye the fast diminishing distance between them, not without a feeling of apprehension. On board both vessels there was absolute silence; nothing broke the stillness of the dawn but the splash of the oars' blades in the water and the hammer-strokes of the time-keepers. Not another vessel was to be seen on the calm lead-colored waste. In all this vast and desert expanse the only living thing was that embodiment of stealthy and vindictive hatred!...

123

It was a ghastly thought, and he shivered.

Another quarter of an hour went by, and the most persistently hopeful could no longer dream of escape. Cornelius Cinna gave the word; the Batavia turned round and the oars ceased to lash the waves. The Charybdis immediately slackened her tremendous speed, evidently in order to put on a final spurt for a killing thrust. She came nearer and nearer, till within about three hundred paces. Then the rowers suddenly fell to with all their force; the ship made a half-turn and rushed with furious might on the Batavia, which was lying still. But Chrysostomus, her steersman, was an experienced seaman. With five or six strokes she turned sharply round, and the Charybdis shot by, close to along-side but harmless.

She turned back at once; the Batavia was again lying to in watchful expectation, her gleaming rostrum threatening the foe, and the Charybdis was not far enough off to repeat her attack with any effect. She now took another line of action. She pulled slowly and peacefully to within a speaking distance of the Batavia. The city-prefect's captain came to the bulwarks with the ship's commander and roared out to them, in the tone of a conqueror, to give up their useless resistance and return to Antium.

"And who are you?" asked Cinna contemptuously.

124

"A servant of Caesar's and a guardian of the insulted majesty of the law."

"Or else a pirate[73]...."

"A foolish subterfuge!—You know the sovereign's guard-ship; aye, as well as I know the face of a rebel. Are not you Cinna, the eloquent advocate of the Nazarenes?"

Cinna did not fail to observe that, during this colloquy, the Charybdis, stealthily, worked only by the stern-most oars, was creeping nearer and nearer. This was exactly what he had hoped for. If only they would grapple! If only they would board. A fight on the decks of the Batavia was, of all the chances open to them, by far the most promising; their knowledge of the vessel, and particularly of its trap-doors and ladders would be a precious advantage. Cinna therefore judged it wise to parley a little longer with the enemy, that he might be deluded into believing that his scheme was not perceived or understood.

"Aye—that is my name!" he shouted back. "And who in the world has any right to dog my movements and detain me here?"

"Caesar and the law," replied the soldier. "Do not resist, but trust rather to Caesar's clemency than to the issue of an unequal battle."

"I do not understand your meaning. Cornelius Cinna sails for Liguria.[74]—What spite is this, that dares to hinder his doing so?"

125

The warrior exchanged a few words with the ship's captain.

"Is not Caius Aurelius Menapius on board?" he asked after a short pause.

"Not to my knowledge. Now, make an end of this insolent catechising. I owe you no account of my proceedings, and I demand a free passage—or, by Pluto!..."

Magus, meanwhile, without speaking a word, had run down to the armory. There he seized a sharp axe, which he tried on the panel of the cabin, and then took the heft firmly between his teeth. While Cornelius Cinna stood disputing with the officer, our friend the Goth glided like a weasel through the port-hole near the rudder, and slid softly into the sea. For a few seconds he lay floating on his back, breathing deeply through the nostrils; then he dived in the clear blue water and came up again close to the rudder of the unsuspecting Charybdis. Again he drew a deep breath; then, swimming with his left hand, he took the axe in his right, and with two or three mighty blows he severed the rope by which the rudder was worked.^[75] A broad smile of satisfaction shone on his tanned face; he dropped the axe into the sea and made his way back to the Batavia.

The Goth was out of reach before the enemy's crew fully understood their disaster. The harpoons and lances they flung after him missed their mark, and he got on board unhurt.

126

Chrysostomus, the steersman, had at the same time handled his ship very cleverly. The Batavia was now in a position, on her part, to run the foe through the flank with her iron-shod beak so effectually, that he would never have made his way home, for with a loose rudder the Charybdis was of course defenceless. Cinna, however, would not hear of this. He would have fought for freedom—he would not fight for revenge.

Three blows of the hammer, the Batavia's oars dipped deeply in the waves and she rode majestically away to the westward. The Charybdis did not even attempt to chase her.

The soldier and the captain of the vessel foamed with rage. They had been so sure of their prey, and it had slipped through their fingers when they thought they held it fast. It was their confidence, which had led to their disappointment.

Cornelius Cinna leaned thoughtfully over the taffrail, gazing at the Charybdis as she diminished to a speck, for she had taken a homeward course to Antium. Strange thoughts filled his brain. Was it so easy as this, to make a proud and well-armed vessel incapably helpless? One bold stroke, and she had become unmanageable—was it not the same perhaps with the vessel of State?^[76] Could it be so difficult to deal a blow at that ship's rudder, to board the drifting barque and to pull it at last into the haven of freedom and peace, there to be freshly fitted and manned for a happier voyage in the future?

127

Magus, of course, was the hero of the hour. He was loaded with thanks and praises, his master embraced him warmly, and gifts were showered upon him; but the honest fellow seemed hardly to understand why so much was made of his achievement. What was the difference, whether he hung over a precipice on some northern shore to gather a rare plant from the rock, or cut his way through the Rugian forests to cast a net over the horns of the aurochs, or climbed to the top-most branches of a primeval oak, or—as he had just done—swam a few paces to thwart a foe? It was all instinctive prompting, nothing meritorious or remarkable.

The rowers set to work with a will, notwithstanding that the imperial trireme was now disabled. The coast was still too close for them to feel sure whence or by whom the pursuit might not be taken up.

After a short council, they decided on taking a course between the little islands of Planasia and Ilva,^[77] north of Corsica, to the coast of Gallia Narbonensis, and then to cast anchor in the most unfrequented bay they could find; Athenopolis^[78] perhaps, or Olbia.^[79] From thence, either separately or together, they could make their way into the interior, and reach Gallia Lugdunensis, where a large number of troops were stationed, some in scattered fortresses, and some in the chief town of the province, Lugdunum on the Rhodanus.^[80] Rodumna, on the Liger, the native town of Afranius, was still to be the central point of meeting on a particular day, to be fixed later, unless the conspiracy should through some unforeseen occurrence be broken up.

128

It had now long been day. The fugitives, quite tired out, retired to their couches; Aurelius only still found something to do. First he went to Herodianus' cabin; he had taken himself to bed as soon as he had come on board, and all the bustle of the last hour or two had not waked him. He now lifted up a bruised and swollen face, and complained of severe pain. His fall on the way had shaken him considerably. Aurelius helped him to move, and then applied a bandage and a herb poultice to his arm and shoulder, and in five minutes the patient was asleep again.

Aurelius, however, still could not rest. He went next to the fugitive entrusted to his protection by Quintus Claudius: Eurymachus. He found him excited, pale, and breathless. He was in a high fever, and sitting up in bed. Through the half-opened port-hole of his cabin he had listened in alarm to the mysterious confusion and noise; he imagined that the pursuit had been on his account, and it had distressed him beyond measure to think that the magnanimous Aurelius should be involved in his hapless fate. When the Batavian had reassured him on this point, he fell back on his pillows with a few words of gratitude. A sort of ague fit shook his frame, and his teeth chattered as if with cold.

"How strange," said Aurelius to himself. "This man, who is so indifferent to danger for himself, is ready to die with anxiety for the safety of his preserver!"

129

He went back to his own room, and threw himself, wrapped in his cloak as he was, on the outside of his bed. He tried to recall all the events of the last twenty-four hours, but his thoughts became confused. He seemed to see a sweet maiden form stooping over him—to see her smile and feel her kiss his forehead. “Claudia!” he sighed and shivered; then he fell quite asleep—and he was at Baiae, in the quiet, peaceful garden, far from the world of hatred, tyranny, and persecutions. A lovely dream! as distinct from the realities of the present, as a bright star in the dark vault of night.

CHAPTER X.

All this time the wily Barbillus had not been idle. He knew too well the whole meaning of a *wish* of Domitian's, particularly when the wish was expressed in such a manner, as his desire to conquer Cornelia had been. Besides, the priest had only too much reason to fear the Emperor, in relation to his high pretensions to prophetic powers. More than once had Domitian shown his aversion to Chaldaeans, mathematicians, and seers generally, and had banished them from Rome by special edicts. These edicts might at any moment be turned against Barbillus, even though he also officiated as the priest of a tolerated faith, and hitherto had had no cause to dread his imperial patron, whom he had found means to amuse and manage. Again, and above all, his vanity was at stake; he felt the failure of the elaborately-contrived mummery as personally humiliating, and longed to purge himself of the charge of clumsiness in the Emperor's eyes.

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On the following day, therefore, he set to work again, and began to reconnoitre the ground. His spies, under a variety of excuses, made their way into Cornelius' house, eavesdropping and bribing the slaves. Now as a Syrian yarn-seller, now as a shipwrecked sailor humbly praying the ostiarius to admit him to shelter, or as a dealer in Egyptian charms—one or another of the indefatigable Oriental's tools contrived to see and hear something, without their presence being thought strange in a house where so many came and went. Thus Barbillus learned many details as to Cornelia's habits and mode of life, which might possibly prove of use, though he did not as yet see the connection they would have with his schemes.

However, the results of this system of espionage seemed more tangibly satisfactory when, on the second day after beginning operations, there was put into his hands the note which Caius Aurelius had written and left on the occasion of his nocturnal visit.

The slave-girl, who had not parted with it for anything less than gold, declared that she had plainly seen and heard Cornelia, when she took it from the Batavian and promised to deliver it to her uncle. Since it could hardly be doubted that it was a precautionary warning from a fellow-conspirator, it would not be difficult to make it appear that Cornelia must be a party to the plot. To an unprejudiced judge, it was indeed self-evident that Cornelia had no suspicion of the importance of this bit of writing; otherwise she would have taken better care of it, and would not have been so foolish as to leave it lying by the lamp when she went to bed. But all that Barbillus wanted was some valid excuse for a hold over the young girl.

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When the note was put into his hands, the day was already waning. It was that same eventful day when, in the morning, the Batavian had so happily escaped, and at night the Christians were doomed to surprise and seizure. Barbillus decided not to waste an instant; he hurried off to the chamberlain's house, where, after some ceremony on the part of the servants, he succeeded in gaining admission.

The courtier was entertaining a highly select circle. They had just risen from a magnificent supper, and he had conducted his guests into a handsomely-decorated room, where a variety of entertainments were provided for them. Some, heated with their potations of fine wines, went out into the cooler air of the peristyle; among these were Parthenius himself and Clodianus, who stood eagerly talking to the master of the feast.

"Come—let us talk no more of business;" said Parthenius, half in earnest and half in jest, when Clodianus paused for a moment. "I assure you, my noble friend, I am almost overwhelmed when I think of the work before us. I am half afraid, that with all these arrests we have loaded ourselves with a burden that we can hardly carry."

"Why?" asked the adjutant coolly.

"Only think! the flower of the Senate and the Knights! It will hardly be wise to punish so many and such illustrious captives with death. Merely to banish them would be to endanger the Caesar's power...."

"Then keep them in prison till further notice."

"That will not do either. Do you suppose then, that their relations and friends would sit with their hands before them? It would be putting a dangerous weapon into the enemy's hands."

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"Really, Parthenius, you talk as if the throne were already tottering. What can the anger of the accused, or the disaffection of their allies matter to us? Is not the Palatium strong enough? Are not our soldiers faithful? Is not Caesar one with all the true feelings of his people?"

"Again I say, put off all serious discussion till to-morrow," replied the chamberlain, offering his hand to the adjutant. "The duties of a host now claim my attention...."

At this moment a servant led the way for a priest of Isis.

"My lord," said Barbillus, bowing, "I have come on the business you know of. Caesar commissioned me...."

"Ah! now I recognize you!" exclaimed Parthenius after looking at him closely for a moment. "You are Barbillus, the stage-manager and prompter at the Temple of Isis. Charmed, by the gods, I am sure!"

Barbillus, who was not particularly pleased at this reception, looked down in embarrassment. He did not know whether to take up a jesting tone in reply, or to try to be dignified and haughty; so as to impress the adjutant, at any rate, even if it were impossible with the chamberlain, who was cognizant of his miserable failure.

"Do you recollect," continued Parthenius, turning to Clodianus with a meaning glance, "that charming creature, whose coarse-fisted slave had the audacity...."

"To be sure. Caesar told me of that wonderful intrigue. I always used to be his right-hand man in such little affairs."

"Then you know the lovely joke about the mask of Osiris?"

"Of course. But let this man speak; he is evidently in a hurry."

"You are right," said Barbillus with dignified calm. "In spite of the inconvenient hour I have ventured to disturb the illustrious Parthenius, in order to inform him that I have found the ways and means...."

"My friend," interrupted the chamberlain, "I see there my friend Latinus, the actor, who is looking anxiously for me. Every second of my time is precious. Clodianus, would you have the kindness to hear what this worthy priest has to say, and in case of need to give him your always valuable advice. Then, when my actors have done, you can tell me what he proposes. And at any rate, Barbillus, if your plans should not necessitate immediate action, pray remain as my guest."

He waved a polite hand and turned away with a light step. Clodianus drew the priest a little on one side.

"Now," he said: "What is your news?"

"My lord," said Barbillus, "to begin at the beginning, it would seem that you too know of the commission with which Caesar has honored me. I am to make up for that little mishap the other evening. Well, I have discovered how to solve the problem; this note, if judiciously used, will put the coy damsel entirely in your power—by right of law, without the slightest exercise or appearance of arbitrary dealing."

"Show me!"

The priest gave him the note. "Caius Aurelius," he said, "gave her this note a few hours before he fled."

Clodianus read every word slowly and thoughtfully, and muttering to himself: "The Batavian to the noble Cornelius greeting. There is danger in delay. Remember Rodumna!"

Then a ray of intelligence lighted up his features, and his eyes sparkled with sudden fire. Rodumna! as it happened, he knew the little town, and one of his clients was a native of the place. In the self-same instant it struck him, that Rodumna was not far from Lugdunum, and this was like a flash of revelation; Rodumna, of course, was the head-quarters of the conspirators.—For that a conspiracy existed, none could doubt after all that had occurred, and Cinna's well-known connection with Gallia Lugdunensis made the choice of that province as a base of operations probable on the face of it.

Clodianus breathed hard. His keen wit took in the whole situation at once. If the contents of this note could be kept secret, if he could succeed in turning the Emperor's suspicions in another direction, this unhoped-for discovery would be of incalculable value. It was but a point to be sure, but that point might serve as the fulcrum from which to lift the world off its hinges. If his schemes with Stephanus and the Empress should fall through, here was a new lever ready to his hand, and stronger, more reliable, more splendid than the first.

Clodianus made up his mind in an instant. He put on an expression of almost ferocious gravity.

"Barbillus," he said with excessive sternness: "You are my prisoner!"

"You are joking!" exclaimed the priest in dismay.

"By no means! This note reveals a secret which, if it became known, would nullify all the measures taken by the government. Till this moment, not a soul but Caesar and those in his confidence knew that the conspirators were to meet at Rodumna. Accident has put you, too, in possession of the information. I must have you in safe-keeping."

"That would be an ill return for the zeal I have shown in the matter."

"I am very sorry, but consideration for you must yield to my care for the safety of the State. The secret must be kept at any cost. Nothing but your imprisonment will be a sufficient guarantee. Come into the house with me, and I will consider where to send you."

"You are resolved on my ruin!" cried Barbillus in despair. "A priest of Isis in prison! only consider; my office, my position, my influence will be utterly lost. Do you suppose, that all these years and in such a place as mine I have not learnt to hold my tongue? Silence is the first virtue of a priest."

The adjutant seemed to waver.

"If I could trust you.—But no. It will not do; I cannot undertake such a responsibility."

"You can, you may in all confidence. You may throw me to the wild beasts, if a rash word ever passes my lips. Only spare me this irremediable disgrace. I am thought by every matron in Rome to be specially favored by the goddess. You are destroying my very existence."

"That would no doubt be a misfortune," said Clodianus relenting. "Well, be it so; once more I will be fool enough to be good-natured. But woe to you, if you abuse my kindness."

"Thanks, thanks, my lord!" exclaimed Barbillus, raising the crafty courtier's hand to his lips.

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"The letter itself I will destroy at once," continued Clodianus. "Parthenius himself must know nothing of its contents, or he would undo all my precautions. Swear to be secret by all you hold most sacred."

"I swear by the precious head of Barbillus," said the priest, laying his hand on his heart.

"Very good; now come with me. You must tell the chamberlain some fib. That you hope to persuade the fair one to yield willingly, or anything else that comes into your head. I will take care of the rest."

"Would it not be wise, if we were to discuss the details of the fib? I am anxious not to blunder, for I have already angered Caesar once."

"Then go, keep out of it, and leave the whole matter to me. I will let you know what I have settled in the course of the evening."

"That will, I think, be the safest plan. My appearing here at so late an hour might excite suspicion: Farewell, my lord. I will never forget the grace you have shown your humble servant."

"The best thanks will be in silence."

Barbillus took his leave. Clodianus took a few more turns up and down the colonnade, rubbing his hands with satisfaction; then he returned to the reception-rooms.

When the extremely witty, but extremely licentious comedy had been acted to the end, amid the wild laughter of the audience, Parthenius found time to speak a few words in private with Clodianus. The adjutant had thought out his scheme and devised a fable, too simple to seem doubtful, to justify the priest's unexpected visit.

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The lovely Lycoris—who looked more bewitchingly than ever from under her long lashes—was just coming towards them, with the intention of thanking their amiable host for the delightful treat he had given them, and the amusement she had derived from it, and Parthenius was turning to meet her, when his attention was once more claimed in an opposite direction. A note from the city-prefect informed him of the escape of the Batavia and the disaster of the Charybdis. The letter also reported the most positive information, that the Batavia was bound for Liguria. This was inferred from the fact, that after that luckless encounter she took her course northwards rather than to the west. The city-prefect had sent express messengers to Ostia, that the chase might, if possible, be renewed immediately.

Clodianus, to whom the chamberlain handed the note with a shrug of vexation, understood the position at once and took advantage of it. The city-prefect's mistake as to the direction the fugitives had taken, must be confirmed by spurious evidence and by an affectation of entire conviction, and Parthenius, who was just now very open to persuasion, must be talked over as soon as possible.

"Of course, it is obvious!" said he, as though to himself. "Savo^[81] or Albium Ingaunum^[82] are the only possible spots.—Well planned, on my word! Their route lies straight there, no islands in the way, and the vast curve of the coast makes it impossible to head them by land. From Liguria they will easily reach the Germanic Highlands, where the Batavian has powerful friends.—I see the whole plot. They will inveigle Germania and march across northern Italy with their flaxen-haired mercenaries and down upon the capital."

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"Your keenness is wonderful," said Parthenius. "To be sure, the whole thing is as clear as day. But what then, what can I do? The order for the pursuit has been issued, and I can but approve, though I am perfectly convinced that it is too late.—Here in Rome one never has a minute to oneself? Go, slave, tell your master I am obliged to him.—And now, enchanting Massilian, by Cypria! but if the ship those conspirators have sailed in had a heart, it would sail straight to Gaul to meet your sisters in beauty.^[83]—Tell me now, what you found to criticise in our comedy.—I see a curl of Attic irony playing round your rose-bud lips."

Lycoris did in fact make a few sarcastic remarks on the piece and the performers; but from that she went off into harmless chat of such delightful gaiety and sweetness, that Parthenius could not weary of listening to her melodious voice or of gazing at her round and snow-white shoulders. Never before had she seemed to him so perfectly enchanting; her lips smiled promise and her eyes flashed passion. Parthenius—a finished connoisseur in all the tricks and graces of the stage of the time—never suspected that this lavish display of her charms and fascinating wiles was a branch of the art; that Lycoris was acting a comedy, and that Stephanus was the manager of the drama. Stephanus himself, no doubt, was but a puppet in the hands of this witch, whose ambition aimed at the highest mark that ever dazzled the fancy of a Roman—at the sceptre of the world.

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Stephanus himself was one of the guests, and with him all was *couleur de rose*. While Lycoris was devoting herself to entangling the chamberlain, Stephanus was exchanging a few polite phrases with the adjutant.

"Listen," said Clodianus in a low voice, as Stephanus turned to leave him; "I wish to warn you—Cneius Afranius is on the list of the proscribed, but this in no way prevents Caesar from taking the opportunity you know of..."

"What!"

"Gently—we are watched. Will you come to see me in the course of the week? I will let you know the day and hour.—Good; now enjoy yourself, and of all things trouble yourself last about me—take no notice of me."

New, and still new surprises, had been provided to entertain the company. A whole troupe of very slightly-attired dancing-girls from Gades, with butterfly-wings and floating hair, crowded into the lower end of the hall, and began their mazy dance. When this was ended, a shower of rose-scented spray,^[84] that fell from above like a fine mist, cooled the revellers deliciously; and finally soft music invited the company out into the pleasure-grounds, where a brilliant display of fireworks turned night into day.

Through all these entertainments, the *blasé* adjutant made a great show of enthusiastic enjoyment. He laughed immoderately, he shouted, he even sang, and praised their liberal and amiable host in a stirring speech—their host, who, in the midst of his pressing cares and unresting exertions, could still find time to make a study of amusing and delighting his friends. He devoted himself to winning the good graces of a young Greek girl, who had lately come to Rome from the island of Cypris. He affected a fervent accent, as he called her Cypria in person; swore by the sanctuary of Paphos^[85] that a smile from the lovely Myrrhina would outweigh for him all the treasures of India, and quoted the famous line of Catullus:^[86] "Let us live, my Lesbia, and let us love."

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"On my word, that Clodianus is a true son of Epicurus, as he represents himself in his book!" exclaimed a client of the house, who had modestly held aloof.

"And no wonder," retorted another. "Wealth and good fortune are poured into his lap! His whole life is sunshine. Even the affairs of state hardly trouble him at all; he has no ambitions—no fears—no anxieties. He plucks the present^[87]—*carpe diem*, as Horace sings, and never for an instant troubles himself about the future. Who would not change with him!"

It was during the night following on the evening, which the guests of Parthenius spent in dissipation, that the fearful catastrophe took place of which the reader is already informed. Quintus Claudius and the whole congregation of Nazarenes were discovered and seized in the catacomb between the Via Appia and the Via Labicana.

We left our hero at the moment, when the procession of prisoners was setting out Rome-wards. It was a long and melancholy march through the solitude and gloom. No one spoke a word; only a suppressed sob or a groan of anguish now and then broke the oppressive silence. With what emotion did Quintus cross the bridge over the Almo, which he had walked over once before, that night when he had rescued Eurymachus. He did his best to banish all memories, all fears—nay, all hopes—and to fix his mind unswervingly on one thought alone: that his life and fate were in the hands of God.

But it was hard, very hard, to school his struggling soul to composure. Again and again an image rose before him, which threatened to undermine his self-control—an agonized face—the features of his beloved, oh! so-devotedly loved father. And then again the voices, the shouts of a vast multitude rang in his ears—he was in the arena—face to face with ravening beasts—defenseless, alone, forsaken, delivered over to a fearful death.

It was impossible!... He, a son of the ancient and noble house of Claudia! No, never! That father could never give up his only son to be torn limb from limb. Perhaps this would end in salvation for all, perhaps his arrest meant liberty for all his companions. If he, Quintus Claudius, could swear fidelity to the creed of the Nazarene, was it not at once and forever purged of all suspicion of hostility to the State? Could any one think of him—the richest and most envied youth of the imperial city—as a foe to social order? Certainly his father could see and understand how greatly the government had erred; the faith that had been so blindly condemned, would be granted a hearing, and the law which had but just been passed for its suppression, would be trampled under foot.

And in spite of his will, these pictures chased each other through his excited brain, terrors and hopes in rapid alternation, till, at last, their destination was reached: the Mamertine prison^[88] at the foot of the Capitoline Hill. Then he had no thoughts but for the horrors of the present.

Here, in the very heart of the splendid capital, in sight of gorgeous temples and pillared halls—which, lighted at this hour by torches, looked even more imposing than by day—in view of the imperial palace he had so often entered as Caesar's guest and friend—here he must be swallowed up, as it were, as a malefactor in the horrible gulf of the Tullianum!^[89] The thought was unendurable; he was on the point of making a desperate resistance to the centurion's word of command. But his eye fell on the calm and happy face of the blind man—and in that instant the picture, which the old disciple had set before his hearers with such startling reality, rose before the young man's soul.

"It must be endured to the end," said he to himself. "To be sure, at eighty a man's heart does not throb with such keen pain as at twenty."

The Christians wept and embraced each other; they were led away to separate rooms in the prison. Quintus' turn came last, and to him the governor had assigned a separate cell. He crossed its threshold with calm deliberation; the gaoler set down some food and drink—not a better sort of food, such as was usually granted to prisoners of rank, but the ordinary criminal's fare. Then he shut the heavy, iron-plated door, and pushed the three outside bolts.

Quintus sank on the stone bench^[90] that served as a bed-place, utterly annihilated; the last drop of his self-command seemed to evaporate, as the echoing steps of the gaoler died into silence. He covered his face with his hands, and a wild groan broke from him; then for nearly an hour he sat stunned and motionless.

Exhaustion and cold recalled him to his senses; a raw, damp atmosphere pervaded the underground vault. He shuddered and drew his cloak, which had fallen off, over his shoulders; then he looked round him.

The cell was rather longer than it was wide, rectangular, and just high enough to allow of his standing upright. By day a niggardly ray of light might be admitted through a round hole in the roof; at present a smoky little oil-lamp was burning on one side of the room, opposite the bed-place. Besides this couch the cell contained a rough wooden bench and a short iron rivet, furnished with rings and chains, to which the temporary resident in the cell could be secured, and he perceived a second rivet of the same kind on the opposite side near the bed.

With a tremulous hand he lightly touched the rattling irons; it made him shiver. He started to his feet, and began to pace the cell in feverish excitement. He involuntarily remembered that Gaetolian mountain lion which, at Ostia, had rushed so fiercely at the bars of its cage.... He, a proud and noble Roman, was caged now, no better off than a wild beast.—No better! His scornful laughter echoed uncannily through the vaults. He compared the lion's airy and open cage with the hideous dungeon that held a man but just now free and happy—and he envied the brute. That clumsy, dull, black door confronted him as though it could never open again; he went close up to

it, struck it with his fists, and tried to shake it. It neither moved nor rattled. It was as immovable in the masonry as the lid of some huge primeval sarcophagus. He suddenly felt helplessly inconsolable, and pressing his forehead against the cold iron plate, he cried like a child.

What was that written in Greek characters—carefully, elaborately scratched by hands that had all-too-much time? He read through his tears a message of promise.

“Jesus, my Saviour and Redeemer.—To Thee I live and die.”

Then some other follower of the Christian faith, some fellow-sufferer in the cause, had here awaited his fate. Laboriously, and to comfort his stricken heart, he had left a record in the dungeon, where he lingered and pined, to greet and console a successor. And it was no cowardly lament, no cry of despair, but a brave confession, a word of heavenly confidence and beatific submission to the Master. Quintus felt, what so many thousands have felt since: the overpowering attractiveness of example; the bliss, the charm of martyrdom. This creed, which made the most agonizing death so easy, and filled the most wretched with peace, calmness, joy—must indeed be the creed of redemption, high above all that the wisdom of men had yet devised—and it would surely pour balm even into his aching wounds, and bear him up on the wings of enthusiasm to triumph over the terrors of death.

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Strangely comforted, he carefully examined the walls all round, and he found numbers of inscriptions, some hardly legible in the rough stone, but all telling the same tale of suffering and of supreme faith, of death for the truth's sake and the beatitude of a godly frame of mind.

In one place, in Latin, he read as follows: “I, Sericus, forty-three years old, and I, Psyche, the daughter of Sericus, seventeen years old, write this; imprisoned here by the city-prefect under Nero. We are Christians; we die for the faith. We forgive our enemies and hope for God's mercy.” Close by, in Greek, was written:

“Blessed are they that are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.” And below this, another hand had added in continuation: “Yea verily, that is my hope and comfort, which shall strengthen me in the hour of death.”

The longer Quintus lingered over these tokens of past spiritual victories, the more he felt as a wanderer might who, in the horrors of the wilderness, traced the footprints of men and so learnt that others had crossed the desert before him. He fancied himself surrounded and overshadowed by the death-defying army of martyrs, and he swore to himself that he would quail no more than Sericus and his maiden Psyche; than Archilaos, a lad of twenty, spoken of in another inscription, or than Chabrias, who left a lovely and adored bride in Rhodes, to be burnt alive or crucified in Nero's gardens.

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And here the thought of Cornelia, which he had, so far, resolutely held at bay, took possession of his soul. He shuddered and turned cold at the recollection; but his resolution was not to be shaken. Even the reflection that not one of the witnesses that had sojourned here, not even Chabrias, had had this horror added to his sufferings; that he was a victim to his own, dearly-loved father—even this worst stroke of all could not make him flinch. Something within him had frozen—petrified—something which had hitherto been alive to all the impulses of hope, fear and despair. If he could bear something more than all had suffered, who had gone before him, then it must be that God, who had laid it on him, deemed him to be of more heroic mould. The torment was greater? then the greater must the glory be! Fate had set him in the high places of life, visible from afar, one of the leaders of the people.—Then he must endure greater bitterness, suffer greater torments, so that his death should be heard of among the nations like a herald's call from a mountain-top.

The solemn conviction that a special call from Heaven had ruled his fate, became clearer and firmer in his mind as the hours went by. With a curious mixture of pride and humility he regarded himself as an instrument in the hand of Providence, and in proportion as this belief grew and struck root another idea died out, which, during the last few hours, had recurred as mysteriously seductive, that of killing himself if all other hope failed. This, from an educated Roman's point of view, was in no respect sinful or wrong.

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It was considered permissible, nay highly praiseworthy, to cut the thread of existence, when every hope of an endurable future was lost. Nor had Quintus been long enough familiar with the principles and views of Christianity, to reject this desperate remedy at the first thought of it. But now, as he began to believe that he saw in his fate the designs of a higher power, he felt steeled against its seductions.

The lamp had burned lower and lower and at last went out; Quintus sat staring into the darkness for some little time. Then he felt his way round the wall to the bed, lay down on the mildewed worsted blanket and covered himself with his lacerna. After once more dedicating himself to God and his conscience, even unto death, he repeated the short prayer that the congregation had used on the occasion of his reception under the covenant. He had heard the words but once, but they were graven on his soul—those simple child-like words: “Our Father”—and then he fell asleep, as soundly and quietly as if he were lying on the soft cushions of his own cubiculum.

When he awoke, some hours later, a dull foggy twilight pervaded the room. The rattle of the bolts had roused him. It was his gaoler, who came in and set a freshly-filled amphora^[91] down by his side; then he tilted the bowl of porridge, which Quintus had not touched, to see if the mess were yet too stiff to be eaten. After a moment's hesitation he put it down and was leaving the room,

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when Quintus spoke to him.

"What time is it?" he asked, sitting up.

"Two hours past sunrise."

"I am very hungry; give me something to eat."

The gaoler pointed to the clay bowl without speaking.

"You do not indulge in luxuries here!" said Quintus bitterly. "That is too vile food for the meanest of my slaves, nay for my dogs."

The man shrugged his shoulders.

"You must get used to it. We are under the strictest orders to treat every one alike by the rules of the place, with no distinction of birth."

"Indeed—and what is the rule of the place?"

"Porridge and water, with rye-bread for supper. I cannot help it, if you fine gentlemen do not relish it. We often have folks here, who are only too thankful for such food, poor wretches who have not had a morsel for days if the gifts of corn have been stopped."

"Do you know who I am?" Quintus interrupted his voluble informant.

"No, I rarely get out into the world. It is a year last Feast of Saturn, since I was in the Field of Mars. But I can see by your manner that you are of some noble family."

"I am Quintus Claudius, the son of the Flamen."

"Stuff and nonsense!" said the gaoler. "Why, you were caught in a quarry with the Nazarenes."

"Quite true."

"Then you cannot be Quintus, the son of the Flamen Dialis."

"You doubt it? Did not the centurion, who took us, tell you?"

"Not me—he spoke to the governor."

"To be sure. Well, you will know it too before the day is out. Now listen to what I ask. The news of my arrest can hardly yet have got to my father's ears. And if the report reaches him, if a stranger tells him the worst, point-blank, it will kill him. No one but myself knows how to mitigate the blow to him. Will you carry him a note, only two short lines—on these wax-tablets?"

"Impossible!" said the man, drawing back.

"Look here—I will give you this stylus—it is of pure gold...."

"If you offered, me ten times its value, I dare not. It is as much as my life is worth."

"Then take me to your superior officer."

"I cannot without leave."

"Try to get leave." The gaoler looked doubtful; the young man's calm, urgent manner, and his evident high breeding, impressed him greatly.

"I will see what can be done," he said, hesitatingly. "Take patience till this evening."

"Till this evening!" cried Quintus, in despair. "Miserable man, do you not understand that you are killing him. Every instant is precious, and you say: till this evening."

He had hardly ceased speaking, when they heard steps outside the dungeon door. The gaoler rushed out, and Quintus heard the murmur of voices coming nearer and nearer. Suddenly his heart stood still.

"Many thanks," he heard just outside. "Leave me alone now, worthy Haemon; you know me well enough to feel sure that you run no risk, in admitting me without a witness."

Quintus gazed anxiously at the door. It was his father's voice. In an instant the door opened, and Titus Claudius stood before him.

For a long time neither could utter a word; they stood looking at each other as pale and silent as the dead. Their lips quivered, but this was the only outward sign of their cruel suffering. But they understood each other; each was struggling for such composure as might enable him to speak. It was the father, who first succeeded; but it was in a hollow, forced voice that he said, as he clenched his hands convulsively: "It is here—here—that we meet!"

The words conveyed such deep and unspeakable anguish, that Quintus shuddered from head to foot.

"Father ..." he began, and then he broke into sobs. He turned his face to the wall in despair, and pressed his cheek against the cold stone as though entreating its pity.

