

AS THE GODS DECREE

DANIEL HENRY MORRIS



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A NOVEL OF THE TIME OF AUGUSTUS

By
DANIEL HENRY MORRIS



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As the Gods Decree

CHAPTER I

“The honeyed words of Regus ring true, Decius!”

The speaker was a man of about forty years of age, tall and wiry, but of shapely contour. His aesthetic cast of countenance was intensified by contrast with the armour and accoutrements that denoted his rank. He was the military tribune, Caius Artus, and in his bronzed arms carried his helmet, for the day was warm. His hair was slightly tinged with gray about the temples and a forelock of white nestled among the raven locks that had thus far escaped the ravages of time. His eyes were cold and piercing, but his most attractive feature was a firm mouth, touched at the corner by a scar that lent an expression of cynicism which women called fascinating. One could read on that clean-shaven face, strength of character, experience in life and suffering.

His companion, a man of strong and massive frame, who had already passed the half century mark of time, was Marcus Decius, a senator. He was of that noble and commanding mien which in-

dedicated his former vocation in life, ere the purple-bordered senatorian toga had taken the place of the scarlet-coloured cloak of the general. In a voice strong and deep, he replied to the words of the tribune.

“Aye, we should be grateful for this great privilege that rewards our struggles and strife,—this view of Rome’s greatness! Well does the world cry, ‘Ave, Roma!’ Yet,” he added in subdued tones, “I tell thee, Artus, these men,—aye, even such as young Regus, or the popular Tibullus who prefers the caresses of a wanton to the victories of war,—bah! I care little for their honeyed words. The strength of Rome lies not in arms weakened by debauchery. Augustus does well, indeed, to discourage it,—and by Pollux! so I have told him.”

“Thou art right, Decius,” said Artus, “and therefore—albeit I am no Stoic!—in quietude I enjoy my furlough in Rome. It rests with thee whether I return to Hispania to rejoin the legions of able Antistius against the stubborn Cantabrians, or else remain here to plague thee.”

“Artus,” replied the senator, “I but await thy final decision. Does this life in Rome please thee more than the duties of active service to which thou hast been accustomed these many years? Say the word, for I have influence that can gain for thee a place of honour here,—aye, mayhap greater than thou canst suspect! Other things, however, likewise require thy immediate decision.”

“Now, Decius, thou dost wrong me. There is no place this side of the Styx in which I would rather spend the hours of my restless life than in Rome—and with thee. I’ve had enough of war,

and thou hast been to me patron, friend—and—brother.”

They stopped walking and the eyes of Decius now sparkled with a heretofore hidden warmth, for the voice of the speaker had changed to tones of gentleness.

“In the name of Jupiter!” said the senator, “I welcome thy words. Augustus would deny me nothing I deem necessary for the welfare of the republic.” He smiled and his eyes twinkled as he looked at his companion. “And,” he continued, “my friend, the Consul Statilius Taurus, knows that Octavianus would give to me even the selection of a praetor,—for thou knowest the word of Augustus is law, notwithstanding the fact that the *comitia* resumes the election of magistrates. The office is one of power and can lead to great things. I have thee in mind as a candidate for a praetorship. What sayest thou?”

“What,—Decius, me? Surely thou art jesting!”

“Adrastaea bear me witness! I am in earnest. Hast thou not bled freely for Rome? Indeed, were we not with Taurus in the subjugation of Sicily aside from our service with the Caesar? Since thou hast returned I have also had in mind another matter. Thou shouldst take unto thyself a wife, to enable thee to share thy growing power more worthily. Joys of parenthood are not only for mothers. Old age is lonely. Likewise marriage is necessary if thou dost aim to attain higher rank. Thou knowest the ideas of the *princeps* on these matters.”

“Yet,” said Artus, as he smiled, “thou dost remain a widower!”

“With me, ’tis different,” replied Decius. “I have my daughter and have relinquished the tent for the home, because each night and morn she awaits me there.”

“Yet as regards marriage, Decius, truly thou dost freeze me! Misjudge me not, for well I know Rome gives birth to maidens for the gods,—aye, maidens that could shame the beautiful and too-loving Helen of Troy! But speak of other things. Keep thy praetorship. Next month I sleep in Hispania.”

Decius grasped the wrist of Artus in a firm hold and said, “My Artus, think not that I am blind to thy heart, nor that I forget thy fidelity to Eurycele. Yet I know that thou wilt tire of thy Greek concubine. Once thou didst love ‘my lamb’! Know then that Decia obeys her father!”

“Honour me less, Decius, and tempt me not with such sweet bait.”

“Tempt thee, Artus? I more than tempt. I give! My daughter loves thee,—aye, for those very things in thee that thou dost deplore. Such is woman. Her reason dies when she loves. Man, I say thou art to her a very god, nor too fat, nor too lean, nor too old, nor too young,—aye, she confessed it all!”

“What? Love me—as a lover, Decius?”

“My words are clear. Of course she knows little of Rome. I have kept her from the city, for, by Jupiter! I have long since vowed I would not sacrifice her,—even to Rome. She is for thee, I say and—and knows naught of Eurycele or thy past,—naught, indeed, save that thou didst love her when she was a child; nor has she forgotten that

thou didst take her on thy knee when she was but little higher than thy greave."

Artus turned his head aside, but Decius continued:

"Have I ever told thee that one day I came upon her,—aye, 'tis now more than ten years past. She was perched upon a *cathedra*, which she had dragged with efforts akin to those of the messenger of Marathon, until it stood abreast of my statue of great Julius. Her tiny hands encased a *stylus* and she scratched the face striving to make a mark upon it. 'Ho, ho!' I shouted, 'art thou becoming sculptor?' 'No, father,' she replied, 'yet 'tis an ill statue, because the face is not like Artus!' Think upon it, Artus, my marble from the scalpel of none other than Pasiteles! Now, by the gods! so did she rule me then,—aye, even as now I am her slave!—what needs but that I must do the work for her, kissing her between times! Her love for thee, thou seest, has grown through the years and was not placed upon her soul as seal on wax."

"O, Angerona, ease her pain! What, Decius, dost thou think thy lamb will say when she knows all,—for surely we must needs tell her, ere that day she would suddenly learn,—and break her innocent heart. Dost thou forget that she is, indeed, unlike Eurycele? Nor can we judge the daughter by the mother, for, alas! Decia does not resemble thy dear departed wife, Aurelia, who knew Rome,—and men's frailties. Wouldst thou have thy 'lamb' discover the truth of my—— O, Decius, spare us!"

"Truth of thy what?" asked the senator, as he stopped abruptly.

"Hear me, Decius, and judge. There is a writ-

ten chapter in the scroll of my life of which thou knowest naught. When I was a youth, an old man picked me from the gutters, where I lay bleeding one day after an encounter with a number of young ruffians,—like me—who were trying to rob me of a little trinket. He took me to his humble home, near the Tiber, and befriended me. He had a young and pretty daughter. Such things thou knowest happen not only in tales. How otherwise than that I should have loved her? Gentle, innocent and affectionate, and I, but a wild tempered youth! No man is born without faults. She gave herself to me. By Venus, goddess of Fertility! I vow 'tis not in a Roman's nature to thrust aside the fruit. Sorrow follows pleasure. I was impressed in the legions—then off to the wars. Years glided by and engaged in foreign service, I thought less of it. However, one day, after a battle in the Dalmatian campaign, a sorely wounded legionary sent for me. His face mirrored the death agony. 'Didst thou live, when a youth—with an aged man near the Tiber—and the Forum Boarium?' he asked. When I replied in the affirmative, he continued, 'Didst thou there claim—the name of Calchus?' My startled countenance was my reply; then he gasped, 'Thou—hast—a—son,—seducer!' He expired, with an expression of hatred on his agonized countenance. I could learn naught of his identity save that he had come from Rome. However, Decius, men speak truth in the shadow of death. The gentle maiden had become a mother,—the mother of my child. This son, if he is alive, is now grown to manhood. Even yonder youth

may be he! So do I pass through life. Some day I may hear one say, 'Thou art my sire and didst ravish the maiden who bore me!' Some day I may meet her,—if she be not with the shades! Thou wilt say, Decius, that such is life,—aye, thou, who art a man, wilt say it,—but what will Decia say? So hover the clouds and my soul has no protection 'gainst such elements. And yet, Decius, 'tis not only this that keeps me from stealing 'thy lamb.' Early, not late remedies, are the most effective. I must deny myself."

"Deny thyself?" said the senator. "Nay, all this is in mortal life. These things can be kept from her knowledge forever. I have chosen thee of all men for the husband of my daughter. To thee only can I entrust her happiness. Yet, truly, I gave but little thought to the fact that some day she must needs leave her innocence for—Rome! Come to me on the morrow at my villa. Meanwhile I will coax my dull mind upon this problem."

The sun was now setting west of the Palatine. They parted with a clasp of the wrist, but did not observe the figure of a man slink silently away in the shadows of the fast disappearing radiance,—a man, whose body was covered with a coarse and torn woolen tunic. Yet, when from the distance, he saw the senator and the military tribune go their several ways, he folded his arms and whispered half aloud:

"By Pollux! could I but have heard more of it! Calchus! Near the Forum Boarium and the Tiber! The traducer of a maiden ere he was impressed!"

He then walked slowly in the direction of the Palatine.

It was in the 728th year of Rome, and during the consulship of Octavianus and Statilius Taurus, the year succeeding that in which the former had been honoured with the title of Augustus by decree of the senate. Gaius Julius Caesar Octavianus (a name the great ruler had assumed at the time of the assassination of his grand-uncle, Julius Caesar) had already begun the mighty task of creating a Rome that was to be the most stately and magnificent city of the world. Many important additions were being made to the great structures of the "nameless city," which was adorned with imposing edifices. Even the Pantheon of Agrippa was in course of completion, and the great temples, such as that of Jupiter Capitolinus, which surmounted the Capitoline, and sacred and civil edifices, stood forth from a sky of Adrian blue. Porticoes, columns and statues embellished the *forum Romanum*. The great aqueducts, monuments of engineering ability stretching across the level Campania, seemed to carry with them into the walled city unseen powers which made Rome the mistress of the world. Indeed, the *Umbilicus urbis Romae*, or ideal center of the city and empire, in the *forum Romanum*, was virtually supposed to mark the center of the world; distances to all points, even the remote provinces, were reckoned from the gates of the city, and mile-posts on the Via Appia and other great roadways, told the mileage from Rome. The dominions of the Empire at this period stretched practically from the Atlantic to the Euphrates, were hemmed in on the north by the forests of Germany and the bleak steppes of Scythia, on the south by the sands of African deserts and

the dreary wastes of Arabia. In the city of Rome mingled a populace that included types of all the peoples of the hundred millions over whom her eagles held sway. Asiatics and Africans, mingled in the *fora* and along the thoroughfares. Rough and hairy barbarians rubbed elbows with graceful Greeks, whose clear complexions made strong contrasts in the crowd. Gaudily attired Egyptians and dark-robed Jews, fierce Numidians and refined voluptuaries of the East, exchanged glances. Patricians, knights, freedmen, slaves! The highest pinnacles of the worldly power and possession, the most abject conditions of poverty and serfdom, were all represented in this seething, surging, restless humanity.

CHAPTER II

The home of Artus was situated in the salubrious Janiculum, the trans-Tiberim region of Rome. On the succession of terraces stood many handsome residences. Close by the *pons* Sublicius crossed the southward flowing Tiber, and on the opposite shore, touched near the Forum Boarium. Although the house of the tribune was of less magnitude than those of many of his neighbors, it was of considerable artistic beauty and perfect in detail. No busts of a long line of ancestors, however, adorned its atrium. Indeed, the very name of Artus ("joints") had been jocularly given to him, as his *gens*, by rough companions in the cohort when he had been impressed, the legionaries having noticed the large joints of the young recruit. This physical characteristic was the most prominent to which he could at that time lay claim. Under the name of Caius Artus only, was he known. A source of gratification to its owner was, that his many years of service had enabled him to eventually possess a permanent domicile in Rome, where he could rest during the periods of his furloughs from active service. He had fought at Philippi under Octavianus and Anthony against Brutus and Cassius, when he was twenty-one years of age, and it was during this campaign that his distinguished bravery

had won the notice of Decius, to whom he attached his career.

Decius sided with the young Octavian during the eleven years' struggles of the triumvirs for possession of the prize of supreme power, and was with Octavianus when the Roman army pursued Anthony to Egypt, where the latter committed suicide. Decius, the patrician, moved onward in life and Artus remained attached to him.

A week following his conversation with the senator in the Forum, found Artus one morning at sunrise seated in his peristyle, pondering over the combination of incidents and accidents that had brought him to his present discontented frame of mind.

His thoughts wandered backward to that early period in his life when he was the beloved child of noble and wealthy parents. Of this, however, he retained but slight recollection. Quickly moving political events, and malicious lies and treachery, had robbed his father of rank and wealth,—and eventually of life itself. His father had been denounced as a traitor to Rome! Artus did not even dare to breathe the name, though years had passed. The memory of the Caesar was keen! The tribune considered it a cruel trick of fate that he possessed but a single vague clue to the identity of those who had been responsible for the crime. Twenty years of service to Rome! He had gained a comfortable competence, was now of the Equestrian order, and held the rank of military tribune. The future held promise of even greater rewards.

Eurycele arrived upon the scene as he was fighting this silent battle. She approached him quietly

from the rear, glorious in all the radiance of her Grecian beauty, the smile of Aphrodité playing about her beautifully formed mouth. He felt her arms about his neck and the soft touch of her lips upon his hair. The rays of the rising sun stole gently through the polished marble columns of the *peristylum*. He arose and lifting her face to his, looked long and piercingly into her eyes. He was startled to discover in their depths a wealth of love for him which he had never before believed could have existed in this "child of fate." However, he bade her summon his favourite *antiambulo*, or waymaker, Hercules by name, a Gallic slave of gigantic build, with whom it was his custom to wrestle each morn. It was while he was thus engaged that Decius entered and heard Artus cry: "Loosen thy hold, Hercules! Am I so ill a master that thou wouldst break my back?"

The slave dropped to one knee before him.

"My life is thine, lord!" he said.

"Words cost thee naught, slave," interrupted Decius at this moment.

"Decius!" cried Artus. "In the name of Jupiter, welcome,—yet wrong not good Hercules. I'll summon Eurycele, who will converse with thee whil'st I repair this damage to my temperature."

"Hasten, Artus," said the senator, "for I would have thee visit Damassus with me. He is training a novice in his 'family',—a young *retiarius* who fights on the morrow. Damassus speaks highly of the youth, who is a Roman, and has promise of my patronage should he prove a victor. I desire to have thee tell me of my chances on the outcome."

“Hast thou wagered much on the youth, Decius?”

“I have a better reason for desiring victory,” replied the senator. Eurycele entered and Artus hastened to his bath.

CHAPTER III

The wine-shop of Largus, the ex-gladiator, was located near the amphitheatre of Statilius Taurus, in the Campus Martius. It had become a favorite resort of the free gladiators, and on this morning preceding the day of the games, contained a goodly crowd of combatants and their backers.

Among the wine maids who served the mixed crowds was one called Mecinia. Her beauty was startling, her clear olive complexion being illumined by large black eyes, for the sake of whose lustre, many a gladiator had pursued elusive victory and its rewards with which to bedeck her. For a view of her pearly teeth behind a smile, *spectati* or victorious gladiators had at times thrown their coins in a shower over her in a moment of intoxication from the wine, or the influence of her fascination! Though it cannot be said that she never had a lover, it was known among the patrons, that her favours were few and far between. In the cruelty of her nature, there was no hope for the defeated, no tears for the dead. A product of the slums of Antioch, knowing neither kith nor kin, she found herself at the age of realization, in the ill-kept abode of a beggar, an old hag who had used her as a bait for charity. Later she worked in the *tabernae*, and eventually drifted to Rome.

A massive Gaul was leaning against the wall. He

was bragging of his possession of the *iudus*, the token of liberation, for he had in former times been a slave. He was now a *rudarius*, engaged as a gladiator by various nobles. His earnings, through his hire, were considerable. He turned to Mecinia and said:

“Queen of the ‘family,’ say thou wilt share my spoils, for by the God Taraan! I vow I will win with thy favor as the prize!”

“Bah, Brute!” (for thus they termed him, owing to his great size, hairy chest, and guttural voice). “It is one thing to boast, another to fight; save thy sesterces for bandages!” was her taunting reply.

Standing in a distant part of the room was a young gladiator. He was a *retiarius*, or netsman, and unquestionably a novice, for he did not wear the *tessera gladiatoria*, which would have signified that the owner had appeared before an audience. His wiry frame possessed much nervous tension, which, when coupled with strong sinews, often conquered physical strength in the arena. He gazed admiringly at Mecinia, who, apparently, was unaware of his existence. His face seemed to lack the harsh expression which was to be observed on the countenances of the majority of occupants of the tavern. “Brute” once said of him: “He’s still new at the business,—nor will he live to be old at it!”

Mecinia seemed to hold the glances of the youth as in a spell, but he approached her with head erect and dignified carriage.

“Say, beautiful Mecinia, doth the victor on the morrow gain thy favour?”

“O, 'tis thee, Glaccus, thou serious one! Wherefore thy interest? Truly with thy soft glances thou canst not hope to gain the favour of Fortune?”

The crowd, including the weather-beaten gladiators, had gradually drifted toward these two.

“Hear this novice among ye!” she said, as she laughed, “craving for my favour should he win!—Should he win!”

Her auditors joined in her mirth. Largus, the host, suddenly shouted:

“Hush! hush!” as the cry of a waymaker was heard at the entrance; “here come nobles!”

“What have we here?” said Decius, in commanding tones, as he alighted from the litter, followed by Artus. “A nest of laughing wolves! Save thy breaths for the sand! Glaccus, strip, that the tribune may see thy thews and sinews.”

The youth obeyed and systematically Artus felt and twisted the various sinews and muscles of the novice, testing their strength as it were, and said:

“A model netsman, by Hercules!”

