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CHAPTER I

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THE gray stone seats of the Circus Maximus were already beginning to fill; the gates were opened, throngs of people were crowding through the corridors, pouring from the doors of the boxes into the narrow passages, which divided the seats, rushing like a cataract down the steps, or rising like the waves of a stream which threatens to fill a valley. Soon not a vestige of the marble in the building was visible, the vast interior was packed with heads up to where the last pillars of the outermost enclosure touched the blue sky.

Heads, nothing but heads, buzzing, roaring heads, a sea, a mountain of heads, in whose vast circle the white sand of the arena burned in the sunlight. How peacefully lay that white sand, soon to be dyed scarlet, how intently those thousands of eyes gazed at it. Now the dazzling sunbeams still glittered on its grains, but the Roman populace longed to see it smoke with blood. Death was to stalk over it like a Phoenician dyer, when he crushes purple snails upon a white woollen cloak till the dark juices trickle down investing the snowy vesture with a crimson splendor. Banners wave, bronze statues shine in the morning light, the seats of the Senators await them, and before the Emperor's golden chair a superb hanging swells out like a sail into the arena. Now the scene darkens; high above the heads of the spectators a cloud is rolling, depriving the sun of the right to annoy the citizens of Rome by its fervid heat; a gigantic screen, woven of variegated material, stretches from one summit of the human mountain to the other, waving, swelling, and

concealing the sky; the multitude greet with enthusiastic cheering the cool shade that is slowly extending over them.

The attentive ear often catches a dull roar, or a hoarse, long-drawn growl, which dominates with its bestial sound the buzzing voices of the throng. Expectant hearts thrill, and one man nudges another, saying: "Do you hear the lions raging behind the grating?" His neighbor, rubbing his hands gleefully, replies: "How hungry the animals must be!"

The last belated arrivals enter, and the slaves arrange cushions for them on the reserved seats. A youth, scarcely beyond boyhood, who has been here since before sunrise, takes his breakfast—consisting of a few peaches and some bread—out of his pocket, and a poor weaver tries to eat the sausage he has brought, while people crowding past him almost knock the mouthfuls from his lips. Men from the cookshops offer their steaming pasties for sale, and the patrician dames in the front row of seats below flutter their fans, laugh, and nod to one another. Lovers seated close to each other sometimes receive a jesting admonition to move a little nearer, which calls forth a universal peal of laughter; an unmannerly boy throws fruit stones at girls sitting below him, and is roughly called to order by the soldier on guard with the handle of his lance. Now the Senators' chairs gradually fill; the crowd is growing more and more impatient. A moment's silence follows; helmeted warriors, on whose weapons the sun flashes, appear in the imperial box; soon he must enter, the Lord of the World, the Emperor of Rome, Nero. How intently the throng is watching; now the heavy hangings stir, black hands draw them aside; there is Spiculus beckoning to a stately man in a flowing toga to

take his place in the front row of chairs, and that is Petronius, the manager of the festivals, who is officiously arranging the golden chair. And now, hailed by the thundering cheers of the populace, the man for whose pleasure Jupiter created the world stands surveying the assembly. A gracious smile hovers for a moment around his beautiful but pallid lips, a feigned expression of affability flits over his flabby, effeminate, almost womanly face, and Seneca, to whom the Caesar has just whispered one of his acute remarks, bends forward and instantly repeats it to his companions, who of course receive it with the most animated applause, especially as Seneca himself pronounces it uncommonly witty.

Now the Emperor approaches the front of the box. The Senators rise, but he motions to them to resume their seats. Still leaning on the railing, the monarch scans the vast amphitheatre, and some of the spectators awaken great amusement, which he expresses with mingled mirth and cynicism.