"Quintus," the priest went on—and his voice was as gentle and mild as a child's, "is it true, that

you spent the night in the catacomb with the Nazarenes?"

The young man looked round.

"Yes, Father," he said.

"Did you not know the law?"

"I knew it, Father."

"And what were you doing among the rebels?"

"Who calls them rebels?" retorted Quintus, recovering his self-possession.

"All who respect the government, for the law has branded them so. Answer me, Quintus; What were you seeking in the society of these reprobates?"

"What I never found in the society of their persecutors, what all my life-long I have vainly longed and hoped for: peace and salvation for my soul."

"Then it is true—it is true...?"

"What, Father?"

"That you are not merely their protector, but, in fact, one of them."

"As you say."

Titus Claudius turned paler and more ghastly than before.

"Wretched boy!" he said; "then you are a lost man! The crime of being a Nazarene is punished with death."

"I know it."

"You know it? And you tread the law under foot?"

"In my soul I carry a higher law."

"There is no higher law than that of duty. You are a Roman. You are my son. Madman! As a Roman, you are breaking the laws of the country—as a son, you are breaking your father's heart! What demon possesses you? What disease is this that has turned your brain? Does it charm your hopes more to bleed to death under the fangs of Libyan beasts, than to be clasped in the arms of your Cornelia? Does the air of the Tullianum please you better, than the perfumed atmosphere of your own rooms? You have everything, every single thing your heart can desire, and you must plunge into dark gulfs of crime, soil your soul with the foul mire of superstition—nay, call yourself the brother of vile slaves, of panders and corpse-carriers!"

"I follow the light of truth," replied Quintus. "You are wrong, father, in regarding the Nazarenes as mere vile rabble. It is not rank that makes the man, but character. Before the God of the Nazarenes there is no respect of persons, and it is just that which makes the doctrine of Christ so noble."

"Noble! Quintus—by all the gods, return to your right mind! A man of senatorial rank, a son of the house of Claudia, thinks the doctrine noble, which grants him equal rights with street-porters and executioners.^[92] Such madness puts me beside myself. And what has all this to do with the salvation of your soul? Have you gone through the senseless farces, of which I have heard so much? Kissed the gallows,^[93] and offered sacrifice before the miserable image of a crucified man? Have you lent ear to the fables, which superstition has woven round that execution on Golgotha? Alas! your silence is only too eloquent. These tricksters have entangled you with their wiles, till you have lost the power to free yourself from the net. Oh! I can quite understand, that it was well worth their while to entrap a Claudius. Your name outweighs a thousand lesser ones, and held aloft on their banner at the right moment, it might bring victory to the traitors! And do you not perceive all this? Does your keen eye fail to see through their treacherous game?"

"Father, we can never understand each other. By all that is sacred..."

"I will not hear you!" interrupted the priest. "What can you say? Who it is that has entrapped you, and how far the ramifications of the plot extend, we shall learn in the course of enquiry. I came not as your judge, nor commissioned by the Senate. I came to save you. Confess you were led astray, abjure this superstition, which can never really have taken possession of your soul, offer a sacrifice of atonement to Jupiter Capitolinus—and all will be well. A year of exile—to Hellas perhaps, where I have crowds of friends—would be the worst that could befall you, and even this short banishment Caesar would no doubt remit at my entreaty. All is ready, and to-morrow morning early the ceremony can take place. Till then you will be a prisoner, but in my house,^[94] and treated with the honor due to your name. Norbanus himself will escort you thither; he is waiting at the door of the prison. His highest officers will keep guard over you. Forwards then; let us leave this scene of disgrace—and may your bitter experience have taught you wisdom."

But Quintus did not stir. His eyes were spellbound to the wall which, in the gloomy watches of the night, had revealed such strange histories. Each inscription, each name seemed to raise the image of some pale and suffering face. He felt at the bottom of his soul that now, here, the moment had come for giving expression in deeds to the reflection and resolve of those dark

hours. Side by side, too, with the ecstatic enthusiasm of the convert, there surged up in his soul the unbending pride and iron will of his race. Should he be more cowardly, baser, weaker than the lowborn and wretched? His heart beat high at the thought, and the blood mounted to his brow.

"I cannot, Father," he said, turning away.

"What? You cannot walk in the path, in which your father is ready to lead you? Or do you think it mean to confess the error of your ways? Give place to reason, Quintus! It is to no mortal, but to the gods alone that you have to confess your crime. Humility before the gods is no dishonor...."

"Your gods are not mine," cried Quintus vehemently. "A confessor of the true God can never sacrifice to Jupiter Capitolinus."

"Who is the true God, but he whose care and rule we see, wherever we turn our eyes, and feel in our souls? Are you so utterly degenerate, that you have learnt to confound the great universal spirit—whom our fathers worshipped as Jupiter, the Father of Light—with a mortal—with a Jewish revolutionary, whom the imperial governor silenced by death?"

"Nay Father, you misunderstand. We do not revere the crucified Saviour as God himself, only as our Master, who revealed the true God to us. Between the God of Christ and your idols there is a great gulf fixed. Your own noble nature associates with those idols of a false faith, aspirations and feelings, which have always been foreign to the spirit of that faith. If only you knew how the faith in the light I walk in glows through my whole being, you would expect the skies to fall, sooner than that I should pronounce the base denial you ask of me."

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"Mad fool!" cried the priest in great wrath. "You hold a tissue of lies as more precious than life and happiness, as higher than the honor of your family? Have done with this reckless mockery! Follow me, I command you!"

"Father!" groaned Quintus with growing anguish, "God is my witness, that I would shed every drop of blood in my body for you and for your happiness: only this one thing—I cannot—I cannot...."

"You must. By all the gods, but you must! What? My son a traitor—to be the sport and gazing-stock of a cackling crowd, scorned and mocked at as a fool, and condemned to an ignominious death—? You are raving, boy! Come, away from this fetid cell. I command you!"

Titus Claudius gazed with agonized enquiry at his son's pale face, which looked more and more petrified to marble.

"I cannot, Father!" That was all the bloodless lips could utter.

Then the despairing father fell on his knees and raised his hands in entreaty, like a criminal suing for mercy. Tears streamed down his distorted face, which looked ten years older for that hour's anguish. He rent his robe, he tore his hair, he struck his forehead against the pavement. In heart-rending accents he implored his son—his only, beloved son, the star and joy of his life, not to make him so miserable—more miserable than ever man had been before in all this grief-stricken and strife-plagued world. He reminded him of the days of his infancy, when he had nursed him in his arms, lived, cared, and toiled only for his boy. And would this child, his Quintus, his all in all, doom him to this hideous fate?

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The miserable man presented a pitiable sight.

"Oh Father," cried Quintus, gasping for breath. "What have you done? Woe is me, I am a monster! That sacred head in the dust—compose yourself—you are driving me mad! O God, not yet! Father, I will obey you, I am yours henceforth. My soul's salvation?—I give it up. You shall not suffer for my sake."

Titus Claudius rose. The strong man was trembling like a child. With one passionate cry the father and son were clasped in each other's arms.

CHAPTER XII.

The commander of the imperial guard, with a few officers and soldiers, received Quintus as he slowly went out through the heavy stone gate-way into the street, but his silent greeting was not altogether free from embarrassment. During the last few days events had occurred, which had thrown the worthy soldier off his balance. The intrigues of a court, with their underhand and mysterious details, were foreign to his nature. Out in the field, with the Dacian foe in front of him, he could avail himself of the ruses of war and the arts of strategy; but in peace, in the capital of the empire, this mode of action revolted and puzzled him. Such a measure as the wholesale arrest of senators and knights had never been adopted before, even under Domitian. And now this mysterious discovery of Quintus Claudius in the catacomb with the Nazarenes! Norbanus was wholly at a loss how to account for it. The high-priest had given him a very superficial and hasty explanation, and the whole thing might be either the device of some mortal enemy, or the result of some outrageous whim. Norbanus had long known the young man's spirit and daring, though under different circumstances. A man, who could address a love-song to a vestal virgin, would be quite capable of playing the part of an adherent of the Nazarenes, particularly if among them there bloomed some rose of Palestine, whose beauty would suffer no drawback from the superstition of her people. To be sure—as they came out, the father and son together—their faces were too pale and grave for so light a matter. The worthy warrior had a grave feeling that, whatever had happened, he had not the key of the riddle and would be sure to say the wrong thing, so he wrapped himself in a dignified and significant silence, which each might interpret just as he pleased or as the case required. Quintus understood it to mean kindly sympathy and due considerateness, the Flamen took it for horror and disapproval, the tribunes and centurions attributed it to military severity and discipline.

157

They took the shortest way to the high-priest's residence—along the foot of the Capitoline and across the Forum. The people crowded round them from all sides, for the rumor of Quintus' arrest had long since spread into the remotest quarters of the city. Now, every one wanted to see the illustrious father, who had been to fetch his son out of the depths of the Tullianum. The little procession could hardly get along. Even the lictor, who marched before the high-priest and the soldiers of the guard were powerless. A hundred voices at once shouted their comments on the unwonted sight.

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"He plotted against the Caesar's life," said a rough voice in the background.

"Nonsense—he is one of Caesar's friends."

"He was in the quarry with the Nazarenes."

"He kissed the cross."

"He is condemned to death."

"It was his own father that made the law."

"But see; it is his father, who is setting him at liberty."

"That is just the way of the world."

"True enough. Laws are only made for slaves and beggars! They take things easier at home."

The last words were spoken under the very nose of the high-priest, so that he could not help hearing them. An angry glow flushed his face, and with a scornful curl of his lip he looked round. He seemed as though he would speak, but he checked himself in time. A smile of supreme contempt parted his haughty lips; then he said aloud to Norbanus:

"You are too considerate, and the people too bold. Your men should use their arms."

The general looked at him in astonishment.

"To be sure," Titus Claudius added more mildly, "we might have foreseen this crowd. Such a sight is ambrosia to the mob."

They were nearly ten minutes reaching the Flamen's house. Norbanus and one of the officers went in with them to the rooms adjoining the peristyle; the rest remained till farther orders in a room opening out of the atrium.

159

When Quintus had washed and put on a clean dress he went, still accompanied by Norbanus and his centurion, into his father's study, where the family had assembled. Quintus wondered to find his mother so calm, comparatively speaking. He did not know, with what enormous effort of self-command Titus Claudius had represented the catastrophe as a trifling mistake, a mere misunderstanding. Lucilia was a good deal excited; the exceptional and startling character of the event gave her fancy much to busy it. She would have given the world to talk over the occurrences of the last few days with Fabulla, the wise old mother of her friend Cneius Afranius; but now, in all this confusion, an expedition to Ostia was quite out of the question. So she must think it all over to herself alone, particularly as Claudia had shut herself up in unapproachable reserve, and had no answer for any questions but "Yes" and "No." Even now, when her brother came into the room, Claudia was very chary of her words, in marked contrast to Lucilia. And yet

Quintus was obscurely conscious, that she took the situation more gravely and seriously than either Octavia or the excited Lucilia. And, in fact, Claudia knew her brother too well, not to feel sure that something deeper was at work here than a mere foolish adventure. The audacity of wild spirits craves a public; its extravagant flights are displayed to those who are like-minded, and who will applaud and admire. But when a man like Quintus had carried out a plan in secret and among such unfamiliar companions, it could be no jesting matter.

During an hour which he spent with his family, Quintus himself was for the most part silent. Seated in a deep easy-chair, he eat a small breakfast which Lucilia brought to him. The Flamen meanwhile exerted himself to explain to the party, what steps he had taken to win Caesar's favor and clemency for his son, and what the ceremonial sacrifice, which Quintus was to offer, must consist in. 160

The more the father talked, the more the son's heart was wrung. He might be absolutely convinced of all he so vehemently uttered; to Quintus it was all a foul lie, a ridiculous and cowardly subterfuge. It was a lie, to say that mere boyish curiosity had led him to assist at a meeting of the Nazarenes; it was a lie, that intriguing knaves had taken advantage of his curiosity under false pretences. It was a lie, that the Nazarenes had plotted to overthrow the whole fabric of Roman society, that they had fanned his ambition after befooling him, that they had abused his good nature. It was above all a lie, to say that he bitterly repented of ever having had anything to do with the Nazarenes, and only longed to purge himself publicly of the disgrace of that contact. Why was it so impossible to convince the priest—usually so calm, clear-sighted, and just—of the error of his prejudice? Why had he so resolutely closed his eyes and heart to the truth?

The burden of this question, and all the false aspects of his position, almost crushed the young man to the earth. He returned to the room which had been his till he quitted his father's house, as dull and indifferent as if he were only half-witted. This room was a pleasing counterpart to Claudia's pretty room, and, like it, was on the upper floor, and on the same side of the house. The furniture was still as he had left it. Even some of his first books, his playthings as a boy, and other such memorials of the happy past had found an abiding place here, so that—as Octavia said—the son might always recognize his old home in his parents' house. Lately, no doubt, the quiet nook had for months together never been visited but by the slaves, who came to dust it and shake up the pillows on the divans. 161

Quintus thanked the captain of the guard for his considerate treatment, and begged to be allowed to be alone. Norbanus, who regarded his watch over the young man as a mere formality, acceded with pleasure. He posted a centurion at the entrance with three men-at-arms, recommended the utmost courtesy to their prisoner, pressed the young man's hand with a jesting farewell, and left the house, as urgent business required his presence at the palace.

Now, at last, Quintus realized his position. All that he had gone through and done during the last few hours had gone over his head, as it were, not more than half understood. He had walked on like a somnambulist over heights and hollows, without appreciating the danger, and now, waking suddenly, he shuddered to see precipices and yawning gulfs on every side. Wherever he looked, horror stared him in the face—misery, shame, dishonor, and despair. Either way his fate was hopeless. Either he must shatter the existence of the man he loved more than himself—or he must be that mean and cowardly thing, a traitor and a renegade, trailing all he held most sacred in the dust. Had not the Master of Nazareth taught, that no man could have any part in the infinite mercies of God, who fell away from the faith through fear of men? And was it not this which was driving him into denial—base fear of men? It wore, to be sure, the specious aspect, the garb of light of filial love. But ought not the true heir of the Faith patiently to take upon him even that fearful grief? Did not Jesus die on the cross, although he knew that he was breaking his parents' hearts? Aye, He had done this thing, the Just one, the Mighty, Omnipotent; but he—Quintus—was but a feeble and worthless disciple of the Great Teacher. He could not do it, though the joys of heaven and the torments of hell were in the balance. He must lose his soul to all eternity—if only he might spare his father. 162

It was a terrible day that he spent, surrounded by all the treasured relics of his unclouded childhood. Titus Claudius came to visit him, to thank him for his filial obedience, and to assure him once more, that his father's heart had forgiven and forgotten all that had passed. Quintus was incapable of responding to all his loving words, spoken in a voice that trembled with agitation, excepting by sighs and silent signs of consent and submission. In all this Titus Claudius read remorseful distress, and did his utmost to encourage him and raise his spirit; but presently, seeing that his efforts were vain, he left his son to himself again, in the hope that solitude and a night's rest would restore his agitated soul.

But he was mistaken; Quintus did not close his eyes all night. From time to time he fancied he heard the voice of old Calenus, reproaching him with his base apostasy. Then, tortured with horror, he sprang from his bed. He compared the night he had passed in the Tullianum with this present night under his father's roof. There—a squalid cell, with death under the clutches of wild beasts an almost absolute certainty. Here—a pretty, comfortable room with freedom ere long, happiness for his family, and all the joys of life for himself. And yet his storm-tossed heart had yesterday been at peace, while to-day it was wrung with incessant and unutterable anguish—"Blind fool!"—he seemed to hear the words spoken—"You think you are sacrificing only your own soul. But are you not also betraying and imperilling, so far as in you lies, the whole glorious work of the Master? If all were to act as you have done, where would the sublime idea be, which brought light and joy to the crucified Saviour: the Redemption, to wit, of mankind? Have you any 163

right to sacrifice the salvation of millions, merely to spare your father—however much you may love him—a transient sorrow, which may even lead him too to the light of truth?”

He thought that Calenus was standing by his bedside, and laid his hand on his forehead. “Take courage!” said the blind man solemnly, “by God’s help all—all—all may be overcome.”

Again Quintus sat up terror-stricken. It was but a dream with his eyes open—a vision, but how vivid! He had plainly felt the pressure of a hand on his brow, and seen the prophet-like face, with its calm, holy, celestial gaze.

At last morning broke. The slaves came to help him to dress. He felt as if he were being dragged to execution, but he unresistingly submitted to all his father commanded.

The sun was rising over the Esquiline, when the father and son, in festal dress, went out of the house. Norbanus was on the spot, and a large party of clients and friends. The Forum and the adjoining streets swarmed with spectators, notwithstanding the early hour. The recantation was the great event of the day. The supreme council of the Pontifices^[95]—at the head of which sat Caesar as Pontifex Maximus—had agreed, in consideration of the distinguished merits of Titus Claudius, that the sacred ceremony should be one with the daily public sacrifice offered by the Flamen Dialis, and that Quintus should be held justified and free from all suspicion of Christian proclivities, if he would, after his father and in unison with the high-priest’s clients and friends, distinctly offer up a prayer to Jupiter, the almighty and all-merciful, calling down vengeance and destruction on all the foes of the State, and especially on the vile and reprobate sect of the Nazarenes. All this Titus Claudius had hastily explained to his son, adding that everything else was a mere matter of course.

164

The solemn procession made its way up the broad steps to the Capitol. Quintus was suffocating, a weight lay on his breast like a tombstone. Once or twice he stood still, his knees trembled and he could hardly stand. Norbanus, who was walking by his side, had to support him.

At the top Quintus involuntarily looked round him. His eye gazed over the heads of the crowd in the Forum, past the Flavian Amphitheatre, out to the Via Appia. There, to the left, hardly distinguishable in the distance, was the wood, in whose calm retreat salvation had been opened to him—and now?

165

“Proceed—why do you hesitate?” said his father in his ear; and on they went to the temple. Here again a crowd, half curious and half reverent, had followed them and filled the vast hall. The altar of the patron divinity of the city was decked and wreathed with consecrated plants and costly streamers, ready for the sacred ceremony. A herald now proclaimed silence^[96] and not a murmur was heard. Two of the temple-servants led in the beasts for sacrifice, covered with garlands, while a third made a mixture of wine, spring-water, incense, and cones^[97] with which to dedicate them.

The high-priest took his place in front of the altar; he was as pale as death. Raising his hands, he spoke in a deep voice, audible in every corner:

“Jupiter, the merciful and mighty one! Save and defend this city, that thou hast made great!”

“Defend this city, that thou hast made great!” echoed from the chorus; and Quintus too moved his lips in a faint whisper.

“Blast the foes of the Roman name with the lightnings of thy wrath!” Titus Claudius went on, and again the choir repeated the words.

“More especially destroy all reprobates and traitors, who hoist the standard of superstition and plot the ruin of society. Crush the foul brood of rebellious Nazarenes!”

“No—a thousand times no!” shouted a voice of thunder, that echoed from the stone walls. “Tear me in pieces, but spare me so base a lie!”

166

Titus Claudius staggered; he had to support himself by clinging to the altar.

“My son, my son, what have you done?” he muttered in a husky voice.

“What I had to do,” cried Quintus vehemently. “Lead me back to my cell, kill me—I die a Nazarene!”

An unexampled tumult arose on this unexpected incident. Titus Claudius, with a faint scream, sank senseless into the arms of a temple-servant. The mob, who took up the young man’s words as a note of defiance, forgot all the respect due to the sanctuary, and pressed forward, shouting for prompt vengeance. Indeed any faith in the doctrines of the State religion survived in very few, it was Roman arrogance, which had taken the place of the old Roman pride, which demanded its rights. The crime, that Quintus had now committed, was contempt of the majesty of the people, an insult to the Roman name—a crime a thousand times more unpardonable than the folly of those poor wretches, who gathered in a catacomb to worship in secret round the cross. Norbanus tried in vain to restore order; even his nearest allies seemed paralyzed and helpless.

Suddenly the voice of the Flamen was heard once more; he had recovered his self-possession, and was standing in an imperious attitude before the altar.

“Stand back!” he exclaimed, clenching his fist over the heads of the mob as though he wielded the bolts of Jove. “What do you want? What do you fear? The law is immutable. Centurions of the

guard, do your duty, as I do mine. Away with the Nazarene! Take him back to prison! And you, noisy simpletons, meditate in devout silence, till the priest shall have ended his sacred office."

A death-like stillness responded to this address. No one stirred; neither of the centurions ventured to obey the Flamen's orders.

"Why do you delay?" said Quintus to Norbanus. "The ground here burns under my feet. Take me away!"

Norbanus and his subalterns quitted the temple with a saddened mien; Quintus walked slowly in their midst. Once he turned, and in a tone of anguish said:

"Father—farewell!"

"You no longer have a father," said the high-priest averting his eyes, and he at once began the interrupted prayer and performed the service and sacrifice to the end.

CHAPTER XIII.

Eight days had gone by since the events related in the last chapter. A chill cloud hung over the house of Claudia, the sources of life seemed ice-bound. All intercourse with the outer world was restricted to what was absolutely necessary; the inhabitants crept and glided about like speechless ghosts. Titus Claudius fulfilled the duties of his office with stern regularity, but without unction, dully and mechanically. His son's name never passed his lips, and yet every one felt that one hideous thought was ever present to his mind. It was the same with the two girls. All brightness, all youthfulness had deserted them, particularly Claudia, who had borne her own hard fate with such steadfast hopefulness. Octavia alone clung unshaken to her conviction, that her husband, whose irresistible strength of will had proved victorious in so many contests, would, even in this bitter strait, find a solution and an issue. 168

It was still early, but two hours after sunrise, and Octavia was sitting in silent abstraction with her two daughters, in the snug little room where—so short a time since—Caius Aurelius had read to them the *Thebais* of Statius. Cornelia, too, was with them; she was sitting pale and listless near the door, and listening for a step in the hall. She was waiting till the high-priest should come in from attending Caesar's *levée* and presenting a petition to him. Since the day when Quintus had been taken back to the Tullianum, Cornelia had never ceased to implore to be admitted to the dungeon, where she thought she could bend her lover's obduracy; for she was convinced that nothing but a proud spirit of defiance had prompted his retractation at the last moment.

"You do not know how to coax and entreat him," she had said to the high-priest. "Your very requests sound like commands, and leave a sting in his wounded pride. But I am a woman, his betrothed; I love him, and I will implore him! His heart will soften, as soon as he hears my voice."

She had thus persuaded Titus Claudius, who, though he felt that Cornelia did not fully understand his son's character, thought he ought not to neglect this last possibility. But unluckily he met with unexpected hindrances. The governor of the prison, supported by higher authority, positively refused her admission, and the priest's declaration that he would take all the responsibility on his own shoulders, produced no effect whatever. 169

Titus Claudius applied to the city-prefect, but a long discussion only led to the same result. Some one, it was evident, must have an interest in the complete isolation of the illustrious prisoner, and that some one must be of exalted rank. A visit to Clodianus was equally unsuccessful. Indeed, the adjutant displayed a rough and uncompromising severity, which was startling in a man who was not wont to deal thus with persons of position and influence, and the Flamen quitted him in high wrath. The meeting seemed to have resulted in a lasting coolness, not to say hostility, between the two officials. But this step, too, on the adjutant's part was the result of calculation. If Caesar should hear of the matter—and he was certain to hear of it, for there were witnesses present—he could no longer doubt the devotion of his faithful Clodianus. He, at least, was a true and trustworthy servant, who would rather make an enemy of the powerful high-priest, than abridge by one iota the laws and interests of the State, which in the present instance were so surprisingly identical with the private interests of Caesar himself.

On leaving Clodianus, Titus Claudius betook himself to the chamberlain Parthenius. Still the same refusal, though wrapped here in the utmost politeness and reverence—but it could not be, it was simply impossible. If in anything else Parthenius could oblige his illustrious friend, he would devote himself to the cause with all the indefatigable zeal he had before now displayed in the service of a man so highly venerated, world-renowned and distinguished.

After two or three more attempts to interest influential personages in the matter, the high-priest resolved on laying his request before Caesar himself, though it went hard with him to appear as a petitioner in his own behalf. And now, for the past half-hour he had been waiting at the palace. 170

The family, and particularly Cornelia, awaited his return with eager anxiety, and at every step on the pavement the excited girl started and shivered. Her hands clutched the arms of her seat; her breath came quickly, and her face was as white as marble. If this last chance failed! Alas, and Cornelia had only too much reason to regard failure as certain! Domitian, that incarnation of hatred and revenge—it was too much to hope for! Domitian, whom she had scorned and humiliated, as a queen might treat a slave—was it likely that he would allow her to save the man she loved? And yet, if anyone could wring this permission from the tyrant by the mere weight of personal influence, it was the Flamen.

The minutes went by—a quarter of an hour—half an hour. Hardly a word was spoken. Claudia held a book and tried to read, but could not get beyond the first three lines. Lucilia sat gazing at the floor and gave herself up to sad fancies; that delightful day at Ostia now and then rose before her memory—what a difference the little time that since elapsed had wrought in three happy young creatures! Cornelia's lover in a dungeon, Claudia's under sentence as a traitor, self-banished and far away, never to return perhaps—while she, Lucilia—she, to be sure, had no lover, no friend, no one to care for her—but she felt for all that concerned Cornelia and Claudia, and she herself had been happy too in that peaceful country home, oh so happy! That good old Fabulla, how kind she had been, how anxious to please her guests, how full of sympathy were her clear honest eyes. And those eyes were now perhaps not less tearful than Claudia's—who so often wept at night when she thought Lucilia was asleep—for her only son Cneius Afranius was one of 171

the fugitives too. How sad for her to miss the accustomed greeting and kiss, never to hear that honest manly voice. Yes, sad indeed—everything was sad—poor unfortunate mother!

Lucilia was wiping away a tear, that had fallen unbidden down her own cheek when, with a loud cry, she started from her seat.

There in the door-way stood, in the flesh, the very subject of her compassion. Fabulla, announced by Baucis, had come in, and, with a thousand assurances of her dutiful respect, begged to be forgiven her venturing to intrude her presence on the illustrious family of the high-priest. But for ten days she had had no news of her son, her letters had remained unanswered; a messenger she had sent to his residence had found the house locked up. So, in her despair, she had come herself to Rome, and as she did not know another living soul in the city, she had thought of the noble young men and ladies, who had done her the honor of visiting her at Ostia.

While she was thus explaining herself in spasmodic haste, Lucilia had rushed to meet her, had affectionately taken her hand and made her welcome; and Octavia bowed politely and begged her to be seated, for she must be tired. Claudia, however, and Cornelia particularly, seemed too much absorbed in their own thoughts to take much notice of the new arrival. This Lucilia remarked, and as Titus Claudius might now be expected at any moment, she thought she would be doing both her family and her friend a kindness, by taking Fabulla into another room, to give her the information she wished. She easily found some simple excuse and took Fabulla upstairs, just as she heard the measured tread of the master of the house in the atrium.

172

Titus Claudius came into the room with the most perfect calmness; a faint tinge of color alone betrayed, that he had gone through some severe trial to nerves and temper.

"There is nothing now to prevent your visit to the prison," he said gently; but then he sat down, and, in a hoarse voice, asked for a draught of water.

"Is it possible?" said Cornelia, rushing up to him. "I may see him? You have settled it?"

Titus Claudius signed to her to have patience; a slave brought him the water, and he drank it in a long, deep gulp.

"It was a hard matter," he said, seeing they all were eagerly awaiting his words; "Caesar was not at all like himself. He received me coolly, almost repellently."

"You," cried Octavia, starting up, "his most faithful adherent?"

"He fancied I was about to ask some favor for the imprisoned Nazarene.—And, in that case, Octavia, he would have had a right to be angry with me, for my petition would have imperilled the State. Laws are not made, to be evaded at the first case that occurs. That Caesar should have so misunderstood me.—It makes my face burn with shame and indignation only to think of it! I explained to him, perhaps in too strong terms, that he was mistaken. What Titus Claudius could ask was forbidden by no law, only by the over-carefulness of his officials. I then told him all I had done, in the hope of disarming their precautions, and how I had at every turn met with the same refusal; that I had at last come to the determination to come before him, the fount of all justice and clemency, and so gain my end beyond a doubt, though at the cost of troubling his sovereign majesty. He, no doubt, would allow me a privilege, which had never before been refused to any one. I was ready to pledge my life for it, that the course of justice would be in no way interfered with. Caesar was gloomy, almost wrathful, and he looked at me with an expression I never saw in him before. However, he granted my request. He sent to Parthenius at once...."

173

"Your firmness and dignity were too much for him," said Octavia, with a sigh of relief.

"And when—when?" asked Cornelia.

"As soon as you like. Two of my slaves will accompany you. This snake-ring, with my signet, will be your token."

He drew off a ring, broken in its continuity as the law prescribed, and gave it to the girl, who was trembling with joy.

"Not an instant will I lose," she cried excitedly. "You will see, his pride will melt like the snow on Soracte when spring returns."

She hurried out into the atrium in front of the slaves, and got into her litter.

The governor of the prison had been duly warned; he came himself to the gate, and received the visitor with the politeness which seemed due to her misfortunes, her dignified demeanor, and her beauty, even more than to her rank and position. When she showed him the ring, which Titus Claudius had lent her, the governor bowed, as though to say that no such guarantee was needed. He begged her, however, to leave the slaves with the litter-bearers, and to follow him unescorted to the cell, where she was to be allowed a strictly private interview with Quintus. In an hour he would return and conduct her back.

174

The door turned heavily on its hinges, and with a half-suppressed cry of rapture and sorrow, Quintus and Cornelia were in each other's arms. Pain and love, despair and hope, broke in that cry from their trembling hearts.

After the first storm of feeling had subsided, Cornelia took her lover's hand, and looked up to him like a child beseeching a favor.

"Quintus," she began tenderly, "how cruel you have grown. Do men then understand the meaning of no other word than Pride? Must everything be sacrificed to that idol—even all that is sweetest and most sacred? Your father—but why should I speak of others, when no one can suffer so much as I do! Woe, woe, and three times woe on the pride of your house! Accident threw you in the way of these Nazarenes, and so you have pledged yourself to defend their cause, even unto death, as if it were your own!"

"It is mine," said Quintus, sadly looking at the ground.

"Oh yes! you will say so. A Claudius is not to be frightened into yielding! That is grand, magnanimous!—But what threats cannot do, love may. Quintus, only reflect, only think; try to comprehend all that your refusal involves. You are the son of a family whose happiness is centred in you, and the very idol of a devoted girl, who must die.—Do you hear me, Quintus? I shall die, if this hideous law hurts even a hair of your head. But I know, I know: in the eyes of a Roman and a Claudius, the only virtue is to persist in a thing you have once undertaken. Your poets praise tenacity as the crown of glory.^[98] You would rather run headlong into error, than turn round and seek the right path. But in this case, Quintus—you must own it yourself—there is a tenacity, a wilfulness, which is a crime. You cannot possibly regard the wild stories of these Nazarenes as true?"

175

"As the only truth, that is known to man."

"What? Is it you, my own Quintus—proud, wise, high-spirited—who say this? Have you waited for me to tell you, that all belief in the gods, be their names what they may, is as hollow as a gilded nut which a child or a fool takes for gold...?"

"Belief in the gods—yes, Cornelia; but not belief in God. One word may have many and various meanings. The gods—is the name the people give to those idols of the imagination, to which they attribute human passions and weaknesses. Dionysus is a god—and Silenus!^[99] But what we call God, dear Cornelia, has nothing in common with those empty mockeries. Our God dwells not in a temple made with hands. Our God is a Spirit, and the very essence of all that lives in us, round us and above us, and that stirs our souls to joy and sorrow. He is in the light that shines from heaven; the blossom that unfolds in Spring; the passions that bind your heart to mine, and the courage that will support me to face death without blenching, for the faith's sake."

176

"Death!" cried Cornelia in despair. "Quintus—my darling; Death! But the light of heaven and the flowers of Spring, and all that is lovely in us and around us bid us live. If you, my dearest, believe what I can never, never again believe: that higher powers rule our existence, well and good; indulge and cherish the consoling thought; nurse it as a gardener nurses his flowers; but what can compel you to confess the secret to all the world? What can drag you so irresistibly to cast in your lot with that abominable sect, of whom the very best is not worthy to kiss the dust from off your feet?"

"The Master's will. Those who have known salvation, find their highest and sublimest duty in laboring together in the great work of redemption. Without knowing it themselves, suffering hearts are striving and groaning towards that light, which they now think so dim and contemptible. You have lost your faith in a divinity, because the form of your belief was false and hollow. Until you have got past this condition of negative and comfortless mistrust, you will never be able to understand me. I shall not even attempt to make it clear to you, and will say only one thing: In spite of all my love for you and my family—a love beyond words—in spite of the youthful blood that dances in my pulses—I cannot do otherwise! I am, and shall die a Christian."

177

"Quintus a Christian! Turning from Cornelia, to bleed in an arena with slaves and workmen out of the Subura! And we had so fondly, so confidently dreamed of a happy future! An empty, worthless formula is dearer to him, than my spoilt and ruined life!"

"A formula! Ah! if it were only that. There is no humiliation I would not submit to for your sake."

Cornelia sat closer to him and threw her arms round him.

"Quintus!" she cried, bursting into tears. "Do not refuse my entreaties. See with what bitter tears I implore you for mercy. I will be your slave, I will worship you all my life. Only have pity on my wretchedness! Speak the word, oh Quintus, say I may hope!"

"Cornelia, you break my heart—but I cannot; God help me, but I cannot!"

Cornelia stood up.

"Very well," she said coldly, "where you stay, I stay. We are pledged to each other, and I will keep my oath."

"What are you going to do?"

"You will see—Oh! the chains of my love are not so easily shaken off."

She went to the door and knocked at it; the governor and the gaoler appeared at the summons.

"You can keep me here," she said; "I too am a Nazarene."

"She is raving!" said Quintus horrified. "She came to persuade me to renounce Christianity."