Decius dismissed the litter and, accompanied by the tribune, walked in the direction of the Forum. The former discussed with much enthusiasm, the abilities of the various gladiators entered for the combats on the morrow. This fact was somewhat of a surprise to Artus, for never before had he seen the senator take such keen interest in these spectacles. He had once heard Decius remark that “he had seen enough of blood in the wars.”

“What means this sudden enthusiasm, Decius?” he inquired.

“I'll tell thee in confidence, Artus; I have a dangerous mission for a man who possesses strength,

endurance,—aye, and recklessness—and one who needs reward. Where better can I find such an one than amongst the victorious novices? Ha! but the nature of this mission I must keep secret, even from thee, and I fear I must deepen the mystery by adding that it perchance concerns thee! Curb thy impatience until the aftermath and join me on the morrow at the games.”

“Thou hast not aroused my curiosity, and all this trouble is most unnecessary,” said Artus.

In the meanwhile, Glaccus tarried at the tavern.

“Dost thou expect to win, proud man?” laughed Mecinia, derisively, as Glaccus lingered, for many of the others had already left. He made no reply, but walked slowly to the door. Once he glanced backward, but did not stop. He had loved her since the first moment he had seen her, on a certain day many, many months gone by.

As the youth walked to the gladiator’s barrack opposite, the glances of Mecinia followed him. Her surroundings had created in her mind disbelief in that mysterious thing they called love. She had never experienced it, had indeed seen nought but the worst of its substitutes. Once only she thought that Cupid had shot an arrow true. That was when she first heard Glaccus speak to her in a voice tinged with a sadness that ill became his stern habiliment. She laughed at herself, however, for her weakness, and the arrow did not penetrate! Her heart was protected by the armour of experience. She love!—she who had so often seen men drunk with wine and blood!

“I fear I was harsh with him,—yet he carries his head too high; I care not for such wooing.

They all beg, but he—— Bah! the morrow sees his end, for 'Brute' will kill him, even because they both say they love me, and Glaccus is more fair than he. Did Venus frown upon me and give me wrinkles, they would jeer at me! Ecastor! if 'Brute' wins, I'll throw his reward back into his vile face. But this will never do,—though I do wish I had given the youth some kind word ere he went to death,—Death!"

At the word she seemed to feel something touch her heart, then grasp it as she thought of his black hair reddened with blood, of his eyes again softened, but this time by death. She resolved to visit Glaccus at the barrack on the morrow before the games commenced.

CHAPTER IV

In the morning Mecinia discovered that they would not admit her to the barracks. She must needs content herself with one of the seats in the upper gallery, which was the only part of the amphitheatre from which women were permitted to witness the games. She must join the pushing and crowding hordes that would pour through the *vomitoria!*

The hawkers hushed their cries, as they ceased plying their trade of selling refreshments. The shrill tones of the flutes and pipes were soon stilled and the games commenced. She sat impatiently through the *venatio*, combats between wild beasts, and the succeeding events of the *bestiarii*, who pitted their skill against the strength and ferocity of savage animals. She sat there, silent and uninterested, until the trumpets pealed and the resounding brazen cymbals clashed the signals for the commencement of the gladitorial combats. Out marched the contestants slowly and two by two. After defiling at the *bisellium*, and saluting with the "Morituri te salutant!" they paired off. Their weapons were examined. The *editor* waved his red handkerchief. Blasts from the *tuba* were again heard. The signals for positions! Mecinia could have shrieked as she saw Glaccus, naked, save for

a short white tunic reaching to the knee, matched against his first adversary, an able-bodied Liburnian captive, armed as a *myrmillo*, yet clumsy as an elephant. The rabble hissed when the Liburnian fell, entangled in the meshes of the net which the youth had deftly thrown over him. The trident had lightly touched his groins and he gave vent to a howl. The people shouted:

“Euge!” “Bene!” “Hoc habet!” “Hoc habet!” and laughed, but turned their thumbs up. This hilarity, therefore, did not save the life of the *secutor* for Glaccus, in accordance with the rules of the games, drew forth a short knife from his waistband and slew him. The body of the victim was then dragged out through the *Libitinensis*, the “Gate of Death.” The populace were disgusted at the victim’s fear of death.

The arena was now sprinkled with fresh sand to hide the dark spots formed by the blood of the vanquished. After a short interval, Glaccus was pitted against the victor of another combat. Mecinia swayed in her seat as she watched them, for the opponent of Glaccus in this event was of the veterans, a Thracian, victor of many combats, who was hailed by the populace with shouts of welcome. He was one of the *threces*, or buckler and cutlass men; and then the wine-maid realized that she loved Glaccus, and she arose to her feet and screamed! Glaccus looked toward the upper tier, whence her cry had come. He set his jaws firmly together and his blood leaped like fire in the excitement of action. He thought of Mecinia and hatred was born for his opponent,—for life itself. He sprang forward with an impetuosity which took his oppo-

ment almost unawares. His net fell true and again spelt death amid the plaudits of the blood-thirsty multitudes and their shouts of, "Peractum est!"

Again the arena was sprinkled with sand. Next came the victors of the second trials! Mecinia recognized in the youth's new adversary, him they called "Brute!"

Her voice failed as she tried to call out to Glaccus. "Brute," whom she hated and feared! Two women seated next to Mecinia held her to prevent her from falling over the balcony in the excitement. They thought she was drunk,—and so she was,—with the fear and terror of it all! She looked again at the arena and saw what appeared to her bereft mind to be a giant before a pigmy, but though much larger than Glaccus, "Brute" did not possess that nerve force, grace and ease of action, swiftness of limb, or that hatred of life itself, which gives such courage in the face of death. The trumpets again pealed forth their harsh blasts. It was the signal to take positions! "Brute" crouched forward, his heel dug deep into the sand, his eyes peering through the opening of his helmet, his body protected by his *clypeus*, or large round shield, his short sword pointed toward his adversary. Glaccus, however, now in the intensity of action, appeared to the populace as though he were a bundle of springs, as he moved about in a semi-circle, carefully preserving the folds of his net, which was weighted with small lead balls and hung over his left shoulder. He became the aggressor and prepared to cast his net at the first opportunity. Suddenly he let it fly swiftly at his opponent, who, however, dodged it successfully. Nought was left

for Glaccus now but to run swiftly from "Brute," dragging his net across the sand and increasing the distance between himself and the *secutor*. This he was enabled to do, as he was unencumbered with weighty armor such as that worn by his opponent. The audience arose in the excitement of the action. Even the patricians forgot their assumed indifference for the moment. Glaccus, by this time, however, had recovered his net to position, and awaited the onslaught of the now maddened "Brute." The Gaul stopped suddenly. These tactics were not new to him, for the netsman calmly awaited the onslaught. Yet, perhaps his adversary had some new trick! What was it? Again Glaccus cast the net and this time it struck "Brute," but became entangled on the shield of the latter, who, though he pulled and tugged it, could not loosen the hold. Ere long Glaccus was running with "Brute" in full pursuit. It was, however, a difficult position for both of them. If Glaccus should be overtaken, or if he relinquished his hold on the net, he would practically have no defence. On the other hand, if the *secutor* let fall the buckler with which the net had become entangled, he would virtually be at the mercy of the long trident of his opponent. The shield of "Brute" was now useless for any purpose whatsoever, entangled as it was in the meshes of the net of the *retiarius*, who was pulling it with might and main and menacing the *secutor* with his trident. They both halted at as far a distance from each other as this peculiar chain permitted, each with his weapon held aloft. "Brute" now adopted new tactics. He began, with the strength of his left arm, to pull the net toward

him. Thus he succeeded in bringing Glaccus nearer to him each moment. He thought the *retiarius* would fight against this operation, but, on the contrary, Glaccus suddenly poised his trident in the air and aimed for a fatal thrust. The latter's adversary realized that this plan of campaign would have to be changed! There was naught else for "Brute" to do than to loosen his hold upon the shield with its attached net, which he did. The net, however, was equally useless to Glaccus, because it was encumbered with a heavy shield. It was many a day since the people of Rome had seen so strange an outcome to this character of combat, for now the combatants had lost part of their weapons! Shouts of "Euge!" and "Bene!" again arose on the air. The combatants now stood facing each other, studying the situation. Glaccus was armed only with his three-pronged trident. "Brute" was at an equal disadvantage, without a shield to protect him from the reach of his opponent's dreaded weapon. The spectators were shouting lustily. A smile now appeared on the face of Glaccus that sorely puzzled "Brute." The former began new tactics and made a flying start as if to thrust his trident at his opponent. Such, however, was not his purpose, for he suddenly changed his course and ran around him in a circle, coming closer and closer each moment. "Brute" was, therefore, compelled to keep turning around and around upon the same spot, a very uncomfortable operation. Indeed, he suffered so from the heat and exertion that he was forced to discard his helmet. At this action Glaccus laughed tauntingly, and shouted:

“Why not throw away thy sword!” The odds were now about equal. Should Glaccus drive a false thrust, the trident would glance off or perchance be pushed aside by his opponent, and he would be conquered; on the other hand, should “Brute” attempt to force the issue with Glaccus he would come within range of the dread trident. He realized, however, that unless Glaccus thrust him in a vital part, he would, perhaps, but suffer an injury from which he could recover, and the people would undoubtedly spare him as he had been popular in the past. Therefore, the advantage, should he decide to determine the outcome at once, was on his side. Glaccus, however, appeared to be at ease; in fact, notwithstanding the strenuous efforts he had already put forth, he was in good physical condition. His manoeuvres had considerably tired the heavily armed Gaul. The latter realized that some desperate action was now imperative and, therefore, with his left arm poised before his head to thrust aside the trident, and his right hand firmly clasping his sword, made a dash for Glaccus, who dodged him, and with a backward thrust as the *secutor* passed, sent the trident into his back, but only slightly wounded him. The people shouted, “Hoc habet! Hoc habet!” as “Brute” gave vent to a howl of fury and became madder each moment as he raced wildly around the arena after the fleeing Glaccus, who scoured lightly over the sand, always keeping out of reach of the stroke of that terrible right arm, awaiting an opportunity for a thrust with his trident. With the passing of the moments, and amidst the hush of excitement of the assembled multitude, “Brute” became tired and could no longer

pursue with speed. Loss of blood had somewhat weakened him, and he stopped to recover his wind. This was the opportunity awaited by Glaccus, who realized that now, while his adversary was fatigued, was the moment at which to strike. The crowd arose as one man and a great roar traveled through the amphitheatre. Quickly gathering his strength, he made a rush at "Brute," and the trident penetrated the stomach of the latter. Again the populace shouted, "Euge!" "Hoc habet! Hoc habet!"

However, as Glaccus attempted to recover himself from the momentum of his rush, he came within too close range of his adversary's weapon, and received a downward slash at the rear of the shoulder. He had, however, dug his trident into a vital part of "Brute," who sank to the earth. Glaccus, however, felt the ground slipping from under him. The wound he had received drew much blood, the loss of which, coupled with the exertions he had put forth, was more than mortal man could endure, and he sank to the sand at the moment that a woman's shriek pierced the silence of excitement, just before the people gave one mighty roar, and the rabble crowded forward from their seats, even attempting to gain entrance to the arena to discover which, if either, of the combatants, was alive to claim the victory. It required the entire force of *designatores* and *locarii* to preserve order and prevent the rabble from invading the first *maenianum* appropriated to the Equestrian Order, and the broad *praecinatio*, occupied by senators, magistrates and other persons of distinction. The physician, accompanied by his attendants, quickly sped to where the two men lay upon their weapons.

After an examination, he kicked the body of "Brute" to signify that it was that of a corpse, at which some of the rabble now threw half-sucked figs. It was then dragged by hooks through the gates. The crowd cheered and watched his examination of Glaccus, who was rolled over until he lay face downward. Quickly the physician tore the short tunic from the loins of the *retiarius*, and attempted to stay the flow of blood. At the sight of this action the people realized that Glaccus was alive, and a mighty cheer shook the air! He was carried through the gates to the *spoliarium*. The shriek that had broken the silence of that moment was from Mecinia, for, as she saw the blood flowing freely from the shoulder of Glaccus, she ran, screaming, from the *vomitoria*, for the purpose of gaining admittance to the arena. One of the patrons of the wine-shop, who chanced to see her, forcibly led her away. However, she learned that Glaccus was still alive. She then hastened to the barrack, to which they had carried Glaccus by the orders of Damassus. There she was admitted, after bribing an attendant, and forced her way through the crowd that surrounded the wooden couch upon which Glaccus was lying. She saw a patrician, who was none other than Decius, watching with keenest interest the efforts of the physician to hold together the cleft muscle. Behind him stood Artus, betraying but slight interest. When, for the first time, Glaccus opened his eyes, he felt the burning tears of Mecinia falling upon his face.

CHAPTER V

When Artus returned to his home in the Janiculum, he found Eurycele surrounded by her handmaidens, who were busily engaged on the finishing touches of her elaborate toilet. He had been invited for a late *coena* by Lucius, a young philosopher whose writings had already made their appearance in the bookshops, and who lived with his mother in a handsome residence on the Palatine.

"By Hercules!" said Artus to Eurycele, "thou didst, indeed, miss a joy! Ne'er before has there occurred in the arena so exciting an event as the combat between one called Glaccus, who was a novice, and "Brute," a gigantic Gaul. The former, thou shouldst know, is a protégé of Decius."

He proceeded to describe the combat.

Eurycele held her breath at his tale and as the climax was reached, said excitedly:

"Aye, my lord, aye!"

"Patience, Eurycele, patience. What matters it to thee who fell to feed the worms? Thou hast heard sufficient."

"Nay, tease me not! Say who won?"

"My love," said Artus, calmly, "it was a pretty sight. Thou shouldst have heard the people shout when the massive Gaul and the wiry youth sprang at each other at the final thrust."

He completed the story.

“’Twas splendidly done! How brave a youth! Wilt thou have him here that I may gaze upon the new hero?” she asked.

“To have him prove a successful rival to poor Artus? I did long fear that thou wert becoming tired of my scars.”

“O, truly thou art the worst tease and cruelest man,—albeit the handsomest,—that e’er plagued a woman, and I could devour thee this instant.”

“And a tough morsel thou wouldst find for thy dainty stomach; I have much gristle that would break thy teeth, and then thou wouldst be a toothless Eurycele, much like thy faithful slave-damsel, Endice, who whistles as she speaks!” laughed Artus, “but learn that life must be combined with laughter and tears,—else would the gods have perpetual holiday. Come, soon we must start. If thy stomach is well, thou wilt have an excellent opportunity to feast on delicate viands. The chief cook of Lucius is not without certain fame. I, however, find the greatest attraction to be the presence there of Regus. His words are honey!”

It was before the tenth hour that they entered their litter.

“And who is this Regus?” questioned Eurycele.

“He is the inseparable companion of our host, and a young poet who can make the fount of tears o’erflow upon the moment. By Hercules! I would that he were a son of mine! though, alas! he lacks the muscular strength that life in the legions would have engendered. He is too perfect of face and form, and ’tis said, Eurycele, that half the women

of Rome are at variance with their husbands for his sake. Am I not courageous that I dare to bring thee in range of his charms?"

"What in the name of great Zeus care I for this Regus, or his charms. Artus is my all!" she replied fondly.

They finally reached the residence of Lucius, and after being admitted by the *ostiarius*, and ushered into the atrium by the attending *vicarius*, were greeted by Lucius, who said:

"In the name of Jupiter, patron of all hospitality, a thousand welcomes! Thou hast brought another star to add to the radiance of this night,—and shame the others by sweet comparison,—thy wond'rous fair Eurycele!"

"Ecastor! I am glad we are at last arrived," she said.

Decius, who arrived later, completed the eight guests invited to the pleasures of the grand *triclinium*, and who, together with the host, completed the number of the muses. The others were Regus, the poet, the young centurion Claudius, Donatus, a senator, Flavia, his new favorite, and Parthenia, the newest conquest of the poet. Between the various courses of the sumptuously served banquet, the conversation was sprightly. Much Falernian and Setinian wine was indulged in by the men, and not a little by the women. The chief topic of conversation during the early part of the meal was naturally the *ludis matutinum*, or morning games, in the amphitheatre of Taurus, and particularly the combat between the young *retiarius* and the massive Gaul. Those who had witnessed it, vied with each

other in their efforts to extol the ability and courage of the youth in the face of such keen disadvantage.

“How fares the youth?” inquired Artus, who had left Decius at the barracks.

“’Tis a deep cleft muscle at the shoulder, yet not cut through. A most sore wound!” replied Decius.

Eventually, however, the conversation drifted to lighter matters and Regus was called upon to entertain the company with some of his verses. Artus suggested that he use as his subject the famed Tarpeian Rock in Rome, and Regus recited a number of verses, concluding with the following:

“Stern Tarpeia! knowest thou, thou once didst claim
From me my one most prized possession? Aye,
And in thy innocence didst break my heart.
Because the mighty Mars did claim my time
Whilst one fair maid did long for that caress,
The sword had levied for grim battle’s deeds,
She threw herself from thy majestic height
To seek in thy cold arms the loved embrace
That I, her lover, must to her deny,
Because grim distance lay ’tween my lone tent
And her pure couch, O! chaste as Vesta’s own!

“O mighty Tarpeia! break thy silence; say
That my lost love as thou encompassed her
In embrace bleeding, and as she breathed her last,
Did cry she loved me—and thy deathly kiss
Did come unwelcome as foul Tarquin’s rape
To virtuous Lucretia that famed night.
O, speak but once, e’en though in mighty roar,
And not hushed by the wail that rolls through time

From out the grieving heart of her, my love,—
O Tarpeia—and say that she awaits me there
On Cytherean shores, consoled by nymphs,
Beyond the reach of thy well meant embrace
That robbed me of my one and only love.”

Much applause greeted this extemporaneous effort of Regus.

These verses served to direct the minds of the assembled guests to military matters and Decius related that Artus, when a centurion, penetrated the enemy's lines one night to take a gift to a maid a tribune loved. Donatus remarked that he doubted not that Artus gained the fruits for which his brother soldier, the tribune, paid. Decius laughed as he replied, much to the amusement of the others:

“A fool 'twould be who did not steal that which was offered him!”