"Who is the big man up yonder in the third gallery?" he asks with a careless laugh; "it really is hardly seemly to exhibit such a paunch in the Circus. I should like to see the fellow run away from a couple of leopards. And the one over there with the long nose which he is constantly sticking into people's ears, must be a barber. Tell him not to forget to wear a mask during the day time in future. How can one insult the air with such a nose! But I would like to see him in a fight with the nets. And that lean fellow. Tell him to pour lead into the soles of his sandals, that the wind may not blow him away. Aha! And there sit my Senators, who, spite

of their purple-bordered pomp, are only the puppets of the Caesar's will. What is to prevent my showing them some day naked to the people in the arena? Look yonder at Piso, he grows older and gloomier every day. And there is the chaste Aemilia; I should like to have her, too, in the arena, or hide a young buffoon in her chamber at night. But how the beautiful Justina has adorned herself today; I should like to know where her husband gets his money—"

So Nero talks on, without waiting for a reply, drums with his fingers on the edge of the box, gazes through a polished emerald at the spectators, and at last lapses into a bored silence. The Consul Piso whispers to his neighbor: "He looks ill, Justinus." In fact, the Caesar, as he takes his seat, whispers to his freedman: "The sea-fish, my dear Aperinus, lies very heavy on my stomach; tell the cook not to serve it to me again, or I'll have him put into his own pots."

The sovereign's angry expression changes to one of assumed good-nature, as Spiculus arranges the folds of the toga artistically, but it seems to the attendant courtiers as though Nero was struggling with sleep, for sometimes his broad neck droops, sometimes his eyes close, then he suddenly opens them again. Now he even represses a yawn and asks why the games do not begin. Petronius apologizes for the delay. There is a very beautiful Christian maiden to be given to the wild beasts: would the Caesar prefer to have her death reserved until the last, or should she enter the arena first? The Emperor drowsily replies with a word that Petronius does not understand, and to which, in order not to ask a second time, he replies: "Yes, my Lord!" Burrus, stern Burrus, whispers to his neighbor, "The Caesar is drunk

again." But the other pretends not to hear the blasphemy. Petronius waves a white kerchief and the tuba sounds, giving the signal for the commencement of the games. The combats between the wrestlers which now take place, bore the populace; it wants stronger fare, and while the men struggle, gasping and panting, the occupants of the galleries talk on without even looking at the bloodless battle.

"Agrippina, Agrippina," now runs in a whisper from seat to seat. "See how proudly she moves."

Nero's mother enters her box. Tigellinus ventures to approach the dozing ruler and inform him of her arrival. The Emperor's face darkens, it is true, but swiftly controlling himself, he shakes off the last remnant of drowsiness, salutes the Empress, nay, even sends a slave to invite her to witness the games at his side, and Agrippina then appears in her son's box, where he embraces her before the whole populace. Otho, with his beautiful wife, Poppaea Sabina, now appears in a row of seats at the right of the Emperor's chair. Vatinius, the Caesar's jester, succeeds in giving his master a secret sign which the latter had evidently arranged with the dwarf; for, as soon as he receives it, Nero turns his head toward Otho's box, a faint flush mounts into his face, and he speaks with twofold graciousness to his mother. Sabina, too, blushes and whispers to her husband. It does not escape the notice of the courtiers that, while conversing with his mother, the monarch often glances, as if by accident, at Sabina, and that the beautiful woman returns the look. The couple seem to be noticed by the audience also; many inferences are

drawn from the eloquent language of Sabina's eyes, many bold assertions are made.

"How is my illustrious son pleased with his young wife?" Agrippina asks in the course of the conversation, while the gladiators below are vainly striving to attract attention. All Rome knew that the relation between the imperial pair was by no means the most tender; Agrippina, who has also noticed her son's restlessness since Sabina's entrance, has intentionally put the question. Nero bites his lips. As he turns away, his eye meets his mother's and it betrays that she is again in a fault-finding mood. Agrippina does not cease to praise Octavia's virtue. Nero makes no reply, but gazes down into the arena as if he did not hear the paeans in honor of his wife's fidelity. Finally, when his mother unmistakably blames his indifference to the daughter of Claudius, the sovereign's face wears an expression of impatience; he interrupts Agrippina's words with the exclamation: "She is too virtuous for me," and beckoning to his favorite Spiculus, whispers an order into his ear.

Spiculus vanishes, but soon reappears in the Caesar's box and secretly thrusts a long strip of papyrus into the folds of his toga. The son scans his mother's features suspiciously to discover whether her penetration has detected the secret correspondence, and lets the strip of papyrus slip lightly through his hands—but not a word of writing is legible; the receiver of the letter must wait until he returns home and scatters charcoal upon the characters written with milk.* Not until then will they become visible in black outlines.