"Your eloquence has converted me," she retorted scornfully. "Governor, do your duty. I confess

myself guilty. The God of the Nazarenes is the only true God. Your Jupiter is a foolish, ridiculous image."

The governor shook his head in bewilderment.

"Follow me then," he said doubtfully; "I will inform the city-prefect."

"Quintus—farewell!" cried Cornelia, with a triumphant glance at her lover. "Think better of it, Quintus! or else we meet again face to face with the beasts in the arena!"

Quintus stood petrified. The door was shut, the bolts rattled—their steps died away—he was alone.

CHAPTER XIV.

On the following day Titus Claudius presented himself a second time as a petitioner at the palace. Thus, under stress of circumstances, within a few hours the haughty man had twice been forced into a position which he had carefully avoided his whole life long.

There was to-day no public reception. Caesar had risen late, and now, when the sun was already high over the Caelian hill, he was sitting with Clodianus and Parthenius in a room looking to the south-east. He knew full well why Titus Claudius craved an audience, for the city-prefect had informed him the day before of the strange occurrence in the Tullianum.

When the high-priest perceived on entering, that the emperor was not alone, he involuntarily paused for an instant. Hitherto, when serious matters were under discussion, he had always enjoyed the privilege of a tête-à-tête interview with Caesar, and the letter in which he had asked admission to-day had expressly stated, that the occasion was strictly personal and private.

179

Domitian rose, went a few steps to meet him and kissed him. Never before had this traditional formality seemed so meaningless and hypocritical to the high-priest, and there was an expression of such diabolical satisfaction on Caesar's face, that Titus Claudius for the first time felt an echo in his own mind of that public opinion, which he had hitherto so persistently rejected as prejudiced and unfair. What a smirk, what a suspicious play of features! Some new intrigue must have come in his way, some underhand transaction, and the high-priest's request might interfere with it! Titus Claudius had already had an inkling of this when, the day before, he had gained permission for Cornelia to visit the prison. It almost looked as though Caesar had kept the adjutant and the chamberlain about him, that their presence might be a preservative against any possible fit of amiability and weakness.

"And what have you to say, my worthy Claudius?" asked Caesar, with cool formality.

The high-priest looked him steadily and respectfully in the face.

"My lord," he replied with much dignity, "I have again come to crave a favor. I do not know whether you have heard—my son's betrothed, stricken it would seem with sudden frenzy ..."

"I am informed of her crime," Domitian interrupted. "I pity you sincerely, but I cannot and ought not to weaken the arm of the law."

Titus Claudius turned pale.

"My lord," he began, drawing a painful breath, "I have come only to prevent the law from degenerating into blind cruelty. The law condemns the Nazarenes, but not a crazed girl who, in her desperate grief, feigns belief in their errors. Inform yourself my lord ..."

180

"The law judges of facts," Caesar threw in, "and not of feelings. None but the gods can read the soul. Besides, how can you prove what you assert?"

"I will attest it by the most solemn oaths. I know, for certain, that Cornelia loathes the superstitions of the Nazarenes. My lord, Titus Claudius sues only for her, not for—the other. That may guarantee the honesty of my purpose. If I could only stoop to lie—it would be for him, and not for the niece of Cornelius Cinna."

His lips quivered as he spoke, and Clodianus looked with sympathy at the man, lately so erect and haughty, now bent, his head drooping, his spirit crushed. Even Parthenius, cold as he was, felt that momentary qualm, of which a father's heart is conscious in seeing another parent suffer. Domitian alone was unmoved.

"I have no doubt, Claudius, that you speak the truth," he said with affected benevolence, "but my personal convictions have no right to speak, when the safety of the State is involved. And that safety would be endangered, if I were to yield to my feelings and to your wish, which so far, it is true, I can only guess. Is the city-prefect to set the prisoner free, that she may proclaim in every street: I am a Christian, but Titus Claudius has procured my pardon!...? You see, circumstances are too strong for me."

The high-priest looked at the ground in silence. Certainly, if Cornelia persisted in her madness, Caesar was right.

"Well, my lord," he began in a low, hoarse voice, "I confess that I had overlooked that contingency. She must, then, remain in confinement till her excited brain has recovered its balance. But one thing yet I would crave of your grace: remove her at least from the dungeon, and let her be kept in ward elsewhere. She is but a tender creature—deal with her as with a sick child, not as with a criminal."

181

Domitian glanced meaningly at Parthenius, and he spoke with a sugared smile.

"Our clemency," he said, "is never weary of obliging our friends. When so meritorious an official expresses a wish or a request, his sovereign must grant it—if it can possibly be reconciled with his duties and the prosperity of the State. It is well! I will run the risk of being accused of undue partiality, and have the girl held in custody here, in the Palatium, with all the respect due to her."

She will hardly feel her imprisonment even as a check upon her freedom; only she must on no consideration quit the apartments I shall assign to her. You see, my worthy friend, how truly Domitian inclines to leniency.^[100] Nay more, I will endeavor to mitigate the severity of Quintus' incarceration. Only, do not ask more than I ought to grant."

"I thank you," said Claudius, drawing himself up. "I am glad you consent to be lenient with Cornelia. But, as regards my son—no, my lord; the horrors of imprisonment are my last hope. Solitude, misery, hunger—by these, if at all, his proud spirit may be broken. If this should be the result, if he repents of his errors and does due penance—then indeed I will advance a claim on the mercy of the Ruler of the world."

Caesar dismissed him, and the high-priest, utterly exhausted by the tension of this brief interview, hurried home, and shut himself up in his own study. There was a bitter distrust lurking in his mind, like the after-taste of some nauseous draught. Caesar had, at last, been gracious. And yet—that first impression was ineffaceable. Here, in the privacy of home, he felt all that was wounding in that reception more keenly than at the moment. A strange spasm in his throat seemed to choke him, a dull headache weighed upon his brow, and the blood throbbed in his temples. He had been pacing the room, but suddenly his knees gave way, he dropped into a chair, and all grew dark before his eyes. But presently he staggered to his feet.

182

"I shall be ill," he said to himself. "Hold up, miserable body! your task is not yet ended! You must not and shall not give way, till the last resources have been tried, and the last hope is dead."

And the mere will of this man of iron was strong enough at this appeal to seem to work a miracle. Titus Claudius was firmer, calmer, and stronger at once, and a draught of icy-cold water completely restored his powers.

He went to join Octavia, to inform her as to the issue of his efforts. He found her alone; but in the adjoining room, with the door half open, Baucis was sitting and chattering, it would seem to herself. The priest closed the door and told his story, and his manner and way of speaking were reassuring. As he spoke the name of Quintus, Octavia sighed deeply, but her looks showed that she had not yet given up her hope of a happy ending to their trouble. When her husband had done speaking, she went up to him with the gentle and almost childlike reverence with which she always treated him, and took his hand.

"My dearest," she said, looking at him through her tears, "what have you not had to suffer in these dreadful times of sorrow and terror! If only I could relieve you of the whole burden of anxiety! We women succumb and bend, and the weight is less intolerable. But you—proud, unyielding, you hold up your head and stiffen your neck and suffer doubly."

183

Titus Claudius embraced her in silence, and she leaned her head on his shoulder and wept. He gently smoothed her still abundant hair and said, half-unconsciously: "Save your tears, Octavia! save your tears...."

"You will need them in a worse hour than this," he would have added, but he realized what he was saying in time to check himself. He clasped her more closely and only saying: "Farewell for the present," he turned to leave the room.

"You are going?" she said disappointed.

"I have business to attend to."

"What, again to-day? I thought the most pressing work was now all over."

The priest sadly shook his head.

"So long as our Quintus lies pining in a dungeon, I cannot have an hour's rest. What I must do, how and where to set to work—I have no idea. But I must try everything—everything. And alas! Rome is a wide world, and the roads are endless, dear Octavia—if only one of them might lead to the goal. Yes, one does—that I know full well—but it is a bloody and thorny path...."

"I do not understand you."

"No?" said the priest with a strange smile. "Well, if the law demands a victim, it might be possible to effect an exchange. The few years I have to live—what can they matter? If the father's grey head were given for the son's young life—Justice would lose nothing."

184

"What are you saying?" cried Octavia horrified. "By Jupiter the all-merciful, cast off these hideous thoughts! You will save him—but not at such a cost! Go, there is none like you! My heart at every throb is always with you."

At this instant Lucilia came into the room, flushed with eagerness; she had on a long full cloak, as though prepared to go out.

"Where are you going?" asked Octavia, and the priest paused in the door-way.

"I have just returned from the house of Cneius Afranius, and I am now going out with Claudia. I only wanted to hear what news my father had brought of Cornelia."

Octavia told her.

"Oh, that is good indeed!" said Lucilia delighted. "For my part I have always hoped for the best;

for I cannot believe that Quintus ever really joined those meek imposters—or even mixed with slaves and vagabonds. The whole thing must soon be cleared up; I wish it were equally so hopeful for some other folks.—Poor old Fabulla! only think, mother, her son’s name is really on the list of the proscribed, and it seems he is more hated at the Palatium than all the rest. His house has been broken into by the city-prefect and every corner of it searched; they say they mean to raze it to the ground. The poor woman is half-crazed, and I had to promise her that, as soon as matters were settled for Quintus and Cornelia, I would go and spend a few days with her at Ostia. She is afraid she shall go out of her mind in her utter solitude. But I must go now; Claudia is waiting for me in the litter. Ye gods! what a time of bustle and scurry; I never have a minute to myself—well—good-bye for the present!”

185

Titus Claudius looked sadly after her.

“And she does not see either, what is hanging over our heads!” he said half to himself. Then he went through the atrium and out of the house, followed by a few of his clients.

Domitian meanwhile had made arrangements for fulfilling his pledge as soon as possible, for the turn affairs had taken was precisely what he could have wished. Without arousing any kind of suspicion, he could thus have the girl in his power. Neither craft nor mystery was needed; in a simple, honorable and perfectly legal manner, he was attaining the end which, since the tragicomic scene in the temple of Isis, had become a fixed idea with him. Barbillus, indeed, seemed to have set about the task assigned to him in a very questionable manner, and now his wily agency could be altogether set aside.

Almost at the very moment when Lucilia got into her litter, after her short interview with her parents, another litter, closely curtained and escorted by a small party of the imperial body-guard, was being carried by a circuitous route, past the Circus Maximus^[101] to the Palatine Hill. Arrived at the Palatium, out stepped Cornelia, confused and agitated, a pathetic image of anguish and despair. The events now befalling her, and a well-founded suspicion of what awaited her, filled her soul with apprehension; she had lost all her self-command, and trembled like a reed.

Parthenius received her with marked politeness, and begged her pardon in flowery language for his inability, under the law, to set her at liberty at once. That, he admitted, was unhappily out of the question; but her durance should be made so easy and agreeable, that the fair Cornelia could not but forgive him. Titus Claudius, who—as she no doubt knew—had the greatest influence over Caesar, had made interest with their imperial sovereign to spare her the horrors of the Mamertine prison; she was therefore to spend the interval till the decision of her case in the Palace itself.

186

He led the way through the pillared halls, and Cornelia mechanically followed. But she kept her right hand tightly clasped over a spot in her breast-belt.^[102] There, ever since that night of the Osiris performance, she had kept a small phial of poison. She was determined to be prepared for the worst. She had not a doubt that Caesar would, ere long, recommence his persecution; for such a failure was, to a man of his temper, reason enough in itself for a fresh attempt. Formerly Cornelia would have trusted to her maiden pride, her uncle’s high rank, and to the aid of Isis the all-merciful. But now her pride had been deeply wounded, her uncle had deserted her, and Isis the all-merciful was dead. She must have some means of protection, which in the last extremity might save her from unthinkable shame, so she betook herself, as secretly as a criminal, to Bryonia,^[103] a freed-woman of evil repute living by the wall of Servius Tullius, who kept a tavern much resorted to by the low population of the quarter, but who also prepared strong potions of hemlock, wolf’s bane, and venomous sea-creatures, which she sold to the wealthy and noble for good gold coin. Cornelia’s desire to possess herself of a dose of this poison, was strong enough to conquer all her loathing and to enable her to endure with cool composure the hag’s mumbled enquiries as to whether it was a hated husband, a tyrannical guardian, or a successful rival she wished to get rid of. She paid the price and hid the tiny phial in her wide belt. There it was still—almost forgotten for a time under the stress of the events that had followed, but suddenly remembered again now, in the very den of the imperial tiger. Cornelia felt the hard edge of the crystal with a sort of sinister delight, the contact seemed to revive her strength and resolution.

187

The room, to which she was led, was indeed an effective contrast to the vaults of the Mamertine prison. Everything, that the most extravagant luxury of a luxurious age could contrive, was combined in this little room, which was lighted by a skylight of costly glass panes. Carpets of the rarest kinds, magnificent flowers and plants in jars, soft pillows and couches of gorgeous colored stuffs, columns of onyx and ornaments of beaten gold—it was a perfect casket—of the most enchanting aspect, and well adapted to impress a girl whose keen sense of beauty had been cultivated by wealthy surroundings. And in point of fact, notwithstanding her miserable plight, she could not help feeling the charm as pleasant and restful. She drew a deep breath, the atmosphere was full of aromatic perfume, and yet as pure and fresh as the mountain air that fanned the heights of Tibur.

188

“Here I will leave you,” said the chamberlain. “Two slave-girls await your commands in the next room.” He pointed to a heavy gold-fringed curtain. “Here you are absolute mistress; there is nothing to remind you that you are a captive, but the step of the guard at your door, if you should happen to hear it. And—I may add—it rests with yourself to cast off even these light fetters, as soon as you will. Farewell—fair Cornelia. I shall often allow myself the honor of enquiring as to your needs or wishes.”

He bowed low and went out; Cornelia could hear him speaking a few words to the guard outside,

and then his steps died away in the labyrinth of passages.

Cornelia, fairly exhausted, sank upon a seat and rested her head on her hand. Her eyes slowly filled with scalding tears, that gathered and rolled down her cheeks. To what straits had she been brought! Her lover in a prison and devoted to certain death—she herself offered the choice of the last conceivable disgrace, or of sharing his fate. Of what use was it to hope? If Quintus could resist the attack of her besieging, imploring love, it was only too certain that his delusions had overthrown his mind.

She abandoned herself unresistingly to her crushing grief—but suddenly she started up. She remembered where she was; she realized all the hideous significance of this transfer, which the unsuspecting Flamen had accepted as an unqualified favor. She looked round her, and the sneering face of the tyrant seemed to leer at her through the elegance of the room. A sense of unutterable desertion came over her, and with her head thrown back and her arms flung up as if in desperate supplication, she gazed at the blue autumn sky which looked down upon her, pale and remote, through the round skylight.

189

“Ah, miserable fate!” she cried, clenching her fists. “Why are you so empty and cold, ye skyey spaces? Why does no heart dwell beyond you, that can feel for us below—no merciful spirit, that can understand what crushes our souls? Oh Isis! Isis! With what fervor have I not besought Thy favor!—and if Thou Art—if, anything resembling Thee exists beyond the stars!—but no; if Thou wert Isis, who should fear Thee more than Thy priest? And he—he despises and desecrates Thee. It is an invention of the brain, an illusion, a fable; and in my quaking heart all is wretched and hopeless enough without that fable.”

She ceased to look upwards, her gaze fell, and she fixed her eyes on the floor.

“There is none,” she said, with dull conviction. “No help—but in Bryonia’s potion.”

She paced the room, and her steps fell silently on the thick, soft rugs.

“A gilded cage indeed!” she muttered, looking round her. Then she went to the door-way, and raised the curtain. Two handsome slave-girls were lying on fine panther skins; they seemed to be sleeping, but at the rustle of the curtain they started up.

“Lie still,” said Cornelia, with a melancholy smile, and they needed no second telling. They had perhaps spent the night as dancing-girls, or in waiting late on their master’s orders; their pale, olive faces were weary and worn.

Cornelia studied the details of this second room. It was completely fitted as a bedroom, with everything that a Roman lady of rank could need for her elaborate toilet. A deeply-cushioned couch filled up all one wall to the left, and opposite to her was a door. Cornelia went past the sleeping handmaids and opened it. It led into a third room, small, dark and square, intended apparently as an eating-room. When the chandelier which hung from the ceiling should be lighted, this room also might look rich and comfortable, but it had no entrance excepting through the cubiculum. All the rooms were lighted above; this third room through a kind of shaft, that pierced the ceiling obliquely. Thus the outer world was completely excluded.

190

Cornelia now returned to the first room, and tried whether the door, through which she and the chamberlain had entered, was bolted on the outside. At a slight touch the two ebony wings turned easily on their hinges, and the young girl, with her swift impulses, was on the point of acting on her hope of liberty, when a glance at each end of the corridor showed her that she had been too hasty; three of the praetorian guard, in full armor, were posted at each exit.

One of them came up to her, and asked, half-respectfully but half-ironically, if she had any orders. He was a gigantic Gaul, stalwart and broad-shouldered, with a good-humored look in his face.

“Do you take orders from a prisoner?” said Cornelia, haughtily.

“Why yes, mistress,” said the soldier. “And, by Hercules! they will be fulfilled with zeal. Sooner or later....”

But he broke off; Cornelia’s lofty gravity confused him.

“What were you about to say?” she asked with a frown.

191

“I only meant.... If you and Caesar—if you were reconciled—Caesar is very good-natured to the ladies—he loves. You might pay us off, if....”

“Man!” interrupted Cornelia, quivering with rage. “What do you take me for?”

“For all that is sweet and lovely,” said the man much disconcerted. But Cornelia heard him not; she had gone back into the room, and flung herself in despair upon a divan. Convulsive sobs choked her, but presently the tears came, and at last, after crying silently for a long time, she fell asleep. But even in her slumbers her hand still clutched the little phial of poison.

CHAPTER XV.

It was late in the afternoon, when Cornelia woke from her swoon-like sleep. She felt crushed and racked in every limb, and her head ached madly. She rose and went into the next room. The slave-girls were gone, and in the inner room she heard a clatter as of laying the table. She opened the door, and saw the two girls busy, with two Nubians dressed in yellow, in arranging a supper with costly Murrhina vessels, cups, wine-jugs, and flower-vases. The five-branched lamp that hung from the ceiling was lighted, and she could see that the walls were colored bright-red, while beautiful figures of the gods, each a masterpiece, stood out from this strong background. All the furniture was of pure silver, richly and tastefully wrought; particularly the couches, which were of fine incised work, and covered with sky-blue cushions.

192

As she stood there a trap-door opened in the marble floor—the head and shoulders of a slave came up through it, and a fresh load of flowers, just gathered, were taken from him by the two slave-girls.

“What does all this mean?” asked Cornelia.

“It means, my pretty one,” said a voice in Greek, close at her elbow, “that it is nearly supper-time, and that Caesar will do you the great honor of permitting you to eat at the same table with himself.”

She turned round, and before her, in full dress, stood Parthenius.

“Such a favor is quite unmerited,” said Cornelia, summoning up all her courage. “I am wearied, worn out, almost too ill...”

“Oh! the presence of the sovereign works wonders. Be fresh and gay, Cornelia. True wisdom is at home everywhere. Only children and old men pout to get their own way.”

“But do you consider of what crime I am accused? Caesar derogates from his majesty, by sitting at table with a criminal.”

“Oh! but clemency is the prerogative of the crown. One word from the sovereign wipes out any crime.”

He nodded significantly, and went back into the outer room. Cornelia stood at if rooted to the spot; but presently, recovering her presence of mind, she rushed after Parthenius. She threw herself on the ground before him, and clasped his knees.

“Let me go, take me away again—back to prison—straight to execution—wherever you will; only away from that hated presence, that hideous fate! Have pity, have mercy, Parthenius.”

193

The courtier shrugged his shoulders.

“You take the matter too hardly,” he said, raising her politely. “Be brave, and divest yourself of all prejudice. The situation is a simple one. Your lover has fallen under the law; what then can you lose, by raising the veil of maidenly coyness a little? Moreover, a thoughtless speech has placed you in a position to fear unpleasant consequences. These of course will be spared, if you show yourself amenable to—reason. Nay, if for old attachment’s sake, you feel any strong desire to save that perverse Quintus Claudius from the last extremity, even in this—I am well assured—Caesar’s clemency may be easily obtained if—of course.... You understand.”

At every word, that Parthenius spoke, Cornelia turned colder and paler. The choice, then, that lay before her was between the last disgrace, that could befall a woman and a Roman—and the death of the man she loved, ah! so passionately. Both were alike unbearable—and now, as this was borne in upon her consciousness, she felt clearly that a third alternative must at any risk be attempted—even if it were the maddest ever dreamed of by mortal creature. And for that she must gain time; she must detain Caesar, put him off, seem to fall into his horrible trap, deceive him, entangle him.—Some good genius would suggest to her how, where, and when the chance for safety offered. Despair is so ingenious, and makes us so cool, so steady, so keen-sighted.

Parthenius supposed that Cornelia’s calm reflections were the result of his worldly-wise harangue.

“Yes, my child,” he went on, “that is how matters stand, and you will do well to reckon with the factors as they are given you. Do you think you know Rome, my good Cornelia? Nay—you only know the narrow, cross-grained, little world, that your uncle chose you should see. If you had eyes for all that goes on round you, you would make no difficulties. Did not Julia enjoy the most splendid position, although her connection with Caesar was a breach of morals, as it is called? Is there anywhere in good society a single married woman, who has not a dozen of lovers? And do the clients and slaves bow less low before her? Men must live their lives.”

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Cornelia’s heart sickened in loathing of the man, but she looked him steadily in the face.

“What?” she asked with affected innocence; “would it, do you think, be no sin before the gods...?”

“The gods! What are the gods? Are you afraid of the image you stitch into linen with colored yarn? And what you call the gods are just such images, in the web of human culture. Children are

frightened at them, when you show them the bogie for the first time....”

These were the very thoughts, that had passed through Cornelia’s mind a score of times during the last few days. How was it then, that this confirmation from the chamberlain’s lips sounded so revolting? How was it, that the courtier’s utterance of them almost roused her to denial, and that her heart refused to ratify the conclusions, which her reason had so lately approved?

But she had no time for these reflections. She must play a part—the part of a yielding, over-persuaded victim. She shuddered with hatred and disgust as she thought of it, but there was no choice.

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“Ah!” she sighed. “Caesar’s commands would not have terrified me half so much, if it had not been for the recollection—I do not know whether you heard—Barbillus, that mean trickster....”

Of course she knew that Parthenius had long since been fully informed of all that had taken place in the sanctuary of Isis; otherwise how should Caesar have employed him to prepare the way for his own coming? But she affected innocence so skilfully, that the courtier was deceived.

“Yes, yes,” he said; “I know all about it.”

“Then you can understand, that I must have been frightened. If Caesar had not been so violent, if Barbillus had not so cruelly betrayed my confidence. I am sure—things might have been different.”

Parthenius smirked affably. “Well, well; all is well that ends well. This may be set right yet. I am truly delighted to find, that the account Caesar gave me of your obstinacy was exaggerated.”

“I, obstinate?” sighed Cornelia with the expression of a baby of ten. “Far from it. I love nothing so much as peace and quietness. But, you see—I am afraid of Caesar.”

As she said it, it sounded too helplessly foolish; but Parthenius, enchanted at his success, did not notice that she overacted the part.

“You little simpleton,” he said kindly. “Do not be uneasy. I will give him a hint. It is plain to any man, that a lily must be plucked with greater care than a cabbage. Though he likes cabbage now and then, does our gracious sovereign,” he added with a laugh.

Parthenius carried on this strange conversation some little time longer. Then, hearing steps outside, he signed to Cornelia to withdraw into the middle room, while he himself went to the entrance. He threw the door wide open, for it was the Emperor, followed by his favorite slave, little Phaeton who, by reason of his tender years, was reckoned as nobody in such circumstances. Domitian wore a long and ample lacerna, and had drawn the hood over his face. When the door was closed behind him, he threw off the wrap, and stood in a short-sleeved tunic of colored flowered stuff, with a gold fillet round his thin hairs, smiling mysteriously at the chamberlain.

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“Well?” he said, glancing round the room.

“All promises for the best, my lord! The fair one is by no means the monster you imagine. It was only the sudden fright, that turned her brain that evening. I have found her quite reasonable, most reasonable; and if the sight of your majesty does not prove too much for her again, I venture to predict....” A smile ended the sentence.

“You are a finished master in all affairs of gallantry,” said Caesar. “Ovid himself might take a lesson from you. But where is she, the lovely, aggravating Fury, who handled the lord of the universe with such rough defiance? Tell me now, Parthenius: Am I not infinitely kind? Is not my condescension far beyond everything you ever heard of? I might have snatched the fruit of the Hesperides by force, and I resign myself to wait till it drops into my lap, beguiled by all the arts of love. It is a stroke of genius, a refinement...! If it comes to the worst—of course—but you say you are sure.”

“I am sure you have only to be yourself, to be certain of victory.”

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Cornelia overheard this dialogue, and she involuntarily made a gesture as if to throttle the hateful man, and she only resumed her indifferent air just in time, for at this moment the chamberlain raised the curtain, and in the next instant Domitian and Cornelia stood face to face.

For some minutes the Emperor found no words. The presence of the noble girl, whom he now had so completely in his power, seemed to have deprived him of his presence of mind. He was deeply conscious, that this queenly Cornelia was no every-day quarry, and that few women in all Rome could compare with her for beauty.

“To-day you will be my guest, fair Cornelia,” he said at last, taking a step towards her. “Your crime is wiped out—for our clemency is boundless. In return I ask but one thing: a happy smile and a few kindly glances from those divine eyes. Will you grant me these, Cornelia? It is your sovereign, who sues to you?”

“My lord,” said Cornelia, “I will try.”

“You are as gracious as Amathusia!^[104] Well, to-day Parthenius will share our meal—but to-morrow—to-morrow, say, beloved one—you will receive me alone?”

“I will try,” repeated Cornelia, looking down.

Parthenius threw a triumphant glance at Domitian, a glance that seemed to expect some acknowledgment of the superior skill, which had so quickly converted the coy maiden into a docile child. And Caesar vouchsafed him a hasty nod. Then he took Cornelia by the hand, and, with an air of repulsive gallantry, led her into the little triclinium, where the slaves had by this time made everything ready. Caesar took his place on the middle couch, with Parthenius on his left hand, and Cornelia on his right. As each couch was intended to accommodate three persons, this arrangement placed them at some distance apart; a respectful distance, which Domitian intended as a sort of atonement for his vehemence on the former occasion. They had no one to serve them but the two slave-girls, helped by Phaeton.

Cornelia had eaten nothing the whole day, and the dishes before her were the choicest productions of that great artist, Euphemus. Nevertheless she could hardly force herself to swallow a mouthful. Her throat seemed to close; her terrors increased every instant, and to give herself some courage, she emptied the gold cup of strong Falernian twice or three times.

Perhaps it was from a kindred feeling, that Caesar carried the goblet to his lips oftener than usual.—Gentle and humble as the beautiful girl seemed, who reclined there on the pillows, now and again he saw, in fancy, the haughty and indignant heroine.—It was not till he had drunk deeply, and the Falernian began to warm his blood, that he found some of the flattering phrases of a wooer. By degrees his eloquence grew freer and readier. He enlarged on the all-conquering might of beauty, before which even the gods themselves must bow; he dilated in rhetorical flights on the charms of a country life—asked for no greater happiness than to marry the vine with the elm,^[105] to wield the harrow, the plough, and the pruning hook, and to live on fresh figs with honey and goat's milk. A few cups more, and his ecstatic mood had sunk to amorous melancholy. He spoke of the solitude of a throne, the aching void of a heart that beats unsatisfied even when nearing the grave; of "black care," which incessantly hovers round a crowned head.

All this mawkish sentimentality, so ill-becoming the furrowed face stamped with the traces of the lowest vices, put the finishing touch to Cornelia's utter loathing. She almost repented not having frankly betrayed her aversion, in spite of every danger, and boldly faced death rather than submit to the approaches of this revolting reprobate. But the thought of Quintus kept her resolution up.

A newer and heavier wine now sparkled in the cups. Caesar drank it unmixed with water, and the color took a deeper dye in his bald and polished forehead—the golden circlet had slipped backwards, his eyes were half shut, and he spoke thickly. He raised himself slowly and unsteadily from his couch.

"Your health, sweet Cor ... Cornelia," he stammered, supporting himself with his left hand against the table, while his right hand held the goblet. "I am happy to think that Aphrodite has touched your heart to kindness."

He went towards her, and laid his hand on her round, white arm. She shuddered, but she kept still. Her mind was made up to endure to the very last limits of endurance, and then to cast off the mask of submission, and defend herself with all the strength of desperation. She hastily glanced at the side-table, where the slaves had set down the dishes; she hoped to see a carving-knife, but in vain. All the meat had come up ready carved^[106] through the trap-door. There was no weapon available but the gold cup with its heavy foot—or, in the last extremity, Bryonia's terrible little vial.

"Cornelia," he continued, still grasping her arm, "we anger the gods, if we scorn their gifts—and to-day—now—I feel so bright, so well, so happy—the present smiles on me.—Cornelia, speak...."

Cornelia made a hasty movement, and freed her arm from his clutch; he tottered.

"It is suffocatingly hot!" he said, looking up at the lamp. "Air—give me air! Only for an instant. Parthenius, give me your arm as far as the balcony!^[107] the wine has bewildered me—or happiness—joy.... Come, Parthenius. Only for five minutes, and then, sweet Cornelia, one last cup to consecrate our meeting."

The chamberlain led him slowly away. Cornelia gazed after them like one dazed. Her face was bloodless. All the misery that this man had heaped upon her head, seemed to rise before her mind in that fearful moment: the relentless law to which Quintus was a victim, the exile of her venerated uncle, and the crushing, maddening disgrace which threatened her even now.

She looked round her; the two slaves were standing with their backs to the table, and Phaeton had quitted the room.

The next instant something bright sparkled in her trembling fingers; it was the phial she had received from the old woman. Just in front of her, full almost to the brim, stood the Emperor's goblet. She bent forward and poured the contents of the phial, all but a few drops, into the purple wine. But at the same instant she started back with a loud scream; before her, in the door-way, she saw Phaeton's pale face: he had seen all.

The lad did not utter a word. He stared at the wine-cup as if paralyzed at the sight. A minute or two later Domitian and Parthenius returned. The Emperor went to his couch, without observing that Cornelia was lying half-senseless on hers. He was on the point of taking up the cup once more, and still the terrified boy found no utterance—but suddenly a shrill cry of anguish broke from him, and he threw himself at Caesar's feet.

"Do not drink, my lord!" he cried, wringing his hands. "The wine is poisoned. She, there—look!

She still has the phial in her hand!"

Domitian had turned ashy-pale; it was only too evident that the boy spoke the truth.

"The guard! call the guard!" he shrieked in the voice of an old hag; his teeth chattered, and his jaw dropped.

"Is it true," Parthenius said, as Cornelia slowly pulled herself up, "what this boy says...?"

"Yes," she said with quivering lips. "I did what every woman, who deserves to be a Roman, would have done in my place. My honor is a thousand times more precious than that wretch's life!"

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Phaeton had flown into the corridor to fetch the guard. That instant of respite gave Cornelia time to lift the poisoned goblet to her lips. But before she had tasted it, Parthenius sprang upon her, and, with an adroit twist, spilt the contents of the cup.

"Serpent!" snarled Caesar, "you will not get off so cheaply, do not fancy it."

"Oh! she will soon find out, that Caesar's wrath postpones death till life has paid its utmost penalty!" said Parthenius. "From Caesar's arms to the rack and scaffold—that is your fate, audacious murderess."

"Here come the praetorians! Away with her! Throw her into chains. The governor of the prisons shall answer for it with his head, if she lays hand upon herself."

Cornelia was more dead than alive. The soldiers bound her hands behind her back, and carried her half-fainting, out of the room.

"You did well, Phaeton," said the Emperor, who was completely sobered by the shock. "Here, take this cup, which was so near being my death—I will give it to you in perpetual memory of the event. Henceforth you shall never quit my side, for eyes like yours do good service in these treasonable times."

The lad humbly kissed his hand.

"You put me to shame, my lord," he said steadfastly. "I only did my duty, and deserve no praises."

"Only your duty!" echoed Domitian. "Then you are superior to all the millions, who own my sway. The world is rotten, rotten at the core—it must crumble into dust.—Come now, you two who are faithful. Take me away from this scene of murder.—Abandoned, mad wretch!"

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"Do not let it weigh too heavily on your mind," said Parthenius. "Women often have such crazes. If once a girl has taken it into her head, that she must guard her honor.... The greatest triumph you could now achieve, and the best punishment for the crime she dared to attempt, would be cold-blooded mockery and compulsion...."

"The gods forbid!" cried Domitian in horror. "The woman is a demon. She would be quite capable of strangling me in her arms, or setting her teeth in my throat under pretence of a kiss. No, Parthenius, I renounce all pretensions to such flowers as these. Henceforth I acknowledge no claim but that of justice. Punishment, the extremest punishment, torment for body and soul, and a cruel death—these must be the retribution for such a crime. And that Quintus Claudius—it was for his sake she aimed the blow at my sacred head—he too shall feel what it is to have the sovereign of the world for his enemy."

CHAPTER XVI.

The little town of Rodumna^[108] lay half-hidden in olive-woods and vineyards, on the right bank of the Liger, in Gallia Lugdunensis. It had formerly been strongly fortified, but since the fall of the Republic it had lost its strategical and military importance. The foreign wars of the Empire were carried on far, far away on the northern and eastern frontiers, while internal convulsions had been constantly more and more centralized in Rome, since the rule of the Caesars had been fairly established, and a civil war in its original sense had almost ceased to be a possibility. Men lived faster in these days, and political changes were rougher and more summary. Thus, Rodumna had gradually dwindled in importance as a citadel; the walls had begun to fall into ruin, and were being overgrown with ferns and maiden hair. In Rome, and even in Lugdunum, men had something else to do than to pay any attention to this out-of-the-way little town, whose inhabitants, for their part, troubled themselves little enough about the affairs of the great world, and repaid contempt with indifference. Here reigned that idyllic peace "far from the madding crowd," which Horatius Flaccus had sung in his famous odes. The inhabitants, for the most part small land-owners or farmers, won from the surrounding lands all that they needed for actual existence, and even something more; produce which was sent either down the river in vessels to Decetia^[109] and Noviodunum,^[110] or in carts, over the ridge of mountains to the east, to the chief town of the province. The poorer inhabitants fished in the river, labored in humble toil, and kept a few taverns in which the thick and muddy wine of the country was sold.