Artus retaliated by relating a joke the tribunes played upon Decius one night during a campaign.

Eventually conversation drifted to matters of government and the subject of conspiracy was discussed.

“The times of Julius were indeed troublous and I have courage of conviction to state that unintentional injustice was done to many,” remarked Artus. “The great Augustus realizes this, and makes amends wheresoe'er his judgment and the laws direct, yet there is one case of which I have heard, good friends, that by very comparison, makes many others insignificant. There is a man who owes his most entire wealth and power,—aye, and rank!—to a successful conspiracy that robbed a patrician—one of the oldest of Rome!—of his all!—his wife,

his child, and all his relatives and—Charon hear me!—eventually, his own life. Upon such a villain, though I know not the man nor his victim, is heaped the wealth that other Romans won by hard campaign. Methinks the Rostra would gain a splendid chance to guide justice could the name of the villain be discovered. Nemesis is, indeed, robbed of a victim!”

“By all the divinities!” said Lucius; “methinks such a man would not hesitate to rob Charon!”

“A patrician, sayest thou?” queried Donatus.

“Aye, and one who, ’tis said, claims descent from the founders of Rome,” replied Artus. “Canst thou imagine a punishment to fit the crime of such a wretch?”

“Most easily,” was the reply of Donatus. “Our poet, Regus, most fittingly described it. The villain should be made to woo Tarpeia!”

The guests soon dispersed. All agreed, however, that a most enjoyable evening had been passed.

“Didst thou note, O Decius, that the face of Donatus changed color as I told of the conspiracy?” said Artus, as they entered the litter of Decius, and, preceded and protected on both sides by slaves called *pedisequii*, were borne in the direction of the house of Artus.

“Did he thus, Artus? To what conspiracy dost thou refer?”

“Aye, Decius, he did, indeed,” said Artus, ignoring the question of the senator; “and wert thou not so heavily laden with Falernian wine, thou wouldst have perceived an evil glitter in his eyes.”

Decius brushed his hair from his forehead and mused: “O, get thee well in haste, Glaccus,—and

set forth for me! Who knows but that the information I have gained be not the truth! Yet, by Hercules! the Tenth Legion claims all too many legends.”

CHAPTER VI

Glaccus lay in the barrack with high fever. The cleft muscle did not heal, although the physicians had done all in their power. Decius was much concerned, as no hope could be given for the recovery of the youth. Ten days after the combat, one of them, Machaon by name, said to him:

“Senator, the patient makes no progress.”

Decius frowned and went direct to the home of Artus, to whom he said:

“Artus, I am disappointed and puzzled. The young gladiator shows no improvement; high fever, no healing of the muscle. Advise me.”

“’Tis strange, Decius! The injury is not fatal!” replied Artus, thoughtfully. “But there may be some other ailment,—one of the mind, I mean. In his present weakened condition, he cares not if he lives or dies. In such cases Aesculapius himself would be powerless! Therefore, the remedy is to be found in giving him something for which to live and strive. ’Tis simple.”

“’Tis most complex, methinks!” answered the well meaning Decius.

“Patience,” replied Artus; “tell him of his debt of gratitude to thee,—of some service thou dost need of him,—and other things. Lie a little, if thou must. ’Tis in a worthy cause and Jupiter will forgive thee!”

The following day Decius spoke to the patient.

"Glaccus," he said, "thy childish methods ill become thy proven manliness. Thou dost make no effort to mend. Go not to the gods owing thy fellowman a debt of gratitude, which is of far more importance than debt of gold. Dost thou follow me?"

"Aye, noble senator," replied Glaccus, weakly; "yet I do not understand!"

"Then use thy mind and hear me further. I gave thee opportunity to become the most talked-of man in Rome through thy successful combat. I paid the trainer. How dost thou repay me? By lying here sick as a woman. The protegé of Decius will soon become a jest in Rome!"

The fevered face of Glaccus now became even more flushed.

"I have need of thee," continued Decius.

"Of me, sayest thou?" queried Glaccus.

"Aye, 'tis therefore I became thy patron. So great a need have I of thy service that, shouldst thou prove successful in thy efforts in my behalf, I will make of thee a man of certain influence. I need a man who possesses strength, and courage. The sand of the arena proves that thou canst claim these. Surely thou art not one who will deny thy honest obligation to me! So far, however, as I am concerned, please thyself, but I tell thee this, Glaccus, thou art less a man than I thought thee, if thou dost fail me."

"Forgive me," said Glaccus. "Thou hast given me a new hold on life which has heretofore thrown the *canis* for me."

Decius looked kindly down upon him.

“By Hercules! I judged thee right!”

As the senator left the sick man, the physician approached him.

“Hear me, senator. Thy interest in the wounded gladiator prompts my words. He needs absolute quiet and uninterrupted care. These things are impossible here. The work of the school, and other sounds of the barrack—all disturb the patient continually. He needs quiet and—good air—of the country.”

“Methinks thou art right. I’ll give thought to it. Get a nurse to tend him. Thou, too, shouldst come; thou art pale.”

“I thank thee. May Jupiter preserve thee!” replied Machaon, as he bowed low in gratitude to Decius, whose plain speech and honesty of purpose had often gained, gratis, a host of friends that many would have paid round sums to purchase.

When Decius arrived at his villa, he found Decia awaiting him on the white marble steps at the foot of the sloping plain, which was bounded at the lower end by acanthus. This entrance was enriched at both sides by statues, and the short road leading from the Via Appia passed it. Alighting from his *rheda*, Decius hastily bounded up the steps.

He greeted her affectionately and they walked along the marbled walk to the portico. The latter rested on Corinthian pillars and before it extended the terrace planted with vari-colored flowers divided by box-trees.

“How like thy dear mother thou art!—yet too pale,” he said, as he gazed at a painted fresco that adorned the red marble which covered the walls of

the atrium. It depicted a matron holding a *cithara* on her lap.

While he was speaking the chariot of Artus was spied and the tribune, throwing the reins to the driver, came up the marbled path.

"Thou sweet lily!" said Artus, as he turned to Decia; "thy old admirer must now content himself to kiss thy hand since thou hast bloomed, yet I tell thee thou didst many times, of thine own free will, press thy sweet lips on my rough cheek!"

Decia blushed as he gazed at her in undisguised admiration of her maidenly beauty.

"Truly, Artus," said Decius, "the years pass! I am becoming old, yet will not admit it—and, too, thou art following me!"

"Aye, Decius, yet I am older than thou,—though not perchance in years. Aye, age is but an accident, even as each and every other thing of life—and this is no new philosophy! Nor have we a Hebe to give us the potion of youth!"

After their baths, they repaired to the summer *triclinium*. This, the favorite dining room of Decius, exemplified the fact that he had engaged artists of mural decoration whose abilities reflected results which depicted the progress of the period. The variegated marbles of the walls were covered with gaudy-colored designs of leaves interspersed with flowers and festoons of ripe grain and fruit. Numerous oil cups of green and other colored Alexandrian glass diffused a softened glow. Later in the evening they were lighted. Overhead the stars shone softly and Luna's silver crescent could be seen.

“Tribune Artus,” queried Decia, “my father is much enwrapped in a gladiator. Indeed, I am becoming jealous! Canst thou tell me aught of him?”

Artus’s love for the daughter of Decius was far different to any he had ever before experienced. Her purity appealed to his nature, and he was surprised at the entire absence of sensual attraction. Since his conversation with Decius that afternoon in the Forum, neither had referred to the matter, although they saw each other almost daily.

“What wouldst thou learn, Decia? He is a plebian, possesses youth, strength, courage and even comeliness,—and, too, he is, as thou knowest, thy father’s protégé.”

“Yet not so handsome as thou art, Tribune Artus,” she said.

“Stay, gentle flatterer,” laughed Artus; “thou canst not move me with thy sweet insinuations!”

“Dearest father, hear! He will ne’er agree with me. Yet tell me, Tribune Artus, why is it my father denies me entrance to his beloved Rome? Am I not beloved? Yet here I am kept a captive, nor can I see the theatres, nor temples, nor games, nor festivals, nor aught of the city. ’Tis not right, I say, and shouldst thou not embrace my cause I will frown upon thee.”

“’Gainst such a threat, Decia, I am powerless. How, Decius, can I parry? Yet truly, Decia, I do believe that thou dost fare better here; there are many things within her walls that would not please thee,—aye, even though her eagles soar o’er all the earth!”

“So I think,” said Decius. “My lamb hath her slaves, games, jewels, ponies, birds, fish, and all

besides that we can both imagine and devise to give her pleasure."

"And yet I must content me," continued Decia, unwilling to relinquish the combat, "but to hear of it. The beautiful city remains a dream in my mind, yet Myhrra says it is wonderful!"

"Cease, cease," said Decius, "for I have here a woven girdle. 'Twas made for thee of threads of gold!"

"O, father, 'tis indeed beautiful!—yet would I rather have Rome close as thou art now, if only for a moment," she said, with a sigh.

"Ingrate!" said Decius, laughingly. "Well, I promise some day I will take thee to the city. Art now content?"

"Dearest, dearest father, 'tis enough. Yet, will the day be soon?"

"Aye, too soon, indeed, methinks; but go now, gird on thy golden belt, and display thy waist line to Artus."

"I would, Decius, that I were in Hispania!" said Artus.

"Thou liest, Artus; thou wouldst pillow thy chin upon the bosom of my lamb! A poor bungler I am to allow thee to prevent my fixing things thus!"

When Decia returned she found them deeply engrossed in thought. Artus was gazing straight ahead into vacancy, and Decius sat with folded arms, frowning deeply.

"What ails ye, my fathers? Art angry at my long absence? The girdle did not fit and Myhrra had to fasten it anew!"

Glaccus again became the subject of conversation and Decius said:

“Where, Artus, can I send the youth? The physician said the country air and quietude are most necessary.”

Decia said:

“Why not the *rustica*, father? A sick man there could disturb no one.”

So it was arranged that Glaucus would be brought to the villa and housed at the *villa rustica*, which, together with the *fructuarium*, was divided from the villa proper by a small stream flowing through the grounds on its way to the Tiber.

The first vigil had already passed when Decius said to Decia:

“Go and woo Morpheus. Artus and I desire to discuss some matters that will not interest thee.”

They sat far into the second vigil, discussing the past. A few of the colored oil-cups that were suspended overhead had become dark.

“Indeed, Artus, I’ll ne’er forget the birth of thy proud scar. That was a day to try the Roman metal and, by Jupiter! thou didst save it with thy ready wit. Had Fortune frowned upon me, ere the sun sank that day, where would be this frame and its attribute, ‘my lamb,’ who loves thee? Why, Artus, I would have been forever ruined,—ruined, but for thy saving courage!”

“Have done, Decius, have done. Dost exaggerate. Do not fail to realize what I in turn owe thee? Art getting in thy dotage to overestimate the soldier’s duty? Cease, I beg of thee.”

But Decius reached over and grasped the wrist of Artus.

CHAPTER VII

The physician who attended Glaccus at the barracks was conversing with an assistant. Orders had been received from Decius for the removal of the gladiator and the securing of an experienced person to assist in the nursing of the patient.

"Canst thou get an able damsel?" the physician asked his assistant, "who would, for generous pay, 'tend Glaccus at the villa of Decius? Why he does not employ one of his many slaves I know not!"

"Nay," replied his assistant, "I know no such woman,—yet—hast thou heard perchance of a poor woman known as 'the gentle widow' who lives in the Subura? She enjoys a certain fame in that region, serving unfortunate neighbors in their sicknesses. 'Tis said she has oft cured where physicians themselves failed. 'Tis further said,—alas for thee!—that she tends no men, but only children and women. Indeed 'tis said she hates men! Perchance, however, the lure of gold may wean her for Mammon oft destroys hatred! Shouldst thou succeed, by Aesculapius! thou wouldst gain a prize in this new descendant of Jaso!"

That night Machaon called at the humble home of "the gentle widow," Aegea, and told her his mission.

"I thank thee," she said. "These poor people here need me more than I need thy pay."

The following morning Decius and Artus called at the barrack together and Machaon related his experience.

“Art sure it is not a pose?” queried Artus cynically.

“Aye, noble tribune, I’ll wager my life ’tis not.”

“The stubborn damsel!” said Decius testily, “I warrant she will not leave some greasy lover! Find another nurse.”

“Pardon, noble senator, she hath no lover. I have investigated. I can find other nurses easily, yet none so able. She should be compelled to serve thee!”

“Aye, but if bribe of purse fail, how then?” said Decius.

“Patience, Decius,” interrupted Artus, “the man means well. Go to her thyself. Is not that the idea, physician?”

Decius turned to Artus and said:

“Thou too, Brutus! Wouldst have me marry her to gain her service?”

“Truly Decius thou art clumsy in thy mind as an elephant. Go to her and use thy wit,—thus canst thou win with women.”

“Have done. My wit with women!” said Decius as he laughed derisively.

“Decius, thou thick-witted Ajax! Don thy toga, awe her with thy greatness and if she proves too stubborn, touch her heart.”

The following morning, the litter of Decius was borne through the Subura to the *insula* where “the gentle widow” resided.

“Gods, does she live in Belgica?” asked Decius

testily. Eventually, however, they reached their point of destination. Decius climbed the flights of rickety stairs, clients and attendants following him. He saw a sweet faced woman, standing at the entrance to a large but plainly furnished room. "The gentle widow" stood there calmly, apparently not disconcerted in the least by his visit, and it was that calmness perhaps which proved to be one of the efficacious methods by which she attained success in nursing the sick. Decius walked majestically into the room, his followers waiting at the entrance and filling the stairs.

"Good plebian woman," he said to her, as he inaugurated the campaign, the plan of which had been suggested by Artus, "I sent a messenger to thee last night offering payment for thy services. I come in person to double the amount, for thy accomplishments have reached my ears. I am the senator, Decius."

"Great senator," she said, and Decius smiled, for her words signified an apparently easy conquest; he frowned, however, as she continued,

"Truly thou callest me plebian woman. As such, and by the laws of Rome, I am free in all my movements. They need me here in their misfortunes, more than I need thy money. See, my wants are simple. I appreciate the honour of thy offer, yet feel within my conscience that the only right thing is that I remain here."

She bowed signifying that as far as she was concerned, the interview was at an end.

"By Pollux!" said Decius in astonishment, "dost refuse my offer?"

She made no reply.

“Speak!” he said commandingly, for he was not accustomed to defeat in his desires.

“Since thus dost thou command, I will put aside my freedom and answer thee. I nurse children and women, not beasts, who, when they mend, fly at each other’s throats again for *sestertii*, like hungry dogs at meat—yet with no such good excuse. I nurse not beasts, but little children.”

“And—and dost thou not fear to cross my desires?” stammered Decius now nonplussed.

“I fear naught.”

“By Jupiter! I seek not to threaten thee. Surely thou hast suffered that thou speakest thus! Thou hast won my respect by thy courage and honesty. Hear me, for I will now talk to thee, not as a patrician to plebian, but as man to woman.” He closed the door of the room, ordering his surprised attendants to await him below.

“Listen, woman,” he continued in his strong voice, but he employed softer tones, “thy words are harsh when thou dost term men who fall in the arena, ‘beasts’!”

Aegea remained silent.

“Dost thou realize that this man I would have thee tend has come of woman, even as thou? He is human and not a beast.”

“He is human in form, yet—beast in act,” she said.

“Hear me patiently,” said Decius in even more subdued tones, “say, if thou didst have a son and he fell, wouldst thou not nurse him? Aye, for that is law of woman’s heart. This beast, as thou harshly termost him, is a youth, not turned twenty. I

became his patron only because I need his services. Still thou canst make no distinction between the stricken children whom thou servest, and he who lies even now upon his stomach in burning fever, his limbs tied to prevent movement that would open a deeply cleft muscle. Now by Jupiter! I vow he is indeed a child,—a child of death. As thou sayest truly, he is a gladiator, therefore thou dost reason that that condemns him! Yet we are all gladiators—in this strange arena of life! Hear me further. He was so trained. Had he studied at Athens, who knows but that he may have been another Socrates? He is but accident, aye, even as thou, and I,—and every other thing in life! Yet so evil a man is he that, as he lay wounded and they brought to him the gold of victory he so freely bled to gain, dost thou think he grasped the coins with avaricious hands? No, he smiled sadly and said, ‘give it to the families of those I slew.’ Such a beast is he! He has youth, courage, character, and gentleness and lies within the shadow of death. Yet thou sayest he is a beast! O, woman, woman, this dying youth calls up a harshness I did not dream to find in one of such sweet and goodly mien. This stricken youth,—such as Rome needs, and of his kind, many more—does not fetch a single tender spark from thy bosom,—yet I tell thee, wert thou the grieving mother among the shades who now looks down upon him, thou wouldst indeed weep thy heart strings wrinkled, if thou didst see him deserted by a sister woman of Rome!”

By this time, Aegea was sobbing quietly. Decius was looking at her thoughtfully; he had become enthusiastic in the cause and told his story well.

“See, I, Decius, a senator, and general of Rome, who never begged for aught, even from a Caesar, do beg thee now, for favourable reply,” he said as he smiled, for he realized that the battle had been won.

“Thou hast no need to beg,” she said.

“I will send a litter for thee on the morrow,” he said. “Accept this purse for those for whom thy heart so nobly bleeds.” Raising his hand he added, “Jupiter protect thee, until we meet again,” and walked quietly from the room.

CHAPTER VIII

Mecinia had been a frequent visitor to the barracks previous to the removal of Glaccus to the villa of Decius. The physician, however, had soon been compelled to deny her admittance to the barracks. This was done at the request of the patient himself, who, from the first moment of his return to consciousness, had refused to recognize her; nor could the tear drops from her eyes falling caressingly upon his bloodless cheeks touch a responsive chord in his heart. Her amorous eyes that once had been his strongest hold on life had lost their fascination for him. It is often thus when death hovers about the door; those things that once had been a very part of our existence become ogres, reminding us perchance of our former weaknesses. It did not require an extended period for Mecinia to learn the truth, and she who once could have boasted of a hundred admirers, now often absented herself from her duties at the wine-shop. In the worst of us, there is a hidden string of our soul's cithara, which at the proper touch will send forth melodies to woo the best that is within us. Thus it was with Mecinia. The stroke of the sword that fateful day in the arena had struck deeper than the flesh of the gladiator, for it pierced the better nature of the wine-maid.