*Ovid: *Ars Amandi*.

"Sly Sabina," murmurs the delighted Caesar.

Meanwhile the crowd is murmuring, and the complaisant director of festivals, to whom its will is law, orders the gladiators to retire. The iron grating at the extreme end of the building rolls back, a huge form creeps from the dark cage, a short growl is followed by a deep roar that shakes the very air, and, directly after, the lion's tail lashes the sand of the arena. He, the terror of the caravans, was dragged in huge carts through the provinces of the Empire and now must extort the admiration of the populace by his fury. The people receive in silence the king of the wilderness, the monarch of the desolate ravines of the Atlas Mountains, who so short a time ago watched for his prey on the rocky plateau and sprang boldly through the air to the neck of the giraffe, and now, with drooping head, slinks along close to the wall, snarling discontentedly. Then he lies down, raises his head with its floating mane, yawns, and licks his bristling lips with his red tongue; the yawning chasm of his jaws close, his eyes blink sleepily, he crosses his fore-paws and looks like a statue.

The walled ring gradually fills with animals from the desert, the forests, the mountains, the marshes; the gratings rattle constantly, the whips of the overseers crack; the people greet the savage guests with acclamations. The lithe Indian tiger steals spitefully around the auroch of Germany, the Northern bear scans with his little red eyes the sullen boar, the wolf licks his jaws hungrily with his hanging tongue, the serpent rolls itself into a coil, the Egyptian hyena, with its sinister green eyes, steals from one hiding-place to another. Timid gazelles tremble, ostriches

fly, claws, hoofs, manes, tails, move in a strange medley, and, like an orchestra tuning its instruments before the concert begins, the beasts gathered from all the quarters of the globe into the arena growl, roar, howl, and grunt together.

The spectators fume, cheer them on, utter angry curses; the animals, finding themselves surrounded by a mountain of heads, grow timid. Scarlet cloths are flung among the beasts to irritate them, red-hot iron poles are thrust through the gratings to stir the sluggish ones. Suddenly the first applause breaks out at the southern end of the circus. A bull whose sharp horns came too near a lion, had received a blow from his paw that laid its right hip open to the bone. The first blood is greeted with cheers, and as if by magic, a universal struggle, all fighting against all, begins. The sand whirls up in tall, white columns; the bear rises on its hind legs, tearing the air with its terrible paws; the lion crouches to spring; snapping teeth strike in necks dripping with blood; horrible sounds of rage, sharp death rattles, hoarse bellowing delight the ears of the multitude, which constantly grows more frenzied. Heads bend forward, people point to the confused medley of combatants, the gaping wounds.

But the sovereign people is not yet satisfied with the spectacle. These scenes still lack their highest charm; the horrors of death as yet encompass only unreasoning brutes,—how it must please the eye of man, endowed with intellect, to see beings also possessing intelligence shrink in terror from these gaping jaws, these uplifted paws! Are there no more criminals? Why don't they seize some of that Jewish sect, the Christians? What sight is fairer than to see

the bosom of a girl of sixteen bleeding under the claws of a lion? Pity, horror, and the charms of the senses blend so bewitchingly in the breast of the spectator, when she raises her beautiful arms imploring aid. What a study for the sculptor is the innocent youth, when his slender limbs struggle against the hug of the bear! How every muscle stands forth, how touching is the haggard gaze with which he looks his last at life! And the old man, how his quiet submission teaches the philosopher to despise death! What a pathetic sight is the infant with its thumb in its mouth, laughing at the animals, ignorant of the coming doom, and how its mother clasps it to her heart, hiding it as the wolf's muzzle reaches her! Such a spectacle makes the blood flow faster through the veins, and, for the first time, one realizes what it is to be safe.

The shout: "Men, men!" rises everywhere; the spectators wish to see human beings struggle with the beasts. The directors of the games are ready to gratify this desire too.