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In the course of the last ten years several houses and villas had been built outside the town walls, often separated by wide tracts and surrounded by gardens, fields and groves, each a little world of itself.

It was one of these isolated country-houses, the home of his old and paternal friend Rufinus, that Cneius Afranius had designated as the place of meeting for the conspirators. They were to concentrate on this point by the ides of February,^[111] and meanwhile each was at work independently in different parts of the province. They were to assemble as quietly as possible, to report the success and prospects of their efforts, and to form their plans for future action.

The eventful thirteenth of February had dawned. The evening before, Cneius Afranius and the Batavian, accompanied by his freedman Herodianus and Magus the Goth, had already met, and early in the morning, before sunrise, the others had arrived, most of them in extraordinary disguise. Ulpus Trajanus appeared dressed as a merchant from Palestine, Nerva, who was with him, played the part of his accountant—his former tutor. The snowy beard, which he had allowed to grow during the last few months, entirely concealed his identity. Even the one-armed centurion had been so cautious as to assume a disguise, though his name was not on the list of the proscribed. He was travelling as a Lusitanian dealer in amulets. Cinna, on the other hand, like Afranius and Aurelius, though with less reason, had regarded these precautions as unnecessary. He wore an ordinary travelling-cloak, gave himself out to be a Roman knight of Lilybaeum,^[112] who had come on business connected with an inheritance to Lugdunum, Vesontio^[113] and Argentoratum,^[114] and he trusted to his good fortune, which certainly had, so far, preserved him from any meeting with a too keen observer. Caius Aurelius had thought it wise to separate from Herodianus. The freedman's conspicuous appearance and unmistakable physiognomy made him a dangerous travelling-companion, and it was not till they were close to Rodumna, that the great worshipper of the Opimian wine-jar^[115] had rejoined him—to his unspeakable delight—for, away from his beloved patron, to him the finest Caecubum tasted no better than the verjuice of Veii.

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Up to their present meeting, not one of the conspirators had been in a position of any real danger. Cinna attributed this to a certain amount of negligence and, perhaps, timidity in the administration. Of course he could not know, that the conspiracy had a noble and influential supporter in the Palatium itself, in the person of Clodianus, who, with all the zeal he seemed to devote to Caesar's interests—and especially to the work of persecution—nevertheless contrived, by the subtlest expedients of intrigue, to cripple every active effort, particularly if it originated with Parthenius, and who managed to combine an appearance of the greatest energy with absolute inaction. His master-stroke consisted in collecting a considerable mass of evidence, which convinced Domitian, and even the chamberlain, that the conspirators were to converge upon Rhaetia,^[116] and take that district as the basis of their operations. Thus, while Caesar's agents were searching and watching that province with eager haste and, misled by false reports, advanced farther and farther to the north, the conspirators in Gallia Lugdunensis were congratulating themselves on their unhoped-for liberty. One old and devoted client of the adjutant's was indeed cautiously endeavoring to track them—not to circumvent them as a foe, but because Clodianus wanted to open negotiations with them, and to further their plots against Domitian. This ambiguous conduct on his part was unexpectedly successful, mainly because for some days Parthenius had also betrayed a strange revulsion, and had ceased to urge on the persecutions with his original virulence. What could have caused this change in the man—whether it was his more intimate connection with the intriguing Massilian, Lycoris, or some secret understanding with the Empress—Clodianus could only guess. But, diligently as Parthenius strove to conceal the fact, he soon became aware of it, and with all his wonted elasticity he stretched out his feelers, so to speak, in order with all caution to investigate this new phenomenon.

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The friends at Rodumna had no suspicion of all this. Even the fact, that some unknown friend had warned them of the danger, could not put them on the track of such a wild and incredible idea. When, on board the *Batavia*, Nerva had referred to these warning letters, Cinna had attributed them to a mercenary betrayal on the part of some subordinate about the court, who thus perhaps gave vent to his own spite and disaffection, and counted on a reward at some favorable opportunity.

Now, on the thirteenth of February, the villa near Rodumna was the scene of an agitated discussion. The owner of the house had taken the precaution of sending off all his slaves the day before, down the river to an outlying part of his property. Only two trustworthy men had been kept back, and these, as the sun rose over the hills, prepared a country breakfast for the assembled party, and then went with Magus into the garden, where they mounted watch over the high-road and carefully-barred gate. At the back of the house, where a small door-way opened to the south-east, Herodianus posted himself, in accordance with his particular wish. The songs of Pindar,^[117] and a jar of the best wine that Rufinus could produce—this was all he should need to keep his spirits up, even if the sitting should last until sundown.

The centurion first made his report. His efforts had been chiefly directed to sounding the feeling of the common soldiers, and he had traversed the country in every direction. Everywhere he had been met with cautious reserve, or even with frank distrust. He had several times been taken for one of those imperial spies,^[118] whose business it was to betray an incautious speaker into some rash utterance of opinion. These agents, who had hitherto been employed only in Rome, had, since Caesar's suspicions had grown to such a head, made their appearance among the troops stationed in the provinces, and had fomented much ill-feeling. It happened that Lugdunum had just lately been the scene of the cruel execution of an officer, who was universally beloved but who, under the influence of wine, had spoken some inconsiderate words and who had been denounced by one of these treacherous informers. The centurion had taken good care not to weaken this prejudice against himself, indeed he had occasionally risked his own safety in playing the part thus forced upon him. In other places, where he had not been suspected, but had been able to talk frankly and freely with the men, he found that two facts especially, as reported from the metropolis, had made a deep impression; one was the unhappy end of the miserable Julia, and the other Caesar's action against Cornelius Cinna. Cinna, he said, had already a strong and enthusiastic following among the common soldiers. It had never been forgotten in the army, that he had so often spoken in the Senate on their behalf and, more particularly, had taken their part against the unjust partiality shown to the praetorian guard, but he believed it would be harder to win over the military tribunes and the rest of the superior officers. Among them Domitian's ascendancy was on the whole undisputed.

These were the most important results of the old centurion's experience; the assembly expressed their thanks and their admiration for his indefatigable energy, and the worthy man, whom Cinna and even Nerva had greatly undervalued—perhaps because they mistook his modesty for incapacity—rose at once to a high place in their estimation. Indeed, it presently proved that the enquiries of Trajan, Nerva and Cornelius Cinna had yielded relatively smaller results than those of this unpretending soldier.

Ulpius Trajanus, who spoke next, frankly admitted that, in spite of all his efforts, he had only occasionally spoken to a few officers and centurions, and had convinced himself that, so far as he was concerned, he could not hope for any success excepting by declaring himself, particularly to the divisions of the troops he had formerly commanded.

At these words Caius Aurelius seemed quite delighted—he evidently thought that the speaker had hit the turning-point of the whole discussion.

"You know," Ulpius Trajanus went on, "that one of the three legions stationed here was under my command, in the campaign on the Rhine against the Germans.^[119] My men were blindly devoted to me, and if I were to stand before them to-day and say: Soldiers, behold your general an exile, persecuted, hunted down, because he defends the cause of truth, justice and freedom.—I am convinced, especially after what our worthy centurion has told us, that they would rise as one man to resist the tyrant. The only question is, whether the adherence of one legion is enough as a beginning of the revolt; whether on the contrary so small a spark might not be at once trodden out. Ah! my friends, had I only guessed, when I led my army out of Hispania across the endless wastes of southern Gaul to the shores of the Rhine—had I only dreamed then, that the real enemy of our country dwelt in the Palatium! had I known that the eternal city was more gravely menaced by the canker at her heart, than by the wild hordes of the Teutobergian and Hercynian forests! But I was no more than a soldier, thinking of nothing but the task in hand, and never troubling my head about anything beyond the field of battle. At that time I could easily have overthrown the reign of terror, have set the Senate free to act, and so have obtained a legal verdict against the archtraitor, who now treads our sacred rights under foot with impunity. Why did I not then understand your misery and evil plight! I almost feel as if that were my own fault, which is, in fact, only the ordering of fate. Just lately, when I have been endeavoring to prepare the soil for our plans, the curse of delay has stared me in the face with heart-breaking clearness. Of all the thousands I then had at my disposal, so few remain with me, that I doubt, as I said, whether it is safe to reckon on such a handful. I await your counsel."

Nerva, who had been Trajan's constant companion during the last few weeks, had nothing to add to this speech, and Cinna's report was but a meagre one.

"So long as we stick at the preparatory stage," he said, discontentedly, "I am nobody. I have seen

and observed many things. With all the precautions I could take, I have found out old connections and, as I will tell you presently, I have found a few persons of distinction, that are won over to our cause, and who may be of the greatest service to us. But with all this I fail to see how you propose to go on. Either one thing or the other.... All now depends on a hazard; it is a game in which everything hangs on a throw of the die."

"The die is cast," said Caius Aurelius.

Every face was turned in astonishment to gaze at the excited young man, who went on as follows in great agitation:

"Yes, my dear friends and colleagues, if I am not greatly deceived, our cause is as good as won. How should I, an unknown nobody, have achieved so great a success? I can quite understand your being dumb with astonishment.—But the success is not mine, but yours—yours, generous Cinna; yours, noble Nerva, and, above all, yours, Ulpus Trajanus. Listen and perpend: After we parted on the coast of Narbonensis, I was crushed by the consciousness of being the least capable of all of doing anything to promote your prospects. All the circumstances were new to me; I had no connection with any great man; I had no glorious past in my own life. So for some weeks, accompanied by one of my galley-slaves, I wandered aimlessly about the province doing no good whatever. Then accident inspired me with a brilliant idea. I was at no great distance from the Rhodanus; I was tired with a long ride, and we had dismounted in the middle of a wood, tied the horses by their bridles to the trunk of a holm-oak, and had lain down ourselves a little way off, where a clear spot offered us a comfortable couch. Presently we heard voices—the Propraetor of Lugdunum,^[120] as I subsequently discovered, who had a house in the neighborhood, and his eldest son. The two men, who had no servants with them, had been hunting, and were now resting awhile. We kept quiet, for silence and patience are the first virtues of a refugee. Thus I involuntarily overheard a conversation, which in a few minutes was of the greatest importance to our purpose and plans. I learnt, in short, that the Propraetor highly disapproves of the latest edicts from the Palatium, and is anything rather than blind to the crimes of the man, whose representative he is. I discovered that he esteems many of the proscribed, and you especially, my respected colleagues, as brave and upright men, and that he regards Trajan's hostility, especially to the present government, as a highly important feature—as a sign, that Caesar is treading a most dangerous road. The son, who is a military tribune, agreed with the father in every particular, especially with regard to Ulpus Trajanus.^[121] He spoke of his distinguished services in the campaigns against the Northmen; he particularly remarked that at that time—at the head of your legions, when you had the power entirely in your own hands—you never laid any ambitious plans, and he wondered how it could have come to pass, that so moderate a man, after achieving such splendid deeds, should be now placed in the position of a Catiline. All this was said in broken phrases and a low conversational tone, and then they went on to speak of the games and races in the circus of Lugdunum. However, it was enough for me. The whole tone and style of their speech had convinced me, that I was listening to people of position and influence; I therefore determined to keep my men in sight, and when they rose and set out I followed them, leaving the horses in the copse. Before long I observed a villa, and meeting some slaves returning from labor in the fields, I learnt, in answer to my questions, that the noble personage who walked on so unpretentiously was the Imperial Propraetor, and had been stopping for a few days in his country-house, as he was particularly devoted to sport. Indeed, as I approached the house, I saw a number of soldiers and a guard of honor,^[122] which left no doubt as to the rank of the owner. Then I felt as if the gods themselves had inspired me.—My resolution was taken at once. I wrote a few lines on my wax-tablet, gave it to my rower, and desired him, in case I should not return from the Propraetor's villa, to carry them to Herodianus, that he might give you all due warning. Still, I had every hope that the immortals would crown my rashness with success. My slave left me; I went forward, and had myself announced to the Propraetor with the notice that I had a most important communication to make to him. Ten minutes later I was standing face to face with the governor of the province.—My lord, said I, as calmly and steadily as if I had arrived to announce some imperial fiat—I come in the name of Cinna, of Nerva, and of Trajan, to inform you, that they have determined to accuse Domitian before the Senate,^[123] charging him with high-treason, and to depose him, and to this end to lead the legions of this province against Rome...."

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"What madness!" cried Cinna, horrified.

"Yes, noble Cinna," said Aurelius, frankly; "now, when I calmly think it over, I am astonished at my own audacity. And yet—what was I risking after all? My life! And my freedman would have had ample time to warn you.—This occurred the day before yesterday."

Cinna changed color from red to white, and from white to red again.

"Go on, go on!" urged the others; and Aurelius proceeded:

"The Propraetor was thunderstruck. For a moment I fancied he feared for his own safety; that he thought that his legions had already been secretly instigated to rebellion, and that at a given signal the revolt would break out. He seemed to breathe more freely, when I told him that the friends of freedom had addressed themselves to him, hoping to precipitate some prompt decision; counting on his knowledge of affairs, his rectitude, and his time-tested patriotism to guide them to an issue from the situation. I painted in glowing colors the fermenting discontent, the smothered disaffection and hatred of the populace, the tyranny of the capricious and detested despot, his crimes and foul deeds that cry to Heaven, and the inevitable pressure from within towards some complete change. Then I reminded him once more of your names, you who are

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here to defend the cause of our country: Nerva, Cinna, Trajan.—What else I may have said I forget, but the gods willed, that I should touch some chord which roused a threatening echo in the old warrior's breast. It may be, that some personal motives weighed with him—be that as it may, the Proprætor is on our side, and as soon as you please you can go to take counsel and lay schemes with him."

"If the whole thing is not a trap on his part?" said Afranius.

"No, no," cried Trajan. "I remember now. Clodianus told me last summer, that after the death of his first wife the Proprætor had wished to marry Julia.... Did he not know how Julia had died?"

"He knew it only by vague report. I told him the facts as they were commonly current in Rome; and he did, certainly, seem very much shocked...."

The sudden appearance of Herodianus at the door interrupted Caius Aurelius in his speech. Behind the freedman they could see the ragged figure of a beggar. 217

"A messenger from Rome," said Herodianus mysteriously. "He has brought important news, if he speaks the truth."

The beggar came forward, and asked if Cornelius Cinna were present, and when Cinna acknowledged his identity, the man handed him a much-crumpled letter. Cinna broke the tie and seal with eager haste, and the eyes of the party were fixed in anxious expectation on his face, which first turned deadly pale, and then flushed with rising color.

"A new ally!" he said, as his hand fell on to the table. "And a powerful one too! This note is from the adjutant, Clodianus.... Like the wolf in the fable.—You had but just spoken of him, Trajan."

"What? Clodianus! impossible!" cried Trajan.

"Not so impossible," said Caius Aurelius. "Only a short time before our flight I met him at the house of Norbanus. The things he said—the questions he asked—I remember it all now."

"By Hercules! but let us hear," said Afranius.

When Herodianus and the messenger had withdrawn, Cornelius Cinna read the letter aloud. It contained, in the first place, the information that it was Clodianus, who had given the mysterious warning of the projected arrests, and to confirm this, the words were quoted of the note that Cinna had received—a proof which all the hearers were satisfied to regard as conclusive. Clodianus then sketched, with great judgment, a project for their joint action. He told them how for some time, he had been working on the minds of the prætorian guard, and assured them that the only difficulty here would arise from the character of Norbanus, who clung to Caesar with considerable obstinacy, who was wholly and solely a soldier, and never troubled himself at all about questions of State. Still, he was not altogether without hope of gaining over this important officer to the side of freedom for Rome; if it came to the worst, ways and means might be found to keep him out of the way, without hurting his feelings. Then he added some valuable hints with regard to military operations, and the opening of rapid and reliable means of communication between Clodianus and the conspirators. Finally he wrote as follows: 218

"If, as I imagine, Caius Aurelius, the Batavian, is with you, tell him that his betrothed came to my house a few days after the ides of November. She is well. She came to entreat my intercession in favor of her brother Quintus who, as you may chance to have heard, was arrested soon after your escape, and cast into the Tullianum on a charge of having joined the Nazarenes. I promised to do my best, in the certainty, however, that so long as Domitian wields the sceptre there is no hope of justice even, and much less of mercy."

This sentence took a surprising effect on Caius Aurelius.

"My friends," he exclaimed, "you see, the gods themselves have opened a way for us! Why do we hesitate? What better guarantees can we expect for the success of our plans? Even if the Proprætor has begun to waver, this letter from Clodianus will open his eyes—he must see that it is vain to struggle against Fate. I would propose that you should at once enter into negotiations with the Proprætor, and start as soon as possible for Lugdunum. There, we will proclaim to the legions that Caesar is deposed, and that the noble old republic of Cincinnatus and Regulus is reëstablished!"^[124] "To Lugdunum without delay!" they exclaimed unanimously. 219

CHAPTER XVII.

April, the sweetest month in the south, had decked the land in all its wealth of beauty. The City of the Seven Hills, with its endless gardens and plantations, wore a really enchanting aspect. It seemed to have put on its freshest and gayest attire in honor of the secular games, which had already begun on the previous day with magnificent races in the Circus Maximus. To-day, the sixth after the calends,^[125] at two hours after sunrise, gladiators and ships were to fight in the Flavian Amphitheatre, and men were to fight with beasts.

It was still nearly an hour to the time, but in the Forum and all the neighboring streets the slanting light of morning fell on a crowd so dense as to defy all description. Long files of litters, gorgeous in purple and gold, pushed their slow way through the surging masses of men struggling along the Via Sacra towards the entrance to the amphitheatre. 220

Three hundred lions^[126] and as many panthers, fifty Cantabrian bears, forty elephants and other beasts, six hundred gladiators and boxers—among them some women and dwarfs—a dozen of highwaymen from the Appian Way, and about ninety Christians, were to shed their blood, some in single combat, others in larger or smaller divisions, and all in the course of the next three days, for the evening of the fourth saw the end of the great festival.^[127] Indeed, the herald who invited the populace in the Emperor's name, spoke the truth in more senses than one, as he shouted the usual proclamation: "Come hither to see what none of you has ever yet seen, or ever will see again!"^[128] To-day, the second day, the interest and excitement seemed even greater than yesterday. The number of strangers, gathered together from all parts of the Empire, was certainly swelled and, although the amphitheatre could accommodate above eighty thousand spectators, the crowd was so enormous, that many visitors were doubtful of succeeding in fighting their way to places. 221

In the stream of litters, which were moving towards the Arena, not from the Forum only but from the Cyprian Way, was one of conspicuous elegance and splendor. The curtains were drawn open, and two handsome but over-dressed and painted girls sat chattering among the billowy cushions. These were Lycoris and one of her friends, Leaina, a native of Asia Minor, who had spent the winter in Athens as companion to an Egyptian lady of rank, and had arrived only yesterday evening in Rome, the sea-passage being only just considered as open for the season. Lycoris had a sort of sisterly kindness for Leaina—all the more because she was well aware, that the oriental could not compare with her in beauty; and Leaina, who had originally filled a very humble position as a dancer in a low tavern at Capua, had been introduced into society by Lycoris, and felt for her a feeble reflection of the feeling, which in a deeper nature might have risen to gratitude. As they sat together in the litter, splendidly dressed, their eyebrows darkened with stibium,^[129] and the veins in their temples outlined with blue color, they seemed to be of one heart and one mind. 222

"It is delightful," cooed Lycoris, "to have you at least—to enjoy the fights in the amphitheatre with me. That stupid ship to be so late—particularly when I think of your love for races. They were splendid, my dear, positively splendid! First there was the great procession from the Capitol to the Circus Maximus;^[130] all the finest young men in Rome on milk-white horses—a lovely sight! Then the two-wheeled and four-wheeled chariots, the dancers, flute-players and cithara-players, the priests in full dress, and last of all the judges, with crowns of golden oak-leaves and robes of ceremony, like the hero of a triumph. That was enough to show what the greatness of Rome means! As a rule, all that people say of the glory of the Roman name and such speech-making, is to me simply laughable; but when I see a sight like that, it gives me a shiver down my back, and I feel a sense of—what shall I call it?—the sublime—of—I do not know whether you understand the feeling?"

"Yes, yes," said Leaina, vaguely. "But you mentioned the priests; was Titus Claudius present, the high-priest of Jupiter? You wrote to me, a few weeks since, that his son Quintus had been charged before the Senate with having joined the Nazarenes, and was condemned to the beasts. I should think his father would hardly care to take part in a festival...." 223

"My dear child!" interrupted the Massilian. "I see that Athens is indeed out of the world. You do not know what has been the talk of Rome for some days; ever since the ides of March Titus Claudius has been lying at death's door. He has a violent fever, is quite delirious and, indeed, out of his mind. His hair, they say, has grown white in these few months like that of a very old man. Rome does not generally find time to think of the misfortunes of individuals, but the sympathy in this case has been universal. At first every one blamed Quintus Claudius, but now he is only pitied, and hundreds of the most influential men in Rome are exerting themselves to save him. Even I, who am indolence itself, have appeared as a suppliant at the consulate. Seriously, Leaina, I feel for him deeply; it is a pity, he is so young and so handsome. Wherever I had a chance I tried—with the chamberlain, whom I can generally twist round my little finger—at last even with the Empress—I forget, whether I told you when I wrote, that even the Empress had done me the honor to smile upon me.... All in vain, Caesar is inexorable. Even when the father offered in sheer despair to be a victim to the law in his son's stead, and to kill himself in expiation, Domitian would not hear of mercy. Now the only hope is, that even in the Arena the people will demand his release."

"And Cornelia, his betrothed? She too was arrested?"

"She is to share his fate. Indeed she is guilty of a double crime: she is a Nazarene, and she tried to murder Caesar. To ask pardon for her would be tantamount to high-treason."

"It is a strange story altogether," said Leaina, with a little sigh. "And after all, tell me, what is the particular crime of being a Nazarene? What is it that they do?"

"Indeed, my dear, you ask me more than I can answer. It would appear, that they carry on all sorts of idolatrous worship, and concoct schemes of rebellion. Norbanus told me that they want to turn the world upside down, and make the masters slaves, and the slaves masters. I told him, that did not sound to me at all a likely story; for, if it were so, only slaves would have anything to do with them. And now, besides Quintus, the consul Flavius Clemens,[131] a relative of Caesar, has been caught and converted; so there must be something more in it than that."

"Of course!" said Leaina.

"Very likely the whole business is somehow connected with the disturbances, that have been reported lately from the Rhaetian frontier. It is said that the conspirators—you know, Cornelius Cinna, Ulpius Trajanus and the rest—have formed an alliance with some Germanic princes, and are marching on Rome!"

"But that would be frightful! Just now too, when the best season of the year is coming on!"

"Oh! do not be alarmed. Clodianus discovered it all in good time. And to make sure, he is bringing troops out of the provinces—out of Gallia Lugdunensis I rather fancy—down into the peninsula. If it comes to the worst, they will give the rebels a lesson. But, as you see, the feast is the only thing in men's minds. If they had the remotest idea even...."

"Well, by Cypris! I do not know what I should do. Only think of it, a conflagration like that under Nero perhaps! The whole season would be ruined."

"You silly child!" laughed Lycoris. "But what is the matter again, Philemon? Every minute we come to a stand-still."

"Mistress," said the bearer, "the city-watch have got a man in charge, and the people are crowding round them and have stopped the way."

Lycoris leaned as far as she could out of the litter. To the left, not far from the entrance to the baths of Titus, two stalwart officials had rushed at a pale young man, who defended himself desperately at first, but was overpowered after a short struggle.

"I surely know that face," said Lycoris. "And yet I cannot be sure.... Philemon, find out what that man has done to be arrested."

The bearer sent one of the slaves, who went in front of the litter, across to the spot where the two men-at-arms were now binding their prisoner's hands behind his back. In a few minutes the messenger returned.

"It is Eurymachus, the slave of Stephanus, who was hunted for through all Latium only last autumn."

"To be sure, it is he!" cried Lycoris. "Do you remember, Leaina? It was just before you left Rome. Of course; now I recognize his pale, determined face. Only he has cut off his beard, which made him look even paler then. My dear, do you know I shudder when I think of that scene! Since Quintus has been condemned to the beasts, I have grown quite nervous. That Eurymachus was his evil genius. Only see how desperately he looks about him—and then he was perfectly calm, even when he was led to the foot of the cross."

"It would seem, that the last few months had taken down his spirit a little."

"No, no—he must have some other reason, that you may depend upon. Besides—as he certainly was involved in this business of Quintus—oh! perhaps there may be some new aspect of the question! He ought to be heard.—Philemon, ask those men to come this way, to me."

The two men, extremely astonished, came up to the splendid litter, dragging their prisoner between them.

"Listen," said Lycoris, in condescending tones. "You have caught a prize this time. I know the fellow, and I know that Stephanus has set a great reward on his head. Now, if you wish to find special favor in his master's eyes, just do as I advise you. Take my tablets, on which I will write two lines, and carry them instantly, with your prisoner, to Stephanus. You will still find him at home—for he is very busy, and will not come to the Arena before noon. Will you do as I desire you?"

"Mistress," said one of the men, "it is all the same, whether we take the prisoner to the city-prefect or to his owner's house. If you wish it...."

Lycoris signed to the slave, who had called the men to speak to her, and the servant took out of his robe two gold pieces, which he gave to them, while Lycoris wrote on her tablets:

"Lycoris to the illustrious Stephanus, greeting:

"With these lines you will receive your slave, Eurymachus, whom you have so long sought in vain. Keep him in safety, but do him no hurt, till you have taken counsel with me. Why, I will

tell you when we meet. I would go to you at once if it were not so late, but I am afraid of missing the beginning of the games. I am writing in my litter—in the Cyprian Way, where your slave was taken. Expect me to dinner. Farewell!”

She gave the tablets to the man, and bid him take the greatest care of them. Once more she glanced at the pale and sadly-handsome face of the prisoner, and a strange feeling stole into her heart, a stirring of pity and of confusion. Most assuredly—so she thought—if, that evening, she had seen the victim’s face so close, she would have spoken a good word for him! Those grave, drooping lids veiled a wonderful glow in the eyes! and the mouth, with its expression of silent suffering and self-suppression, was a curious contradiction to that fiery glance! It was altogether a fascinating riddle for the Massilian’s mobile fancy. It was only a pity, that the problem should offer itself under so unattractive a guise! A young officer, a Roman knight, a senator’s son, with such a mysterious countenance, would have captivated her.—It was disappointing, by Cypris! positively vexatious! There was something bewitching in the man, as he raised his eyes to her face—she could well understand, that it must have had a great effect on a nature so impressionable as Quintus’.

The more she thought about it the more determined she became; she must find out how it all had come about. The man, Eurymachus, to be sure, looked by no means incapable of refusing point-blank to give her any information. But did not his fate depend upon her? His death was inevitable, and she alone could save him; so if she said: “Speak, tell me all, or I leave you to your fate, which will be certain death.”—Absurd! of course he would speak. And it must be a wonderful secret indeed, that could induce a youth like Quintus....

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And then it suddenly struck her, that Eurymachus was not exposed to the vengeance of the steward only. As a Christian he was condemned by law—and she could not interfere with the course of the law. The chief point still remained open: she would examine him closely, if indeed Stephanus agreed to her request. And he must, positively must. Only the other day she had had him in leading-strings, but the child had suddenly outgrown her management. Since she had become so intimate with Parthenius—Parthenius! And might not this prime favorite of Caesar’s be of some service? If Parthenius spoke the word, Eurymachus would be set at liberty, in spite of any sentence passed upon him.

Lycoris passed her hand across her forehead; her head was burning. What strange ideas were these, that had taken possession of her? What a concatenation of foolish fancies and wild, confused ideas! She hardly perceived, that meanwhile the litter had reached the entrance to the Flavian Amphitheatre. Leaina had to rouse her from her dreamy mood.

“What is the matter with you, golden-haired maid?” she said in a low voice. “You seem depressed, and just now you were all in the mood for enjoyment! Tell me—the sight of that refractory fugitive has reminded you of the performance, which ended so unfortunately?—Oh! but your vanity as a hostess makes you too sensitive. Smile again, enchantress! Consider, half Rome is looking at us.”

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“You are very right, child,” replied Lycoris. “Our part is to look beautiful, and we may leave grave thoughts to the vestal virgins.”

They got out of the litter, while one of the slaves obtained at an office on the right hand of the door-way, the *tesserae*, ivory tickets of admission,^[132] on which the numbers of the seats were marked in Latin and in Greek. The two girls took their tickets and slowly made their way through the crush, to the places pointed out to them by an attendant in a gaily-colored holiday tunic.^[133] They gave him a small gratuity in silver, dropped on to the cushions, which a slave had carried in for them,^[134] and drew a deep breath, quite tired out with standing, climbing and struggling.

The amphitheatre was a magnificent spectacle. The fighting was not to begin for half an hour yet, but the rows of seats, particularly the higher and cheaper ones, were already crammed. Every part was as gay as a flower-garden with gorgeous dresses,^[135] eager eyes, and faces flushed with expectation. Even the poorest had donned a newly-cleaned and bleached toga. The gentler sex, decorated with gold pins and diadems, was particularly strongly represented, from the matron of senatorial rank to the artisan’s wife, and the gay Syrian of more than doubtful origin.

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Now the gaudily-gilt *podium*, kept for the senators,^[136] began to fill. They took their seats deliberately, with an air of affected dignity; the Fathers of the State, as they were called, who were now little more than tools in the hand of a despot. And there was many a gap in their ranks, for Caesar’s suspected and proscribed foes still languished in prison, vainly awaiting a judicial trial, much less a verdict of acquittal.

Immediately after, the vestal maidens came in, in long white robes; for them too law and custom reserved a place of honor. Ah! and the boldness of Quintus Claudius in an audacious moment, in addressing one of these priestesses as his ladylove, was not so outrageous as his father had represented it, for those sacred robes were a cloak for more than one broken vow,^[137] and the irony of Lycoris’ remark was not altogether undeserved.

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More and more crowds of spectators kept pouring up the stairs and corridors; a hum of voices, like the surges of the Tyrrhenian sea, rose from every part of the vast oval. At last the place was filled to the very last corner. Only the purple and gold pulvinar,^[138] prepared for the Emperor, and the seats of honor immediately near to it now remained unoccupied. All eyes were fixed on the shining gates, through which the sovereign and his suite were to enter. The velarium too—the enormous canvas awning,^[139] which was stretched across the whole oval of the amphitheatre

and supported by fifty masts—bellied and flapped, as though it shared the impatience of the audience. Any one, seeing it for the first time, would have been tempted to think that the sky was about to fall in on the earth.

"Ave Caesar!"[144] shouted the mob to hail the tyrant, and he graciously bowed, and with theatrical exaggeration raised his hand to greet his faithful Romans.

"A quarter of an hour yet," said a fruit-seller, who passed in front of Lycoris and Leaina. "Fresh oranges from Tauromenium!"[140] Take some, mistress."

"Bye-and-by, my little friend! Look, Leaina, there, in the fourth row—do you know him?"

"I am too short-sighted."

"It is Martial, our famous wit; and there, in the same row, the tenth or twelfth seat from you"[141]—he is stooping forward now...."

"The priest of Isis!" said Leaina. "Oh! his amulet was invaluable. Close to Rhegium"[142] we had such a storm...."

"He is looking uncommonly grave over it, is Barbillus."

"Perhaps he is thinking, that the same fate may overtake him and his Isis-creed, as has fallen on the Nazarenes."

"Nonsense," laughed Lycoris. "He is in high favor with the chamberlain."

"Do you see any more acquaintances near us?"

"Acquaintances, oh yes! But no one I care about. There sits that most ridiculous creature—do you know her, the silly Gaditanian, Melinno?—I think I wrote to you about her. A Hispanian knight—she is his freedman's wife—brought her here a few weeks since, and now the simpleton tries to ape me and my way of living, thinking to put me out of fashion. Why, she even attempted to get up a recitation; Statius was to do her the honor.—Oh! she is exquisitely funny with her affectation of culture; and all the time she cannot even read."

Leaina colored, for she was conscious of being equally ignorant, and to change the subject she hastily enquired as to the order of the games and fights. Lycoris could not give her much information on the subject. She only knew, that the master of the festival had paid particular attention to the variety and due alternation of the different entertainments, so that, on each of the three days, every kind of fight should be represented, and in typical completeness.

"You may be sure of good entertainment, ladies," said a well-dressed young man with an ingratiating smile; he was sitting a row above them, and had heard their last words. "Women even are to fight with knives—indeed the condemned Nazarenes are more than half of them women."

"And are they supposed to be able to defend themselves?" asked Lycoris. "Against lions and tigers?"

"As well as they may," said the lad, shrugging his shoulders. "Some of the men are to have swords. I do not know whether the women are to be so armed."

"What can it matter?" said Leaina. "They are bound to die as criminals."

"Very true; and a few inches of steel cannot make much difference. Even Quintus Claudius, who is one of the strongest and best fighters in Rome, will find out the difference between a fight with a lion, and a wrestling-match in the ring at the baths."

"I fancy the people will demand a pardon for him," said Lycoris.

"Then Caesar will refuse it. If ever all means and ways were tried to save a man, they have been in his case. All he would concede was, that the criminal should be let off after conquering three beasts, and what that means no Roman needs be told."

"True indeed!" sighed Lycoris. "A Gaetolian lion, and a little, short knife! It is as if I were to try to pull these walls down with my own hands."

"A very good simile.—How often have we seen it from this very spot. The cleverest stroke—the knife to the hilt in the brute's breast—never saves the man from being torn to pieces at last. And even if what seems impossible should happen once, how can we hope that the impossible should happen twice?"