One morning she hailed a passing public litter

which she entered and was soon borne from view. She ordered the *calones*, or carriers, to take her immediately to the barracks where, pressing a coin into the hand of an attendant, she bade him summon the physician who attended Glaccus.

“What wouldst thou here?” said Machaon to her.

“Can I see Glaccus once more?”

“Glaccus! Ha, thou art late, for he has gone!”

“Gone? Gone, sayest thou? Thou dost not mean that he—that he—is—dead?” gasped Mecinia.

“No, but this morn he was taken to the villa of none other than the senator Decius where I will go to join them presently.”

“The villa of Decius!” said Mecinia in astonishment.

“Aye, find thou a stronger lover.”

With drooping head, Mecinia returned to the litter.

“Whither lady?” asked the *calones*.

“Onward, onward, I care not, I will pay ye,” she replied. They bore her quickly from the region of the Campus Martius, and when they stopped to rest Mecinia said to them,

“Couldst thou carry me further, through the Capenan gate?”

They replied in the affirmative, again lifted the litter to their shoulders and eventually arrived outside the Porta Capena, where she paid and dismissed them and soon entered a vehicle she hired.

“To the villa of Decius near the Via Appia! Take me there quickly and thou shalt be well paid,” she said to the driver.

The vehicle travelled speedily along the road, the driver, avaricious for reward, urging his steeds. He

stopped at the white marble steps at the foot of the sloping plain where it was the custom of Decia to await her father's return. She chanced at this moment to be waiting there for that same purpose, and was surprised at the appearance of this visitor. Women were infrequent callers, save upon occasion of special dinners, and at such times Decia was not present in the *triclinium*.

"Canst thou tell me, maiden, is this the villa of the senator Decius?" said Mecinia to the daughter of Decius.

"Aye," replied Decia. At that moment, the *villicus*, whose duty it was to guard the entrance, approached them.

"Canst thou tell me if there now lies within a wounded man called Glaccus?" continued Mecinia.

"Aye," replied Decia, "he arrived this morning."

"Who art thou, lady?" inquired the *villicus*.

"Wilt thou take me to him?" asked Mecinia of Decia, ignoring the *villicus* and believing the maiden to be perchance some relative of the owner living there. Waving the *villicus* aside, Decia, puzzled, yet strangely interested by the sad face of Mecinia and thinking her perchance to be a sister of the sick man, sympathetically led her along the pathway that was lined on both sides by tall trees with dark green ivy growing at times from one tree to another and forming natural festoons. The maiden gave Mecinia into the care of an old Thracian slave.

As Mecinia and the aged slave walked slowly toward the *rustica*, the latter questioned her.

"Art you perchance some relative?" he asked.

"Alas, no," she replied, and though mystified, he remained silent.

"Canst thou tell me, good man," she questioned him in return, "if the sick man rests easy after the journey?"

"I know not," he replied, "yet 'tis said that he is dangerously ill."

She clasped her hand to her heart and swayed as though she would fall.

"Do not despair," he said, "there is always hope, which is a great gift from the gods!"

She took a small silver coin from her purse and pressed it into his palm.

"No," he said, "those who serve the noble Decius sell not their services when needed in a righteous cause. I could have my freedom but choose to remain here in servitude rather than be master to another slave!"

"Thou art indeed blessed, good man, to be so well placed," said Mecinia.

"May the gods shower all blessings upon my noble master," said the slave, "and, too, upon his beautiful daughter."

"Daughter, sayest thou? Has he then a daughter?"

"Aye, didst thou not see her? Art thou ill? She led thee to me!"

"His daughter!" said Mecinia in surprise, "the maiden who humbly guided me as though she were a slave? 'Tis impossible!"

"Indeed 'tis true. Art blind in thy worries?" and he smiled as he continued, "Thou art like the rest who think that because she is a *domina* she rules all things by command! Not so the gentle lady Decia!"

They had by this time arrived at the entrance of

one of the buildings where the Thracian bade her await him.

Aegea came from within the house and walked to Mecinia.

She led Mecinia to a bench. The wine-maid, broken in spirit, sore in body, began to sob.

"Thou hast not told me who thou art, nor the object of thy visit," said Aegea gently.

"I come to learn how Glaccus withstood the journey."

"He has much fever," replied Aegea. "Is he perchance thy brother or lover?"

"Alas, neither," replied the wine-maid between her sobs. Briefly she told Aegea the story of her life, dwelling mostly upon that period of it which concerned Glaccus.

"Let Nemesis claim me!" she concluded, "for I sent him to the fatal combat. He was but a novice yet I mocked and jeered at him, so that to win my love, youth as he is, too soon he entered against the veterans. O, Glaccus! Glaccus!" and she continued to sob.

"Cease, cease," said Aegea as she folded Mecinia in her arms, "bear up, perchance all may come right, even though, alas, thou didst treat the youth cruelly!"

At that moment Decius came upon the scene.

"Whom have we here?" he said seriously. "My orders were for strict privacy. Who is this weeping woman?"

Mecinia lifted her face and said: "I—I come from the wine shop of Largus."

"I have seen thy face before; yet why art thou not at the wine-cups?" said Decius.

"I—came—to—see—to see—Glaccus," said Mecinia.

At this moment, Aegea said softly:

"Good senator, she loves the stricken youth."

"How gained she admittance? My orders to the *villicus* were strict," he continued.

"None other than thy daughter gave permission to admit her," said Aegea.

"Did—did she thus? Well—well,—thou must go," he continued hesitatingly.

"Nay, good senator! This woman journeyed from Rome in haste and is tired. Can she not rest until the morrow?"

"Thou rulest this part of the *rustica*, good Aegea. Has the woman had food and drink?" he asked, his better nature conquering. He did not wait for a reply, however, but walked into the house where Glaccus lay, with cleft muscle tightly bandaged and body fastened to the heavy couch to prevent movement. Decius frowned deeply as he observed the fevered condition of the patient. The journey had told heavily on the youth.

Aegea was endeavouring to make Mecinia comfortable in a nearby building, when Decius approached her.

"Aegea," he said, "I do not like the condition of the sick man."

"Alas, he is doing poorly. We can judge better, however, after sun-down."

Aegea was plainly worried. However she bathed the temples of Glaccus with cool water as he lay there and was tireless in her efforts.

CHAPTER IX

Decius walked that afternoon to the *rustica*. As he approached he was startled by groans and words of endearment in mixed succession coming from within the room where Glaccus lay. Hastily entering he observed Aegea dashing water on the face of the youth, while the physician was employed bathing the exposed limbs and back. Glaccus continued to rave.

“Thou fiend of Hecate! Hold not my arm! How can I fight thus? Give me my net! Mecinia, take thy hands from my throat! Help, help! I cannot fight thus! Help, help!”

Even Decius experienced a slight shudder as he listened. Aegea was pale and the physician looked on hopelessly. Mecinia, crouching beneath the window, pale and terror-stricken, was listening with anguished heart to the curses hurled at her by the sick man.

Decius was a picture of disappointment at the ill turn affairs had taken. Aegea shook her head sadly. It meant that she was powerless and that the end was near. Machaon clenched his fist and murmured, “How powerless we are against the will of the gods!”

Decius, who had been deep in thought, said suddenly:

“Machaon, send to Rome at once for the tribune Artus. Have the *tabelarii* use swift horses. Should they not find him at home, they are to have the city scoured for him.”

The physician ran hastily toward the stables and ere long the sound of galloping hoofs was heard from direction of the Via Appia. Decius turned to Aegea.

“If this wound opens and bleeds afresh, he’ll probably die ere morn. I am disappointed and have sent for Artus. Be it fancy or fate, I want the life of this youth!”

The messengers were fortunate in finding Artus, who upon hearing the message, immediately went forth. Soon the tribune passed through the Capenan gate and securing a mount rode speedily along the Appian way. When he arrived at the villa his steed was covered with foam and groaning from the lashes of the rider. Dismounting, Artus sped quickly past the *villicus* and ran to the *rustica*.

“A greeting, Decius!”

“By Jupiter! here already! Now that was god-like! Listen, I am grievously disappointed. The youth is dying. Machaon admits that he is powerless.”

“Dying, Decius? Alas! so will the gods! Yet I cannot see why thou shouldst take it so to heart. I mind not the ride yet if it be that thou deplorest the loss of his services,—by Pollux! are there no other men? Save thyself this unnecessary worry. However, I also am sorry for the youth. He made a splendid fight!”

“Artus,” said Decius, “canst thou do naught to save him?”

“I, Decius? I am no physician!”

“Think, Artus, think! I want the youth more,—than thou canst imagine; I cannot now tell thee why. What can we do?”

Artus calmly folded his arms and gazed thoughtfully at Glaccus, who was groaning and struggling to loosen the bonds.

“Decius, send for some ice and snow. I once witnessed a cure that I will attempt,—yet 'tis a harsh remedy!”

Artus proceeded to remove the few pieces of garment that covered the patient, and after having removed the bandages bathed the sore parts of the wound. The flesh where the leather bands had cut into it was then soothed with pure olive oil. Meanwhile the ice and snow had been brought and Artus, having administered a strong sleeping potion, immediately packed the wrists, ankles and temples of Glaccus with it.

This method served to reduce the fever, and soon afterwards the sick man sank into a heavy sleep. As they left the room, they saw Mecinia lying upon her back near the window, beating her breast with her clinched hands and calling tearfully on all the gods to save Glaccus!

The following morning dawned dark and gloomy. Heavy gray clouds overhung the Italian landscape and a penetrating chilliness had crept into the air. It had been a wearying night for all at the villa of Decius. The duties of Aegea had not ceased with the slumber of Glaccus. Another difficult task was the care of grief-stricken Mecinia, who lay on a couch in the room of the nurse. Dark rings encircled the eyes of the wine-maid and the roses of

her cheeks had fled at the cold touch of remorse. Aegea had soothed and consoled her, oftentimes giving at just the proper moment that touch of severity needed to bring the sorrowing woman back to self control. One more duty still remained to be performed; a difficult one indeed, for Aegea must tell Mecinia that henceforth Glaccus must be no dweller in her hopes, and therefore she said:

“Go forth, sister, into the world, where thou canst find active employment that will help heal the lashes of thy disappointment. Henceforth, and methinks I have judged rightly, Glaccus will turn from thee. Such is man! Glaccus will awaken to a new day and no longer wilt thou be his sun!”

Together they strolled in the bleak dawn, until they reached a clump of trees, near the stream. Aegea advised Mecinia to leave immediately and without a farewell interview with Glaccus.

“Go, Mecinia,” she said, “with the knowledge that thy lover is saved; this should console thee. Thou hast no more food for remorse, even though it was thy cruelty which goaded him to combat. Doth it not appear that the gods so willed it?”

As Mecinia entered the light *cisium* that had been provided for her she kissed Aegea. The former was now composed, but there had appeared upon her countenance an expression of melancholy. Soon the sounds of cantering hoofs faded in the distance.

Aegea pressed her hands to her eyes and strove to keep back the tears. For some moments her gaze sought the direction of the Appian way which was feeling the touch of the day's wonted activity.

“Another one of us!” mused Aegea.

She turned slowly and wandered back to the house where Glaccus lay. Decius was standing at the entrance.

"Thou art a woman of heart, gentle Aegea," was all he said to her, but the soft tones of his voice carried a volume of appreciation. Decius had become accustomed to the harshness of human nature. Even Artus whom he loved as a brother was cold and at times almost distant. He had found the women that he had known during his life, with the exception of his "precious lamb," and his deceased wife, calculating, selfish, ambitious, and tears for others had indeed been rare. Realization of this had touched his heart deeply when he thought of the sympathy of Aegea for Mecinia, a stranger.

"Greetings in the name of Jupiter!" said Artus to Decius and Aegea. "Methinks I can read upon thy countenances the favor of Fortune!"

"Thou art right," replied Decius, "and I am indebted to thee for it. However, thou didst have an able assistant in the nurse here."

"By Aesculapius! without the nurse's aid I would have been powerless; therefore to the good nurse belongs more than a full share of credit. Yet in the haste of the business, thou hast not given me formal introduction."

"True, Artus, I did forget it, yet methinks co-laborers such as thine yesternight were better than words. This is Aegea, 'the gentle widow'." Both bowed and Artus continued along the path toward the house where Glaccus lay.

Artus gazed steadily at the youth who slept on peacefully, and the former peered closely at the uncovered wound which showed less inflammation.

At this moment Decius joined him, and together they walked toward the stable where Artus selected a light *cisium*, a two wheeled cart suitable for fast traveling. While awaiting the harnessing of the steed, Decia was seen standing at the further side of the bridge which spanned the stream running through the grounds.

"O, Decius, see yonder early rising beauty!" said Artus, and together they walked toward the bridge to her.

"O, Tribune Artus," she said, "didst thou intend to so wrong me by going to Rome without saying farewell? Father, he treats me ill!"

"My Decia," said Artus, "I thought that Morpheus had thee wrapped in an embrace I envied."

He mounted the cart and with a crack of the whip the vehicle was off post-haste toward the Appian way. They watched the *cisium* until it entered the "via," Decia waving her hand. Decius lifted her suddenly high in the air, then kissed her forehead and her cheeks.

"Come," he said, "some fresh-born grapes will find a ready welcome in my pouch. Thou art 'my lamb', Artus my friend, Glaccus convalescing, the gods my allies, and I am—almost happy!"

They entered the summer *triclinium*.

After leaving Decius, Aegea engaged in earnest conversation with Machaon, discussing future plans for the convalescence of the patient.

"Good physician," she said, "all is well and the noble senator is happy at the outcome. The sick youth is undoubtedly a new fancy of his. So it is with the rich!"

"May the gods grant us continued success, good

nurse," he replied, "Already I love this place and would that I could stay here forever!"

At this moment a slight moan was heard. Quickly entering they saw that Glaccus had awakened.

"Drink! drink!" he whispered hoarsely. Aegea hastily gave him a cup of cool water, holding it to his mouth and letting the contents slowly trickle down his parched throat.

"More!" he cried when the cup was empty.

"Nay, good youth," said Aegea softly, "presently I will give thee more, and soon thy noble patron, the senator, will join thee in cups of choice Falernian. Sleep a little more. Thou knowest thy future is assured when thou dost mend." Thus talking gently and encouragingly to him, she took the wet cloths from the hands of the physician and bathed the forehead of Glaccus.

CHAPTER X

In compliance with the request of Mecinia for a speedy return to Rome, the driver urged a team of swift Cappadocian horses along the Appian way. The sepulchral monuments consisting of shafts, broken columns, altars and even pyramids of lesser magnitude which lined the great road on both sides for a distance of several miles from the gate of the city, were swiftly passed. Ere long the vehicle arrived outside the Capenan gate, which was in charge of a detail of the *cohortes vigilum*. A centurion, Claudius by name, though serving in the *praetorian cohortes*, was on "special duty", and was making his rounds. He was surprised at beholding the froth-covered steeds, dust begrimed driver, and pale-faced, sad-eyed occupant. He approached as the driver drew in the steeds, and in a voice more kindly than was his usual wont said:

"The nature of thy business in Rome?"

The driver spoke and said:

"This is the *cisium* of the noble senator Decius, who has sent this lady under my care to the city."

Claudius bowed his head affirmatively signifying that all was well, and turning again to Mecinia, he said:

"I know the noble Decius. Surely thou art thirsty and tired after travelling; rest here until one of the men brings thee drink."

Mecinia bowed in token of grateful acceptance and alighted from the vehicle, the driver of which now sought water for his thirsty steeds. Mecinia seated herself, and Claudius stood before her striving to gain a better view of her face that was partly covered by the dark *paenula* or cloak.

“Didst thou not find the hospitality of the noble Decius consistent with its excellent reputation?” continued the soldier, striving to prolong the conversation.

“I was no guest there, centurion, but simply a visitor,” she replied, addressing Claudius for the first time by his rank, a fact which pleased him.

Thus conversing they did not notice a figure reclining against a wall, straining his ears so as to lose no word of the conversation. Had the two been less oblivious to their surroundings, they would have had no difficulty in perceiving that the listener had more than passing interest in their conversation.

“Hast thou perchance lost thy husband, or lover, that thou dost wear so dark a habiliment?” inquired Claudius.

“No, inquisitive soldier, yet,—yet, Aedepol! I will tell thee! I have lost even more than that!”

“I regret the question,” said Claudius.

“Thou has naught to regret. I thank thee for thy courtesy,” replied Mecinia as she drank the cup of water that had been brought to her.

“Can I perchance be of assistance in directing thee to thy destination?”

“I have no point of destination and must dismiss the driver.”

Claudius was surprised at hearing this.

“No point of destination!” he exclaimed, “hast thou no father, brother, husband, friend in Rome?”

“’Tis as thou sayest. I have nothing in Rome save my purse, which is of no such weight that I cannot carry it.”

“Alas, is it so? How unfortunate; but hold. Think not ill of me if I make suggestion.”

At his words she raised her face and gazed piercingly into his eyes as if to there learn the meaning of his suggestion. He was startled at the beauty of her pale face with its sad expression; nor was he blind to the graceful outlines of her form.

“I am, as thou seest, a soldier. I reside with my grandmother, a very aged lady, who claims to have known Julius Cæsar when he was a child. Long has she been lonesome for companionship, for my duties keep me from her much of the time; therefore, I doubt not that she would welcome thee heartily,—if thou wouldst but pay the price she would demand, namely, listen at frequent intervals, to her tales of the former strength and virtues of Romans who now occupy mausoleums!” He laughed as he continued: “It is a habit of age, alas! and I have had more than my full share of the tales!”

She did not smile but said coldly:

“Art sure, centurion, thou wouldst demand no other payment?”