At the extreme end of the circus is an outbuilding where the persons destined for the combats await their turn. It is a vaulted structure, through whose grated windows daylight scarcely ventures to penetrate. The damp stones are overgrown with green mould, against which the wan faces of the condemned men stand forth in strong relief; around them, armed with lances, are soldiers on guard, gazing pitilessly at the scenes of misery before them. But it is not seemly for Christians to wail aloud. They sit quietly side by side on the stone benches, or clasp one another's hands. Mothers exhort their children, old men their sons; they speak tender words of comfort, words uttered by the

Saviour as He hung upon the cross, and many an eye sparkles with a radiant light. The iron-bound door opens; the roaring of the beasts, the frantic shouts of the multitude grow louder, like distant thunder or the howling of the storm. The captain of the guard chooses the first couple who must enter the arena,—two youths, leaning shoulder against shoulder as they sit together. The younger, scarcely beyond boyhood, gazes with pallid face at the floor; the older, of stronger build, embraces his timid companion with his bare arm. The boy, shuddering, leans his head upon the other's breast, clasps his hand convulsively, and raises his large, mournful eyes to his. A submissive smile, a sorrowful quiver of the under lip, are the sole response of the older youth. What can he say? • What comfort can he offer his young comrade? The captain shouts: "Why do you delay?" and they approach the door. There the boy's strength fails, he hides his beautiful face, and the older, overpowered by grief, supports the tottering form. A soldier attempts to force the sinking lad to stand.

"What am I to think of you, my Drusus," murmurs the older youth, thrusting back the soldier, whose rough hand violently shakes the almost senseless form. Now the boy, trembling, clasps his friend's neck, and the latter bears him out, his face, distorted with suffering, and eyes dimmed by tears, turned toward the distant arena.

The iron-bound door closes, and the roaring of the conflict reaches the hapless beings within less distinctly through its heavy boards. In the darkest corner of the room stand two old men convicted of being Christians. They had been friends from boyhood and at nineteen shared the

expedition to Germany. In those days their motto was to live, to enjoy, and they did enjoy until the strange tidings of the Man on the Cross reached them; they loved and drank, and now they were talking about the immortality of the soul, and their eyes sparkled more joyfully than when they dashed together into battle with the Germans. Slaves, too, are crouching on the ground. Whom could the example of the gentle Conqueror of the World inspire more, what bondman's heart did not throb faster when he heard the message of the brotherhood of man and the liberty which death bestows? The eyes of the slaves yearn for this freedom, the blow of the lion's paw is welcome to them.

But the most touching group among those condemned is one standing locked in a close embrace near the door. Even the sullen browed soldier, the Jew Rufus, leaning against it with the spear in his sinewy hand, would fain turn from this scene; yet his deep-set eyes cannot wander from the girl kneeling on the damp stones to take leave of three little brothers who are too young to understand the meaning of what is passing around them. His gaze is constantly attracted by the slender white figure, whose movements are so swift, so bewildered, and whose mortal terror is visible only in the large eyes, whose dilated pupils seem lost in vague, unknown distances. She turns from one brother to another; she cannot give enough proofs of love, encouragement, admonitions, farewell kisses, but her caresses are not returned; a paralyzing stupor rests upon the aged parents, the man with the long white beard, the woman with the wrinkled face.

"Father, tell sister she must stay with us," sobs the youngest child, pressing his wooden horse to his eyes. "Let us go home, I'm so hungry."

The father and mother look down at the children silently; they must lose their darling Lucretia who, without their knowledge, has professed Christianity. Secretly the thin, hollow-eyed youth beside her, who is pressing the crucifix to his brow, initiated their daughter into the mysteries of the new superstition. Yesterday the soldiers captured both as they were kneeling in the catacombs before the crucifix, and to-day they must atone for their boldness in having scorned Jupiter and clung to a fanatic.

"And you, my Regulus," Lucretia whispers with rigid, motionless features, clasping her youngest brother's hand, "you will be good, won't you? You will obey our parents when I am no longer here, as you have obeyed me, and love them as you have loved me. And don't break the toy I gave you, and think of me very often, though I can no longer pray with you in the evening, nor put you to bed. Do you hear? Remember that I shall be very happy, and that you must be good, so that some day you can come where I shall live forever."

But the boy hides his face in his mother's dress, his sister's eyes look so strange to-day as she talks in such hasty, excited tones.