A rattling roll of drums interrupted this dialogue. The roar of voices in the amphitheatre was suddenly hushed. The gates behind the gorgeous couch of state slowly opened, and Domitian, the awe-inspiring Emperor, who—as his flatterers expressed it—moved the world by a wink of his eyelash,[143] came forward in magnificent array, and took his seat on the decorated throne.

Domitia took her place on the Emperor's right hand; the seat to the left remained vacant.[145] It had been intended for Titus Claudius Mucianus, the miserable man, who—but a few hundred paces distant from the scene of these hideous combats—was lying on a bed of anguish in a dark struggle with madness and death.

Among the suite, that followed Domitian, was Parthenius, as ever the perfect courtier and man of the world, smiling graciously, a very Sun of condescension and affability. Clodianus, too, upright and soldierly, only a little paler than usual; but perhaps his paleness was only a reflection from the velarium which, now that Caesar had taken his place, hung in a long curve over the arena, as though stricken with reverence.

The herald's drum rattled once more. Horns and trumpets struck up, shrill, loud and exciting, as if the legions of the Republic were marching to meet Hannibal. Then, down in the arena, the doors were opened for the gladiators. Slowly and solemnly the combatants came out from their cells on to the scene of action; tall and powerful forms, mostly fair-haired, for the greater number were northerners by birth. They marched round the arena with defiant looks, and pausing in front of the imperial couch, they bowed and shouted in loud chorus: "*Ave, Caesar, morituri te salutant!*"^[146] When they had all passed by, the manager of the ceremonies came forward, bowed to the sovereign, and said in a distinct voice:

"Marcus the Suevian will fight with Tumelicus the Cheruscan." Wild, noisy music began to play, and the rest of the gladiators retired into the lairs, the master of the fights described with a staff the circle within which the struggle was to take place. The two gladiators were armed by slaves; they had helmets given them, and round shields, and short broadswords. Then again a drum gave the signal to begin.

There was breathless silence. Often as the Roman populace had seen the bloody games of the arena, they never failed of their absorbing interest. The matrons and maidens, with their golden ornaments, forgot even the vicinity of their flattering gallants,^[147] who till this moment had done their utmost to fulfil to the letter Ovid's advice as to availing themselves of favorable opportunities.

Stealthily, like panthers waiting to spring, the combatants went towards each other; each was watching for an unprotected spot in his antagonist, while trying to expose himself as little as possible. They probably had known each other for some time; they had most likely lived for some months in the same barrack and been in daily intercourse; they perhaps had made friends—if the occupation of a gladiator could leave room for the feeling of friendship—and now they had but one idea: To kill, in order not to be killed.

There was a loud ring of metal; Marcus had dealt the Cheruscan a fearful blow on the helmet. Tumelicus nearly lost his balance; he withdrew a step or two, anxiously screening himself with his shield. Thus he recovered from the shock of the onslaught. He rushed forward, and retorted with a still more tremendous stroke. His attack was better than that of his opponent. The Suevian turned pale; the blow had shattered his sword and so severely wounded his right-hand, that it seemed impossible that he should defend himself any longer; he flung away his shield without more ado. A roar of mocking laughter from eighty thousand throats rent the air. He stretched out his arm and held up his thumb, in token that he acknowledged himself beaten and implored for mercy.

Fresh shouts of laughter! What, a man, whose clumsiness had so shamefully shortened their entertainment, could hope for mercy! How little he knew the Roman mob.

All the spectators' thumbs were turned down,^[148] as if at a preconcerted signal; there was not a single exception, and Leaina even put out both her fat little hands glittering with rings, to give emphasis to her demonstration.

Thumbs downwards, that meant death.

The hapless gladiator glanced despairingly upwards, as though to call on Heaven and the future to avenge his miserable fate. He panted for breath, and terrible anguish was depicted in his face. His thoughts flashed back perhaps, in that instant, far away to his German home, where a yellow-haired maiden sat sadly by the hearth, and his blind old mother wept for his return; away to the hills of the Black Forest, where in the happy days of his freedom, he had hunted the chamois and the wild goat, or gathered the alpine rose for a wreath for that golden head. He clenched his fist and his lips quivered. Then suddenly his expression settled into dull resignation; he bent his head and silently awaited his death-blow. He was too well schooled as a gladiator, not to know that, by all the rules of the art, he must yield and die.

Tumelicus came up to do the office of executioner; he drove his knife in just below the shoulder blade, into his antagonist's heart. The Suevian fell on his knees, gazing fixedly at the ground. The Cheruscan slowly drew out his weapon, and a gush of blood sprinkled the victor with its red flood.

The air shook with the storm of applause; the Emperor himself approved. But it was especially the fairer portion of the spectators, who seemed beside themselves with delight. Leaina clapped so indefatigably, that it seemed doubtful whether she did it out of sheer pleasure, or rather to display her round, plump arms. Lycoris too, naturally swam with the stream, though less eagerly than her companion. She seemed somewhat languid and indifferent to-day.

When the storm of plaudits had somewhat subsided, a handsome youth, dressed as Mercury, appeared on the scene. He had silver sandals with wings; he carried an iron staff, red-hot at one end. It was his duty to touch the body of the fallen gladiator with the hot iron, to make sure that life was extinct. The Suevian, however, seemed still to breathe, though he had lost consciousness.

Mercury signed to a servant, who stood in the doorway with a shining axe in his hand, ready to give the '*coup de grace*' to the victim. One mighty stroke—as a butcher might fell an ox—and all was over. Immediately a second ruffian came forward with a harpoon in his hand. He struck it into the bleeding corpse, with brutal force, and the remains of the hapless Marcus were dragged away to the Porta Libitinensis—the gate of the dead.

The whole scene was repeated twice more, and in neither case did the people respite the conquered victim. They seemed possessed with a special blood-thirstiness. It was not till the fourth scene, a tilting-match, when a rider, who was a favorite with the women, happened to be unhorsed, that their thumbs were turned up, so that the admired and splendid champion, who had so often proved victorious and the hero of many a gallant adventure, should be respited to achieve future deeds of valor. His antagonist's lance had pierced his thigh; cries of "*Habet*,"^[149] resounded from the upper galleries, and when the women had pronounced in his favor, three slaves came forward and carried him away with the utmost care.

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These single combats on foot and horseback were only introductory. The fights with wild beasts were now to begin. When the servants had strewn the arena with sand^[150] and, so far as possible, hidden the traces of blood, the master of the ceremonies appeared once more, and proclaimed: "The criminal, Calenus, condemned as a Nazarene, will fight with a mountain lion from Gaetulia."

"Calenus, a wretch—one of the brood of traitors,^[151] and a contemner of the gods!" said the stranger behind Lycoris.

The door opened, and two slaves led forward the tall, solemn figure of the sightless man, with his long snow-white hair. He held in his hands a wooden cross, the symbol of his faith, the only weapon that the tyrant's ferocity had vouchsafed him.

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"He was a soldier," their unknown informant whispered, "and often punished for his insubordination. Let us see how he will behave himself now!"

"How can he fight?" said Lycoris, "he is blind. Only see how helplessly he stands there; he does not know which way to turn."

"Blindness cannot save a criminal from punishment."

"Punishment, by all means; but the master of the ceremonies said a fight!"

"Well, and why not?" said the young man scornfully. "The Nazarenes declare, that their cross is a mighty weapon, and that their God shows them a path even in darkness."

Lycoris turned away; her eye fell on Barbillus. The handsome and expressive head of the oriental priest had a strange, fixed and lifeless look. And, in truth, the scene, which was now going forward in the arena, was well calculated to excite and impress such a man as Barbillus. He, absolutely bereft of convictions, felt the power of faith come home to his soul as a strange phenomenon. Brought up in his early youth by priests, and then trained at Athens in philosophy and sophistry, he had always been accustomed to regard everything supernatural from the vantage ground of mere self-interested trickery. The more devoutly and zealously his credulous followers gave themselves up to this jugglery, the more convinced he felt, that all faith was the result of a sickly hallucination—particularly in women, a disorder of the system, which must be dissipated like mist by the rough breath of reality. And that this ecstatic frenzy should carry grave and ripe men so far, that they could cling to it in defiance of the law of the land, and sacrifice their lives to a death of excruciating torment—this to the sensitive physique of the Asiatic was astounding, shocking! It was incomprehensible; a man—to all appearance a well-educated man, while his lofty brow indicated superior capacity—and that man believed! That man was at the point of death in witness of his belief—and he did not even tremble.

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Barbillus pressed his hand to his heart, which seemed to be rising into his throat, and his breath rattled as he drew it.

The door, which barred the egress of the wild beasts from the dens, now opened. A lion came bounding into the arena, paused, looked round him, licked his fangs, and gave a mighty roar. Suddenly he started back a step or two. Calenus, who till this minute had stood upright, had dropped on to his knees; and clasping his cross with both hands, he held it up towards heaven, praying audibly:

"Jesus Christ, my Lord and Saviour! behold me about to die for Thy sake. And in dying I declare before all men: Thou alone art the Light and the Truth. O God, my God, have mercy upon me, for Thy Son's sake, who died upon the cross for the redemption of the world."

Dull murmurs, jeering laughter, and a few words of pity were heard as the blind man ended his prayer. The priest of Isis had turned paler than ever and perfectly rigid; he leaned forward; the veins in his forehead swelled, and his lips quivered. A thousand dancing flashes mocked his sight. His whole spirit was in torment under a fearful and paralyzing vision.

The cross, which the blind-man raised skywards, seemed to grow till it was four, five times as tall as the kneeling man. The galleries of the amphitheatre were deserted. The senators and vestal virgins vanished in smoke; the Sovereign of the World and his court were lost in thin air; every living creature was swallowed up in the yawning depths of a vast gulf. The splendid arcades were empty and silent, the marble and stucco facings dropped away from the pillars, clinking as they

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fell, till the rough masonry and brickwork of the main structure stood unadorned and bare. Nettles, darnel and ferns sprouted from every seam. Crows and daws fluttered in flocks from arch to arch, filling the air with melancholy croaking—but still, down there in the arena, the cross stood up on its stone plinth, the triumphant emblem of a despised faith, whose adherents were torn to pieces to feast lions and tigers by Caesar’s commands.

Barbillus sat gazing at the awful picture, that his brain had raised, his eyes almost starting out of his head. He wanted to shriek, but he was speechless; only a choked rattle came from his lips, a groan of torture and terror. Utterly overpowered and bewildered, he covered his face with his robe. A roar of applause roused him from his trance, and he looked up once more. The hideous vision was gone. There sat Caesar on his purple throne, and the wind still flapped the waving screen. A hoarse growl resounded through the arena, the lion crouched for his spring, and in a moment was standing victorious over the body of his defenceless prey. Calenus was no more than a bleeding and lifeless mass.

Barbillus rose from his seat, tottering and half-stunned; the ground seemed to burn under his feet. He hastily made his way out. “When, when is this vision to be fulfilled?”^[152] he asked in his trembling soul. Then he rushed home, bolted himself up in his room, and wrote:

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“I, Barbillus, the priest of Isis, saw on the second day of the secular games, in the sixteenth year of Domitian, a wonderful vision—whether sent me by the gods (if gods there be), or a trick played me by some *daemon*. I thought I saw with these eyes things which were not there to be seen....” So he wrote, and told his story.

In the Flavian Amphitheatre meanwhile—the Coliseum as it is now called—the bloody festival goes on—only interrupted for a while by the dinner-hour—till supper-time puts an end to it for today.^[153] Tired and exhausted, but not yet satiated with blood, the Roman people withdraw to the triclinium, to discuss the incidents of the day over sparkling Falernian or the muddy liquor of Veii. All are looking forward to the morrow, for each day of this glorious festival is to be more delightful than the last.

Lycoris and her friend went to Stephanus. Parthenius, Clodianus, and the colonel of the body-guard, supped with Caesar. Rome was quiet, Rome was happy. So, at least, said Clodianus in the speech in which he proposed health to Caesar, the glorious president over these unequalled centennial games, and drank it in Opimian wine.

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CHAPTER XVIII.

The sudden reappearance of Eurymachus had been extremely agitating to the steward. Satisfaction, alarm, hatred and surprise, struggled in his mind for the upper-hand. He at once gave up all idea of going to the Amphitheatre, and, with his own hand he locked the slave, heavily fettered, into the remotest and securest hiding-place in his house. He was devoured by a feverish anxiety to know what Lycoris could have to say in the matter, and, having neglected, in his surprise, to question the two men-at-arms, he supposed the accidental meeting to have been planned beforehand, and thought that it was Lycoris, who had herself recognized the escaped slave and given him in charge. The whole day he tormented himself with trying to guess how it had all happened, and in his morbid restlessness he did nothing but walk about from one room to another. At last, as the supper-hour drew near, he began to wonder whether it would not be better to put the man, whose existence was a standing threat to him, out of the world at once, without waiting for the Massilian's arrival. In pursuance of this idea he opened a case of weapons and took out a dagger. He slowly polished the keen blade, which had been the costly gift of a Parthian chief, whom he had been able to oblige. One blow with this blue, gleaming steel, and the incubus would be removed for ever.

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He set his lips firmly; the idea gained ground as he thought it over. As a persecuted slave, who must have lived in the fear of being at any moment recognized and seized, Eurymachus could hardly, up to the present hour, have revealed the secret that incriminated his master, to any one but his fellow Nazarenes and accomplices; and they, under the ban of the law and threatened with the same punishment as himself, had the most urgent reasons for keeping it and themselves dark. But what if Eurymachus, even now, were to find an opportunity?—Perhaps even the men who had taken him?—But no; such sharp practitioners would have taken advantage of it ere this, in the hope of extracting a splendid bribe. But Lycoris? some bold hint from the wretch might have betrayed the secret to her, and then Stephanus would be as completely at the mercy of this woman, as she had, ere this, been at his. For she hated him—on that point he had no doubt whatever. And if she wished to see the slave, on what valid pretence could he, Stephanus, refuse.

He slipped the dagger into its sheath again and hid it in his tunic; then he called a slave and desired him to light a hand-lamp. This he took in his left-hand, and went to the room where Eurymachus lay, half-stunned as it seemed, on the stone floor.

"At last I have you in my power," muttered the steward, setting the lamp down on the ledge. "And this time, by the gods, you do not escape me!"

Eurymachus did not reply; he looked up with dull indifference.

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"Where have you been hiding yourself this last half-year?" Stephanus went on. "Will you speak, or shall I loosen your tongue by the help of this dagger?"

He drew out the weapon and stepped forward. The slave raised his head with a melancholy smile.

"I understand," he said, "you have come to finish your work. You are afraid of me. After suffering so long from the misery of terror, you want to make away with the witness of your crime. But you are mistaken. That dreaded secret will not die with me. Cneius Afranius knows it, and sooner or later he will make himself heard. But kill me all the same. For me death can hardly hold more terrors than life."

Stephanus had dropped his arms by his side; a flash of implacable hatred glared in his eyes.

"Wretch! you dared.... But you triumph too soon; Afranius is an exile, banned as a traitor...."

"By Caesar," added Eurymachus. "But even Caesars are mortal and human. Take my word for it, that exile will see an end. The wrath of God is hanging over the head of the tyrant, who gives the servants of God to be devoured by beasts. Your accuser will return and demand justice of a tribunal, that you cannot bribe as you did the judges to whom Thrax Barbatius appealed for his rights."

"Mean slave!" cried Stephanus furious. "And what is there to prevent me from having you racked and tortured, till every nerve in your body writhes with anguish like a worm?"

"Well, satisfy your vengeance. Throw me into the lowest depths of your ergastulum, and leave me there to rot before I die. Send me to join your father—aye, your father—for I know it, and Afranius knows it—it was not your uncle even, but your own father, who was the victim of your brutal crime."

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"Silence!" roared Stephanus, "or I will murder you!" and he flew at the slave. But something in the man's lofty indifference again stayed the blow.

"Is it loathing and horror of yourself, that hold you back?" asked Eurymachus. "Aye, shudder, Stephanus, and quail! Yes—I saw him, the hapless wretch, half-mad on his filthy bed of straw. I shuddered at it too, as if hell had shown me its horrors, and I thanked God, even with tears, when I knew that in that very hour the suffering soul was free. For three dreadful years, immured by his own son, bereft of life and hope, fed like a beggar's dog—and this for the sake of filthy lucre, which you would certainly have had in the course of time! Why, the bloodiest patricide is

meritorious, when compared with your crime!”

Then suddenly drawing himself up, he went on:

“Listen to me, and mark well what I say. I was in safety—free, and as a *free* man could laugh at your penalties and your threats. Then I learnt that Quintus Claudius, who once did me a great benefit, was cast into prison; I learnt that the Senate had condemned him to die for the faith’s sake. From that moment I had but one idea: to free him at the risk of my own life—as he once freed me. I hastened hither from Germania, where I had found a peaceful though laborious refuge, and across Gaul to the sea. At Massilia I took a place on board a galley that was short-handed, and served as a rower to reach Ostia—thus I got to Rome two days before your bloody sports began. Here indeed I find news to shake my soul; I heard, that the dearest treasure I possessed on earth had died a most pitiable death. But even this dreadful news could not divert me from the end I had in view. I thought, schemed, considered—all in vain. It was too late for any elaborate plans, and I had no means of effecting a bold stroke. So I determined at least to offer one last consolation to the friend I could not save: the consolation of knowing that one heart on earth beat true. For the glory of our common faith I intended, as soon as Quintus Claudius should appear on the arena, to hasten down to meet him, to thank him once more for the infinite, loving kindness he has shown to a poor slave, and to suffer the same death by his side. Then your spies seized me. Well, who knows whether this disaster, which at first drove me to despair, is not rather the merciful dealing of Providence? You are all-powerful; your wisdom rules the Empress. I swear to you by that God whom we confess, unshaken even in death, that I will not only be silent myself as to your crime, but that I will bind over Afranius to do likewise, if you will use your influence to save Quintus Claudius.”

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“Impossible!” said Stephanus with a gasp. “I hate him, he is my enemy, he must die.”

“Does that mean, that you have reason to fear him too if he lives?”

“Precisely,” said Stephanus, scowling.

“Do not be uneasy; a Christian forgives his enemies. Believe me, Cneius Afranius is a far more dangerous foe; and yet, I swear solemnly....”

“Folly!” interrupted the steward. “Even if I took your word for it, so far as you are concerned, who shall warrant me, that Cneius Afranius will listen to you?”

“My solemn oath. Afranius will do what I promise in his name, if I tell him that I pledged his word for the life of Quintus.”

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“Stephanus! Stephanus!...” It was the girlish voice of the lad Antinous who, now that his master had given him his freedom, called him quite familiarly by his name.

The steward hastily sheathed and hid the dagger, and hurried out of the room. He locked the door carefully and went to meet the boy, who had come to announce the arrival of Lycoris and Leaina. They came in at the same moment; Leaina with formal politeness, Lycoris almost with vehemence.

“Where is he? where have you put him?” she asked. “I must speak to him, I must question him!”

“I do not understand,” said Stephanus evasively. “Explain yourself.”

“Presently, my good friend, after supper; but, for the present, just take my sweet Leaina into your handsomest parlor and pay her a few compliments on her fine scented hair.^[154] You are expecting other guests of course—they may arrive at any moment. Meanwhile, leave me alone with your prisoner—I want to find out from him, how on earth he succeeded in making a Nazarene of Quintus Claudius.”

“What interest can you take in the question?”

“The interest of curiosity—and something more. Do you suppose we women remain quite indifferent, when the handsomest man in Rome is thrown to the lions?”

“He ought to be left to us,” laughed Leaina; “we should demolish him more tenderly.”

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“But, I beg of you....” said Stephanus, paying no heed to Leaina. “If it were known—what would people think?”

“Anything they please. Make haste; where is he? I am dying to hear what he has to say.”

“Very well....” said Stephanus, shrugging his shoulders, and with an unsteady hand he unlocked the door again, went into the room, and whispered to the slave. “I will see what can be done for Quintus Claudius—meanwhile, not a word—or....”

He ended with a horribly suggestive gesture. Then he added in a louder tone:

“Here is a lady, who wants some information as to your relations with Quintus Claudius; answer her with due respect and strict regard to truth.”

The bronze lamp was still standing on the shelf. Lycoris went in and closed the door behind her, while Stephanus, with a heavy heart, conducted Leaina to the peristyle where, in a few minutes, they were joined by Martial and a few other guests, who vied with each other in their attentions to the graceful and coquettish Asiatic.

Then they went to table. The first dish had been handed round, the first cup was emptied—Lycoris was still with the prisoner. At last Stephanus sent a messenger, who returned with an indefinite answer. A quarter of an hour slipped by; the steward was growing impatient. He sent a second messenger, who, to his great astonishment, brought back the reply that Lycoris felt ill, and begged to be excused if she did not join them in the triclinium.

Stephanus started to his feet. What nonsense was this? Did this saucy jade take him for a fool? or was she making common cause with the foe? Who could tell whether this private meeting with Eurymachus had not been instigated by Parthenius? After all that Stephanus had heard from Clodianus, there was nothing he might not expect at the hands of the wire-puller at the Palatium....

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He excused himself to his guests with a jest, and hastened to the room where he had left Lycoris. What was his astonishment at finding the young Massilian sitting on the floor by the slave, and bathed in tears; while Eurymachus, with a faint flush on his face, was exhorting her in grave and solemn tones, and only ceased speaking as Stephanus appeared in the doorway.

The Massilian rose and dried her eyes and cheeks.

"I thank you heartily," she said with a deep sigh; "you have lifted a burden from my soul—ah! I never knew till now how intolerable it was."

"What is going on here?" asked Stephanus, suspiciously. "You are weeping? Will you have the goodness to explain to me...?"

"Not now. No, nor presently! You could never understand what it is that moves me. How pale you are! I verily believe you are afraid of your slave there. You do not know, that his noble soul forgives you? But you, too, must try to overcome the hatred that possesses you. You must grant the slave his freedom, and give him the means of quitting Rome in secret and in safety. Nay, more; you must now, at once, make a last effort to mitigate the fate of Quintus Claudius. I wish it—I demand it—I insist upon it—and, let me tell you, I am in a position to enforce my commands. Nay, you need not scowl so; I mean it."

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"Lycoris!" exclaimed Stephanus, trembling in every limb, "do not forget to whom you owe everything, and what you rose from."

"From bog and mire, I know it well—but not to struggle all my life-long in the slough of dependence. You have counted without your host, Stephanus! I am no longer your tool. It is you yourself who, without knowing it, have shown me the path to freedom. One sign from me, and Parthenius will crush you to the earth. I have paid dearly for my power, bought it with sin and disgrace—but I mean to use it. Go, Stephanus, and fulfil the behests of the miserable and despised creature, on whose neck you once could have set your foot."

Before Stephanus could reply, Antinous, his familiar, was standing before him, offering him a note. "A message from the Empress," he said, out of breath.

Stephanus opened it and read:

"Domitia to her Steward. I must speak with you at once, this instant"

"I will come," said Stephanus, with a side glance at Lycoris. "The messenger can say, that I am close behind him. And now, Lycoris—I cannot wait—I promise you...."

"Well, what?"

"All—everything," he said in utter bewilderment, "only give me time to breathe."

They went together out of the cell, and Stephanus himself locked the door; then he seized Lycoris by her wrist and his eyes had a sinister roll.

"I beg of you," he said, "take my place with my guests."

"Certainly," she replied. "But you—do not forget."

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"Serpent!" he snarled between his teeth as he hastily quitted the room.

Domitia received him with unwonted ceremony, and in that same rose-colored room into which she had once before admitted him. She was handsomer than ever.

"Stephanus," she began. "You have carried out your task with a mastery, that almost makes me tremble. I am standing face to face with a splendid triumph, and yet—the gods know! I do not rejoice in it. I am told that Quintus Claudius is as calm and unshaken as a demi-god. To-day, as I saw the beasts standing over their gory prey, I pictured him to myself—him...! Stephanus, even at this last moment, you must stem the current and divert it into some happier channel. You may call me faithless—false; I cannot help it, I refuse you the reward of your cruel services, unless you succeed even now in saving Quintus Claudius."

"But Madam, you crush me to the earth," cried Stephanus in accents of unfeigned despair. "You too...! But how can I...? If you yourself have not the power...."

"You must achieve, what your mistress has failed in doing. I have asked his pardon of Caesar, and have been refused—perhaps for no other reason, but that it was I who asked it. I loathe the fate, which thus humiliates me! And you, Stephanus, can you risk your life for your mistress?"

"For the prize of your love? my life a thousand times over."

"Well then—but come close that I may speak low. I know, that during the last few months you have often in secret paid visits to Clodianus; ah! your surprise is in itself a confession. You are compromised, past all escape; but fear nothing! I know all. Now, perhaps, you may understand what has hitherto puzzled you: why I have tried to influence Parthenius through Lycoris.—Now, tell me, how would you like to see Domitia, your sovereign, Empress of the World?"

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"Madam—I am bewildered, helpless; too much is coming upon me at once. I confess..."

"Now, consider what you have to do. If the sceptre were in my hand this day, Quintus Claudius would be pardoned. But, as it is, my will is a mere breath beating vainly against the rock of perversity and cruelty. It is all the same, you must save him—I swear it, by my wrath, by my love!"

"Oh! this is torment, martyrdom! What an incredible revulsion; is your revenge already slaked? And supposing I could save him—who knows whether you might not then reproach me, for having yielded to the request you insist on so vehemently to-day? Then, once more, I should be cheated of heaven and plunged deeper than ever into the gulf of despair."

"I swear to you by Styx, that dark river by which the gods themselves swear: I am yours, as soon as Quintus is saved. You must see, Stephanus, offended pride has gone too far. Have you not heard, that his father is on his death-bed? Pity will have its way, if only for the guiltless father's sake. I too will claim the privilege of the gods and forgive. Now, leave me, Stephanus—go, set to work at once."

"I have no notion how.—But Domitia commands, and I obey. Such a passion as mine dares even the impossible."

He left the room.

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"I am but a weak creature," said Domitia to herself, "but I am under a spell. The idea came suddenly into my mind like an inspiration from heaven, and I was goaded by it into action. No, no, I cannot bear it; Quintus Claudius a victim to some ravening brute! That noble form, mangled and torn! Sooner would I strangle him with my own hands."

Stephanus went to his own rooms, and there he demeaned himself like a madman. What curse was this, that had fallen upon him, in this absurd demand from three quarters at once? Had he triumphed so signally over Quintus Claudius, only to lose his vantage-ground; had he so painfully raised an edifice only to strike it into ruins with his own hand? Besides, how was he to do the odious task in so short a time? It was enough to drive him mad.

For the first time in many years the most unheard-of thing occurred: Stephanus, the courtly man of the world, entirely forgot his company. He had left them at table and did not even return to apologize. He paced his study incessantly like a tiger in his cage, and when at last Lycoris came in search of him, his face was furious, his eyes bloodshot, his lips livid.

"What has happened?" asked Lycoris horrified.

"Has the boy made fools of you all?" shrieked the steward, hoarse with rage. "Away with you—go! You see I am incapable of attending to you!"

"Oh! I am going. But do not forget—every minute is precious."

On the following morning, at the earliest gloaming, Quintus Claudius was conducted from the dungeons of the Tullianum to the underground cells of the Amphitheatre;^[155] and with him were Cornelia and some of the other Nazarenes. About fifty were reserved for the last days of the festival.

The procession of the condemned moved silently along the Via Sacra; as they passed through the arch of Titus and the yellow grey of the eastern sky fell upon their faces, they looked like a file of corpses. Cornelia was as pale as death, and her eyes looked larger than ever. Only Quintus seemed to have lost little of his handsome and elastic youthfulness during these months of imprisonment.

The prisoners were all, without exception, calm and composed. Even those few who, when they first set out, had wept and lamented, soon recovered their firmness when they saw that of their fellow-sufferers.

Cornelia herself was perfectly unmoved. Though she had no ground for that happy assurance and sustaining comfort, which her companions found in their confident faith, she was invincible through her stolid contempt for life which, now that all hope was over, seemed to petrify her spirit and her senses. To live without Quintus was simply impossible. If Fate would not relinquish this victim, if the dark sisters were inexorable to her overwhelming grief, she could have but one wish: to die with the man she loved. To be free from this torment, to vanish into nothingness; this was the one idea that possessed her soul. Even the horror of the last scene of all—the dishonor of standing as a spectacle to the gaping crowd, the agonizing pain under the fangs of the beasts—of all this she took no account. And so it came to pass that she, disbelieving and hopeless, she who so lately tore her hair like one demented—now, on the road to death, bore herself as bravely as the staunchest confessors of the Redeemer; nay, more bravely than some. And the passing glance, a look from soul to soul, that she had exchanged with Quintus as they came out of the prison—the first for so many weeks—had only fanned this passionate desire for annihilation and eternal rest to a fiercer flame.

That look had had a very different effect on her lover. After struggling in the loneliness of a dark cell, and triumphing at length over all that could chain him to life; after a hundred victories over every torture of mind and body, won in the glorious name of duty; the fervent Christian, who hoped confidently that the Son of God would support those who endured such dreadful torment through faith in his sufferings, and that he would, through these torments, work their salvation—this unwavering hero quailed as at a new grief, when he saw the wasted form of the beautiful young girl. For the first time, since Caesar's message of impossible respite had been brought to him, the thought flashed through his brain: Three beasts! could it be hoped for? But the flash vanished before it could dazzle him.—A gladiator's short blade and a Gaetolian lion! Verily it was only adding mockery to brutality, if Caesar called this mercy!

Nevertheless the idea had found place in his mind, and though his reason rejected it at once and absolutely, it haunted the background of his thoughts.

How greatly must Cornelia love him, if merely out of defiance, merely to force him to recant, she could declare her adherence to the doomed sect, whom in her heart she scorned. What self-immolation, worthy of the highest crown. Or had a ray of that saving light fallen on her heart? Quintus felt it a duty to be sure on this point. Now, in the face of death, she could not deny the divine truth of the doctrine of Salvation; if she still should do so, well, she must and should, at that supreme moment, speak the truth—deny the faith, save her life and learn to believe afterwards perhaps. He did not know, that Cornelia was guilty also of attempting Caesar's life; that corrupt witnesses had represented this deed, not as a desperate stroke for self-defence, but as an act of revenge for her uncle's exile, and that the verdict had pronounced it a crime in the first degree.

When they reached the vaulted cells of the Amphitheatre, the victims were relieved of their fetters and well supplied with food and drink, that they might not appear too miserable in face of the final catastrophe; some, indeed, who refused to eat, were compelled to do so by force. After this they were left to themselves. The two exits from the vaults were barred and guarded on the outside.

Then many a heart-rending scene took place in those damp and dimly-lighted caverns; in every corner there was a group, whispering, praying, weeping.

On a stone bench near the chief entrance sat our worthy Diphilus, his eyes fixed on his young wife, Euterpe, who was kneeling before him, her face hidden in his lap.

"And you forgive me?" she sobbed; "you forgive me for everything? Oh I have been very wicked; I have been a miserable sinner, and do not deserve that you should call me your wife."

Her husband gently stroked her hair, but he did not speak; he seemed lost in thought. She, however, sobbed incessantly: "Forgive me, oh forgive me!" Then clasping her hands, she prayed: "O God! All-merciful Father, do not desert us! Have pity on Thy children for Jesus Christ's sake! Almighty God, comfort us and have mercy on us!"

Presently she got up and sat down by the side of her speechless husband; she threw her arms round him and kissed him.

"Tell me," she whispered, and she shuddered, "what prayer shall I say in the last awful moment, when they are tearing my limbs? But oh! it is impossible; God can never leave us to die like this. No, He cannot, He cannot. No earthly father would, why then should our Father in Heaven? Say, Diphilus, he will send us an angel to bear us away to the land of joy and peace? It is only to try us—say, Diphilus."

"My poor child," said Diphilus, and he broke into tears.

And then she began again, chattering in her sweet, silly way, till at last, almost while she was speaking, her eyelids closed, and her head sank gently on his breast; she was asleep—and in a few hours her round young limbs were to be mangled by beasts of prey.

There was another couple of senatorial rank there besides Quintus and Cornelia: the consul, Flavius Clemens,^[156] a man of blameless character and the highest merit, and with him his noble wife. Both in calm and silent resignation had joined a group, that had gathered round a girl of eight, who had sunk into a decline in consequence of her long imprisonment. Her father, an artisan from the Subura, had carried the poor child in his arms from one prison to the other. She was now half sitting and leaning against the wall, looking round her with large, ghastly-bright eyes, while her father held her hands and listened to her words as though they were a revelation from Heaven.

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"Do not cry, father dear," she said coaxingly. "That good angel, that has so often come to me, will not have your Cynthia torn by lions. He is coming to fetch me away. There—there—where the wall is open and you see the blue sky through—he is there in the sunshine."

A faint smile fled across the wasted face, transient and melancholy as the last rosy hue of an autumn sunset. She closed her eyes, but opened them again at once in rapt ecstasy.

"Good-night, father," she said with a sigh. "I am going first, up into that bright and glorious heaven. When the time comes, and your heart is breaking with terror and pain, remember me, father, and do not forget that I shall be praying to God to give you strength and courage to the last. Oh father, I thank you too for having loved me so much, and for having taught me to know the Saviour, and taken care of me in all your trouble. And I thank you too, dear good friends, and I will pray to God for you all as well. What a glorious sight! I can see far, far away into the gates of light. Yes, Angel of Hope, I am ready to follow you. Kiss me, father, once more, for He has got my hand—He is flying, dragging me up—up...." her arms fell into her lap, and she sighed deeply. Then she lay still, as if she had gone to sleep.

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"Cynthia, my child!" cried the father, and with a loud sob he pressed the cold, slender hands to his furrowed face.

"She is dead!" he said. "God's mercy has spared her the worst."

The by-standers, who had so victoriously lived down their own sufferings, stood deeply moved at the sight of the gentle, innocent creature, that had been held captive like a criminal, and almost literally tortured to death.