At these words, the face of the soldier flushed.

“Thou dost wrong me, stranger,” said Claudius, “in proof of which I vow, by Jupiter! I have no other motive, for, ere long, I will leave for foreign service and it is therefore that I doubly desire a companion for my aged relative.”

“Forgive me,” she said, “but I have suffered so

much that I have become an unbeliever in,—everything.”

Their unperceived auditor, crouching nearby, crept closer and held his hand to his ear.

“Thy suggestion is most welcome,” she added, “and in my present extremity I will gladly accept the place. Wilt thou send me to her? I promise that I will be most patient.”

“I will take thee immediately,” replied Claudius. He then despatched a messenger to his *optio*, or adjutant, and left the gate with Mecinia. Together they walked up the “vicus.” Claudius hailed a public litter. Unperceived the spy followed, until he saw them arrive at a pretty house in the Aventine. Mecinia was conducted to a seat in the atrium, while Claudius went in search of his grandmother. He soon returned with her and Mecinia arose at the entrance of this old, though stately patrician, who said smilingly:

“Whom have we here, Claudius? Hast thou brought a wife to brighten this *familia*?”

Claudius blushed and said: “Nay, for a man cannot serve both Thalassus and Mars; I have brought thee a companion, for, as thou knowest, ere long I will join the legions in Hispania and could not bear to think of thee without some close companion. I know that thou wilt agree with me in my choice.”

“’Twas thoughtful of thee, grandson, yet thou hast not told me the name of the maiden!”

“By Hercules! I—I know it not!” stammered Claudius.

“Impulsive as ever, thou overgrown boy! Yet it matters not. How shall I call thee,” said the old lady addressing Mecinia.

“After this lucky day, on which Fortune has brought me such kindly welcome, methinks the name of Fortunæ would be a fitting one,” said Mecinia as she smiled.

“Thou hast ready wit and the name will suffice. Fortunæ! It reminds me of a friend I had in the great days of the old Republic who, though not as beautiful as thou art, was related by direct descent to none other than the conqueror of Hanno, the mighty Tiberius Sempronius Gracchus himself!”

At these words Claudius shuffled his feet in apparent nervousness and as if he expected a long tirade. However, his grandmother spared him.

“Return to thy duties, Claudius, and I will make this new member of our *familia* comfortable.”

Claudius bowed and said: “I hope, lady Fortunæ, that thou wilt find all comfort in this home.” He then left them.

His grandmother was known as “Fulvia, the Ancient,” owing to her great age and strict adherence to old customs. She clapped her hands twice and, upon the appearance of a slave, commanded that “the lady Fortunæ” be conducted to a *cubiculum*. She then gave orders to a handmaiden to immediately go to “Fortunæ” and remain with her. Mecinia reviewed the strange events of the day.

Claudius returned in time for *coena*, which was the most elaborate meal of the day, and took place about the beginning of the tenth hour. Meanwhile, however, the crafty old lady had sent a messenger to Decius, for Claudius had informed her that Fortunæ had come from the senator’s villa. She wrote on a wax tablet as follows:

“To the Senator Decius, greeting from Fulvia:—

“I have now under my roof a strange lady, who has this day applied to me to take position in my household as companion to me in my old age. I am informed that she came from thy villa. Wilt thou send me word by my messenger and tell me if thou dost think she will be a fitting companion for me? It is a long period since these dim eyes of mine have seen thee, Decius.”

Decius was seated on the portico of his villa when the *villicus* conducted to him the dust-covered messenger. The senator read the tablet.

“By the gods! Methinks I am getting in my dotage; I, who could direct a hundred cohorts on the moment, now hesitate when called upon to decide affairs of women! Ah, I’ll consult Aegea!” He summoned the nurse to whom he handed the tablet.

“Thou knowest, Aegea,” he said, “of the past life of Mecinia; therefore I know not what to say in answer to this. I cannot give to her the recommendation of a vestal. Advise me.”

“Answer as thou dost think!” said Aegea.

“I think the wine-maid, with good intentions, will be a good companion.”

“Tell her so,” said Aegea, “and thou hast done thy duty.”

Decius despatched a slave for *stylus* and wax-tablet and wrote the following:—

“To the lady Fulvia. Greetings and the blessings of Hygeia from Decius:

“The woman of whom thou dost write to me is, to my full belief, most well meaning in her intentions, and I think that thou wilt not regret thy choice of her as companion. I hope to visit thee in the near future.”

“My thanks, good Aegea, for thy assistance,” said Decius as he read the lines. “Truly I am becoming so that I employ everybody as a crutch to lean upon! Old age must be gripping me!” He smiled as she left him on her return to *rustica*.

The messenger returned to the lady Fulvia while she, together with Claudius and Mecinia, were enjoying the evening meal. The old patrician took the tablet, bearing the message of Decius, and read it with a smile of satisfaction.

The “Lady Fulvia” retired early as was her custom. In the privacy of the *cubiculum*, Mecinia smiled with grim satisfaction as she mused, “When Claudius goes on foreign service, methinks I will be the mistress here! A wondrous onward step in one brief day! If I progress so rapidly, it will not be long ere Glaccus, of his own accord, will come wooing the lady Fortunæ!”

CHAPTER XI

The senator Donatus was one of the richest and most powerful men in Rome. He was over sixty years of age and claimed descendency from one of the oldest families, and though there was none to dispute him, many had their doubts as to the veracity of his statements and the authenticity of his proofs. Some claimed that his early life was clouded in mystery. In an unknown manner, however, he had earned the friendship of Julius Cæsar and one day appeared suddenly in Rome as a man of affluence. He built a magnificent mansion on the Palatine, which was replete with every detail of luxury. Rich Babylonian carpets and rugs from far Eastern looms, silken draperies, gold and silver ornaments, magnificently carved furniture, and a thousand and one other requisites of an unusually luxuriant home, were all to be found within his great palace. His *familia* was a numerous one, as it must needs be to properly care for the spacious property. He was a man of base passions which had left their marks upon his countenance, and was in fact known as a voluptuary,—a sensualist who entertained on a lavish scale. Notwithstanding his poses in the senate, he had but two aims in life, the increase of his wealth and the pursuit of pleasure. He was a frequenter of the slave marts, a constant seeker after new beauties, and it was further said of him that he had made

more than one journey to Delos, the great slave emporium! He would stop at naught to gain his ends. His wealth indeed made him all powerful, and it was said that once the crafty Donatus desired anything, it was the same as though it was already his. He made it one of his rules of life to learn every possible detail regarding the people with whom he came in contact or who crossed his path of self-interest at any turn. He employed numerous spies and gained pleasure from the hold he was enabled to obtain over many people whom he ruled secretly. At times the most secret meetings between two people were known to none other than Donatus. Senators, clients, plebians, slaves! He used them all and received reports from them as to the doings of those in whom he had even the slightest interest. Such was Donatus who had been one of the guests at the feast given by Lucius, the young philosopher, the evening that Regus had recited his verses on "Tarpeia."

The night that Mecinia slept for the first time in the home of the lady Fulvia, Donatus was informed by his *vicarius* (a slave who was attendant to his *ostiensis*) of the visit of one who had information which might prove of interest. Donatus ordered the man to be immediately admitted, and the spy who had overheard the words between Claudius and Mecinia at the Capenan gate entered and told the senator of the conversation and events of the morning.

"And dost thou know her identity?"

"Nay, Lord, yet soon I expect to learn it from my companion who has kept watch outside the villa of Decius."

Even as they were speaking, however, the man referred to entered, and though he said he had noted the arrival and departure of the visitor at the villa, he could give but little further information; he added, however, that when the strange woman arrived, she had been admitted by none other than the daughter of Decius. He had seen the woman leave early the following morning. He recognized her by her splendid figure, he said. "By Castor and Pollux! The figure of a Juno!" he added.

At hearing these words, Donatus showed increased interest.

"Art thou impressed with her charms?" he said aloud, and to himself added: "Can there be a newly arrived beauty in Rome to eclipse all others?—and coming from Decius! I must learn more of this!"

He dismissed them after commanding them to continue their watchfulness and report any further details they could learn regarding the woman and the villa of Decius, which Donatus, for certain reasons, kept under continual surveillance.

"So she is at the house of that ancient cat Fulvia!" he mused after they had departed. "Methinks I will visit her this very evening upon some pretext."

That night he presented himself at the home of the lady Fulvia. He was armed for the fray. He had come, he said, for information regarding a certain period in the life of Marius. This question immediately aroused the interest of the lady Fulvia. Donatus had learned her weak spot, and she was beside herself with gratitude for his consulting her upon that subject on which she claimed to be an authority. She talked and talked, and Donatus re-

mained hoping to obtain a glance of her new companion. He was rewarded, for Mecinia entered the atrium to remind the lady Fulvia that the first vigil had passed.

“Can it be possible!” said the crafty senator, “so splendidly has thou entertained me that I forgot time! I ask thy pardon and henceforth must forever be thy debtor.”

“Say not so, noble Donatus,” replied the lady Fulvia, “thou wert most welcome. Let me present to thee a new addition to my small *familia*, Fortunæ here, who will be my companion in my loneliness. Like me, she has seen much trouble and has already won my heart. Thou knowest Donatus, that ere long my Claudius goes to Hispania!”

Donatus gazed at Mecinia, disguising with an effort his admiration for her, but said to Fulvia: “Thou art fortunate indeed to have found so sweet and beautiful a companion.” He bowed, but Mecinia waved her hand deprecatingly, and Donatus did not fail to note the grace of her movement, nor the shapeliness of her arm.

When he returned to his palace in the Palatine he had already made his plans for possession of this, his newest fancy.

“A living Venus, by Jupiter! Claudius must leave on foreign service sooner than he doth expect!” he mused, “and yet that might not be such good policy.”

The following morning, however, he decided and despatched the following letter:—

“To the Lady Fulvia, greeting from thy friend, Donatus. I am not ungrateful for thy information, in proof of which I will send to thee this day a release from foreign service for thy pet, Claudius. I

have arranged it for thee that he need not leave until a year has passed. If thou dost appreciate this trifling favor, as indeed I know thou dost, thou canst do for me a service that I would not soon forget. I sorely need another woman to assist in the control of my domestics, for I remain a widower. Thou knowest I am too busy with affairs of state to marry. Thy companion Fortunæ has been so highly recommended to me that I desire to employ her in this capacity. I give thee in place of her, however, the companionship of thy grandson Claudius. I will call upon thee ere the first vigil and trust the gods will grant me favorable reply from thee. I commend thee to the care of Jupiter until we meet."

Upon the receipt of this tablet the ancient patrician could not repress a cry of delight.

"The gods be praised! My Claudius to remain with me another year!" she said.

She then turned to Fortunæ and continued: "I regret to lose thee, yet must I choose between my grandson and thee. However, thou hast glorious opportunity in the house of Donatus! Serve him well and he will generously reward thee. I will arrange it for thee. Read this letter!"

The following afternoon Mecinia moved to the house of Donatus, who introduced her to the entire *familia*. She was practically given full power in the performance of her new duties, and time passed uneventfully for her. She made sacrifices to Fortune in gratitude. Glaccus, however, remained a fixed thought in her mind, and her love for him increased with the passing of time. She saw opportunities for her individual progress, and through the unusual generosity of her master was enabled to

accumulate considerable savings. In her mind's eye, she could see the day upon which, providing her plans matured successfully, she would be in the possession of such power that he who had fought in the arena for a bag of coins would gladly accept her love and beauty, when supported by sufficient money.

CHAPTER XII

The weeks passed uneventfully at the villa of Decius. Glaccus continued to improve although the progress was slow. Time, coupled with nourishment and rest, were the necessary factors contributing to his convalescence. As yet, however, he walked at a slow pace and was often compelled from very weakness to lean upon a staff. His eyes had become sunken into their sockets, his limbs were lean and he stooped as he moved along slowly.

Sometimes Aegea, sitting on a marble bench near the house, would be joined by Glaccus, to whom she would say:

“Thy future is assured, lucky youth, with so generous a patron!”

During this period a strong friendship had been formed between patient and nurse. He learned to love her for her gentleness, her unfailing cheerfulness and her sweet attentions, and looked up to her as to a saving goddess of goodness. Sometimes she would speak of the growing power of Rome, of the promises of great Augustus, for the welfare and progress of the republic. Oftimes, however, his eyes would become drowsy and she would gently lead him to his couch. If the night was warm she would fan him, and even sing softly to him as though he were a child. Then she would sit outside and converse with Machaon, the physician.

When Glaccus became a little stronger he would wander down to the banks of a small stream that, caressed and shaded on each side by woodland, divided the villa *rustica* from the villa proper. At times he would lay upon the bank and dream—day dreams of coming military fame amidst the activity of war; and even where he lay he could sometimes hear the sounds of the cohorts as they marched past on the Appian Way, the regular tramp of marching men, the blasts of the *lituii* and *tubae*, the clatter of horses' hoofs of the cavalry, the rumble of the provision and baggage wagons followed in their wake. Sometimes he would be aroused by the soft voice of Aegea who would bring him a bowl of broth or a cup of *caldæ*, wine sweetened with honey; often, when the weather was warm, he would sink into sleep. At times he would dream of the dryads and the nymphs who were supposed to inhabit all the woodlands. One morning he dreamed that he saw a beautiful golden-haired nymph beckoning him to cross the stream to her! The belief of the superstitious at that time was that whosoever should behold a nymph would not live to tell it. Glaccus awoke from his dream, and as he rubbed his eyes, there on the opposite bank of the stream he beheld a nymph, the nymph of his dreams! She had golden hair, and he imagined that he saw upon her face an expression of pity for him and yet, with a touch of mischievousness lurking about her eyes and tiny mouth with its red lips, the colour of the wild rose with pearly teeth showing between. He struggled to his knees, pale as death, crying:

“Take me not! Take me not! Spare me to serve the noble Decius!”

Then he fell into a faint. A rustle on the opposite shore denoted the speedy disappearance of "the nymph," who chanced to be none other than Decia. In a spirit of mischief she had broken her father's rule which was that she was not to stray from certain boundaries on the grounds of the villa proper. She had been startled by the sudden awakening of Glaccus! Aegea found the youth unconscious when she came to seek him, and placing a cup of wine to his mouth, revived him. He was pale and trembling, and Aegea sped quickly toward the *rustica* calling for help. Machaon, the physician, and three slaves followed with a stretcher and carried the youth back to the *rustica*. There was, however, little need for alarm. He speedily recovered and said to Aegea:

"By great Jupiter! good nurse, a most favourable omen! I saw a nymph—aye, with these eyes of mine, and yet I live! Doth it not signify that I am in high favor with the gods?"

"It doth indeed," replied Aegea, humouring him. She knitted her brows, however, and wondered: "What can it mean? It cannot be that he has become weak in mind! I must tell Decius this very day!"

That evening the chariot of Artus stopped at the villa. The tribune walking quickly up the marbled path said to Decius:

"We made great speed to arrive in time, and truly I am famished. No bird tongues to tempt my appetite, host Decius!"

During the course of the meal Artus said:

"Thou hast not told me, Decius, how fare my chances of gaining a praetorship?"

"Chances, sayest thou, Artus! Now truly thou

wilt anger me. Have I not had thy furlough doubled? I told thee it will be thine in time, and too, thou knowest that neither Augustus nor Taurus refuse me aught. Fear not that ere long I'll see thee sending miscreants to the Tullianum!"

"Decius, thou art indeed a friend and patron to me. Thy words make me almost happy!"

"Good," said Decius, "and thou, my lamb, must soon needs say Praetor Artus in place of Tribune Artus. Dost thou like the change?"

"O, my father, I fear! See how harshly he judges me now. How then will it be when he wears the *praetexta* of such superior magistracy?" she said.

"And truly, Decia," replied Artus, "I will condemn thee to serve forever as goddess of all my hopes."

Decia had become quiet and thoughtful, which prompted Decius to say:

"What means that line between thy eyes, my lamb? Art frightened at the mighty words of Artus?"

"My father, I have confession to make to thee!" and she smiled roguishly.

"Confession, sayest thou? Ha! What foul crime hast thou committed now? Careful of thy words which will be used as evidence against thee,—for there sits the Praetor Artus!"

"Perchance, father, the crime is grave! I have disobeyed thy commands and—strayed beyond the limits of my prison, and—and I have suffered for it."

"What dost thou mean, my prisoner, if that is what thou wouldst have me call thee?" queried the now interested father.

"This morning I tired of the boundaries thou hast set for me, and thinking it would be a pretty lark to do some wrong—thou knowest I always do right—I wandered alone—aye, wilfully and not in thoughtlessness!—to the woods yonder by the stream. Now 'tis out and I await my punishment." Her eyes twinkled as she looked at him as if in great fear.

"Ho! ho! vile and wicked woman! so thou hast done this thing, eh? Now by the gods I know not how to punish thee—— Kiss me this instant, as a partial serving of thy sentence."

Decia complied, then he continued:

"I fear, however, that I cannot pass judgment. Thou Praetor Artus, open court!"

"I am ready, Decius. First let us hear what punishment the prisoner has already undergone, for she said that she has already suffered for her disobedience."

"Aye, for I was frightened near to death!" said Decia, as she proceeded to tell in detail of her surprise and fright as she observed the awakening of Glaccus, of whose identity she was not aware. Decius and Artus, however, smiled as they exchanged glances, and the senator winked to the tribune.

"I fled as though a hundred furies were after me!" continued Decia, "yet thou has not heard all! That strange man was mammoth in size, and had a big stick and surely did mean to injure some one with it!"

"That, Artus, would be a case of a host kicking out his guest without ceremony," laughed Decius. Then Decia correctly guessed the identity of the "strange man," and she blushed, for it was at her

suggestion that Glaccus was brought to the *rustica*.

"Look, Artus, look!" said Decius, "alas that blush! It doth indeed convince me that 'my lamb' is no longer a child. Too soon comes womanhood, —too soon thy father's eyes behold Time's conquering legions, tearing thee from the embrace of love in which he fain would hold thee forever!"