"My Brutus," Lucretia turns to the other boy, pushing the black curls from his brow with her hand, "you will understand me; your heart beats strongly and bravely, though you are so young; and I know you will do great

deeds some day. God has given you much, my child; honor Him in using your talents."

"Where are you going, Lucretia?" he asks. "I will go with you. They shall not let you face the wild beasts alone."

But the sister has already turned to the third brother, who, almost as soon as she speaks to him, bursts into tears without knowing why.

"He must leave me; he will rob my soul of all its strength with his tears," she says to herself, then, looking reproachfully at him, rises. Does she feel compassion as she sees her grief-stricken parents wringing their hands? Her gaze expresses bewilderment. The door has opened again; the command rings out; a number of victims leave the room at the same time to enter the arena; Lucretia notices it and averts her face from the departing figures. Has she fought the last battle? Has her heart, has her mind, been so torn by conflicting emotions that claws and teeth can no longer harm the flesh? Does Faith really possess the power to destroy human nature in human beings? As the despairing shrieks of the lacerated victims penetrate the cell, she lays her beautiful hand on her father's arm; does she need comfort? She would fain console him, but a deadly pallor overspreads her features. The groans of anguish send a shudder through her frame, and she murmurs: "Everything, everything, great God, only let me not hear."

She covers her ears with her hands. Her mother, with a hollow groan, sinks upon the stone bench; no one can go to aid the fainting woman. The door opens once more; again the shout of command and the clank of weapons are heard; more victims are wanted. The thin, fanatical youth, with

scarlet spots on his hollow cheeks, approaches the maiden and silently holds before her bowed head the crucifix, sure of its sustaining power. What is his amazement as she stares fixedly at the Crucified One and shakes her head!

"Where is your faith, Lucretia?" he says hoarsely, frowning. "Will you do your teacher so little honor, has your zeal to fathom the divine life proved so small, and where has your trust in the help of Christ fled?"

Lucretia is about to clasp the cross, but now frightful sounds, such as no human ear has ever heard, echo from the arena, blended with bestial yelping and howling laughter; it seems as if mortal agony was striving to find tones to touch the heart of savage curiosity. Of what scenes these sounds speak, what blood-stained visions they hold before the eyes! How they describe the fearful torture of mangled bodies dragged by gnashing jaws over the smoking sand!

Lucretia draws her hand away from the Redeemer's image; the Man on the Cross has forsaken her; even His example no longer raises her courage. What would she give if, instead of the untenable consolations the fanatical believer is whispering in her ear, instead of the invisible presence of Christ, a visible saving hand would rescue her from this prison! Her gaze wanders helplessly from her mother to her father, and from him to her own body, now beautiful in its symmetry, whose charms must serve as food for the wild beasts of the wilderness. Then her glance falls on the Jew, Rufus, who still leans against the door, his head bowed, his lips compressed, staring at the young girl. Her livid mouth is distorted, the reddened lids of her eyes open

widely, and her expressionless gaze is almost like that of an animal, but she does not utter a word. Yet she is still beautiful in her anguish. The Jew sees how she struggles to control herself, how she strives to hold the fear of death at bay, and, to numb it, clasps her brother to her bosom.

"Help me, my Brutus; comfort me, my child!" she murmurs. "Oh, to what can my soul cling in this hour of need! My parents, have you no consolation for your child? Father, you who gave me life, kill me with your strong hand—to be torn by snarling beasts before this throng of people—Hark I hark! How they groan! If only dying does not hurt much! but, oh, father, I fear it does."

And cowering on the floor, not knowing what she is doing, she drags herself to the Jew's feet, clasps his bare knees, and falters wildly: "If you are a man, thrust your spear into my breast."

Rufus turns pale, sighs, and lowers the spear as if he intended to fulfil her entreaty. Then he shrugs his shoulders and gazes with fierce indifference in another direction, as if he did not feel a tremor as the hapless girl's head rested against his knees. Lucretia, with throbbing temples, remains in this attitude for a time, as if half unconscious; but Lucius, the fanatical convert, approaches, and lifts her from the floor. He is trembling as he embraces and kisses her.

"Lucretia, the hour of death looses my tongue," he whispers as if enraptured. "Listen to me: I have kept silence until now; but I have loved you, Lucretia, since I first saw you, since I taught you to pray to the Christian's God. The arena shall be our nuptial chamber; what do I care for death, since it gives you to me?"