"It is well with her!" said Flavius Clemens, clasping his weeping wife in his arms.

Calmer than all else, as it appeared, was the half-whispered dialogue between Quintus and Cornelia. Each was endeavoring to utter what was bursting their hearts, but in as indifferent a tone and with as little gesture as possible, so as not to attract the attention of their fellow-prisoners.

"Listen, Cornelia," whispered Quintus, hardly daring to open his lips. "You are here solely in the hope of urging me to recant. It is not true, that you are really condemned to death?"

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Cornelia looked him in the lace with a bitter smile.

"Of urging you to recant?" she repeated slowly. "Alas! if any sufferings of mine could have softened your heart, we should never have come to this! Why, you would see me torn to pieces ten times over by wild beasts, before you would yield a jot of what you call the truth. No, Quintus, it is quite true. You did not care to live with your devoted Cornelia—very good; then if you must suffer death, Cornelia dies too. It is as simple as a nursery rhyme."

Quintus shuddered.

"But could any one condemn you?" he said. "You are not one of the sect."

"I pronounced myself guilty—and they believed me."

"Then you deceived your judges. Or has what was untrue become the truth by the force of conviction?"

Cornelia haughtily shook her head.

"My dearest," said Quintus, hardly able to control his grief, "you are destroying my last hope of comfort. Ah Cornelia! if we could but have died united in a common faith! But as it is, woe to us both, Cornelia; your death is in itself a sin."

"You alone are guilty of it."

"I!" cried Quintus, in utter despair; his voice spoke grief too great for words, and Cornelia's eyes humbly implored forgiveness.

"But how can I force my heart to submit?" she said as gently as an ill-used child. "Can I wish to live, if you die? Or again, can I believe what my reason condemns as a fable? Oh! I am not laughing at it, as I did when I first went to see you in prison! I feel now that faith is an invincible force, and gives bliss and strength even in the hour of death. And yet it seems to me a madness, a delirium of raving fancy. No, I cannot believe, however much I may desire it. My faith in Isis made me strong too—and it was all a lie, foul and base treachery. Ah! Quintus, Quintus, you are sacrificing your young and promising life for a mere dream, a delusion, a shadow—throwing everything away for an empty bubble!"

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"My poor Cornelia!" said Quintus deeply moved. "The greatest idea, that ever dawned in the mind of man, you call a delusion and a dream. It is true, perhaps, that many of the aspects under which we shadow forth this great conception are petty and childish, for we are but weak and helpless mortals. But the essential part, the living principle which lies hidden behind these symbols, is true and perfect to all eternity. Poor, hapless Cornelia; how will you find courage to look death in the face; you, forsaken, alone, without a Saviour—hopeless—speechless—when the Nazarene can joyfully murmur the name of Jesus Christ? What prayer, what word of comfort can you find to whisper in that awful moment?"

"Can you ask?" said Cornelia, looking into his eyes. "The last words, that my lips will utter, will be your name, my first, last, only love. My god, my saviour, is called Quintus Claudius."

Quintus could control himself no longer; the tears started to his eyes. He clasped her in his arms and covered her lips, cheeks and brow with passionate kisses.

Thus they stood for a time in an oblivious embrace. Suddenly they heard the roll of drums; a sudden terror fell upon the party of prisoners. This drumming was the signal for the fights in the arena to begin. The scattered groups drew closer together; the flute-player had sprung up with a scream. Some of the men began to bewail themselves and lament loudly, but the consul presently succeeded in controlling this outburst of terror. In a firm, loud voice, he admonished his fellow-victims to emulate the example of the Redeemer, and to remain steadfast through all their torments, so that the sight of their unshaken courage might win Him new disciples among the people. Then he told them how nobly the servants of the Lord had died under Nero; how even when burnt by slow fires, lighted by the hand of Caesar himself, with their latest breath they proclaimed the truth in Christ Jesus. The prisoners listened with growing devotion to his enthusiastic appeal, and the vault was as still as the catacomb used to be, when the little congregation met there for their Feast of Love.

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When Flavius Clemens ceased, a strange sound fell on the ear; it was the clapping and applause of the spectators, which was heard only as lulled by distance, like the tramp of a horse's hoofs over a wooden bridge. The first scene of the bloody performance was over—a fight probably, like that of yesterday, between two gladiators. The fatal moment was drawing nearer and nearer.

Twice or thrice was this fearfully suggestive sound repeated, mixed with confused shouts and wild laughter; heavy steps were heard in the corridor and the principal entrance was unbarred.

The bravest quailed, paralyzed by terror, and stared with glassy eyes at the door, which opened slowly, creaking on its hinges. An armed soldier stood on the threshold, and two others were visible on the steps that led up to the arena.

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"Diphilus, the carpenter, and Euterpe, his wife!" cried the warden in a harsh voice. Diphilus had started up the instant he heard his name called. With his head bent forward, he fixed his gaze on the apparition in the door-way as though he thought he might be dreaming. Euterpe had crept behind him; like a child threatened with punishment, she hid herself behind her husband's stalwart form.

"Come on!" said the man. "Make haste! The people are waiting."

"We are ready," said the carpenter.

"No, no, no!" shrieked Euterpe wildly. "I will be hewn in pieces, before I go up to that horrible blood-stained place. I cannot, Diphilus—no, not if the Lord himself were to appear and command me."

"Woman," said the man-at-arms, "give over whimpering and do not keep me waiting. There is no help for you now; and besides," he added with a jeer, "the beasts will only be all the hungrier."

"Control yourself and pray to God," whispered Diphilus.

"I cannot, I cannot," sobbed Euterpe falling on her knees. "Why must I die—and I am so young, and this world is a very pleasant one! Mercy, for Christ's sake have mercy! No, no, I am not a Christian. I am innocent, indeed I am. I was misled—go and tell Caesar, tell the cruel judges. I cannot die, I will repent before the altar of Jupiter—only let me live, and my good honest Diphilus."

"Miserable, weak creature!" said Flavius Clemens, going up to the distracted woman and stroking her hair with a pitiful smile. "God will forgive you for what you have said in your terror

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of death. It does not come from your heart, and God is love.”

Then turning to the man he said: “Is it not possible to give her a little longer time? If we came first—I and my wife?”

“Impossible,” said the man.

Meanwhile Diphilus had infused some little courage into the trembling Euterpe. She got up, but her knees gave way. He took her up, more dead than alive, and bursting into tears, clasped her in his arms.

The warden signed to his comrades; without saying a word they snatched her from him. One of them, a red-haired Sicambrian, lifted up the slender form of the weeping woman, as if she were a mere plaything, and carried her up the steps. The other two followed with Diphilus, who held himself bravely, and waved a farewell to those who remained behind.

The door fell to with a crash, and no sooner had the footsteps died away, than they heard the signal drum. Most of the prisoners fell on their knees at the horrible sound and raised their hands in passionate supplication. Flavius Clemens, Quintus and Cornelia remained standing.

There was a breathless silence; lips moved but spoke not, only a suppressed sob now and then broke the deathly stillness. Suddenly a convulsive shudder thrilled the worshippers, the dull roar of a lion was heard; involuntarily every eye was more fervently raised and hands were clasped more tightly. Then there was a fearful shriek, shrill, despairing, piercing—and then again the wild applause, the clapping, shouting and laughter.

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“That was Euterpe,” whispered Quintus, pressing his face against the wall.

Nearly two hours went by, before the vault was opened again. The interval was occupied by a series of combats on horseback in grand classical style; and when the man next appeared he hailed twelve of the Christians at once.

It was strange, but the victims were now all calm and composed. The men and women, who at the first appearance of the messenger of death had flinched and quailed, now only betrayed by their shortened breathing, that the door that stood open before them led to death, and not to liberty.

“The Lord give you strength!” cried Flavius Clemens as the door closed upon them, and the remaining handful looked at each other with a sad and wistful smile. Their number was greatly diminished; at every moment the end drew nearer—nearer and more certain.

At noon the noble Flavius was led out to die, and a few minutes later his wife followed him. Then the rest, till at last only Quintus and Cornelia were left in the subterranean vault.

“They have reserved us for the last,” the girl began after a long and painful silence. “The most effective piece to conclude, as the connoisseurs say. Oh! Quintus, the disgrace is worse than the dread of death. Tell me, my dear love, you will not give the mob the triumph they long for, to see you fight like a gladiator? You will obey the voice of pride, which bids us rather turn the sword with calm dignity against our own breast?”

“I shall fight, Cornelia.”

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“Miserable man!” she groaned, hiding her face in her hands. “No worthy Claudius would say so! Or do you hope to be victorious over the lions?”

“I hope nothing, for I know that the short dagger is little better than a toy. But so long as my arm can wield it, I have no right to drop it out of self-conceit. If Providence has so willed, even that puny weapon will avail to fell the foe....”

“You are mad—or rather, I see now your creed is indeed the creed for slaves. It treads the pride of man into the dust.”

“True pride is that, which raises a man above all prejudice—which teaches him to despise scorn and look down on contempt. I know but one law—that of duty. But you, Cornelia, once more I implore you....”

The rattle of the bolts interrupted him; the dreadful moment had come.

For one second, breathless and with his eyes closed, he leaned against the wall. Then he stood calm and defiant Cornelia flung her arms round his neck.

“Say not another word, my own dearest love,” she said, with passionate devotion. “I too know the duty of a true and loving heart. I follow you joyfully, and my last breath is yours. Now be yourself, all yourself, and never think again about me. If I were to be left alone in the world—then indeed I might claim your tears; but, as it is, death cures every ill.”

Quintus felt that Cornelia was equally right from her own point of view, as he, as a Christian, was from his. He kissed her once more on the white and trembling lips, which in happier days had spoken so many a fond and tender word, blessed her for her heroic faithfulness, swearing that in that other unknown land, where they would presently meet again in glory, he would yet save the soul that was one with his own.

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Then he took her hand, and led her up the steps.

The little gate-way was thrown open, and they slowly stepped out on to the arena. Whether it was the intense daylight after the dismal twilight of the dungeon, or their own tension of nerve and sense—they saw nothing; neither the endless ranks of seats, the thousands of heads that filled the Amphitheatre to the top-most course, nor Caesar in his gold-embroidered pulvinar. Everything swam before their eyes in a grey mist, a blank chaos. They were alone, together, in the midst of this vast multitude. At their feet spread the arena with its yellow sands, like an island in an ocean.

Cornelia tottered; she would probably have lost consciousness if the hard rattle of the drum, and immediately after the loud voice of the master of the ceremonies proclaiming the names of the victims, had not startled her into life again.

A servant came up to Quintus, and handed him the short dagger-like sword.

“Be sure to throw it,” he whispered stealthily in his ear.

Quintus, who recovered an un hoped sense of self-protection as soon as he felt himself armed, looked enquiringly in the fellow’s face.

“If you value your life,” the slave repeated, “throw at him, throw the knife.” And he withdrew to his place behind the parapet.

What could he mean? No doubt, if Quintus were close to the lion, even in the event of his striking a fatal blow, it might be considered certain that in his very death-struggle the beast would mangle him. Still, a stab must be surer to hit than a throw; besides which he might be able to stab twice, he could not repeat the throw. The suggestion then must be the malicious trap of some enemy, or at best the brutal joke of a ruffian.

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The doors at the farther end of the arena were now flung open, and an enormous lion, all tawny gold, his wide head loaded with a thick and flowing mane, came calmly and majestically out on to the arena. A large black lock of hair hung over his eyes.

Quintus at once recognized that very beast, which had flung itself so furiously against the bars of its cage as it stood on the quay at Ostia. He clutched the handle of his weapon with a convulsive grip; it suddenly felt so small, so ineffectual, that he thought the spectators that sat watching must laugh at the absurdity.

Cornelia was standing a few paces to one side of Quintus, as pale and motionless as a marble goddess.

The lion came deliberately towards them, and Quintus fixed his eye steadily on the glaring eye of the foe. Suddenly the brute seemed to hesitate. Could he have recognized the face, which had before so roused his ferocity? He lashed his flanks with his sweeping tail, and foaming slaver dripped from his jaws. The muscles of his huge paws twitched to strike—and now he crouched to spring. Every sinew was strained, and the next instant he flung himself straight at Quintus. At the same moment Cornelia had thrown herself in the line of the brute’s attack, while Quintus started aside. The girl’s unexpected movement may have startled the beast; he sprang short, and fell on the ground very near to Quintus, and as he fell the sword pierced his shoulder with such force, that it went up to the hilt.

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What was this? What an unheard-of stroke of skill! The knife had hardly hit the lion, when he sank limp and helpless; he shuddered with a tremendous convulsion, and then rolled over stark and stiff in the sand.—He was dead.

Quintus could not believe his eyes—some demon, he thought, must have tricked his excited senses. How was it possible? One of these monstrous beasts, in whose side half a dozen of lances would sometimes be broken, before their tenacious vitality was spent—and this sudden death had resulted from a single stroke, though, it is true, a shrewd one?

But the uproarious applause of the crowd gave him no time to meditate upon the miracle.

“Mercy for Quintus Claudius!” was shouted in a thousand voices, and from every side.

“Caesar, release him! Pardon for Quintus Claudius!”

Pale as death, his lips set, his brows knit, Caesar sat impassible in the midst of the storm. Clodianus went up to him and, with a meaning smile, whispered something in his ear. Caesar angrily shook his head.^[157]

“Pardon for Quintus Claudius! Pardon for his betrothed!” rang out incessantly, and louder than before, from every part of the Amphitheatre.

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“My lord and husband,” said Domitia, bowing with dignified and well-feigned indifference to her frowning sovereign, “your clemency will save him?”

“Never!” cried Domitian, rising from his seat.

He signed to the herald, and the tumult was hushed.

“Romans!” said Caesar in a voice like distant thunder. “You are demanding mercy for a man, who pronounced his own sentence of death. He had his life in his own hands. One word, one single word of recantation, and he was free. His obstinacy refused to speak the word. Romans, Caesar

pardons none but those who repent.”

“None but cowards!” shouted a voice from the top-seats.

“Pardon for Quintus Claudius!” the shouting began again—the building seemed to tremble at the terrific uproar.

“Quintus,” murmured Cornelia, closing her eyes, “speak the word, that will set you free! You will not escape your fate a second time. Quintus, if ever you loved me....”

A melancholy smile and a look of utter devotion were the only response.

Again Clodianus made some remark, in an undertone, to the wrathful sovereign, and once more the herald commanded silence.

“I am merciful and kind,” said Caesar. “I am always glad to fulfil the desires of my beloved Romans, so far as it is possible. But here I am bound by duty. The utmost I can grant is a reprieve. For this day the criminal is respited from carrying on the struggle. He may have time to recover himself and collect his strength; then victory may crown his efforts a second and a third time. Then, my faithful Romans, your heart’s desire will be fulfilled, and the object of your sympathy will be free!”

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A murmur of discontent rose from the disappointed people; however, they felt that any farther insistence would be useless, if not rash. They had not failed to observe that, at the very beginning of the tumult, Domitian had beckoned the commander of the body-guard to his side, and when he was in this frame of mind some violent measures on the Emperor’s part were only too probable. [158] “Good counsel prevails over revenge,” said the voice from the upper circle.

The master of the ceremonies hastened to lead Quintus and Cornelia away. The dead lion, which lay with its long blue-black tongue hanging out of its foaming jaws, was dragged off through one of the gates, and the arena hastily strewn with fresh sand. A fight between a little girl of thirteen and a dwarf [159] soon put the incidents of Quintus’ struggle out of the heads of the spectators, and by the end of the day, when the whole arena was flooded with water and a magnificent naval fight was performed, [160] few indeed remembered the brave youth and his pale, beautiful companion.

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Few—but still some did.

First of these was Caesar, who swore that he never would consent to save the life of a man, whom Cornelia would follow to death rather than enjoy the favors of Caesar. All the emptiness and nothingness of his existence had come home to his conscience, as he looked on at that life and death fight. He, who was only hated and feared, felt at that moment a wild hunger for love and constancy; but this impulse, in itself so purely human, at once assumed, in his degraded soul, the form of aggravated vindictiveness.

Then, there was Domitia. Her hatred, which had long been dying out, broke down altogether under the impression of what she had just witnessed—even her hatred for Cornelia, her happy and envied rival, over whose death in lingering torment the rancorous Empress had so long gloated in fancy.

Shortly after the beginning of the naumachia Domitia quitted the amphitheatre and returned to the palace, where her steward met her.

“Is my Lady and Mistress content?” he inquired in abject tones.

“Content?” repeated Domitia. “And is it any merit of yours if he won the victory in an unequal fight?”

“Madam,” said Stephanus, “the time was short, and every effort to move Caesar failed. I used the only means, that lay within my power. Or did you really suppose, that a Gaetolian lion could be killed like a hare with a nip of the hunter’s fingers? The dagger was poisoned.”

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“Ah! I understand....” She would have said more, but Polycharma rushed breathless into the room.

“I want Stephanus—a messenger from the amphitheatre....”

“Bid him come in,” said the Empress.

A young man handed a note to the steward. Stephanus turned pale as he read it, and he closed his eyes as if blinded by a flash.

“Go, it is well,” he stammered, and he crushed the letter in his hand.

“What has happened?” asked Domitia.

“Madam—the worst that can happen. The master of the ceremonies suspects—the trick is discovered.”

The Empress flushed crimson.

“Then you no longer have Quintus alone to save, but yourself too, Stephanus. Your life is at stake as well as his. Remember, consider the reward that awaits you! Let Rome perish if need be, but

prevent that last, worst....”

“You command, and I obey.”

CHAPTER XX.

Day was dying; the sun sank, blood-red, into the Tyrrhenian sea. The Capitol and the arches of the Amphitheatre still glowed in fiery purple, when the streets already lay in cool twilight. Then the last glory died away from their topmost crests, and the blue darkness stole up the walls; night enveloped the pleasure-loving crowd and their martyred victims—at last the people seemed to have had their fill. They poured out of the Amphitheatre like an overflowing stream, over the Forum, through the Vicus Cyprius and the neighboring streets.

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While Rome was resting and refreshing itself after the exciting pleasures of the day, and giving itself up to the sweet influences of the warm spring evening, six noble ships were flying before the wind from the island of Igilium.^[161] At about three hours before midnight the vessels came to anchor close by Alsium^[162] and landed their passengers—three cohorts of picked men—without let or hindrance. The son of the Proprætor of Lugdunensis, was at their head, and with him were Caius Aurelius Menapius and the one-armed centurion. The Proprætor himself was advancing with the rest of the forces by the main north road, the Via Cassia,^[163] and had already reached Clusium,^[164] while the rest of the conspirators were coming round south-eastwards with a smaller following from Luna,^[165] and Pisae^[166] to Rusellæ,^[167] to join the Proprætor's troops at the Forum Cassii.^[168]

Domitian knew only of the advance of the Proprætor, and still supposed that it was in fulfilment of his own orders. Completely hoodwinked as he was by Clodianus, he had himself insisted on reinforcements within the city itself. The adjutant had indeed here taken advantage of the circumstance, that Caesar had received repeated and mysterious warnings that a great conspiracy was on foot. The disembarkation at Alsium was the first step towards open revolt, and though Clodianus, in collusion with Parthenius, did his utmost to prevent this news from reaching the Palatium and the Prætorian guard, whom they could not yet regard as secured—nay, though he was prepared in case of need to account for it by some plausible lie, still they could not but expect every instant that the mask would be torn aside. Clodianus and Parthenius spent the evening outside the walls of Rome in the adjutant's villa, and after midnight they adjourned to the house of a freedman of Parthenius's, where they held a momentous conference with Norbanus, the prefect of the body-guard. After much parleying and persuasion he was won over to the side of the conspirators. Caesar's latest outrages, more particularly his monstrous injustice towards the senators and knights who had lingered, untried, in prison since the day when they were arrested, struck the balance in the upright and honorable soldier's mind. But even then, to the great regret of the conspirators, Norbanus could only answer for the adhesion of three of the cohorts under his command; the others had been freshly recruited at the New Year, and the growing distrust of the Emperor had filled every post, particularly those of the officers in command, with his own special favorites and creatures. Whatever the result might be, it was too late to avail themselves of every resource; the road straight forward was the only one now open to them. Still, an attempt was worth making at any cost. At the worst the Prætorian guard could certainly be kept in check for two days, and by that time the Proprætor and his forces might have reached Rome. Possibly too there might be another solution of the difficulty.—Clodianus was thinking of Stephanus.

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By the time the sickle of the waning moon rose ruddy above the horizon, the Proprætor's son and his eager troops had already left half the road between Alsium and the capital behind them. Aurelius, accompanied by the faithful Herodianus and the Goth, rode by the young leader's side, marking with happy anticipation the growing distinctness of a black cloud on the southern horizon—that dark silhouette was Rome. Now, as the moon rose, Aurelius fancied he could recognize the buildings on the Janiculum, and distinguish to the left the temple on the loftier Quirinal. Between these points—which he saw more in fancy than in fact—dwelt his Claudia—adored and beautiful, “the only She.” What must she not have suffered during these last months! Ah, and even now be suffering! This very day probably the brother, that she so devotedly loved, had fallen a victim to Caesar's hideous mania for persecution. Clodianus had indeed promised to do everything, even the impossible, only to postpone the frightful climax; but who could tell!

Aurelius set spurs into his horse, as if he could not bear a moment's delay till he dashed through the streets of Rome, tore open the prison doors, and clasped his rescued friend in his arms. How could he face Claudia, if he came too late to save her brother? Why had the execution of the conspiracy been so long postponed? The reasons, it is true, had been irresistible—even Cinna had confessed that; but an aching, longing heart ignores every motive of strategy and of state-craft, and the days, which had been allowed to slip by in inactivity, had seemed a dreary eternity. Well, the immediate future would put an end at any rate to suspense, and surely the gods could not so cruelly betray his fervid hopes. If he should succeed, if fate had such mercy in store—what joy for him of all men to break the chains, what a triumph over the stern and inexorable father, who to uphold the law could not spare his own son!

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Aurelius was half-ashamed to find himself thinking so exclusively of his own future, when the next few hours must decide the fate of millions—nay, of the Empire. But of what avail were strength of resolve and effort of will? His thoughts would revert to the scene he so fondly pictured in his dream, when he should clasp his Claudia in his arms, and stand proudly before the high-priest with the words: “I restore you your son.”

The road was lonely, the step of the marching men sounded loud in the silence. The few passengers and vehicles that they met were allowed to pass on; but all who were going towards Rome were, willy-nilly, detained, and only allowed to proceed in the midst of the cohorts.

In spite of these precautions they kept on the alert. At about half a mile outside Rome, Clodianus and Parthenius joined the force, as had been agreed, and the soldiers halted for a moment. The conspirators greeted each other warmly. Still, it was only with a determined effort, that Aurelius could find a civil word for the chamberlain, for whom he had always felt a deep aversion, and who, even now, impressed him as odious and repulsive. The loud bluntness of Clodianus, on the contrary, who harangued at some length about freedom and patriotism, he felt had the ring of genuine coin.

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"I received your father's last message," said Parthenius to the young captain. "Well, I must submit. A woman on the throne of the Caesars seems to you dangerous, and still more so Cornelius Cinna's scheme of re-establishing the Republic. Your father's arguments have, on the whole, convinced me, so we will agree.—Your candidate is also mine."

"You have our thanks," replied the Proprætor's son. "Our troops are already informed as to the work in hand. Nerva's name has been mentioned in the ranks, more than once. You will see, my noble friend, that only a spark is needed to fire their faithful hearts."

He turned his horse, and faced the troops.

"Men," he cried in a voice of thunder: "Your Caesar is Marcus Cocceius Nerva!"

"Nerva!" was shouted by a thousand voices. "Down with Domitian! Long live Nerva *Imperator!*"

The scattered natives, that dwelt near the high-road, might start from their sleep in astonishment at this rolling peal of shouts, and ask themselves what such a roar of voices could mean. But seeing presently that these were armed cohorts, marching in close order on Rome, they no doubt crept back under their coverlets with a shake of the head, and the time-honored comment that the soldiery were allowed to do just what they pleased,^[169] even to rouse the peaceful peasant from his dreams.

The cohorts themselves set out again with a will, and soon reached the western slope of the Janiculum, where, thanks to Clodianus' cautious foresight, no obstacle stood in their way.

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Quintus and Cornelia, meanwhile, were enduring a terrible night. After the un hoped-for issue of that first combat, they had been led back into the underground vault, and there they were left—either for convenience sake, or for fear lest the populace should give too emphatic expression to its sympathy, if the prisoners should be seen on the way back to the Mamertine prisons. A few rugs were flung on the stone pavement, and a man at arms was posted in the cell, while two more guarded the door outside. No one thought of giving the exhausted wretches food or drink, for their being yet alive was no part of the programme, and the master of the festival had too important business on hand, to trouble himself as to the fate of two "postponed" victims.

Cornelia, utterly crushed by all she had gone through, sat in a corner sunk in a heap, and silently wringing her hands. It was certain, quite certain, that the tyrant was pitiless; the whole thing was merely a prolongation of their misery, a postponement of the inevitable, a slow sipping of the cup of agony, which others had been allowed to swallow at a gulp! It was more than she could bear.

Even Quintus, who had at first been elated by the sense of victory, became every moment more restless and wretched. Cornelia's cry of despair, when the lion made its spring—a cry of horror and yet ecstatic—had pierced his heart. In that supreme utterance, wrung from her very soul, she had expressed all that could never have been said in words: a deep and tender reproach, a defiance of all their enemy's worst efforts, and a whole world of love, which could only live for him she loved. It was not till they were locked within the dungeon again, that Quintus observed that Cornelia was wounded; blood was flowing from her left arm—the brute's claws must have touched her there. His feelings as he perceived this were beyond words; and then—when she refused, almost angrily, to let him stanch the blood, and at last tore a strip off the hem of her dress, and tied it up just "anyhow!" Her whole manner asked with gloomy scorn: "What is the good?" They knew, both of them, full well, what the next day must bring forth.

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The minutes dragged along with leaden slowness. The young man's excited brain had lost all power to banish the most hideous thoughts; he could scarcely pray. He saw himself standing once more in the arena with Cornelia at his side, repeating the scene they had just rehearsed—till the end. This time he struck with less skill and success; the roaring beast crouched, sprang, he felt its claws in his flesh. He was lying on the earth, bleeding, mangled—yes, it was all true, only he felt no pain, only utter exhaustion. And the lion had clutched her too, Cornelia—beautiful, stately.—Then the monster was scared off from his bleeding prey, back into his cage. The servant was coming towards him with the harpoon—he could hear it crunching in the sand.

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He started up, shuddering violently. It was a hideous dream; he had fallen asleep after so long being restless. But the crunching and grinding did not cease, and now he heard his name called in an eager, loving human voice. The grey gloom was bright with the glare of torches. Before him stood Caius Aurelius, with eight soldiers of the northern army.

"Quintus!" he cried, with open arms. "The gods be praised! Rise, noble Cornelia. Why do you gaze at me, as if you saw a ghost? I am Aurelius. I have brought you freedom."

"Caius?" stammered Quintus, almost speechless with surprise and new-born hopes. "You here—tell me, what has happened?"

"Rome is ours. More than half the Praetorian guard have sworn fidelity to Cocceius Nerva. The Palatium was invested an hour ago. You shall hear it all, but oh! my senses are reeling...! Forward, men, make way.—Oh, Quintus I who could have foreseen all this, only last autumn...?"

Quintus, tottering like a drunken man, went up the steps into the sweet night air, and Cornelia followed, half carried by their preserver; but when she presently drew herself up and walked on in the torch-light, her black hair all loose and gently stirred by the wind, her dress torn and stained, and so stately in spite of it all, her presence touched the heart even of her rough guards.

In the Forum they found a tremendous uproar. A strong division of the troops guarded every entrance to the Palatium; others, and among them many of the Praetorian guard, were being sent to various parts of the city, to defend the most important strategic points against any plans of their opponents; at the same time the mob came streaming in from every quarter, shouting, shrieking and wasting its breath in questions.

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Close by the Arch of Titus, Clodianus sat on horseback in the midst of a madly-excited crowd.

"Yes, citizens," he shouted in stentorian tones, "the tyrant reigns no more. Too long indeed have we endured the humiliating yoke, but now we have shaken it off. Those, who have acted for you, are grateful to you for your unanimous and noble enthusiasm, and Nerva, *Imperator* will show his thankfulness by doubling the gifts of corn for the next year."

"Long live Nerva, the father of his country!" they shouted in chorus. But it was not only the capricious proletariat, who joined in; more eager and joyful still were the better classes of the citizens, even up to the knights and the few senators who, in their uncertainty as to the issue, found courage enough to express their opinion.

"Romans!" Clodianus went on. "Never fear, that the handful of mercenaries, who defend the Palatium, can imperil our work this day. The legions of the Proprætor of Lugdunensis are already on their way hither, by forced marches from Clusium. Before the sun has twice set, they will be before the walls of Rome. Go and tell all your friends, who still hesitate, that he himself will march in with the Proprætor; Nerva, the choice of the people, the divine Emperor."

"Long live Nerva! long live Clodianus!" shouted a hundred voices at once.

It was with great difficulty, that Aurelius could make a way for the released couple through the dense throng.

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"Where are we going?" asked Quintus, who had scarcely been able to speak a word.

"To your father's house."

"Miserable man!" groaned Quintus, bending his face on to his friend's shoulder. "What must he not have suffered?"

And thus they made their way slowly, like a funeral procession, to the house of Titus Claudius.

In the Palatium too there was stir and turmoil—torches, the clatter of arms and confused shouts. At the receipt of the news of the blockade, Domitian had almost lost his wits. He sobbed like a woman; he started from his bed shrieking and lamenting, and rushed wildly up and down his room, his teeth chattering with terror. When he learnt, that the cohorts which were on guard in the palace had remained faithful, and would resist every encroachment to the death, he recovered himself a little, and called his palace officials together for a sort of council of war. For an hour at least he listened to their opinions, but rejected almost everything that was proposed, as impracticable or useless, and at last, in great wrath, dissolved the sitting. Then he himself went the rounds of all the posts, and condescended so far as to overwhelm, not the centurions only, but even the private soldiers with flattering appeals, and to implore their steadfast adherence; besides this, he distributed gifts of money.

But, in spite of all this, he fancied that the demeanor of the guards was less respectful than of yore, and this suspicion filled his mind with bitterness and alarm; he swore to himself, that when once the rebellion was quelled some, who had especially roused his ire, should be made an example of. He was still ignorant, that the larger half of the Praetorian guard had gone over to the enemy. Besides, he was expecting the Proprætor of Gallia Lugdunensis who, alone, would be strong enough to turn the balance, and who would no doubt hurry on to Rome with double speed, when the news of the events in the capital should meet him. In his utter bewilderment it did not occur to Caesar, that it was Clodianus who had been in treaty with the Proprætor, and that Clodianus was at the head of the revolution.

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When noon had come and passed, and still the Praetorians had not raised the siege by expelling the forces under Clodianus, Domitian once more lost all self-control. He rushed from room to room in utter despair, now breaking out into abuse of Clodianus and Parthenius, both of whom he had raised to rank and power; now tearing his hair, now trying to extract some comfort from those about him—particularly from his favorite Jewish slave Phaeton, whom he commanded to sing and talk to him and scare away anxious fears.

Stephanus, who, with Caesar, was blockaded into the Palatium, was not less agitated than his sovereign; all night through he had sat in his study, devising and rejecting schemes for obeying

his mistress' behests. Clodianus had indeed made him a party to the conspiracy, and had even intended—as he declared—that he should play an important part in it. Nevertheless, the freedman could not but confess to himself, that the action of the piece had begun while he was still behind the scenes; that he had had no idea of the extent of the preparations already made, and that events were fast getting beyond his ken.

Nothing had surprised him more than the fact, that Clodianus' intrigues in the capital were in connection with the efforts of Cinna and Nerva, and this discovery almost overwhelmed him. If the rebellion were to succeed—as seemed most likely—Cneius Afranius was one of the heroes of the situation, and a full disclosure of all the crimes which Stephanus had, until now, so successfully concealed, was a mere question of time. After all that the Gaulish lawyer had attempted up to the present date, it seemed more than doubtful whether he would pay any heed to the appeal of a moon-struck enthusiast like Eurymachus, even supposing that Stephanus could carry into effect any scheme in favor of Quintus Claudius. Come what might, one thing was certain: in the new order of things, the steward of the deposed Empress must fall from his high estate, unless he could prove his connection with the conspiracy by some conspicuous service, and so secure beforehand the gratitude of the future sovereign.

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By degrees a resolution took form in his terror-stricken mind, which had already suggested itself to him several times, though on other grounds—the resolution to murder Domitian.

The Empress' lust of power and then his fears of the prosecution under a law, which Caesar might be planning—a fable invented by Clodianus—had some time since prompted the idea, which he had always set aside because Caesar's excessive suspiciousness had made it seem impracticable. Now, however, opportunity was more favorable. The extraordinary events of the day made an extraordinary step less startling. Besides, he had, as he thought, no choice.

Soon after sunrise a vague report spread through the Palatium that, late the night before, Stephanus had detected a suspicious-looking personage wandering about in a strange way, at no great distance from the Caesar's residence, that he had collared the man and snatched from him an important document, relating to the conspiracy; in the struggle the stranger had given him a somewhat deep wound in the left arm.

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In point of fact Stephanus, when he came out of his office in the morning, had his arm in a sling, [170] and to judge from the blood which had stained through the linen, though the bandages were thick, the wound must have been a serious one. Anyone, however, who could have watched the steward an hour before in the solitude of his chamber, would have seen him scratch his skin with his sharp dagger, carefully spot the bandages with blood, and then bind the poniard itself close to his arm like a splint, with strips and folds of linen. At the third hour Stephanus craved the favor of an audience of Caesar, as he desired to show him a highly-important letter, which was intended to meet no eyes but those of the sovereign. Domitian had already heard of the steward's misadventure, and he had been on the point of commanding his presence, when his petition was laid before him.

Stephanus came in, pale and excited; any one might suppose he was exhausted by loss of blood.