Decius sighed as he gazed at Decia, but she came to him and sat upon his knee, caressing him as only she of all the world knew how; patted his cheeks, pressed his lips between her fingers and proved indeed that the great love he showered upon her did not go to waste,—as love so often does.

Later in the evening Decius and Artus strolled to the *rustica* to see Glaccus.

"Good Aegea," said Decius, "thou dost look troubled. Does not Fortune wait upon the patient, or art thou tiring of our hospitality?"

"I am worried; some strange or fancied vision hath had an ill effect on Glaccus!"

She told of the finding of Glaccus in a faint, and of his tale that he had seen a "nymph." Decius and Artus could not restrain their laughter, but the senator said that the nymph was evidently a creature of dreams.

"Methinks, good nurse," said Artus, "'twould be most wise not to undeceive the youth, for common superstitions are useful when they augur good."

They entered the house.

"Ha, Glaccus," said Decius to the patient, "I heard of the miracle! Thou hast seen a nymph and art alive! It is a most favourable omen."

The eyes of Glaccus sparkled as he replied.

“But,” added Decius, “thou hast not paid homage to the tribune Artus here, who that morning in the wine-shop predicted thy victory,—and who likewise rode in haste from Rome to save thy life.”

“Pardon, noble tribune,” said Glaccus to Artus, “I would not appear ungrateful, when I make partial payment of my debt, perchance thou too wilt give me opportunity to serve thee upon some occasion.”

“Thou canst best serve me, Glaccus, by forgetting thy trifling debt to me and by serving Decius unto the last drop of thy blood,” replied Artus.

“These veins, tribune, would be opened for his asking!”

“I believe thee, Glaccus,” said Artus, “thy words suffice.”

“Glaccus!” remarked Decius, “thou hast indeed received a full compliment from Artus. To few men would he say such words; forget them not!”

CHAPTER XIII

An elapse of several days found Glaccus again setting forth to take his accustomed exercise, which consisted of a walk to the little stream, there to rest upon the bank. It was during one of these hours that he had been so greatly startled by his glimpse of "the nymph" on the opposite shore. This beautiful spring morning he was in better spirits than at any time since the combat. The flowers were in bloom, and beautiful acanthus, cyprus and other trees with their feathery inhabitants, and a Campanian blue sky overhead, all combined to awaken in the breast of the youth a love for life, a desire to penetrate further into its future and its mysteries, its pleasures and enchantments, with scarce a thought of its pains. He leaned on his staff as he walked and at times stopped to inhale deep breaths of the perfumed air, laden with odors of roses and violets that grew wildly about, and which seemed to invigorate him. His mind, however, had not as yet become clear, for thoughts come slowly after the strain of severe crises.

He thought of his years of dragging through the gutters until he reached that height he thought would be the pinnacle of his ambitions, a victor in the arena! He had discovered, however, the futility of it all.

“No honourable combat on the field of battle but thrusts for *sestertii* to shower on a woman of vice!” he exclaimed. “By Pollux! only now can I realize it, by comparing Mecinia with the motherly nurse who tends me!”

He arrived at the bank of the stream and leaned against a tree. He gazed at the opposite shore but was not rewarded by a sight of his “nymph.” He gave vent to a sigh of satisfaction, however, as he realized that his strength was steadily returning, although the process was all too slow to accord with his impetuous nature. He felt his now flabby muscles and thin limbs.

“Alas!” he said, “where is my strength, where is the strength for which I strove so long?”

Suddenly, above his head he heard the sounds of birds chirruping loudly as if in great excitement. He looked upward and beheld a nightingale flying about an upper limb of the tree in evident distress,—as though crying loudly to summon aid! He listened intently and heard the squeaks of birdlings. He then perceived that their frail nest had become loosened and was in fact in danger of falling.

The mother-bird continued her series of chirrups signifying her pain and fright as she circled around and around the nest in her apprehension.

“How can I help thee, little mother? Had I but the strength to climb, I would. Alas!”

The cries of the poor nightingale, however, continued to ring in his ears as he stood gazing helplessly up into the branches.

“Now, by Hercules!—’tis meet that I should help, and if I can fetch but a little added strength, I’ll try.”

He grasped the lower limb and painfully drew himself upon it. Beads of perspiration stood out upon his forehead at the exertion, which was considerable for one in his weakened condition. Unknown to him, his wound had opened and a little stream of blood trickled down his back. He endeavoured to lift himself to a higher branch and eventually was successful. Another would have relinquished the struggle, but Glaccus, as Largus at the barracks had remarked, "if once started in action, could not be restrained." He arrived at length at the branch whereon he found the nest of birdlings. The mother bird and her mate had kept up their continual chatter. He took from his waist the leather cord that loosely bound his *subucula* or light sleeveless tunic, around the hips. Securely he tied the nest to the branch and began his downward journey. His strength, however, was fast deserting him. When he felt his feet touch the ground his head swam, his knees gave way beneath him and he fell against the trunk of the tree. The blood from his wound made a red stain on his loose garment. The sun poured down upon him. Fortune, however, did not desert him in his extremity, for unknown to him there had been an eye witness of his chivalry; none other than "the nymph," Decia, who once again, lured by curiosity, had returned to the spot of her first adventure. Brought up since childhood in the country, it was but natural that there had been developed within her soul that love for all dumb creatures with whom her life had for so long a period been intermingled. It was therefore that the heroic action of Glaccus appealed strongly to her and touched her heart. His identity was now

known to her and she reasoned, "he could not be an evil man if he loved birds." She could not control her delight as she saw him fasten the nest to the limb of the tree. As he began his downward journey, she held her breath, for she was aware that he was a sick man. As she saw his feet touch the ground, she started forward through the branches, and it was at that moment that Glaccus lost consciousness. He had obtained, however, one brief glimpse of her, and as he felt the earth slipping from under him, he believed that this time he had been summoned at the final call. Decia saw him fall, saw his face grow ghastly pale, ere he dropped to the ground. In her perplexity she knew not what to do. Her first thought was to summon slaves to his assistance, and then she remembered that if she did so, her father would learn that she had again, and wilfully this time, disobeyed him. Again, if she took matters in her own hands and crossed the bridge nearby to aid him, she would likewise be running tremendous risk of discovery. Her better nature conquered her, however, for she quickly sped across the bridge. As she drew near him, she saw the blood stain on his garment; but this was Glaccus of whom she had heard so much, and she had no fear. She took the little jeweled knife she carried from its sheath and slit his garment at the rear of the shoulder. To the pure all things are pure and no thought of any possible immodesty in the act entered her mind. Then she took her white girdle from her waist and ran to the stream to wet it. Returning quickly, she gritted her teeth and bathed the wound! She repeated this action several times, and finally dashed water on his face. As

she saw consciousness returning to him, she quickly fled the spot, crossing the bridge and running as though some dreadful ogre was in pursuit of her. The first sight that greeted the eyes of Glaccus as he gazed around, was the vision of "his nymph" hastening through the woods on the opposite shore. He noted that his garment had been rent! Upon closer examination he found that it was cut cleanly and not torn! He realized that naught indeed but a keen knife could have done the trick. He likewise observed that his garment was wet, not alone with blood but with water. These facts, coupled with the sight of the fleeing Decia, astonished him, but he realized that the gods still smiled upon him indeed and that it was none other than "his nymph," though "one of the flesh" who had succoured him in his distress.

"O, my nymph," he said, as he stretched forth his hand toward the opposite shore, "I thank thee!"

Decia, peering through the branches and unobserved by Glaccus, did not know the meaning of his action, could not hear his words. She fled from her point of observation, and changed her garment which had become soiled. Her handmaids, from whom she had stolen unperceived, had been searching for her everywhere.

Meanwhile Glaccus had started on his return to the *rustica*. He met Aegea on the way. She was surprised at his pale face and disordered appearance.

"Glaccus, what means this condition?"

Then she observed the blood stains on his garment and that the wound had opened afresh. She looked into his eyes inquiringly.

"Scold me not, good Aegea. I confess that I

have disobeyed thy orders, yet in a good cause. Do not tell Decius."

He related to her the incident of the birds, omitting, however, the assistance that had been rendered him by "the nymph." When he lay within his room, Aegea observed that he had a high fever. She scolded him gently but praised him in her heart.

When Decius called at the *rustica* that night she did not know how to break the news to him. Glaccus was still in high fever. Indeed, she endeavoured to keep Decius from entering the room. He observed that something was wrong and said:

"Come, Aegea, come! 'Tis not like thy usual self to thus hide things!"

She was therefore compelled to tell Decius the story of the adventure of Glaccus.

"Is the youth bereft of senses? I will scold him on the morrow. If thou needest ice or snow, send for it," said Decius.

He returned to the atrium where he found Decia awaiting him. He told her of the kind action of Glaccus that morning! It gave her a strong prick of conscience, for this was the first time that she had ever deceived her father.

Decius sat in the summer *triclinium* drinking a goblet of wine, his usual custom ere he retired for the night. He had lost whatever resentment he felt at the action and disobedience of Glaccus, for he said half aloud: "I am wrong. Rashness is the companion of youth and it doth not make him less a man because he hath a heart; for did not great Cæsar weep at the ingratitude of Brutus more than at the pain of the severed veins?"

CHAPTER XIV

Several days elapsed before Glaccus had recovered. One morning, however, found him reclining on the bank of the stream where he had been befriended by "his nymph."

He rested on the bank all morning until his reveries were interrupted by the arrival of Aegea, who said:

"Hast thou forgotten all record of time? 'Tis long past the hour for thy nourishment. Come!" He clasped her hand in both of his and replied softly:

"I would fare badly without thy constant watching. Thee, too, must I thank for my returning strength; not since the combat have I felt as well as I do this morn!"

Aegea smiled with undisguised satisfaction at hearing his words, and together they walked to the *rustica*, where, in company with Machaon, they sat down to their midday meal.

The following morning Glaccus returned to the bank of the stream.

And Decia! Alas, Decia! A mysterious seed had been planted in her tender bosom. Decia, stealing away from her handmaids, attracted by some unknown force, leading her footsteps to the bank of the stream where she had observed Glaccus on the opposite shore! Since his identity had become known to her, added curiosity had been awakened.

“My father denies my request to see him; he said a gladiator is not fit company for the daughter of a patrician!”

She walked slowly, meditating on this first great problem of her life, striving to convince herself of the righteousness of disobeying her father's command and deceiving him for the purpose of favouring her own desires.

How, but that the patrician maiden should have been attracted by the plebian youth! She found herself at the bank, even before she was aware of it. Gently she thrust aside the bushes, peered through them and there beheld Glaccus sleeping peacefully on the opposite bank, a smile adorning his face, which betokened that some sweet influence was present in his dreams,—and Decia was glad! She softly crossed the bridge, took the chaplet of lilies from her golden hair, and placed it gently on the ground, resting it against his leg.

“Thou art a hero,” she whispered, “for thou hast conquered weakness with the kindness of thy heart.”

She quickly returned to the portico. That entire afternoon a mischievous smile lurked about her mouth.

When Glaccus awoke he was startled, for the first thing that met his eyes was the wreath.

“She crowns me for a deed that still remains to be done!” he murmured.

The following morning he found himself at his accustomed place and fed the birds. Ere long, he chanced to glance across the stream and there saw the face of Decia peering through the bushes. Some rays of sunlight, penetrating the branches overhead, illumined her golden hair. Her white *palla*

vied with her complexion! Stolen waters are the sweetest, and her dark eyes shone from the excitement of her adventure. At sight of her, Glaccus sprang to his feet, and approached the bank, even to the edge. She, however, did not move.

“Was it thou, sweet stranger, that did befriend me?” he asked. She did not reply, but cast her eyes downward. This was but little encouragement for Glaccus. O, youth, to what rash deeds, to what land of dreams, to what hopes, aims, efforts do thy years of inexperience lead thee!

“May I cross the stream to thank thee? Thou didst succour me when I was stricken yonder,” he said.

She did not answer him—in words, but raised her eyes to his. He crossed the stream. So, too, was the invisible barrier that separates patrician from plebian, crossed! He approached her slowly; their eyes met and love’s mysterious current flowed through their souls.

“I know not who or what thou art, but thoughts of thee have given me strength, and too, the greatest happiness I have ever known,—therefore, sweet maiden, thou canst well judge how high a value I place upon thy kindly action—that morn. More so then is this true when I realize how most unworthy I am to feel those gentle touches of thy fingers—when thou didst bathe my wound!”

Decia raised her hand to her bosom. She strove to speak, but speech was difficult. She, who had a dozen handmaids at her beck and call, she, the daughter of Decius, whose entire *familia* bowed down, as it were, at her very glance, now found

it a task indeed to speak to a plebian! At last Decia said softly:

“Thou—thou didst save my birds—and—I am grateful.”

Suddenly her face became diffused with rich colour. She bowed her head to him and turning slowly, walked quietly from the scene. After the lapse of some moments, so as not to appear forward, he followed a few steps and thrust aside the bushes through which she had passed. He was rewarded, for he saw her look backward and glance kindly at him.

Glaccus recrossed the stream, and walked homeward as one in a dream.

CHAPTER XV

Donatus was a widower! The late wife of the senator, who Donatus claimed had been of patrician stock, had, however, been brought by him to Rome. Since her death, many women had striven to gain the honour of succeeding her; thus far Donatus had not succumbed. Rumours of evil deeds and orgies held within his palace had spread throughout Rome, but carefully and craftily Donatus guarded its secrets.

It was not surprising that Mecinia was overawed by the wealth of his establishment. She looked upon the mighty Donatus as though he were a Cæsar, and ere long almost hated him with all the venom of her soul, through envy of his possessions. She lived there in comfort, however, save for the one cry always ringing through her mind, "I want Glaccus."

"Could I rule this Donatus, I would be forever great. Glaccus must then surrender and I would raise him with me. There is hope. Slowly but steadily my money increases."

Her heart fluttered wildly and her eyes took on an evil glitter at the thought of a possible sudden enrichment through this tool that had been placed within her hands. She performed her duties with a certain severity, and treated the advances of Do-

natus with a coldness with which she succeeded in whetting his appetite. She kept as much to the privacy of her own *cubiculum* as the discharge of her duties permitted, and bided her time for the completion of her plans. She wore none but the most subdued of garments, though she spent many hours studying the arts of personal adornment, and purchased from time to time those requisites for her toilet which might, at some future day, prove useful. She had not long to wait, for Donatus in his endeavours to draw her from her cold indifference to him, and without desiring to make her aware of his strong passion for her, tried a dozen different methods. One day he told her he had procured special permission for her to attend the amphitheatre in a choice seat. She paled at the thought of what she had lost through that fatal place—Glaccus, lying even now in slow convalescence! She had succeeded in obtaining news of the youth unknown to any one within the household.

Donatus determined on another course of action, and said to her one day:

“Good Fortunæ, I am deeply indebted to thee for the able manner in which thou dost aid me to govern my *familia*; I crave of thee a favour. Certain friends of mine whose influence is useful to me, have made comment upon the fact that thou, of whom I have spoken in glowing terms, hast never adorned one of my feasts. Wilt thou lend thy presence to my *triclinium* on the third night hence? I would deny thee naught to show my gratitude, for well I know my request must jar thy quiet tastes.”

“Lord,” said Mecinia coldly, “thou hast been

kind to me and I fear I cannot refuse thee—this once at least,—yet thou wilt offend me if thou speakest of payment.”

As she withdrew he mused :

“Can I but get that cold mollusk from her shell and stir her with excitement and Falernian wine, methinks her surrender will be no arduous task. She puzzles me sorely, for ne'er before have I met so strange a woman—nor one so beautiful!”

As he thought of her life within his house, this friendless, quiet, beautiful woman, upon whose cheeks the roses of health had again left their reddened imprint and whose large black eyes he longed to see illumined with that which he would call love for him, he clenched his hand and said :

“Action, Donatus, action! Thy thoughts thus far have brought thee naught in this too long campaign.”

He was one of those men who used people as one would employ chess upon the board; by ways and means mysterious, he moved the figures to win. It could therefore be considered as an assured fact that those who graced his festal board were such only who would perchance prove useful to him. He consequently spared no expense to make these occasions enjoyable to his guests. His object in desiring Mecinia to appear at his next banquet was therefore a two-fold one.

The third night arrived, and Donatus, arrayed in myriads of rich jewels which he took pleasure in displaying, much to the envy of his guests, received his company. Among those invited were several senators and a general who had but recently returned from foreign service. Lucius, the philoso-

pher, was among those present. They were reclining in the grand *triclinium*, on the three couches placed about the table. Lucius said:

"None can question the generosity of Donatus, yet one thing I miss, and Aphrodité will not frown upon it—I sorely miss—come, canst thou guess it?"

"Aye," replied the host, "thy sensual eyes betray thee; thou wouldst have Circe or Aphrodité herself to share this festal board."

The guests laughed at the expense of Lucius and Donatus continued:

"Patience, friends, patience. Who knows but that as we drink to Venus, the model of our beauty, yonder *aulæum* may part and the goddess in person honor us with her divine presence!"

He clapped his hands and slaves entered, carrying an immense tray upon which were silver goblets adorned in relief with figures of Venus and Bacchus. Other slaves followed, drawing a small wagon, on which had been placed a large-sized keg covered with earth and cobwebs. An exclamation of surprise greeted this filthy product.

"By the divine laughter of Bacchus!" said one, "what jest wilt thou now cloak us with, thou ever entertaining Donatus!"

"Jest, sayest thou? Dost thou not know a poor cask oft holds good wine? It is a most expensive jest, I tell thee!"

At a signal the cask was opened, and the goblets were filled. The contents proved to be Falernian wine of a very old and rare vintage. As the assembled guests tasted it an exclamation of delight came from each throat.

"Nectar from the vineyard of Bacchus himself!"

said Lucius, and Donatus, rising to his feet, poured the libation on the mosaic floor.

“Let us drink then, to Bacchus and to Aphrodité, upon whose beauty the wine loving god doth gaze, like our friend here, with amorous glances.”

As they raised the goblets to their lips Lucius sprang to his feet and said:

“Look, Donatus, look, for, by all the divinities! here comes none other than divine Aphrodité herself, or else 'tis Circe in all her splendor!”