He clasps her to his breast; she does not heed it; she has scarcely understood his words; he continues to stammer mingled prayers and vows of love, which she hears with an indifferent, meaningless nod of assent. At last she seems to realize the significance of his ardent kisses, and pushes her curls over her cheek.

"I do not love you, Lucius—may the Lord be merciful to me—I do not love you—but give me your hand—there—let me clasp it firmly—you must forgive me for saying this to you, but I am so weak I scarcely know what I am doing—my parents abandon me—at least be my friend, Lucius."

The tuba interrupts this strange love-talk; the door opens; the shout of command rings out; the captain chooses a group of victims, among whom are Lucius and Lucretia. Rufus's lips part as if to utter some exclamation; he grasps his spear more closely, then shrugs his shoulders as if he were saying to himself: "What is the girl to me? I can't help her."

The old father sinks down on the stone bench, weeping and muttering to himself in childish grief; the mother rises, rushes noiselessly to her daughter, and clutches her dress convulsively, while her chin moves as if she were talking in her sleep. But now that the die is cast and death opens his iron arms before Lucretia, courage returns, at least the nervous feminine courage, the reckless defiance of death, the feverish hardihood of despair. She beholds the world steeped in crimson light; she could laugh aloud, her heart throbs so high with joyous terror; the whole world whirls around her, shining strangely; she moves toward the entrance as if borne onward by burning clouds. A soldier has

attempted to remove the old woman's hand from her daughter's dress, but he finds it impossible, and is obliged to hack the garment away with his sword.

The roar of the surging sea of the populace already deadens every other sound, and now heart-rending shrieks pierce the air. Again Lucretia turns back; she sees her mother prevented by force from following her, sees the poor woman struggle, then clasping Lucius's hand closely, whispers: "When I fall, Lucius, arrange my stola, I beg you, that I may not lie with garments disarranged before the throng."

She adjusts her dress, hiding her bosom with her long hair, in half-unconscious modesty. They approach nearer and nearer to the place whence the deafening noise proceeds. Lucius, raising the crucifix toward heaven, begins to sing a hymn which dies away in the uproar. Clasping the girl with his right arm, his eyes, almost starting from their sockets, survey the vast arena as if defying the wild beasts; mortal terror, enthusiasm, contempt of the world, are all depicted upon his haggard features. The grating before the entrance rises; some resisting victims are thrust forward with red-hot iron poles.

Now the young pair stand in the arena; the grating closes creaking behind them. The girl rests her beautiful arm against the stone blocks of the encircling wall; the dense clouds of dust, through which are seen, as if in a mist, the mountain of heads, the hairy bodies of the wild beasts, the mangled human limbs, all appear to Lucretia like a shapeless vision of the imagination at which she gazes in wonder.

The thundering roar seems to lull her senses, the cries of fury, the sharp, shrill, hungry howls of the animals appear like flashes of lightning; the blood-soaked sand, into which she sinks to the ankles, seems painted; flames dart around her; everything shimmers, quivers. So she stands waiting, with her beautiful arm braced against the thick pitiless wall; often the face of a girl friend rises before her, an affectionate word, a beautiful scene from the days of her childhood,—all swift, fleeting, vanishing. Then she feels as if consciousness were receding farther and farther, shrivelling more and more; she sees dimly, as if through a light, swaying crimson veil, a monstrous brown form with huge paws tower in gigantic outlines before her, beholds Lucius throw himself upon it and his head vanish in yawning jaws. Then, drenched with some warm fluid, she sinks beside the wall; something quivering convulsively rests upon her body.

CHAPTER II

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MEANWHILE Rufus, who had been on guard before sunrise, was relieved. Instead of watching the spectacle, he left the Circus and, absorbed in thought, walked around the building, passing the booths of the shopkeepers under the arcades of the amphitheatre without noticing their wares; even the smile of the Assyrian dancing-girl, whose alluring gestures invited the attention of strolling idlers, could not efface from his imagination the image of the Christian maiden led forth to death. He felt a dull, vague compassion when he thought of Lucretia's head as the trembling girl pressed it against his knees,—a compassion which angered him, because he knew that whoever wished to attain a good position in Rome must contemptuously thrust pity aside as weakness, and to attain a good position had been the ambitious Jew's aspiration from his early youth. Hitherto he had not made much progress,—he was a private soldier in the fifth maniple of the Praetorians; but who, at twenty-four, loses the hope of being at least a centurion in the imperial guard when he reaches the age of fifty?