"My lord," he began, "a discovery of the greatest consequence..." Domitian, terrified beyond measure, sent all the slaves, with the exception of Phaeton, out of the room and bid Stephanus come closer to him. With profound respect the freedman handed him a document, which he himself had concocted a few hours previously. Caesar turned pale, and hastily glanced through the craftily-composed letter.

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This was the instant of which Stephanus took advantage.[171] He drew out the dagger like a flash of lightning, and struck it to the hilt into Caesar's stomach. Domitian gave a fearful scream, and threw himself on the assassin like a wild beast.

"My sword!" he shouted. "Phaeton, my sword!"

The boy flew into the next room to fetch it, while Domitian and Stephanus struggled desperately. The Emperor tried to wrench the dagger from his foe, but only succeeded in clutching the blade and cutting his fingers to the bone. With a roar of pain, he tried to force out his adversary's eyes, or to set his teeth in his throat. The slaves rushed in, but dared not interfere. They thought that Stephanus might be acting under the orders of Clodianus; Phaeton alone, who had found the sword, rushed boldly at the victorious assassin, and dealt him a deadly blow, at the very instant when Stephanus stabbed the Emperor to the heart.

"Phaeton!... too late[172]..." cried Domitian as he fell. "You alone have been faithful..." A dark stream of blood gushed from his mouth, and Caesar, who for so many years had trampled the world underfoot, was dead.

Stephanus did not survive him many minutes. Phaeton's stroke had split his skull.

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Domitian's death left the Praetorian guard no reason for resisting the revolution; as soon as the news was known, Clodianus sent an envoy to the Palatium, who came to an understanding with the tribunes and centurions, and they surrendered at once. The rest of the guard, outside the Palatium, then made no farther demur. Thus the victory of Marcus Cocceius Nerva was an accomplished fact, and, excepting for the two victims of the struggle within the palace, it had been a bloodless one.

Notwithstanding the lateness of the hour, Clodianus at once summoned the Senate to a sitting.

The very men, who had hitherto grovelled in the dust before the despot, now vied with each other in their expressions of hatred and contempt for the dead.[173] After the election of Marcus Cocceius Nerva had been officially ratified, and proclaimed in high-sounding phrases to be the happiest event of the century, the assembly passed a resolution declaring Domitian to have been a foe and traitor to his country, and requiring the Roman people to deface and obliterate every memorial of a man accursed. The numerous statues of himself, that Domitian had erected, were to be thrown down from their pedestals, and his triumphal arches laid level with the ground.[174] Certain petty and undignified suggestions, which had for their object extended powers of denunciation[175] such as they had existed under Domitian, but with increased severity, and the impeachment of some men of the highest character—as for instance of Titus Claudius—as adherents of the late emperor, were promptly negatived at an unmistakable sign from Clodianus, who had been expressly informed by Caius Aurelius, that the new ruler would set his face most positively against all the base expedients of the old government. On the other hand, the Senate were given full powers to provide for the liberation of all prisoners of state, inclusive even of the Nazarenes,[176] since the decree relating to that Jewish sect was to be reconsidered immediately after the Emperor's arrival. In this also Clodianus was acting under the direct guidance of Caius Aurelius, who, after returning from the house of Titus Claudius, never quitted his side.

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So little were social peace and order disturbed by this revolution in the history of the world, that after midday the games and combats in the Flavian amphitheatre were proceeded with, though it is true they were attended by scarcely any but the lowest class, to whom it was a matter of indifference whether a god or a demon sat on the throne, so long as they had their largess of corn and their circus games. A few of them complained even that, by releasing the Nazarenes, the new Emperor had abridged the programme. But when at the close Clodianus indemnified each by a present in money, the last dissentient voices were silenced and "Long live Nerva!" rang loudly through the Amphitheatre, where two days since Domitian had been no less loudly greeted with shouts of "Ave Caesar!"

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CHAPTER XXI.

"Titus Claudius is dying!" the slaves whispered to each other in the silent and deserted rooms, where notwithstanding the dignity and gravity of the master, so much gay laughter had once been heard, so much young life had once been busy and gay.

"He is dying!" Octavia sighed, as she gazed in despair on the pale, altered face lying on the pillow, bathed in cold sweat, and with eyes half closed.

Behind that high, pale forehead dreadful havoc had been made during the last few days. All the tortures of martyrdom, to which the barbarous law condemned the son, the father had suffered a thousand-fold. In the delirium of fever, again and again he was dragged out to the hideous scene, where his boy was to be butchered and mangled; the merciful cloud which, at first, had darkened his consciousness by degrees had lifted, only to add to his sufferings, and his fancy ran riot in sights and images which threatened his life. Octavia and Claudia had watched by his bed with infinite patience, forced to control their own grief and look on, stricken and inconsolable, while the unhappy man wrestled day and night with the demons that possessed his mind, and poured out furious curses on himself and his fate.

Now, after the storm, he had sunk into the calm of lethargy. His strength was visibly sinking, and the leeches turned away in helpless silence.

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"He is dying!" was sorrowfully repeated in the remotest rooms of the house; for not the lowest of his slaves was so dull or so base, as not to mourn for so revered a master from the bottom of his heart. But he is sitting up, he is speaking—listen.

"No, no—you will forgive me," he murmurs hardly audibly. "You will, Quintus? You will not curse me? I have always loved you—oh! loved you more than my life! That dreadful decree! Woe, woe is me! he turns away! A murderer, he calls me a murderer!" And he sank back on his pillows, gasping for breath; his hands clutched convulsively at the quilt.

"Quintus," he began again, softly, coaxingly—like a child. "Say one kind word to me. Oh! Quintus, can you for a moment imagine, that I am your enemy! This hand has so often stroked your cheek, smoothed your hair, your beautiful, long, waving hair! Ah! the beasts—the horrible wild beasts! Caesar, this is a hideous crime; mercy, pardon! Let me go down to them, let me die, but spare his youth! in vain, in vain—they have rushed upon him, they have seized him—ye gods! ye gods! have pity on me!"

A hoarse, dull scream, and then total silence.

"Father, Father, do you not know me?" said a trembling voice. "It is I, your son—I myself; not a delusion, not a dream.—And here is Cornelia—and here is Caius Aurelius, who has snatched us from the jaws of death."

Titus Claudius started up at the sound of this voice. He fixed his glassy gaze on the figure of the young man, who was kneeling by his side and covering his wasted hands with tears and kisses. Then, suddenly a light passed into his face, a shiver thrilled through his enfeebled frame, and with a joyful cry of "Quintus! my son!" he fell back senseless. There he lay, motionless as the dead. His face grew paler and paler, and his arms hung helplessly by the side of the couch. The by-standers were paralyzed with dismay; only Claudia had enough presence of mind to fly out of the room and call for assistance. In two minutes she brought back old Palaemon,^[177] a freedman of the household, who was versed in all the mysteries of Greek and Roman medicine. He came up to the couch with a look of the deepest grief, and laid his hand on the unconscious man's forehead, feeling at the same time his scarcely fluttering pulse. Claudia, always brave and calm, told him of what had happened.

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"Give him quiet," said Palaemon, waving them all back with his hand. "This moment is decisive."

The family left the room; Octavia herself in an almost fainting state. Leaning on Aurelius, she went to her own apartments. Claudia only, with Baucis, remained with the leech to watch the sick man.

Palaemon forced a few drops of Samian wine,^[178] between the sufferer's livid lips, and then seating himself on a chair at the foot of the bed, he kept his eyes fixed on the senseless form.

"Courage, my child!"^[179] said, as he caught sight of Claudia's tearful face. "He knew him, and that is everything. That will be better medicine, than all the herbs and decoctions known to our art. See, he is already breathing more quietly and regularly—that is not a swoon, it is sleep. If he does not sink from mere weakness, this sleep will check the violence of the fever and save his life. Open the door, daughter; quite wide, that the fresh spring air may come in. Baucis, do you go and fill a bowl with snow-water and wet a handkerchief—I will lay it on his forehead, and that will cool him. But make no noise, not a sound—lest you should wake him."

295

A delightful breath of roses was wafted into the room, as Claudia softly opened the door, and in a few minutes Baucis had brought the cold water. The cooling application evidently had a soothing effect on the sleeping man. He sighed deeply and turned on his side; his features relaxed, and he slept soundly and easily.

Presently, outside in the colonnade, appeared Caius Aurelius; he glanced into the sick-room, asking for a report. Claudia rose and went to meet him, smiling through her tears; regardless of Palaemon's presence, she threw her arms round her lover and laid her head on his shoulder with a deep sigh of relief. "He will live," she whispered, looking up in his face; "only look how quietly and peacefully he is sleeping."

"Jupiter be praised! Oh! my darling, what have we not gone through those last few months!"

"More than we could have borne, if it had not been for our love."

He kissed her, looked once more at the sick man, and left her.

The sun sank behind Mons Janiculus, and the worn-out Flamen still lay in his death-like sleep. About two hours before midnight he moved and asked for Quintus. Claudia, who had not quitted him, bent over him and said gently:

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"He is safe, Father, you know," and her father looked up at her with a beatific smile. Then he asked for something to drink, greedily emptied a cup of water with fruit syrup, and at once fell asleep again. When day began to break, Palaemon, who had taken some hours' rest in the adjoining room, sent Claudia to lie down. In all human probability the danger was now over, and Claudia obeyed, for she could scarcely hold up her head.

The sun rose in a cloudless sky—the first day of freedom in redeemed and regenerate Rome. The people set to work on all hands, to prepare a worthy welcome for the new Emperor, the gentle and high-souled Nerva, who was expected to arrive the following morning. Every arch of triumph, every colonnade, every temple was decked with garlands. Rome was like one vast festal hall. The Praetorian guard and the soldiers of the city-garrison marched in noisy troops through the streets, to overturn the statues of Domitian and to set up hastily-modelled images of Nerva in their stead.

But all the tumult and noise failed to wake Titus Claudius Mucianus, who lay sleeping and gaining strength every hour on the couch in his airy cubiculum. It was not till late in the afternoon, that he began to grow restless and to toss from side to side. Palaemon called the family, and they assembled in the room: Octavia, Claudia, Lucilia, Cornelia, Quintus and Caius Aurelius, who, now that the great political revolution was accomplished, felt himself quite free and had flown at an early hour to see his Claudia. But with them there also came, to the great surprise of the worthy Baucis, a stranger, a knight from Rodumna, who to this day had never before crossed the Flamen's threshold; our esteemed friend Cneius Afranius, the advocate. Lucilia's eyes, which in the midst of her anxiety sparkled with an anticipation of imminent happiness, whenever they met those of the man she loved, might have explained to the old nurse, that the unexpected guest had not come altogether unbidden—nay, that something must have passed between the two young people, which was of the deepest interest to Afranius himself, as well as to the girl who—once so saucy—now looked up at him with an air of maidenly reserve. Cneius Afranius remained modestly in the background, as if he was quite satisfied for the present to leave the old slave-woman's doubts unsettled.

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Palaemon met them with the smile, that gives new life to the relations of a sick man.

"Only go very gently," he said, as Lucilia and Quintus began to question him.

Presently they heard a deep sigh from Titus Claudius, who was sitting up in bed, and gazing at the assembled family with wide and eager eyes.

"It is you!" he said, trembling with excitement "You, Quintus, my son, my adored son."

"Father!" was all Quintus could say, and he fell sobbing aloud into those trembling, wasted arms.

"Was it delirium?" asked the high-priest, "or is it true? Was it you, Caius Aurelius, who saved my son?"

"As you say, my lord," replied the Batavian.

"How did you do it? Did you procure his pardon? Did you succeed, when we had all failed, in touching Caesar's heart?"

298

"Domitian is dead," said the Batavian, solemnly. "Before his rule was wrenched from him, he died by the hand of an assassin. But Nerva, our new Emperor, is innocent of blood; he, mild and just, ordered me to strike off the chains of the Nazarenes. We hurried at our utmost speed from the shores of Gaul to Rome, and the gods willed it, that I should arrive just in time to rescue Quintus and the noble Cornelia. The decree, which pronounced them guilty, is abrogated."

The high-priest had listened to him, motionless and silent; Palaemon went forward to interrupt the conversation.

"Not yet, my good friend," said Titus Claudius with a grateful smile. "You need fear nothing for me. New life is dancing in every vein. Suspense alone was crushing me to death; the truth will restore me to life. Let our young friend tell us what has happened. Domitian dead! Nerva Emperor! The Nazarenes released...! I feel as if it were all a dream!"

Aurelius told his tale, and Titus Claudius listened, clinging to his son's hands with both his own. The one feeling that he had been preserved from the last, worst horror, without having to reproach himself with any breach of his duty as a statesman and an official, triumphed over all

the other various emotions, that Aurelius' narrative might have roused in him. Again and again his eye turned to rest on the radiant face of the son he had believed to be lost beyond recall, and whom he now saw and held in the flesh. Every other consideration was swept away in the current of a father's love, so long held in unnatural check.

"The gods have willed it so!" he said sadly, when Aurelius ceased speaking. "I cannot hold the office, conferred on me by Domitian, under the enemy of the murdered Caesar. But I yield to the force of circumstances; what till now was treason is now law. I am but a weak mortal; I do not pretend to judge the case. I can but marvel and be silent. Justice is perhaps on the side of the stronger conviction, the stronger will and the greater vigor—such mysteries can only be solved by the gods. So the first words I address to you, after these days of terror and torment, shall be words of conciliation. Cains Aurelius, my daughter's heart is yours—then she shall be your wife. I will not destroy your happiness; you have all suffered enough on my account."

299

But here Palaemon interfered with all the authority of his office. He almost pushed Claudia and the Batavian from the bedside.

"Pardon me!" he said, "but this will not do. He must have perfect rest. I only wanted him to see Quintus, that will conduce to his recovery. He will shake hands with his worthy son-in-law quite soon enough." The whole party left the room.

"And we?" asked Lucilia, as Afranius came close by her side.

"Patience, my queen," said the lawyer; "the fruit that has set is sure to ripen. Leave him to get well and think quietly over the past; our hour will strike in good time."

Lucilia nodded assent, and Claudia threw her arms round her, and kissed her ardently.

Quintus was the last to quit the room; his father gazed after him with a look of rapture. Then, with an upward glance, he sighed deeply, and once more closed his eyes. He was quite exhausted, and presently again dropped asleep. His excited brain still worked in fresh and vivid dreams, but now they were not demons that hovered round him, but kindly ghosts, and his fancy bore him through rose-tinted clouds to the sunny regions of freedom and peace.

300

Kindly genii, proclaiming freedom and peace, hovered over Rome, the long-suffering city. The next day, two hours after sunrise, Marcus Cocceius Nerva made his solemn entrance, amid the enthusiastic shouts of the multitude; and before the sun had sunk on the second day, he had accomplished that grand change, which altered the course of the world's history, and secured to the Roman Empire for many years the benefits of justice and liberty. The venerable Emperor, in order not to leave his dominions a prey to fresh political convulsions in the event of his death, solemnly adopted the Hispanian, Ulpus Trajanus, as his son, before the assembled Senate,^[180] and with the consent of that illustrious body, appointed him his successor on the throne of Rome.

"I know, my beloved son," so the old Emperor addressed him, "that you will accept this gift from your venerable father, and this highest of all honors at the hands of the Roman Senate and people with a due sense of gratitude. You will not be overbearing in the possession of power, any more than you were servile when, at any moment, you might have fallen a victim to the miscarriage of a noble cause, You will not let yourself be befooled by flatterers, for you yourself have never learnt to flatter. You will acknowledge, that all your dignity and power emanate from the sovereign will of the people; that you rule only because your country bids you rule; that you are not called to be the tyrant, but the servant of the State."

301

So spoke Nerva, and Trajan bowed his head with a grave conviction of duty, and accepted the responsible honor.—Trajan, that noble, moderate and just man,^[181] whom the verdict of posterity has, with singular unanimity, pronounced to be the best of all the emperors of Rome.

At the same hour, when Marcus Cocceius Nerva was returning with Trajan from the heights of the Capitol to their residence in the Palatium, two men, each solitary and in the plainest dress, were turning their back on the Eternal City.

302

One of them, Barbillus, the priest of Isis, stole away, carefully disguised, to Antium, where he was met by an accomplice, who had in his charge all the treasure he had been able to collect in his haste. From thence he purposed to reach Alexandria by sea, and so elude the wrath of Cinna, who was now all-powerful and Cocceius Nerva's closest friend. But the ship was wrecked, and a week later the body of the great magician was cast on shore near Messana.

The other of the two men was Eurymachus, who took the road to Ostia. Lycoris, who had given up all luxury and splendor and had had herself baptized, had anticipated all that Quintus had intended to do for him; she had bought Eurymachus from the heirs of Stephanus, had set him free and had provided him amply for a journey to Gaul. Thus, after all his trials and struggles, he set forth with renewed energies, to be the apostle of the Nazarene creed in the remotest frontiers of the Empire.

303

THE END.

Footnotes

[1] "ENOUGH!" WAS ATTACHED TO THE BASE OF A PORTRAIT BUST. See Suet. *Dom.* 13, where it is true, the "enough" refers to the excessive quantity of triumphal arches and statues, the

emperor ordered to be erected everywhere. Inscriptions similar to those quoted in our chapter were, however, by no means rare in all times.

- [2] A CENTURION HAD RAISED THE STANDARD OF REVOLT ON THE GERMANIC FRONTIER. See Dio Cass. LXVII, 11: About this time Antonius, governor of Germany, rebelled against Domitian, but was defeated and slain by Lucius Maximus.
- [3] AN ASTROLOGER, ASCLETARIO BY NAME. See Suet. *Dom.* 15.
- [4] LATINUS THE ACTOR. See Mart. *Ep.* I, 4; II, 71; III, 86; V, 61; IX, 28. The manner in which Martial, in this last-named passage, flatters Latinus, proves how high the actor stood in the emperor's favor. Concerning the matter, see Suet. *Dom.* 15.
- [5] A STRANGER CAME BY WITH THREE HUGE DOGS. Faith in the sudden appearance and disappearance of mysterious, demoniac creatures was very wide-spread under the reigns of the later emperors. A striking instance of this is found in Dio Cass. LXXIX, 18.
- [6] AN INTOLERABLE DREAD ALMOST DEPRIVED HIM OF BREATH. See Suet. *Dom.* 16: "At midnight he was seized with such terror, that he sprang out of bed."
- [7] JULIA WAS SENSELESS ON THE FLOOR. For the death of Julia, see Suet. *Dom.* 22. What is there related, is so ill adapted for artistic description, that we have replaced this act of brutality with a less loathsome one. Our invention can appeal to historical analogies. Thus Nero, from whom I borrow various traits for my Domitian's character, killed his wife Poppaea, during a quarrel, by a kick. See Suet. *Ner.* 35; Tac. *Ann.*, XVI, 6.
- [8] IT WAS DOMITIAN'S BIRTHDAY, THE 24TH OF OCTOBER. The Caesars' birthdays were great and universal holidays. At the time of this story, the month of October was called "Domitianus" (See Mart. *Ep.* IX, 1.) The vain ruler had hoped by this change, following the example of Julius Caesar and the emperor Augustus, to perpetuate his name forever. But while "Julius" (July) for the month Quintilis, and "Augustus" (August) for the month Sextilis, still exist at the present day, neither "Germanicus" for September, nor "Domitianus" for October, bestowed by Domitian, remained even a single day after the tyrant's reign. The emperor called himself "Germanicus" on account of his campaign against the Chatti. (See Mart. II, 2), where the flatterer compares the prince to Scipio Africanus, and asserts that the surname "Germanicus" would be far more illustrious than that of "Africanus."
- [9] THE USUAL CEREMONIOUS RECEPTION TOOK PLACE OF MAGISTRATES, SENATORS, AND KNIGHTS. Vespasian had abolished this custom, which flourished, especially under Claudius, even during the civil war. See Suet. *Vesp.* 12.
- [10] A DULL ATMOSPHERE OF SUSPICION BROODED LIKE A VAPOR AND SEEMED TO FILL THE SPLENDIDLY-DECORATED ROOM. See Plin. *Paneg.* 48: "Menaces and terror hovered around the doors, and those admitted had as much cause to fear, as those who were not."
- [11] ATRA CURA, AS SUNG BY HORATIUS FLACCUS. See Hor. *Od.* III, 1, 40.
- [12] WHY, THE VERY MORNING DEW, DISGUSTED AT THE CRIME, DID ITS BEST TO WASH THEM AWAY. A flattering flowery turn of speech in perfect harmony with the spirit of the times. (See numerous passages in Martial's *Epigrams.*)
- [13] OUR HEART IN ITS TENDER MERCY. See Suet. *Dom.* 11: "He never uttered a harsh sentence, without a preface about his mildness."
- [14] TOGA VIRILIS. Donning the *toga virilis*, by which the boy was regarded as a man, was an important family festival.
- [15] RHEA GAVE BIRTH TO ZEUS. Zeus, according to Greek tradition, was born of Rhea, in a cave on Mt. Ida, at Crete.
- [16] PYLIAN NESTOR. Nestor, king of Pylos, was considered in ancient times the type of vigorous old age.
- [17] FEAST OF MINERVA. Reference is here made to the Quinquatria (a five-day festival, principally for the benefit of workmen, artists, etc., as well as school-boys) which Domitian ordered to be annually celebrated in the month of March, at his Albanian estate.
- [18] THIS POEM IS AN ALMOST LITERAL TRANSLATION FROM MARTIAL, *Ep.* IV, 1.
- [19] HE WAS WRITING DOWN ON A WOODEN TABLET THE NAMES OF THOSE WHOM HE DEVOTED TO DEATH. The story of this wooden tablet, according to its actual characters, is borrowed from the account of Dio Cassius, (LXVII, 15).
- [20] GARUM. A delicacy similar to our caviare, prepared from the entrails of sea-fish.
- [21] MILK COOLED WITH ICE. In well-to-do families, the drinks, etc. during the warm season of the year, were cooled by snow or ice. See Mart. *Ep.* XII, 17 ("Caecubum cooled with snow-water") XIV, 103, 104, etc.
- [22] FATHERS. This nearly corresponds with the Latin *patres conscripti*, as the senators were called.
- [23] WITH THUMBS TURNED DOWN. These words, with very little variation, are found in a satire by Juvenal. Turning down the thumbs by the audience was a sign, that mercy was refused the conquered gladiator.
- [24] DRESSING-CHAIRS AND LITTERS (*cathedrae*). High-backed chairs with arms and a stool for the feet. The fashionable Roman dames performed the duties of the toilet in these *cathedrae*.
- [25] LICTOR. A public officer, who attended on the higher magistrates, and who preceded them

bearing the fasces, the bundle of rods with an axe.

- [26] PRONOUNCED THE SITTING OPENED. The following description of a session of the Senate corresponds precisely, in its main features, with the accounts handed down to us by the ancient authors.
- [27] RELATIO. The name, as is evident, given to the discourse concerning the cause and purpose of the session.
- [28] LEDA. DANAE. SISYPHUS. Familiar forms of the Hellenic myths. Leda was the daughter of Thestius and the wife of Tyndareus. Zeus approached her in the guise of a swan. Danae, conquered by Zeus in the shape of a shower of golden rain, gave birth to Perseus. Sisyphus, son of Eolus and Enarete, king of Ephyra, (Corinth) was compelled in the nether-world, as a punishment for his crimes, to roll the oft-mentioned mass of stone up-hill.
- [29] TRULY LATIN WORD RELIGIO. The etymology of the word *religio* really corresponds with the interpretation here given by Cinna.
- [30] POSTPONE YOUR DECISION BY DIGRESSIONS. This was called; *dicendo diem eximere*; for no valid decree could be made after sunset.
- [31] BE ON YOUR GUARD, LEST THE FATHERLAND SHOULD SUFFER. A variation of the familiar formula: *videant consules ne quid res publica detrimenti capiat*.
- [32] COLLECT THE VOTES BY A SHOW OF HANDS. See Tac. *Hist.* IV, 4, and Sen. *Ep.* VIII, 6.
- [33] NEWLY-BLEACHED TOGA. The fullers (*fullones*) played an important part in ancient Rome. When togas became soiled and unsightly, they were given to the *fullo* to be washed, smoothed, and renovated. At the festivals, even the most insignificant man appeared, so far as his circumstances would permit, in gala dress.
- [34] IN THE FORM OF THE HAWK-HEADED GOD, OSIRIS. Nothing is said by the ancient authors concerning such a farce enacted by Domitian; but from all we know of the man's character, there is no doubt that my imagination does him no injustice. With respect to the incident itself, similar ones actually happened, and in A. D. 19 Flavius Josephus relates that a Roman knight, Decius Mundus, pursued an aristocratic lady called Paulina a long time with offers of love, without obtaining a hearing. As she was eagerly devoted to the worship of the goddess Isis, Decius Mundus, by the offer of 5,000 denarii, induced the priest to tell her that the god Anubis (son of Isis and Osiris) desired a nocturnal meeting. Paulina believed this, and Decius Mundus appeared in the jackal-headed mask of the god. The cheat was successful, but when the emperor Tiberius heard of it, he sent the knight into exile, ordered the priests to be crucified, the temple levelled to the ground, and the statue of the goddess flung into the water.—By the way, it may be remarked that Domitian, before he was emperor, escaped from the besieged Capitol, whither he had fled in the war with Vitellius, *in the costume of a priest of Isis*; and his defeat.
- [35] IS TO BE BURIED. Usually a longer interval elapsed between the date of death and the funeral—about a week.
- [36] TEMPLE OF THE FLAVIA FAMILY. See Suet, *Dom.* 15 and 17. The ashes of Vespasian and Titus lay there.
- [37] I SEE HIM, BAREFOOT, HIS MANTLE TORN, RIDING TOWARDS PHAON'S HOUSE. For Nero's terrible end, see Suet. *Ner.* 48 and following pages. Dio Cass. LXIII, 27, etc. Phaon was a freedman of the emperor, one of the few who were faithful to him to the last. See also what Dio Cassius (LXXVII, 15.) relates of the visions of Caracalla.
- [38] AT THIS MOMENT THE HEAVY TREAD OF CLODIANUS WAS HEARD APPROACHING. In Dio Cassius (LXVII, 15), it is Domitia, the empress, who surprises the boy playing with the little wooden tablet.
- [39] SERVICE IN THE CUBICULUM. Service at the altar of the Lares. See Suet. *Dom.* 17.
- [40] THE HOLY CITADEL OF JERUSALEM. The destruction of Jerusalem by Titus, son of Vespasian, the reigning emperor at that time, occurred on the 10th of August, A. D. 70.
- [41] CATCHING FLIES, AS HE HAD BEEN WONT TO DO AS A BOY. See Suet. *Dom.* 3: "In the commencement of his reign he spent several hours alone every day, doing nothing but catching flies and impaling them on a sharp stylus."
- [42] CASSIOPEIA. A constellation near Cepheus, so called for Cassiopeia, the mother of Andromeda, who was placed among the stars. See Prop. I, 17, 3; Ov. *Met.* IV, 7, 38.
- [43] SEMELE, the daughter of the Theban king Cadmus, at the instigation of the jealous Hera, entreated Zeus, who loved her, to appear before her in all the splendor of his divine majesty. As Zeus had sworn by the Styx to grant her request, he was bound. He approached the unfortunate girl with lightning and thunder—and the heavenly flames consumed her. Dying, she gave birth to Dionysus (Bacchus).
- [44] THE ROOM QUIVERED UNDER HER FEET. Hippolytus, in his "Refutation of Heresies," gives a number of directions for the magical appearances commonly used by the conjurers and miracle-workers of those times; among them is one in a MS. not wholly preserved, for the production of an earthquake.
- [45] PULVINAR (from *pulvinus*, the pillow and cushion) was originally the name given to a cushioned seat covered with costly tapestry, placed for the gods at the so-called *lectisternium* (banquet of the gods). Statues of the gods were placed on this *pulvinar*, and food was offered them, (See Liv. V, 13, 16). But the name was also applied to the couches of goddesses and empresses—(See Cat. 64; Ov. *Pont.* II, 2, 71; Juv. VI, 31)—and

lastly to the cushions of the imperial box at the circus and amphitheatre. See Suet. A. 45.

- [46] WELL—THAT BLOOD HAS BEEN SHED. See Suet. *Dom.* 16, where it is related that the emperor, tortured by forebodings, once accidentally scratched himself till the blood came, and then exclaimed: "Would this might be enough!"
- [47] APODYTERIUM, (ἀποδυτήριον) the room where the clothing was removed at the baths. See Plin. *Ep.* V, 6, where a dressing-room at the bath of a villa is mentioned.
- [48] ELAOTHESIUM, (ἐλαιοθήσιον) the anointing-room, the oil-room. See *Vitr.* V. 11, 2.
- [49] GYMNASIUM, (γυμνάσιον) from γυμνός, naked) the wrestling-room.
- [50] WILL OF A CHILDLESS SENATOR. See note, 324, Vol. I. That such stories of wills formed one of the principal subjects of city gossip (*fabulae urbis*) appears in Juv. *Sat.* I, 144, where the failure of a will attracts attention, and Plin. *Ep.* VIII, 18, where the will of Domitius Tullus is mentioned. The passage runs as follows: "The most contradictory rumors are circulating through the whole city. Many call him ungrateful, false and faithless.... Others, on the contrary, praise him, because he disappointed the unworthy hopes of these people." And at the close of the long letter: "Now you know all the city news, for nothing is talked of except Tullus."
- [51] AN INCIDENT IN THE LIFE OF A CERTAIN ATTORNEY-AT-LAW. The following episode was suggested by Mart. *Ep.* IV, 46, where a lawyer named Sabellus, is derided precisely as here described. There, however, the point in question did not concern the payment for a lawsuit won, but the customary gifts at the Saturnalia. The lines given as improvised verse, a little farther on, are to be found in Martial (verse 5-10.)
- [52] FALERNIAN CHITTERLINGS, from the Etruscan city of Falerii. The inhabitants of this city were called Faliscans.
- [53] LUCANIAN SAUSAGE. The old Romans were passionately fond of sausages. They had black-pudding (*botuli*) liver and common sausage (*tomacula*) which were to be had hot in the streets from little tin ovens, smoked sausage (*hillae*) and Lucanian. (*Lucanicae*, so called from the province of Lucania in Lower Italy, famed for its sausages) which were usually eaten with spelt-flour bread. See Mart. *Ep.* XIII, 35:
- "Daughter of a Picenian pig, I come from Lucania;
By me a grateful garnish is given to snow-white pottage."
- [54] MARTIAL *Ep.* IV., 46. "All these airs and all this exaltation are excited in Sabellus by half a peck of meal and as much of parched beans; by three half-pounds of frankincense, and as many of pepper; by a sausage from Lucania, and a sow's pauch from Falerii; by a Syrian flagon of dark, mulled wine, and some figs candied in a Libyan jar, accompanied with onions, and shell-fish, and cheese. From a Picenian client came a little chest that would scarcely hold a few olives, and a nest of seven cups from Saguntum, polished with the potter's rude graver, the clay workmanship of a Spanish wheel, and a napkin variegated with the laticlave. More profitable Saturnalia, Sabellus has not had these ten years."
- BOHN, Class. Lib.
- [55] PRAXITELES. A celebrated Athenian sculptor, creator of the famous Cnidian Venus, a master of the graceful and charming. Clodianus only means to say: a great sculptor; otherwise something about Lysippus would have been more appropriate to the subject—two wrestlers.
- [56] FRIGIDARIUM. The cold bath, in distinction from the caldarium, the hot bath. Rooms, similar to those described here—are found, though of smaller size, among the excavations at Pompeii.
- [57] TRACTATORS, (*tractatores*). The name of the slaves who, after the bath, rubbed and kneaded the body and limbs. (See Sen. *Ep.* 66.) According to Mart. *Ep.* III, 82, slave-women (*tractatrices*) also performed these services, but probably only in private houses.
- [58] HERODIANUS NOT ONLY BOLTED THE DOOR, BUT BARRED IT TOO. The fastening of the door was usually accomplished *either* by bolts (*pessuli*), or by means of a crossbar (*sera*). Here the crossbar is used *besides* the ordinary fastening of the bolt, as an additional means of security. The crossbar was generally made of wood.
- [59] CITY PREFECT, (*praefectus urbi*). His position under the emperors was similar to the office of a chief of police. He commanded the *cohortes urbanae*, the city-guard. His authority extended to the hundredth mile-stone.
- [60] VIA ARDEATINA. The highway to the little city of Ardea, situated on a hill eighteen miles south of Rome. See *Liv.* 1, 57; V, 11.
- [61] ORACLE OF THE FAUN. This was about two-thirds of the distance from Rome to Ardea.
- [62] LAVINIUM, LAURENTUM. Only the ruins of these two cities exist at the present day.
- [63] SETIAN WINE. Setia, a city in Latium, south-east of Suessa Pometia. A famous place for wine, now Sezze. See *Liv.* VI, 30; VII; 42 etc. Plin. *Hist. Nat.* XIV; 6, 60. Mart. *Ep.* IV, 64, 69; VI, 86; IX, 2; X, 13, 36; XIII, 23 ("old Setian wine may be compared to Chian figs.")
- [64] ACTA DIURNA. The official collection and publication of important news was first introduced by Julius Caesar. These publications were called *acta diurna urbis* or *acta diurna populi*. After one number of this official gazette was prepared, it was multiplied by an army of copyists, and sent to the most distant provinces. Besides the official news, the *acta diurna* published miscellaneous communications about specially important events in public life, family news, art notices, etc. See Hübner in *Fleckeisen's Jahrbuch*,

Suppl. III, pages 364-594, as well as the admirable explanation by Göll, "the newspaper of Rome" in his "Pictures of Civilization."

- [65] THERE LAY HER FAVORITE AUTHORS NEATLY ARRANGED IN IVORY CASES. Valuable books were kept in closed boxes.
- [66] THE HEAD OF JUPITER, COPIED FROM THE WORLD-FAMED WORK OF PHIDIAS. The most renowned and perhaps most magnificent creation of Greek plastic art, was the Pan-hellenic Zeus at Olympia, a work of Phidias. Everything the ancient authors tell us of this colossal statue sounds extremely enthusiastic. Thus an epigram runs:

"Great Zeus did descend to earth his image to reveal,
Or, Phidias, to behold the god, Olympus thou did'st scale."