They cast their eyes toward the *tablinium*, where, standing at the entrance, the curtain having been partly drawn, they saw a woman of majestic figure and striking beauty. A chaplet of red roses entwined her black hair, which shone from the radiance of a thousand particles of golden powder that had been sprinkled on it. Her throat and bosom were bare save for a single red jewel that hung suspended by a thin chain encircling her throat. Over her snowy-white tunic were thrown the folds of a simple mantle which seemed to be composed of myriads of silver scales that sent forth dazzling radiance at the slightest movement. She said:

“Methinks, well meaning flatterer, that thou dost defame, by very comparison, the goddess whom thou dost claim to worship! I am but human and crave a place at the *triclinium*!”

The entire company were startled and delighted, not to say fascinated, by the opportune appearance of Mecinia. None replied to her words, but Donatus approached her with a look of adoration on his evil face. He took her hand, and bowing, led her to an empty couch at the table.

“By Venus herself! I vow, Donatus,” said the

general, "that, although I have visited many lands, ne'er before have I seen so beautiful a reflection of Venus as she who now graces thy feast!"

He gazed piercingly at Mecinia.

"Friends, allow me to introduce to thee, none other than Fortunæ, who rules my *familia* for me. She hath no relation to me save that she chooseth to call me 'lord,' and persists in taking service in this house which she could rule as *Domina*, did she but desire it—with me as an added slave to the great number I possess."

"Cease, I beg of thee, illustrious Donatus!" said Mecinia, "I did but assume this garb in a frolic, and if thou dost tease me I will quickly change it for my usual dark habiliment."

She laughed, displaying beautiful white teeth behind lips of reddest coral, but refused to drink the goblet of wine that had been handed to her by Donatus, whose face consequently became serious in its expression.

"'Tis easy to perceive, O Fortunæ, and thou hast been rightly named," said Lucius, "and that thou dost not worship at the shrine of Bacchus!"

Her appearance on the scene, however, did not serve to increase the jollity of the occasion; on the contrary it appeared as though some "goddess" had suddenly come to subject them. Even Donatus, known as one of the most talkative of hosts, was quiet to an unusual degree. Lucius strove to save the day, or night rather, and rising to his feet proposed a toast to her who had given to them that added enjoyment which could not be gained when beauty was absent. He raised his goblet on high and said:

“To thee, beautiful Fortunæ, we drink. Truly thou dost honor Fortune! In thee we behold the combination of the graces. Our thanks for thy presence.”

Mecinia, however, said:

“No, no, the jest has proceeded sufficiently. Good Donatus, tell thy friends my real station. They embarrass me with their flatteries.”

Donatus had drunk copious goblets of wine, which contributed in no small measure to the heating of his blood and the increase of his enthusiasm at her advent, and he replied:

“Hear me, friends, Fortunæ would have me speak of her real station. It is as I have said, yet she denies me even a single kiss. For that I blame her not, for I am not as young—as I was,—yet I tell ye, one and all, Fortunæ can own me, body, soul and all my wealth, by Jupiter himself, I vow it!”

He gazed at her in open admiration. It was the first and only occasion upon which, with proper surroundings, he could tell her of his love for her,—could proclaim that love before the world and thus convince Mecinia of his sincerity.

The latter, still playing her game, returned his glances with a meaning that could not be misinterpreted, and her unspoken reply was heard, so to speak, by Donatus, who, ere the guests arose to depart, said:

“I vow by Jupiter himself, O, Fortunæ, none would count thy wishes as aught but commands!”

CHAPTER XVI

Affairs with Artus had suffered no change, and he busied himself with matters pertaining to his candidacy for the praetorship. Eurycele continued to love him with a fidelity that earned for Artus the envy of men, and for his mistress the jeers of women. Many of the latter did not hesitate to characterize her worship of her lover as "injurious in principle, tending to spoil the men by such example." She became known as a "one-man woman," and lived for the present only,—for the day, the hour, the minute and each thought and action of her life revolved about Artus. At times when she found him preoccupied, jealousy would tear her heart. She had heard whispers that Artus was in love with the daughter of Decius. At first she laughed. Rome was full of rumours regarding men and women, for the growth of her jealousy was restrained by the kindness of Artus.

Decius was a frequent visitor at the home of Artus in the Janiculum. The senator had earned her highest esteem, by the solidity of his character which was so consistent with his strong and heavy frame. She attributed the frequent visits of Artus to the villa of Decius, only to the friendship of these two men. One day, however, while at the baths, she overheard two women conversing. Though un-

known to her, they were evidently acquainted with Decius and conversant with details of his life. One of them said :

“I am surprised that the senator Decius doth not marry again. Ah me, he is a man quite after mine own fancy,—and too, he is more than comfortably rich.”

“Waste not thy thoughts on him,” replied her companion, “he is so enwrapped in his child that some say he worships her in place of the gods.”

“That may be true,—but when his daughter marries and leaves him to a lonely old age—what then?”

“They say that she is beautiful, yet Decius keeps her from all men,—indeed, makes her reside at his villa so as to be away from Rome!”

“Ha, is not the Tribune Artus then a man?”

“Dost thou mean he who hath the constant Eurycele to spoil him?”

“Aye, none other. Listen now to this. 'Tis whispered,—and loudly too,—that Decius is saving his daughter to be the wife of Artus who is a candidate for a praetorship. Decius, as thou knowest, stands in highest favor with the Cæsar, with Taurus,—in fact with every one, and is spending money liberally to bring about the election of his friend. Thou knowest that every wish of Augustus is law to the *patres conscripti*, the *comitia*, and every one besides.”

Eurycele staggered to a bench, pale as the white marble against which she leaned. It was as though the darkness of Hades had enveloped her soul. When she recovered her self-control, she ordered her *lecticarii* to hastily bear her homewards in her litter, and there she let loose a flood of tears.

“How much of this is true?” she questioned herself. She felt powerless to act, but resolved to endeavor to discover the truth regarding the aims and purposes of Artus, resolved to question Decius at her first opportunity. Fortune aided her, for the senator arrived that afternoon, and when they were seated in the peristyle she said to Artus:

“My lord, I heard this day that noble Decius worships his child. I doubt not that she well deserves it, being so splendidly fathered.”

“Aye, Eurycele,” said Decius, “yet thou dost make me blush by attributing her perfection to me. It was the mother,—may the gods fore’er protect her sweet soul!—that left me as a legacy those wonderful virtues mirrored in her daughter, my Decia.”

“What then wilt thou do, O Decius, when some man comes to take her from thee as his lawful wife,—that is, if thou dost think there is a man quite good enough to be her husband?”

And Decius replied sadly:

“I cannot bear even to think upon it. Perchance he will give me a place in his *familia* so that I may be near her!—Else I vow I must seek active service in some distant province to help me bear my loss.”

“Then thou dost believe there is a man to whom thou couldst safely entrust thy most prized possession?”

“Aye, there should be one in all Rome.”

“Do I know him, good Decius, for if not, I would indeed give much to see a man who can hold such great opinion from thee.”

“Most honestly, Eurycele, I do say that thou dost not know him, for it would require years of search through all the provinces to find him!”

“Truly thou art most particular to have thy daughter well husbanded and in this again, hast thou risen even higher in my esteem, O senator. Artus can bear me witness that I do place thee on a certain pedestal.”

“Aye, Decius, my Eurycele would arouse the jealousy of any other man save me, for the place thou holdest in her heart and mind,” said Artus.

Decius smiled with satisfaction as he said:

“I thank thee roundly, Eurycele, and hope to retain thy great opinion forever, for I tell thee that most Romans would call me weak if they knew more of my father-love.”

Ere many minutes had elapsed Eurycele said:

“I will retire, Artus. My bath this day did sorely tire me.” She kissed him and rewarded Decius likewise, to the great astonishment of the senator, whose face reddened.

“That was for thy great father-qualities, noble Decius, and my Artus here, and all Rome knows, my lips are sacred to his touch alone. Perchance 'tis therefore he doth sometimes tire of me!”

She walked slowly from the *triclinium* as Decius said:

“May Morpheus grant thee dreams as beautiful as thyself.”

For some time afterwards both men sat in silence, each buried in his own thoughts.

“Artus,” said Decius, “thou hast the best and truest mistress in all Rome. Alas, for thee, and me, and—and—my lamb. How can a man dispense justice in so terrible a dilemma!”

“Eurycele is my blessing,” said Artus, “and too, my curse,—and thou knowest how most properly I

value her. Again I tell thee, Decius, I must kill the love thy daughter bears for me, and reasons for it multiply with the passing of each hour.”

When Eurycele reached her *cubiculum* she dismissed her handmaids.

“Gods, thy bolt has struck! I am lost!” she moaned, for she realized that Decius had selected Artus to be the husband of his daughter. The words of the senator rang through her ears:

“It would require years of search through all the provinces to find him!”

The fact of the many years of friendship of these two men was indeed known to her. In her heart she realized that Decius’s estimate of the qualities of Artus was correct.

“To me he is a god!” she cried, but when she recovered her composure she reasoned that she would not surrender without a struggle.

“By the two Goddesses! The combat lies twixt Decius and myself!” she said. “Alas! how weak I am, against such a force,—and I,—and I the thief of his daughter’s happiness!”

CHAPTER XVII

Glaccus did not tell Aegea of his meeting with "his nymph." That was his secret, and he guarded it as his most prized possession. The few words spoken by Decia rang in his ears.

"Thou didst save my birds and I am grateful." He repeated them a hundred times, and the remembrance of the sweet tones, the maidenly modesty which characterized them, and the heaving of her bosom were things upon which he had lived since then.

"My birds! Ah, then she is the child of a slave—the slave who cares for the birds here!"

The thought that she was the daughter of the senator, Decius, never for a moment entered his mind. Remembrance of this maiden brought to his mind's eye a vista of some little outhouse on the grounds. He pictured a plain interior and the occupants, perchance an old father and mother, captured in the wars. Again he speculated that perhaps she was an orphan.

He did not eat that entire day or do aught but sit and dream—and hope—O, priceless hope!—that he would see her again.

Aegea was perplexed and worried.

"What ails thee, Glaccus," she questioned; "thou

hast not eaten this day! Have patience and fret not, for ere long thou wilt be again in action; thy wound heals speedily."

"Good Aegea, I do not question the wisdom of the gods in keeping me inactive during this long period, yet I would I were able to start this moment on the mission for my patron Decius."

His thoughtless speech pained Aegea, who said:

"And art thou so soon tiring of my poor companionship?"

"Alas!" said Glaccus; "now I have hurt thee. Decius says I owe my life to thee, though I do not need his words to tell me. The net and trident are not a very profitable business for me. Yet didst thou know more, thou wouldst not condemn me—and, too, I am through with it forever!"

"None condemn thee, Glaccus, and I less than any, for I know thee. Thy courage in thy pain, thy gentle speech, thy appreciation, and, too, thy noble action—though ill-timed, indeed!—when thou didst save the nest of birdlings!—all these, little as they seem, do indicate nobility in thy soul. Truly the gods owe thee better times!"

"Dost thou think thus, Aegea?" he asked eagerly.

"Aye, Glaccus. Let me be thy oracle and say that thou wilt be happy in thy life-journey."

When Glaccus closed his eyes in slumber he dreamed that "his nymph" sat beside him and pressed her hand upon his heart saying:

"All else is Rome's, save this,—thy heart—which belongs to me!" He awoke to find Decius standing beside his couch.

"A greeting to thee, Glaccus! Mars encourages those who do not abuse him. Soon thou wilt be in

shape to serve me for thine own advancement—and too, for the happiness of one I love.”

“I pray the gods each day, illustrious patron, that thou wilt soon say I am well enough to go.”

“Patience, Glaccus, patience. Rest, and gain more strength. Artus will come this night to see thee.”

The senator returned to his atrium, where Decia sat patiently awaiting him.

“Father,” she said, softly, “if perchance I should deceive thee ever, wouldst thou forgive me—and—not love me less?”

“What sayest thou? ‘Would I forgive thee and not love thee less?’ Now, by Jupiter! I’ll not forgive thy cruel words as soon as I would the actions their import suggests. Come here to me and beg forgiveness for thy unwelcome thrust. Why, I would but love thee more, no matter what the crime. Let Rome, and the great Augustus, and the very gods,—may they forgive me for my honest words,—let each and every one of them chide, convict, condemn, yet would thy father hurl defiance and say, Decia is perfection, and each wrong she commits changes that wrong into a right. Well I know these words sound un-Roman,—yet, stay,—what prompts thy question?”

Decia threw her arms about him in a paroxysm of tears.

“By Pollux! tears, my lamb? Does my love for thee fetch tears? But, no! Thy mother’s spirit has been with me throughout the day,—nor could she pass thee by!”

Decia resolved that nevermore would she bestow a single thought of love upon any other man.

The stars had appeared when, together, they walked to the white marble mausoleum situated at the far corner of the grounds and facing the Appian Way. It contained the ashes of the beloved wife and mother. Decius had erected this tomb there to enable him to see it each time he journeyed to and from Rome.

Father and daughter read for the thousandth time these words:

PEACE.

THIS GRIEF WILL ALWAYS WEIGH UPON ME: MAY IT BE GRANTED ME TO BEHOLD IN SLEEP THY REVERED COUNTENANCE. MY WIFE, AURELIA, ALWAYS CHASTE, MODEST AND BEAUTIFUL, I GRIEVE, DEPRIVED OF THEE.

LIE IN PEACE.

MARCUS DECIUS, HER HUSBAND, RAISED THIS TO HIS BELOVED WIFE.

CHAPTER XVIII

His desires accomplished by the surrender of Mecinia, Donatus was raised to heights of joy. Nothing desired by his new favourite was denied her and she ruled him by the knowledge of the weaknesses of his character, which perhaps were nowhere better exemplified than by his passion for her.

He said to her one night:

“Fortunæ, methinks thou hast some most sore grievance 'gainst the world. If my words ring true, thou canst summon all the legions of my power and wealth to win thy campaign.”

“Donatus,” she replied; “truly thou hast won my heart with the greatness of thy soul, and I doubt not that thou wouldst not hold back even though a human life was my desire.”

Donatus flushed with pleasure as he said:

“My Fortunæ, thou art a goddess after mine own fancy and one who truly weighs me!”

That night in the privacy of her *cubiculum* the calculating Mecinia mused:

“I have made a bargain that will purchase me my happiness.”

The days passed and the crafty senator was as a man re-born. He spent many hours in the company of his new favourite, showered her with gifts, and invited many friends to meet her. Bedecked

in all her radiance, the very colour of her hair changed by golden powder, animated by the magnitude of her new power and hopes for the future, none who had chanced to visit the wine-shop of Largus in the past, recognized in Fortunæ, the former wine-maid, Mecinia, favourite of the gladiators. She led the life of a wealthy Roman lady, and one day at the baths, made the acquaintance of Eurycele. Ere long a friendship was formed between the two. The heart of Mecinia bounded with joy as she realized that the mistress of Artus would be another source of news regarding the villa of Decius and its occupants. This could prove of priceless value as an aid to her plans for the future, nor was it surprising that ere long, urged on by the assumed gentleness of Mecinia, the now saddened Eurycele unbosomed herself to her new friend regarding her fears of the possible loss of Artus.

“Truly, Eurycele,” commented Mecinia, one day, “methinks thy constancy tires him at times. If I were in thy place, I would adopt other tactics when I saw the campaign going thus against me. It is a foul shame that women of our beauty and good qualities should suffer because some half-grown, virtuous child attracts these fools of men! Ecastor! I’ll hold my Donatus against a hundred such, even though I must needs resort to measures that would rouse his jealousy to a tempest! Thus only canst thou hold men!”

“Dost thou think thus, O Fortunæ?”

“Thus, indeed, I think,—and more. I vow by Venus! who had her troubles with Mars and all the rest of them!” replied the scheming Mecinia.

“Canst thou advise me further, good Fortunæ? Truly, I would die without my Artus,” said Eurycele, a tremor in her voice.

“I’ll think upon it for thee,” was Fortunæ’s reply, as she kissed the Greek and hastened homeward, not alone to welcome Donatus, but to receive reports from spies she had hired for the purpose of watching the villa of Decius.

Eurycele, seated in the atrium of the house of Artus, was deeply engrossed in thought inspired by her treacherous new friend.

“Perchance Fortunæ is wise in this, although she doth advise inconstancy! Yet, I vow by great Zeus! that no other chin save that of Artus will pillow on this bosom.”

Mecinia, reclining in her litter, mused with a smile of satisfaction.

“The pretty *Graecule* will serve me well! I’ll send to her a generous gift this night to stronger bind our friendship.”

When Mecinia arrived at the house of Donatus, she found a man awaiting her in the guise of a peddler with jewelry for sale.

“Yes, I do need some things,” she said to him; “come into the peristyle, where it is cooler, and I will see thy wares.”

When she was alone with him, she examined a ring, to allay the suspicion of any inmate of the household who should perchance be spying upon her.

“What is thy news?” she asked, quickly.

“The youth is convalescing speedily, and hath a new employment for his leisure hours. I crawled into the grounds this morn, closely following the

stream that runs through them. By Pollux! I risked my precious life thereby, to serve thee! There upon the bank I saw the youth kneeling in worship of love before a maiden. She had golden hair and showed such attributes of wealth that I do believe she was none other than the daughter of the senator Decius!"

Mecinia sprang to her feet with a cry, which caused her handmaids to run to her. She realized her fault, and quickly recovering, said in a loud voice:

"No, robber! thy prices are excessive! I would not purchase thy wares at the price of a rotten nut!—yet, wait, I'll take this amulet,—and only because I so sorely need it."

She handed him a purse, which, however, contained enough gold to buy a dozen such ornaments, and turning to her handmaids, said:

"Away, away, I did not call ye!" They retired in confusion.

"Tell me more," said Mecinia.

"That is all I know. I will have more news for thee on the morrow."

Shouldering his package, he departed.

Mecinia hurried to her *cubiculum* in a tremble of excitement.