Rufus now tried to interest himself in the dancing of a Phoenician, whose nude limbs were relieved in artistic beauty against the dark archway, but the fair one's smile only called before his imagination, in still more vivid colors, the death-agony of the Christian maiden whose limbs were now perhaps quivering on the sand of the arena; and he could no longer watch the dancer's movements, which

reminded him hideously of the last convulsions of a dying form.

As a Jew, his nature was more sensitive; and being averse to the brutal deeds of these Pagans, his sole consolation was that the girl's sufferings were over. To him a human life was of more value than to these Romans, and, though recklessly ambitious, he felt a certain respect for every human being that Jehovah had created. Yet, after all, what was this girl to him?

Shrugging his shoulders, as was his habit, he muttered to himself: "What do you mean, Rufus? She is dead! Have you the power to call her back to life? Nonsense! I forbid you to think any more about her."

Then he really felt relieved; military discipline had so pervaded his nature, he was so thoroughly convinced of its necessity, that he treated himself with the strictness with which his superior officer, whom he always implicitly obeyed, would have treated him.

As, clinching his black beard between his lips, he hurriedly turned around a pillar, he ran against one of the street astrologers, who usually enjoyed excellent patronage in this place. The man, an Assyrian, was crouching on the ground, completely enveloped in a long robe, which was intended to lend the necessary dignity to his lofty calling. His knees almost touched his chin; he clasped his pointed beard thoughtfully in his hand; his brow, with its bushy eyebrows, was bent over a tablet covered with all sorts of strange characters; while several bystanders were listening patiently to hear what the august man would read from the stars concerning their future. After some time he raised his

head and beckoned to a muffled woman, into whose ear, as she bent near him, he whispered the result of his investigations. She gave him money and hurried off with a light step; the news she had received of the future of her lover in Egypt had doubtless been pleasant. Another person

to whom the result of the calculation was communicated left the astrologer with less satisfaction. The heritage expected by the smooth faced young dandy would never come to him—if the learned man's opinion was correct.

Now the astrologer sat alone in the shade of the pillar. The burning noontide sun was blazing outside; the smooth leaves of the distant laurel-trees glittered as if set with tiny mirrors or gems, whenever a sunbeam touched their green enamel; high above, towered the stone blocks of the Circus wall, partly covered with clinging ivy. Opposite to the Circus rose the Aventine, whose white temples gleamed in dazzling radiance against the deep blue sky. Not a human being was visible at the moment. Rufus pondered whether he should try his fortune too. True, his religion forbade him to meddle with magic, and he valued it no more than a dream, yet he could scarcely resist the impulse of his gnawing ambition. For what was he destined? He would but ask jestingly; Jehovah could not be wrathful with him for playing a prank with the Pagans. Yet his heart throbbed violently as, glancing timidly around him, he approached the crouching figure. ^The Assyrian started up, trying to assume a majestic air, as the excited soldier's footsteps cast gravel on his tablets.

"So you can unveil the future," exclaimed the Jew, while an incredulous smile hovered around his bearded lips.

The Magian, with a majestic gesture, answered: "Thou hast said."

"And how do you do it?" asked Rufus.

"How do I do it?" The Magian did not exactly trust the stranger, and scanned him from head to foot, while reflecting whether he was dealing with a scorner or a respecter of his art. The examination finally convinced him that he need not conceal his wisdom in the presence of a comparatively untutored soldier.

"Yes. How do you do it?" Rufus repeated, leaning his spear against the pillar, raising his helmet, and passing his hand over, ^ his hair, dank with perspiration.

"Do you suppose that this secret can be explained to you in a few seconds?" replied the other, almost insulted. "Young man, go with me to Egypt, visit the temples, become initiated into the mysteries of the priests of Isis, hold intercourse, as I have done, with Thrassylus, the astrologer of Tiber, and Barbyllus, the astrologer of Nero, study medicine, mechanics, mathematics, astronomy, and live to be seventy years old; then perhaps you may have a vague idea of the wisdom I call mine."