Dio Chrysostomus writes: "No one who has seen Phidias' Zeus, is capable of forming any other image of the god.... A man, whose soul is troubled, oppressed by the many cares and griefs life offers, so that he would no longer be refreshed by sweet slumber, must I think, while confronting this statue, forget everything that is gloomy and terrible. Thus, Phidias, hast thou designed and executed thy work. Such light and grace animate thy art." Phidias had created his statue of the god according to the image of the Homeric verse, where Zeus grants the entreaty of the imploring Thetis:

"He spoke, and awful bends his sable brows,
Shakes his ambrosial curls, and gives the nod,
The stamp of fate and sanction of the god:
High heaven, with trembling the dread signal took
And all Olympus to the centre shook."

POPE.

Phidias' Zeus was represented seated on a throne; his left hand held the sceptre, his right bore a goddess of victory. Among all the statues of Zeus that have been preserved, the bust of Otricoli seems to approach most nearly to the ideal of Phidias. There is no absolutely accurate copy; but the descriptions given us by the ancient authors, as well as two coins from Elis, carefully described by Overbeck and Friedländer, afford a succession of by no means unimportant points.

The bust in Claudia's boudoir may be imagined a duplicate of Otricoli's Jupiter—only approximating somewhat more closely to the separate features of the original.

- [67] SARDINIAN MINES. Sardinia played a similar part in the Roman Empire, to the one performed by Siberia in the kingdom of the Czar. Criminals, and often innocent persons, languished through a miserable existence in the mines there. Besides, the climate of the island was considered extremely unhealthy. (See Strab. V, 13. Mart. *Ep.*, IV, 60.) In cases of less importance the culprits were simply exiled to Sardinia, without being condemned to enforced labor, and permitted to live there at liberty. (See Mart. *Ep.*, VIII, 32.)
- [68] TIGELLINUS. Sophonius Tigellinus, of Agrigentum, in Sicily, by his talents as a sportsman and horse-breaker, won Nero's favor, and finally became commander of the praetorian guard. (Tac. *Ann.*, XIV, 51.) Dissolute, revengeful, and unprincipled, he was regarded, with reason, as the evil principle in the life of the Emperor, whose last noble impulses he strove to stifle. He was most to blame for the majority of Nero's crimes; even the horrible conflagration, that laid half Rome in ashes. (See Tac. *Hist.*, I, 72, Dio Cass. LXII, 13, LXIII, 12.)
- [69] SMOKED CHEESE. See Mart. *Ep.* XI, 52; XIII, 32. The best smoked cheese was the Velabrian, so called from Velabrum, a region between the Capitoline, Palatine and Aventine Hills.
- [70] METAPONTUM, also Metapontium (Μεταπόντιον). A Greek city on the Tarentine Gulf, which has now disappeared except the remains of a Doric temple (*la Tavola de' Paladini*). Even at the time of our story the once famous city had already begun to decline.
- [71] CYRENAICA. A region on the northern coast of Africa; now the table-land of Barca.
- [72] GRAPPLING HOOKS. Grapnels (*corvi, manus ferreae*) were an invention of Duilius. See Front. II, 3, 24; Flor. II, 2. When the *corvi* had seized the hostile ship, bridges were thrown across. Of course the party most interested in securing this close combat was the side that considered itself the superior in military strength, while inferior in point of strategy. For instance, the Romans in their wars with the Carthaginians.
- [73] OR ELSE A PIRATE. In spite of the energetic measures adopted against the piracy practised by the Illyrians, Cilicians and Isaurians, it was not wholly suppressed on the Mediterranean, even in the reign of Domitian.
- [74] LIGURIA. The Ligurians lived in the country, now called the Riviera, between Marseilles and Pisa. Under the emperors the territory of Liguria contained the region now occupied by Nice, Genoa, Southern Piedmont, and the Western part of Parma and Piacenza.
- [75] HE SEVERED THE ROPE BY WHICH THE RUDDER WAS WORKED. This bold method of rendering a hostile ship unfit for battle, was by no means rare. The two-edged axe, used to cut the rope of the rudder, was called *bipennis*.
- [76] WAS IT NOT THE SAME PERHAPS WITH THE VESSEL OF STATE? Comparing the administration of the government to a ship was common among the Romans. See the well-known ode of Horace "*Ad rem publicam*" (I, 14.): *O navis, referent in mare te novi fluctus...*
- [77] PLANASIA AND ILVA, now Pianosa and Elba.
- [78] ATHENOPOLIS, now Saint Tropez.
- [79] *Olbia*, now Hyères.

- [80] RHODANUS, now called the Rhône.
- [81] SAVO. Now Savona on the Riviera.
- [82] ALBIUM INGAUNUM. The modern Albenga, south-west of Savona.
- [83] IT WOULD SAIL STRAIGHT TO GAUL TO MEET YOUR SISTERS IN BEAUTY. The women of Marseilles, and especially those belonging to the neighboring city of Arles, are distinguished even at the present day for a beauty resembling the type of the Hellenic ideal of feminine loveliness.
- [84] A SHOWER OF ROSE-SCENTED SPRAY. This delicious method of cooling the air, which was by no means rare in wealthy and noble houses, was called *sparsio* (sprinkling). In theatres, etc. the spectators, on particularly hot days, were cooled by such *sparsiones*.
- [85] PAPHOS (Πάφος more accurately Παλαίπαφος, Old Paphos, to distinguish it from Πάφος νέα, New Paphos) a city of Cyprus, the principal seat of the worship of Aphrodite. Here the foam-born goddess was said to have risen from the sea. See Hor. *Od.* I, 36: III, 28 etc.
- [86] QUOTED THE FAMOUS LINE OF CATULLUS. See Cat. V, I: *Vivamus, mea Lesbia, atque amemus!*
- [87] HE PLUCKS THE PRESENT. See Hor. *Od.* I, ii, 8. The expression "he enjoys the present day" is a literal translation of the "*carpe diem*" used there—just as the phrase: "without troubling himself about the future" corresponds with Horace's "*quam minimum credula postero.*"
- [88] THE MAMERTINE PRISON. The state-prison in Rome was the Carcer Mamertinus at the foot of the Capitol—still in existence at the present time.
- [89] TULLIANUM. A part of the Mamertine Prison, so called after King Servius Tullius, who is said to have built it. The Catilinarians had been executed in the Tullianum.
- [90] THE STONE BENCH. Bedsteads built of stone were not unusual even in private dwellings, as appears from numerous specimens in Pompeian houses.
- [91] AMPHORA. A jar, usually made of clay, but sometimes of glass, running to a point at the bottom and supplied with a handle on each side. By this point the amphora was fastened into the soft earth, or the holes in the tap-room counters specially intended for them. Here allusion is made to a hole in the stone floor designed to secure the amphora.
- [92] STREET-PORTERS AND EXECUTIONERS. The profession of executioners (*carnifices*), to whom the execution of slaves and foreigners was committed (condemned citizens were put to death by the lictors), was held in greater obloquy than any other.
- [93] KISSED THE GALLOWS. Titus Claudius means the cross, which to cultivated Romans was held in no higher esteem than the guillotine is regarded by us.
- [94] TILL THEN YOU WILL BE A PRISONER, BUT IN MY HOUSE. For accused persons of high rank, an arrangement existed called the *libera custodia*, which consisted of setting a guard over them, but permitting them to remain at large in the house of an aristocratic citizen.
- [95] THE SUPREME COUNCIL OF THE PONTIFICES. The pontifices were a college of priests, that superintended the affairs of religion and worship on behalf of the government. Under Sulla they numbered fifteen; the emperors increased or diminished them according to their good pleasure. The chief of the pontifices, the *Pontifex Maximus*, was at the head of the college. Under the emperors the head of the government *eo ipso* was also *Pontifex Maximus*. The oversight of the manner of worship was the special duty of the pontifices.
- [96] A HERALD NOW PROCLAIMED SILENCE. The herald (*praeco*) was in the habit of shouting to the crowd: "*Favete linguis!*"
- [97] A MIXTURE OF WINE, SPRING-WATER, INCENSE, AND CONES. The libation with which the victim was consecrated to death was called *immolatio*.
- [98] YOUR POETS PRAISE TENACITY AS THE CROWN OF GLORY. See for instance the well-known "*Justum ac tenacem,*" etc., (Hor. *Od.*, III, 3.)
- [99] SILENUS. (Σειληνός.) Son of Hermes and a nymph, the constant companion of Bacchus. "He is the very image of an elderly satyr, a perpetually-intoxicated, jovial, good-natured old man with a baldpate and snub-nose, fat and rotund as a wine-skin, from which he is inseparable. His own feet can rarely carry him; he usually rides on a donkey, or is led and supported by satyrs. He delights in music and song as well as wine." Silenus had a temple at Elis.
- [100] YOU SEE, MY WORTHY FRIEND, HOW TRULY DOMITIAN INCLINES TO LENIENCY. See [note 13](#), Vol. II.
- [101] PAST THE CIRCUS MAXIMUS. The Circus Maximus lay south-west, the Mamertine Prison north-east of the Palatine Hill.
- [102] BREAST-BELT. The breast-belt (*mamillare*) supplied the place of corsets to the Roman ladies.
- [103] BRYONIA (the hedge-rape). Such professional poisoners are often mentioned. Locusta ("the grasshopper") a contemporary and accomplice of the emperor Nero, was specially notorious. See Suet *Ner.*, 33; Tac. *Ann.* XXII, 66; Juv. *Sat.* I, 71. Our Bryonia is not historical.
- [104] AMATHUSIA. A surname of Aphrodite, from the city of Amathus on the southern coast of Cyprus, where there was a famous temple of the goddess.
- [105] MARRY THE VINE WITH THE ELM. A favorite phrase, to characterize the idyllic activity of rural life. See Hor. *Epod.* II, 9; *Od.* IV, 5, 30.

- [106] ALL THE MEAT HAD COME UP READY CARVED. The various dishes were usually carved in the triclinium, by a slave (*scissor*) specially appointed for the purpose, after which the taster (*praegustator*) tried them, to secure the company from poison.
- [107] PARTHENIUS, GIVE ME YOUR ARM AS FAR AS THE BALCONY. Out-buildings (galleries, balconies, bow-windows) were not unknown to the ancients. See, among other instances, the famous bow-windowed house in Pompeii.
- [108] THE LITTLE TOWN OF RODUMNA. *Municipes*, that is, sharers, was the name originally bestowed upon the inhabitants of those cities most closely connected with Rome, for instance Tusculum, Formiae, Lanuvium. Later the term extended to all the cities in Italy, so that every Roman country-town was called *municipium*. Still later the name included all the cities in the empire. We use the word *municipium* here incorrectly, in the sense of the German "country-town" for the elevation of all the cities of the empire to *municipia* did not occur until several decades *after* Domitian's reign. What is here said of the importance of Rodumna is not supported by the writings of the ancient authors.
- [109] DECETIA, now Décise.
- [110] NOVIODUNUM, now Nevers.
- [111] THE IDES OF FEBRUARY. The middle of the month was called *idus* (from the Etruscan *iduaire*—to divide; see *div—idere*). In March, May, June and October it fell on the 15th, during the rest of the months on the 13th day.
- [112] LILYBAEUM. A city on the western point of Sicily, now Marsala.
- [113] VESONTIO. Now Besançon.
- [114] ARGENTORATUM. Now Strassburg in Alsace.
- [115] OPIMIAN WINE-JARS. Jars containing the vintage of former years, jars with wine that was pressed under the rule of the Consul Lucius Opimius (633 years after the building of Rome.) See Cic. *Brut.* 83, 287; *Vell.* II, 7.
- [116] RHAETIA, embraced portions of what is now Tyrol, Upper Bavaria and Switzerland.
- [117] PINDAR, (Πίνδαρος.) A Greek lyric poet, born at Thebes, 522 B. C. The only poems of Pindar which have come down to us complete are his *Epinicia*, festal songs to celebrate the triumph of the victor at the Greek national games.
- [118] IMPERIAL SPIES. For such persons, see Epict. *Diss.* IV, 13, 5: "Thoughtless people in Rome allow themselves to be arrested by the soldiers, in consequence of their over-hasty confidence. A soldier in civilian's dress sits down beside you, and begins to abuse the emperor. You believe, that the circumstance that he commenced the reviling, affords you a guarantee of his trustworthiness, you therefore express your thoughts, and are instantly fettered and thrown into prison."
- [119] THE CAMPAIGN ON THE RHINE AGAINST THE GERMANS. For Trajan's campaign on the Rhine, see Plin. *Paneg.* 14. Some expressions in the description given there have been literally transcribed.
- [120] THE PROPRAETOR OF LUGDUNUM. Augustus divided all the provinces of the empire into two classes: the imperial and senatorial. The management of the former he undertook himself, confiding the latter to the senate. "In one respect, he had selected for himself those most difficult to govern, either because the inhabitants were not yet at peace, or warlike neighbors threatened an assault: the senate, on the contrary, obtained the peaceful ones. Thus the matter looked as if he had granted the senate the best and most lucrative, undertaking all care and peril himself; but in reality, he made the senate defenceless, retaining the army for his own exclusive use. Only one senatorial province (Africa) obtained one, and afterwards two legions. The governors of the senatorial provinces were divided into two classes. Africa and Asia, according to the decision of the senate, obtained ex-consuls. The other senatorial provinces were entrusted to praetors, who also bore the title of proconsul. The governors of the imperial provinces, on the contrary, though they might also have been consuls, were called propraetors, to indicate that they commanded the army (*praeire*). These propraetors (*legati Caesaris pro praet. cons. pot.*) were distinguished from the senatorial proconsuls in this respect—that they held office longer than a year, in consequence of which the provincials obtained great pecuniary relief." Lugdunensian Gaul belonged to the imperial provinces, and therefore possessed a propraetor and a larger garrison.
- [121] WITH REGARD TO ULPUS TRAJANUS. See Plin. *Paneg.* 14, where the supposition is expressed that Domitian at that time cherished "a certain fear" of his victorious general Trajan.
- [122] GUARD OF HONOR. An imperial propraetor had a right to six lictors.
- [123] THEY HAVE DETERMINED TO ACCUSE DOMITIAN BEFORE THE SENATE. The senate possessed the right, which however was scarcely more than theoretical, of elevating and deposing emperors.
- [124] REPUBLIC OF CINCINNATUS AND REGULUS IS REESTABLISHED. The opposition, under the emperors of the first centuries, possessed a really republican character, which frequently asserted itself in contemporary literature.
- [125] TO-DAY, THE SIXTH AFTER THE CALEND. The first day of every month was called Kalendae (from *kalare*, to proclaim). The beginning of the month was originally fixed by the new moon. An official, in later times the Pontifex Maximus, proclaimed the appearance of the new moon from a house (*Curia Calabra*) specially built for the purpose on the Capitoline Hill. The days of the second half of the month were reckoned in such a manner, that they were mentioned as before the calends of the following month; for instance, the 24th of

March was the 9th day before the calends of April. The day from which, and the one to which the computation was made, were included in the reckoning. The phrase used here, "the sixth day after the calends, corresponds identically to no Latin form of speech."

- [126] THREE HUNDRED LIONS. "We are most amazed"—says Friedländer—"at the number of animals of one species, as well as the whole number of those belonging to different species, gathered at the great Roman spectacles. These numbers sound incredible; of course it must not be forgotten, that within two thousand years the species of the large animals have sustained a vast, scarcely computable diminution. Doubtless Dio's remark, that all such numbers are exaggerated, is correct; but even after great reductions, nay, even if cut down one half, they remain enormous. The spectacles exhibited by Pompey and Caesar, are not only unsurpassed, but unequalled in this respect. In the former 17 or 18 elephants, 500 or 600 lions, and 410 other African animals were displayed; in the latter 400 lions and 40 elephants. Among the historians of the empire, the statement is by no means rare that 100, 200 and even 300 lions, 300, 400 and 500 bears, an equal number of African wild beasts (and still larger numbers of the ordinary kinds of animals) were exhibited or hunted at a single spectacle. All the Zoological gardens in Europe at the present day could be abundantly supplied with the animals gathered in Rome for a single great festival. According to Augustus' own statement—he took great pleasure in 'vast numbers of animals and unfamiliar wild beasts'—3,500 African animals alone perished in the 26 spectacles he gave. At the hundred-day festival given by Titus in the year 80 to commemorate the opening of the Flavian amphitheatre, 5,000 wild beasts of all kinds were exhibited in a single day, and the whole number of wild and tame ones killed reached 9,000."
- [127] END OF THE GREAT FESTIVAL. The centennial games, so far as we are informed, usually numbered only three festival days; nothing however prevents the supposition that Domitian, by the exercise of his sovereign will, might have made an exception.
- [128] "COME HITHER TO SEE, WHAT NONE OF YOU HAS EVER YET SEEN, OR EVER WILL SEE AGAIN!" Latin: —*quod nunquam quisquam spectasset nec spectaturus esset*.
- [129] STIBIUM. A cosmetic much used by the Roman ladies—a powder made of baked antimony, known at the present day among the orientals by the name of Surmé.
- [130] FIRST THERE WAS THE GREAT PROCESSION FROM THE CAPITOL TO THE CIRCUS MAXIMUS. The centennial games commenced with a festal procession (called *pompa*) whose route corresponded with the description given here, and which closed with the chariots, that were to appear in the races in the Circus Maximus. These, however, usually played a more conspicuous part than in our story, where they are treated more as an introduction.
- [131] THE CONSUL FLAVIUS CLEMENS. See [note 137](#), Vol. I. Pyat has made the fall of this (historical) Flavius Clemens the subject of a novelette—unfortunately faulty in coloring—from which I have used some outlines for my story. Flavius Clemens' relations to Christianity are told by Dio Cassius, (LXVII, 14.) and Suet. (*Dom.* 15.)
- [132] IVORY TICKETS OF ADMISSION. Such admission tickets (made also of clay and metal) have been found in large numbers during the excavations of the last decade.
- [133] AN ATTENDANT IN A GAILY-COLORED HOLIDAY TUNIC, (*designator*) corresponds with our box-opener or usher.
- [134] THE CUSHIONS, WHICH A SLAVE HAD CARRIED IN FOR THEM. The rows of seats consisted of marble blocks, which during the spectacle were covered with cushions and seats of honor (*bisellia*.)
- [135] EVERY PART WAS AS GAY AS A FLOWER-GARDEN WITH GORGEOUS DRESSES. Every one appeared at the public spectacles in full gala dress. Those who possessed but *one* toga sent it before the festival to the fuller (*fullo*) to be cleansed and smoothed. The fuller's work is very clearly depicted in the frescos on a fuller's shop, excavated in Pompeii in 1826. See [note 33](#), Vol. II.
- [136] THE GAUDILY-GILT PODIUM, KEPT FOR THE SENATORS. The senators had special seats reserved for them at all public spectacles.
- [137] BROKEN VOW. Concerning the broken vows of vestal virgins, see Suet. *Dom.* 8. If the crime was discovered, Domitian's government treated the culprit more harshly than those of Vitellius and Titus, indeed the severity increased at each instance. The vestals Ocellata and Varonilla were granted the choice of the manner of death, but their betrayers were exiled. In later times, however, Domitian ordered the vestal Cornelia to be buried alive, and her lovers—for she had several—to be flogged to death in the comitium. In contradiction to this is the (perhaps incorrect) remark of Dio Cassius (LXVII, 3) according to which Domitian, to his credit, ordered that vestal virgins convicted of breaking their vows, should not be buried alive, but sentenced to a less cruel death.
- [138] PULVINAR. Here a superb seat resembling a divan, is meant. See Suet. A. 45, also see [note 45](#), Vol. II.
- [139] THE ENORMOUS CANVAS AWNING. The stone rings, into which these masts were fastened, are still visible at the present day in the walls of the Coliseum.
- [140] TAUROMENIUM. A city on the eastern coast of Sicily, now Taormina.
- [141] THE TENTH OR TWELFTH SEAT FROM YOU. My story here allows both sexes to be seated promiscuously, as was customary in the circus. At the exhibitions in the amphitheatre, women had places specially set apart. The license I have taken is the more easily justified, because the disposal of seats in the theatre was never strictly carried out, hence the frequency of the complaint that people who had no right to the places,

crowded into those reserved for the knights.

- [142] RHEGIUM. A city in the southern part of the Italian peninsula, in the country of the Bruttii; now Reggio.
- [143] MOVED THE WORLD BY A WINK OF HIS EYELASH. See Hor. *Od.* III, 1, V. 8; "*cuncia supercilio moventis.*" The words there refer to Jupiter; but Domitian's flatterers, especially Martial, never wearied of deifying the emperor as a second Jupiter. See Mart., *Ep.* V. 6, V. 9, and many others.
- [144] AVE CAESAR! or *Ave Imperator!* (Hail to thee, oh Caesar!) The emperor was greeted with these words whenever he appeared in public, and replied by the phrase: *Avete vos!* (I greet you also!) The word *Ave!* (Be greeted! Be blessed!) was also in general use when persons met or took leave of each other.
- [145] THE SEAT TO THE LEFT REMAINED VACANT. At public games, by virtue of his office, the Flamen Dialis sat at the emperor's left hand. See Suet, *Dom.* 4: "Beside him sat the priest of Zeus."
- [146] AVE, CAESAR, MORITURI TE SALUTANT! The actual words with which the gladiators destined for the approaching combat saluted the sovereign.
- [147] THE VICINITY OF THEIR FLATTERING GALLANTS. See [note 141](#), Vol. II, Ovid's prescriptions, here mentioned, are found in the *Ars amandi*, I, p. 135. Elsewhere (*Amores* III. 2) the same author gives us examples of a flattering gallant's conversation with a fair neighbor.
- [148] ALL THE SPECTATORS' THUMBS WERE TURNED DOWN. See [note 23](#), Vol. II.
- [149] HABET! He is hit! was the usual acclamation from the audience, when a blow struck home.
- [150] WHEN THE SERVANTS HAD STREWN THE ARENA WITH SAND. See Mart. *Ep.* II, 75, 5.
"For while two boys did rake the sandy floor,
With savage rage he both in pieces tore."
- [151] CALENUS, A WRETCH—ONE OF THE BROOD OF TRAITORS. The expression is similar to the well-known "*sus de grege Epicuri.*"
- [152] "WHEN, WHEN IS THIS VISION TO BE FULFILLED?" Perhaps it will not be superfluous to remark, that Barbillus here beholds in imagination the Flavian Amphitheatre, as it afterwards appeared in Catholic Rome—the mighty vine-grown ruins of the Coliseum with the solitary cross in the grass-grown oval of the arena. The Italian government has meantime somewhat changed the picture, by removing the vegetation, which seemed to endanger the venerable ruins by promoting the process of disintegration—certainly to the detriment of the artistic effect.
- [153] TILL SUPPER-TIME PUTS AN END TO IT FOR TO-DAY. It is here supposed, that the games only lasted until the hour for the principal meal (doubtless delayed on these days). The amusements at the centennial festivals and similar occasions were, however, usually continued through the night.
- [154] HER FINE SCENTED HAIR. The hair was anointed with costly essences, especially with an oil, made from the blossoms of the Indian spikenard (*Nardus indica.*)
- [155] THE UNDERGROUND CELLS OF THE AMPHITHEATRE. The greater part of what in our theatres we call "behind the scenes," was underground in the Roman amphitheatre; especially the cages for wild beasts, and cells for condemned criminals. The subterranean rooms in the Flavian amphitheatre are still visible.
- [156] THE CONSUL FLAVIUS CLEMENS AND HIS NOBLE WIFE. The wife of the consul Flavius Clemens was a relative of Domitian. According to Dio Cassius (LXVII, 14) she was called Flavia Domitilla, According to this historian, she was not condemned to the wild beasts, but only to exile at Pandataria. How near Flavius Clemens originally stood to the emperor's person, appears from the narrative of Suetonius (*Dom.* 15,) where it is said, that the emperor publicly designated the two sons of his cousin Flavius Clemens, then little boys, to be his successors, and therefore gave one the name of Vespasianus and the other that of Domitianus, in place of the one hitherto borne. Besides, according to Suetonius, the Christianity of Flavius Clemens is not so clearly shown as my story supposes. See also [note 137](#), Vol. I, and [note 131](#), Vol. II.
- [157] CAESAR ANGRILY SHOOK HIS HEAD. Usually the emperors had endeavored to heed the publicly-expressed wishes of the people. Only Domitian and a few others were an exception. Thus Suetonius (*Dom.* 13) states that Domitian, when the audience at the combats in honor of the Capitoline Jupiter, asked for the reinstatement of Palfurius Sura, who had been expelled from the senate and now crowned as orator, did not even vouchsafe an answer, but through the mouth of the herald unceremoniously ordered silence. The compliance with the demands of the audience at the circus, who required the recall of the empress, described in this story ([note 148](#), Vol. I.) does not contradict this trait of character, for there the emperor was bound by an express promise.
- [158] SOME VIOLENT MEASURES ON THE EMPEROR'S PART WERE ONLY TOO PROBABLE. Dio Cassius, LXVII, 8, gives us a striking example of such violence towards the spectators at public games. A terrible storm arose during a brilliant performance in the circus. The wind howled, the rain poured in torrents, but no one ventured to leave the place, even for the short time necessary to get a cloak. The emperor himself, on the contrary, constantly changed his upper garment. "Many" writes Dio Cassius, "took cold and died."
- [159] A FIGHT BETWEEN A LITTLE GIRL OF THIRTEEN AND A DWARF. See [note 177](#), Vol. I. Also Dio Cass., LXVII, 8.

- [160] A MAGNIFICENT NAVAL FIGHT WAS PERFORMED. The sea-fights (*naumachia*) took place either in basins and ponds, specially dug for the purpose, or in the arena itself, which by means of the high state of perfection attained by the Romans in the science of hydraulics, could be flooded in a few moments.
- [161] IGILIUM, now Giglio.
- [162] ALSIUM, south of Caere, an old Etrurian city, afterwards a Roman colony, a favorite place of resort, where there were numerous villas (see Front. "*De feriis Alsiensibus*" as well as Cic. *Mil.* 20; *Ad fam.* IX, 6), now Palo. Some ancient ruins still exist.
- [163] THE VIA CASSIA ran between the Via Flaminia and the Via Aurelia to central Etruria.
- [164] CLUSIUM. Early mentioned as the residence of King Porsena, between lakes Trasimenus and Volsiniensis; now Chiusi.
- [165] LUNA. A city in northern Etruria, not far from the modern Carrara; a Roman colony.
- [166] PISAE now Pisa.
- [167] RUSSELLAE, now Roselle.
- [168] FORUM CASSII, south of the Lacus Volsiniensis (Lago di Bolsena.)
- [169] THE SOLDIERY WERE ALLOWED TO DO JUST WHAT THEY PLEASSED. In a poem belonging to the early part of the second century, among other advantages of military life, it is specially mentioned, that the soldier can perpetrate many a wanton act upon civilians (See Juv. *Sat.* XVI, 7-34.) "If a soldier strikes a civilian (*togutus*), the latter not only does not venture to return the blow, but cannot even commence a law-suit, for the whole cohort takes sides with the accused before the military tribunals, by which the soldiers' offences are punished."
- [170] STEPHANUS, WHEN HE CAME OUT OF HIS OFFICE IN THE MORNING, HAD HIS ARM IN A SLING. See Suet. *Dom.* 17.
- [171] THIS WAS THE INSTANT OF WHICH STEPHANUS TOOK ADVANTAGE. The description given here corresponds in essential particulars with the accounts of Suetonius and Dio Cassius, except that we identify the young slave, from whom the emperor, according to Suetonius, demands the sword, with the slave, who rushed in and struck down Stephanus. Domitian's murder, which for private reasons I defer till the month of April, really occurred on the 18th of September.
- [172] PHAETON!... TOO LATE! These words are borrowed from Suetonius's account of Nero's end, (*Ner.* 49) where the centurion, who is ordered to arrest the dying Caesar, overcome by compassion, lays the mantle over the fatal wound, feigning to come to his rescue.
- [173] THE VERY MEN, WHO HAD HITHERTO GROVELLED IN THE DUST BEFORE THE DESPOT, ETC. See Dio Cass. LXVIII, i.
- [174] THE NUMEROUS STATUES OF HIMSELF, ETC. See Dio Cass. and others.
- [175] POWERS OF DENUNCIATION. See Dio Cass. and others: "Many were also sentenced to death through false informers."
- [176] THE SENATE WERE GIVEN FULL POWERS TO PROVIDE FOR THE LIBERATION OF ALL PRISONERS OF STATE, INCLUSIVE EVEN OF THE NAZARENES. See Dio Cass. and others. "Nerva ordered those accused of offences against the Caesar to be set free, and the exiles to be recalled home." He also allowed no one to be dragged before a court of law, on account of a Jewish (Christian) mode of life.
- [177] OLD PALAEMON. See [note 202](#), Vol. I.
- [178] SAMIAN WINE. The island of Samos, near the coast of Asia Minor, was famed from ancient times for its delicious wine.
- [179] COURAGE MY CHILD! This familiar tone from the physician's lips need cause no surprise. Earlier (see [note 209](#), Vol. I.) I have explained that a sort of filial relation existed between the old family servants and the children, nay that the former often took it upon themselves to reprove and scold the latter.
- [180] THE VENERABLE EMPEROR, ETC. See Dio Cassius, LXVIII, 3. In reality this adoption and the appointment of "crown-prince," ("Caesar" in a stricter sense) connected with it, occurred some time later, while Ulpius Trajanus was living as imperial governor in Upper Germany.
- [181] TRAJAN, THAT NOBLE, MODERATE AND JUST MAN. See Dio Cass. LXVIII, 5: "His character had not the slightest trace of falsity, malice or cruelty; he loved good citizens, treated them with respect and distinguished them: about the bad ones he did not ask."—LXVIII, 6: "He was eminent for his love of justice, courage, and simplicity of manners.... He envied no one, barred no one's path to fame; he rather honored and exalted all merit. Hence he had no cause to fear any man. Slanderers he did not trust. He neither meddled with the property of others, nor allowed the innocent to be put to death"—LXVIII, 16: "When he gave the sword to the commander of the Praetorian guard, he drew it from the sheath and held it up, saying: 'Take this sword and use it, if I reign well, for me, if I reign ill, against me.'" Even the eulogy of the younger Pliny, who was a friend of the new emperor, spite of many exaggerated expressions, shows that it is the utterance of sincere conviction; certain facts especially speak for themselves; for instance the total change in the ceremonies of the court. "Formerly"—so says Pliny—"the imperial palace was a fortress; under Nerva and Trajan it has become a public building. There are no bolts, no degrees of humiliation, and when a thousand thresholds have been crossed, we do not constantly encounter fresh forms and obstacles. We do not come to Trajan, as was

the case with former emperors, in confusion and haste, that we may not endanger our lives by delay, but with a feeling of security, gladly, and just as it suits our convenience. If some pressing business detains us, Trajan does not even require a word of apology. When we have saluted him, we do not rush hurriedly away. We linger, stroll comfortably about, as if the palace belonged to us—the very palace, which but a short time ago that abandoned monster (Domitian) surrounded with so many horrors; the very palace where the wild-beast shut himself up as if in a den, sometimes drinking the blood of his nearest relatives, sometimes rushing out to slay the noblest citizens.... But vengeance burst the wall of his guards and pressed victoriously through the locked doors.... How much safer and more free from anxiety is this palace, now that it is *not* protected by the guards of tyranny, but of love, not protected by seclusion and bolts, but by the citizens passing in and out. You have shown us by experience, that a prince's virtue is his best defence," Pliny *Paneg.* 65: "Trajan convinced us that the sovereign is not above the law—but the law above the sovereign," Pliny *Paneg.* 67, and "Usually we have taken vows of fealty simply for the emperor's welfare; but the expressions in which we have sworn faith to our present government deserve to be emphasized—if you will rule the state wisely and for the good of all ... that is you will only be preserved by the gods, on the condition that you rule the state wisely and for the welfare of all."

Transcriber's Notes

Incidental typographical errors have been corrected, and are noted in table below. On occasion, apparent errors, in modern usage, are allowed to stand. In particular, the repeated use of 'eat' in the past tense, even where the subjunctive is not in play, sounds odd to our ear.

On. p. 235, the footnote anchor 146 was missing from the text and has added.

This table documents the textual issues encountered, and their resolution.

| | | |
|-------------|-----------------------------------|-------------|
| p. 8 | [h]as suddenly vanished | Added. |
| p. 18 | be[.]]baptized in a quarry | Corrected. |
| p. 26 | in such contempt[.]" | Added. |
| p. 35 | Latin word ' <i>religio?</i> ["'] | Corrected. |
| p. 50 n. 41 | ["]In the commencement | Added. |
| p. 56 n. 45 | Juv. VI, 31[)] | Added. |
| p. 60 n. 46 | accidently | <i>sic.</i> |
| p. 79 | come | <i>sic.</i> |
| p. 87 | you may bes[ei/ie]ge me | Transposed. |
| p. 89 | to Chian figs.[)]"/")] | Transposed. |
| p. 125 | Piacenza[.] | Added. |
| p. 128 | magna[min/nim]ous | Transposed. |
| p. 133 | a[u/n]xiously | Corrected. |
| p. 160 | resolute[d]ly | <i>sic.</i> |
| p. 168 | retractation | <i>sic.</i> |
| p. 169 | responsib[i]lity | Added. |
| p. 177 | bursting into tears[.] | Added. |
| p. 184 | of Cornelia.["] | Added. |
| p. 205 | Febru[r]ary | Removed. |
| p. 224 | co[u]nsul | Removed. |
| p. 234 | this very spot[.] | Added. |
| p. 242 | tort[ru/ur]e | Transposed. |
| | his defenceless prey[.] | Added. |

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK QUINTUS CLAUDIUS: A ROMANCE OF IMPERIAL ROME. VOLUME 2 ***

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