The Assyrian again became absorbed in his figures, as if he did not desire to be accosted or questioned, muttered all sorts of Egyptian words, and drew strange circles with his stones, while Rufus began to feel some degree of respect for the knowledge of this observer of the stars.

"Have you studied all these things?" he asked in astonishment.

The learned man smiled contemptuously.

"And much more," he said, passing his hand across his brow with a bombastic gesture, which intimated that nothing was concealed from him.

"And your art," stammered Rufus,— "does it always tell the truth?"

"Truth?" replied the Magian, in a melancholy tone, and then suddenly added, stretching out his arm as if in ecstasy: "What is truth?"

After hurling this phrase, he remained several moments in his attitude of profound thought, but meanwhile secretly watching with a side glance what effect his acting was producing upon the young man. Rufus took his spear, leaned on it, and gazed intently at the ground.

"Yes," he murmured, looking watchfully about him, "it is strange! God must know what awaits us; why should not a sharp-sighted intellect endeavor to fathom His thoughts? If we could search into the councils of the gods—of God, I meant to say—"

We can," interrupted the sage, impetuously.

Yes, if one were God Himself, or, as that other called himself, the Son of God," added Rufus.

"That is wholly unnecessary," said the Magian, eagerly. "We need not be God; the gods are like little children in school,—that is, bad accountants. Yes, my son, everything in the world had its destiny fixed from the beginning, before the gods existed. Whoever can calculate how the elements were arranged when love brooded over them, can estimate how they are arranged now, can predict the fall of every grain of sand, the approach of every comet. The gods are but the servants of Fate, its torch-bearers: the gods know

nothing, for they have no mathematics; but Prometheus is the great inventor of the science of numbers. Mathematics, young man, is the key of mysteries. Like a good hunting-dog, figures track the revolutions and courses of the stars, pierce the elements, and divide them into other elements, build temples, arrange the hewn stones like a sturdy Cyclops, and it is figures also which disclose the future of human beings, as a child's hand opens the closed bud."

Rufus was surprised; these words awed him. He felt a dread of calculations, and asked humbly if the sage would not reveal his future.

"Willingly," said the latter, clearing his throat, "but—it is again figures, according to which we value small as well as large coins."

Rufus understood. Horror of the mysterious figures disappeared, or rather it increased when the sage now named the sum after whose payment he was ready to announce the decree of fate.

"Five denarii?" asked the Jew,— "my pay for a fortnight! That 's too much. How am I to live?"

The sage pretended not to hear this ejaculation, which evidently proceeded from the depths of the heart, but played with his stones, and smoothed his Assyrian beard.

"How am I to live?" the soldier muttered again.

"And how am I to live?" answered the sage, coldly. "What is life? Unless you can be content with a sip of water from the hollow of your hand and a bit of mouldy bread, you are not worthy of the sun. Five denarii, young man, that is the will of Isis, the universal mother."

True, Rufus did not understand what the universal mother had to do with his five denarii, yet, sighing heavily, he resolved to pay them, and the Magian began his calculations.

"Will you not give me a short account of your family circumstances?" asked the mathematician after a brief silence. "I can investigate the course of your life better if I know its beginning."

"My father was a physician," said Rufus, frowning, and evidently dissatisfied.

"What is your mother's name?" asked the other.

"Esther. My father died, leaving us in poverty."

"Where do you live?"

"In one of the streets in the Tiber district, near the Covered Way."

"Have you any brothers or sisters?"

"No."

"How old are you?"

"Twenty-four."

"What is your favorite occupation?"

"Ask me no more questions," answered Rufus, sullenly; "it is enough for you to know that I—" he paused in the midst of a remark concerning his ambitious aspirations, and added, "that I don't like to be catechised."

"Very well," murmured the mathematician, and continued his calculations. The warrior intently watched the stones as they formed figures, shaking his head as he gazed at the curves which the soothsayer, with an air of the deepest thought, drew upon the tablet. Several passers-by lingered, to the Jew's great annoyance. One, a young stranger, asked