"Now, by the gods, is it possible that this child whom Eurycele fears, will likewise prove a dangerous enemy to rob me of my Glaccus?"

When Donatus returned late in the afternoon, he wore a look which betokened disappointment.

"Greeting to thee," said Mecinia to him; "and say, is my love of no sufficient power to chase thy frowns?"

Donatus embraced her and replied:

"Truly Fortunæ, thy love is my very life, yet hear me, I am in most sore temper. One, Decius in the senate, did this day destroy my fondest hopes to gain added wealth; he blocked a certain measure I fostered. May he rot in the infernal realms of Cerebus and Hecate, for I would have gained it were it not for his ill-timed interference!"

"And wouldst thou combat tongue with tongue, too, gentle Donatus,—thou, who art so clever in action? Remove him."

"Aye, Fortunæ, that I would, indeed, but how? He holds great favour with Taurus—and even the absent Augustus, and, therefore, with the servile senate."

"Tell me more, and I'll think upon it for thee, Donatus, and advise thee how thou canst strike him with his own created weapons," said Mecinia.

"O, my Fortunæ," said Donatus, as he rubbed his hands together, "hadst thou but been with me through my past life to advise me!"

Mecinia smiled as she realized that another weapon had been placed in her hands to aid her.

CHAPTER XIX

“A greeting to Artus!” said Decius, when the former arrived at the villa. “I was telling my lamb that I have news for thee.”

“News for me, Decius?”

“Well, Artus, thou canst judge for thyself. I heard to-day from the lips of Taurus himself that thy candidacy for the praetorship will be received with most popular favour, and, as he told me this, he smiled knowingly, as though to say: ‘It is already thine, Decius,’ and, like a fool that I am, I straightway blurted out my thanks, aye, like a rough quarryman from the hills, when he receives his cooked beans. Then Taurus laughed and added, ‘By Pollux! Decius, thou art becoming a reader of minds!’ No more was said upon it; therefore, get proper *praetextae* of candidacy for the magistracy.”

The countenance of Artus became illumined with joy, and he said:

“Decius, thou dost ever think of others before thyself. Is not this true, Decia?”

“Praetor Artus,” she replied, “there is no daughter of Rome who has so great a father.”

They walked along the pathway lined on both sides with pines, oaks and myrtles, with many statues set in between. When they reached the portico, Decius said:

“Await us here, Decia, we will visit the *rustica*.”

Together they walked toward the *rustica*, and found Aegea sitting on the marble bench, half way to the bridge, where it was her custom to await Decius each evening.

“Greeting to Aegea! How fares Glaccus?” said Decius.

“I am sorely puzzled again,” replied the nurse.

Decius gave vent to a grunt, and said:

“Methinks thou hast spoiled the child, good Aegea.”

“The wound heals well, but he did not eat a morsel of food this day. He sat and dreamed. Such action begets no strength.”

“Strange!” said Decius; “ah,—but I have here a good physician, Artus, who shall do the business for us!”

Artus smiled and they walked to the room, where they found Glaccus, pale and buried in thought.

“Awake, sleepy head,” said Decius, “what ails thy appetite—and, too, thy mind? Hast thou no eyes to see thy patrons?”

Glaccus sprang to his feet and began stammering his excuses.

“Cease,—but tell us the nature of thy new ailment.”

“Domine, ’tis naught that is serious, yet this day I lost my appetite. I feel, however, in most excellent condition.”

“Truly, most excellent condition,—yet I would not send thee out to fight the Parthians!”

Glaccus remained silent and Artus gazed piercingly at him.

“Strip, Glaccus,” he said, “I will examine thee.”

Artus peered closely at the wound and bowed his head with satisfaction. He felt the biceps and thighs of the youth.

“Glaccus,” he said, “why didst thou not eat this day? Art thou becoming Epicurean in thy tastes?”

“That is not so,” replied Glaccus, “for I need but suggest that which I want and good Aegea brings it ere I am through speaking. I sorely tire, however, of this inaction. Thou knowest, tribune, that the barracks differ from the villas.”

“And action thou dost indeed sorely need,” said Artus, who turned to Decius and remarked:

“Truly, a man becomes flabby when he hath no exercise! I see nothing, however, that should prove permanent in the sickness of this youth. Indeed, he makes rapid progress.”

Then turning to Glaccus, he said:

“Remember, Glaccus, that the gods give naught to man without demanding payment; therefore, realize that if thou wouldst move onward in this life, thou wilt have to pay the price—of inactivity for awhile,—and aid time with patience.”

As Decius and Artus returned to the portico, the latter said:

“There is something in the wind, Decius! Question Aegea closely, for it is passing strange that the youth should change as thou sayest since yesternight. Thou knowest that the ‘good and gentle Aegea’ as thou termost her, is in truth,—a woman,—and too, a widow! Canst thou see the point? I make no accusation, I merely suggest possibilities.”

Decius replied: “No, Artus, no,—’tis not a just suggestion; thou dost not know Aegea as well as I!”

“Perhaps not,” responded Artus with a laugh, “Thou too, Brutus?”—and now methinks, Decius, that the widow is indeed dangerous! Will it chance to pass that thou and Glaccus will ere long be rivals?”

Decius did not laugh, but said:

“By the gods, thou art becoming a greater cynic day by day!”

“Be not angry with me, Decius, I did but jest,—yet follow my advice, and question Aegea; let me add that I have seen her gazing at the youth in a manner that did not fit the robe of nurse!”

“Aye, ’tis possible that she has become fond of him,” said Decius, “for this Glaccus appears to be a good youth, but as for that which thou dost suggest,—no, thou wrongest her.”

“I hope that I do, yet I repeat, question her, Decius,” said Artus as he smiled. He then changed the subject of conversation.

Soon they arrived at the portico where they found Decia frowning.

“Chase those lines,” said Decius. “Didst thou see that frown, Artus? Truly affairs upon my villa become complex when my lamb frowns! Come here this instant, thou rebellious one!”

She arose and said: “Thou didst tarry long!”

“Now, Artus, didst thou hear that? A most enveloping wife would Decia make! She keeps close watch upon her father; how then dost thou think would it be with a husband?”

Artus laughed as he said:

“The husband will be the most fortunate of Romans,” and then he whispered in the ear of Decius,

“whose wives, as thou knowest, act the very opposite to this!”

Decius laughed hilariously, and Decia said:

“Now that was not kind! Didst neglect me that moment and I am angry, Praetor Artus.”

Like a spoiled child she walked away and joined her handmaidens, and Artus and Decius laughed.

“Dost thou but use thy power of office as ably as thou didst wield the sword, I vow I will make the *princeps* pay me for my judgment in placing thee! I will await thy edicts for the year with most impatient interest,” said the latter.

“Augustus aims, Decius,” continued Artus, “at legislation of such character I understand, that it will raise the tone of domestic morality and give increase of fruitful marriages. In this, he is noble, yet methinks the task, viewed from the standpoint of existing conditions, is one that would require centuries of ancient virtues to consummate!”

The hour being the beginning of the second vigil, Decia retired. As she bade them both good night, she gazed long and intently at Artus. It seemed that over night he had risen far above her. She looked upon him as a man of coming power,—indeed, just such a man as her own father had become. She reasoned that she must ever be a child to the praetor. She did not deny that in her heart she bore great affection for him, yet in the coming of womanhood she delved deeper into her soul and likewise thought of the other relations that would exist if she became the wife of Artus. She now drew comparisons between Glaccus, whom she had seen that morning at the stream, and the “praetor.” The youth was

young and knelt to her! Yet when she was with Artus she felt as though it were her place to kneel to him! She grew serious at the idea of passing through the years as "naught else than a slave to a man's greatness!" Her father was—her father! He could take her in his arms as though she were a baby. She was his daughter, flesh of his flesh. Yet it is not thus with a husband who requires other things. The voice of Glaccus at the stream was soft and gentle, almost a whisper. She compared it with the stern and oftentimes harsh and cutting voice of Artus, and too, for the first time in her life, she noted that scars were no additions to manly beauty.

"When I become a matron with children, my husband, if he is Artus, will be an aged man! Alas! that would not be fitting! Had I a husband of an age nearer to mine own, we would journey down the road of life together and perchance I'd never be a weeping widow!"

Her thoughts reverted to Glaccus.

"Oh, how foolish I am to think upon it,—yet Felicia talks these things the most entire day, and but yesternight said that I am now a woman, and furthermore that she knew Artus loved me as a man should love his wife, and that he comes to court me, under guise of friendship for my father! If this were true, it would be base deceit. O, Felicia talks too much—and makes me think; and too, did I not vow I'd never give my love to another man save my father, who tarries here in Rome, I know, so that he can be with me, when otherwise he could be a *legatus* and rule one of the great provinces!"

That night her dreams were troubled, and once

when she awoke she found Decius bending over her couch.

“My lamb, what ails thee? I thought I heard thee scream!”

“Oh, father,” replied Decia, “I had a most fearful dream, I dreamed——”

“Now Decia, I told thee that thou dost eat too much sweetmeats. I’ll cut thy rations there.” He then returned to his *cubiculum*, which adjoined hers.

CHAPTER XX

The day following that on which Mecinia's spy had visited her in the disguise of a jewelry peddler, found the former wine-maid in a thoughtful mood. She had received the news of Glaccus's doings at the villa of Decius, with keen disappointment, for the spy had no need to paint Decia's charms in glowing colors. Mecinia had seen her and realized that the little rival would prove a powerful one. That Decia must be a girl of extraordinary qualities could not be disputed, especially in view of the fact that she was able to win the love of a man of such character as that of Artus whose advancement in the service of Rome was made known to Mecinia through Eurycele. As the former sat at *coena* with Donatus, she said to him,

"How are thy affairs progressing in the senate?"

"By Pollux! Did I not tell thee, Fortunæ, that the meddling Decius blocks me at every turn? Things are worse—far worse, than I supposed. It has cost me a round sum of profit."

He ground his teeth in rage and Mecinia said:

"Cease, Donatus; thou dost surprise me, thou, to thus accept defeat, ere the campaign is over!"

"And thou, Fortunæ," he replied, "speakest of things of which thou knowest but little. He is stronger by far than I in the senate, for all know that Augustus and Taurus favour him."

“But I speak not of the senate,” she replied, “I say that thou shouldst take some other field for battle where thy legions can strike to better advantage. Fight him, I say, with weapons that will make his efforts against thee powerless; strike, not with votes, but at the heart, for there thou knowest is the seat of power. Thou dost need no further proof than this, that I am here beside thee. Strike Decius at the heart, I say! Thus canst thou make him powerless!”

“I doubt not that thou art wise, Fortunæ, yet I understand thee not. Speak further.”

“Listen,” continued Mecinia, “didst thou have Decius slain with a dagger, thou wouldst immediately attract suspicion toward thyself, and too, there is always chance of betrayal. Again, didst thou strike Decius thou wouldst leave behind his strong limb, none other than the discerning Artus, of whose coming elevation to new office thou knowest; then thou wouldst be in greater danger than before. Therefore, if thou didst kill Decius, the soul of Artus would be compelled to follow his, but double crimes lead to double danger of discovery. Hear me, Donatus, for I have another plan to win thy battle for thee.”

She watched him closely as she continued:

“This plan of mine is a double-pointed weapon, for it strikes both thy enemies simultaneously. Artus loves the daughter of Decius. It is an open secret in Rome. This wifeless Decius worships his child. Therefore I say if thou wouldst strike both Decius and Artus, take from them their most prized possession—this maiden. Thus wilt thou whiten two walls from the same lime-pot.” She ceased speaking

and looked into the eyes of Donatus to discover the effect of her words. He leaned forward on his elbow and whispered:

“Dost thou mean slay her?”

“In that thou canst please thy fancy; it doth suffice if thou dost take her from them and thus engage their minds in such a manner that they can think or dream of nothing save the missing virgin.”

Donatus arose to his feet, his eyes sparkling in the excitement of the thought. He then turned and gazed admiringly at Mecinia and said:

“Truly, Fortunæ, thy mind is wonderful! It doth appear to me that by no other means could I strike such deadly havoc. I’ll think upon it. Stick thou close to me and, by Jupiter! I will raise thee high in this life!”

That night he paced his apartment for hours, scheming and planning to bring about a result which must be accomplished without attracting suspicion to himself. He thanked the gods, however, for sending Fortunæ to aid him.

The following morning Mecinia questioned him as to his decision in the matter and he said to her:

“Decius blocks me at every turn. The peril will be greater if Artus becomes praetor, for that will give him certain power in the senate.”

“If that is true, perchance it would be well to use another weapon, Donatus. Carry weapons in both hands. That is good advice, for if thou dost lose one, thou hast the other. Thou didst say that thy spies overheard Artus’s confession to Decius as to a long lost son; likewise that Artus has on several occasions made inquiry for him. Why not give

the tribune a son of thine own choosing? Thus couldst thou place a spy within his very breast!"

In his evil nature Donatus was speechless with admiration of the power of mind of his favourite.

"A double thrust in the arena, my Donatus, has oft won victory. Strike the deadly Artus doubly by robbing him of the maiden he loves and at the same time give him a rotten son to drag him downward. Thus canst thou equalize the praetorship! A fitting picture he will make of magistracy when the son thou givest to him is made to commit crimes of such vile nature that the duties of the father compel him to sentence others for similar deeds!"

She laughed heartily at the thought, but to Donatus the matter was too important to permit of his joining in her mirth.

"Canst thou get a son for Artus," she continued, when her laughter had subsided.

"Aye, now that I think upon it, I know the very dog to do the work.

"On the very day that the election of the praetor is decided," said Donatus, "I'll send to him this son as a tribute to his greatness,—yet no seal of mine will ornament the gift! O, I owe thee much, my Fortunæ! I will start the wheels to crush our enemies this very moment!"

Soon afterwards the young poet Regus received a tablet from Donatus inviting him to *coena* that very day. Such invitations were not refused in Rome, for the wealth of Donatus had earned for him a certain respect in these matters. The ambitious Regus immediately sent a letter of acceptance, and long ere sundown, was seated in the beautiful summer *triclinium* at the house of Donatus.

“I was telling my Fortunæ,” said Donatus, “of thy lines on Tarpeia and she has expressed the wish to hear them from thy lips, good Regus. Wilt thou favour me by gratifying her desire?”

His guest, not loathe to display his talents, recited the verses.

Mecinia played her part well and wiped invisible tears from her eyes though she smiled behind her arm. She said:

“Oh, Regus, thou didst move me! Thy lines are beautiful indeed! Wilt thou have a copy made for me upon metal so that I can forever preserve them?”

Regus, flattered in fullest measure at the compliment, replied:

“Wert thou not even the love of Donatus thy beauty would suffice to make thy every wish a command of Venus!”

The calculating Mecinia said:

“Hadst thou but heard him scold me ere thou didst arrive, thou wouldst not think, good Regus, that I was his only love!”

“Scold thee, lady Fortunæ? ’Tis impossible!”

“Nay, ’tis a fact, and thou shalt hear. I declared that because a man bears no feeling of friendship for another, he hath no right to deprive that other of his rightful son.”

“Truly I agree with thee in principle,” replied Regus.

“Listen then and decide not against me else, Ecastor! I will say that thou too, art unjust. Dost thou perchance know one called Artus, a military tribune?”

“Know him? He is my patron, a man I admire

and love above most men, and I am proud to call him friend," replied Regus.

"Ah," continued Mecinia, "then hear that this Artus, whom I know not save by hearsay, hath a son. Donatus learned this by accident, and likewise knows where this son is to be found, yet the father knows naught of this. Now I claim, O Regus, that Donatus commits a wrong by not acquainting Artus with the fact, yet Donatus scolds me and declares 'it is not his concern.' 'Tis wrong, I say. No father should be separated from his son unless Rome desires it!"

"That is true, Regus," said Donatus, "yet I still contend that it is no business of mine. Artus has refused my invitations to dine with me and thus implies he desires no friendship with me."

Regus thought for a moment and then fell into the well-set trap, for he said:

"In such a case, Donatus, it doth appear to me that thou dost let pass an opportunity to make of Artus thy friend forever!"

With an assumed indifference Donatus replied:

"I care not for his friendship. I take pride in the fact that I stand alone, true to mine own convictions, nor do I beg for friendships, not even for that of the Cæsar with whom I nevertheless stand in high favor. What therefore dost thou think I care for Artus? Let him, I say, find his own children. I am no public child collector!"

"I'll grant thee all of that, Donatus," replied the now excited Regus, "yet I claim that thou dost owe to the gentle-hearted Fortunæ, this favor."

"I would not deny it to her if she could discover

some manner whereby this prodigal could be restored to his father, albeit my name did not appear in the matter."

Mecinia was quick to say:

"That is easy, Donatus, for surely some good friend of Artus would be most pleased to take happy responsibility for the action."

This was the final stroke at Regus and he surrendered unconditionally, for he said:

"By Hercules! I would be most happy to send the joyful tidings to Artus didst thou but give me the opportunity!"

Donatus said: "I care not who takes it, so long as Artus is not aware that 'tis I that serves him."

Mecinia then said in softest tone:

"Regus, thou art a true friend," and the poet replied:

"I am glad indeed to do this thing—for thee, for Artus and for myself. I beg of thee to tell me more."

Donatus informed him of the supposed accidental discovery of the youth whose identity, the senator said, proved him to be the son of Artus. Donatus, however, concealed from Regus, all information as to the character or personality of the son, and the poet was overjoyed at this opportunity to serve Artus.

"Give me thy vow, Regus," added Donatus, "that my name will not appear in the matter,—and O, Regus, whilst I think upon it, those lines of thine to Tarpeia have much impressed me. Canst thou have them engraved on a silver plate? I desire it as a present for Augustus. Have this made for me and spare no expense, for I will bear the cost."

Regus was flattered beyond measure.

“My poor words in silver, sent to the Cæsar! O, Donatus, thy kindness overwhelms me and I am truly grateful!”

“Regus,” responded Donatus, “I expect great things from thee.”

Late that evening Donatus opened a cabinet and took therefrom a long, dark Gallic cloak with a hood. He summoned a favourite freedman, Galbus by name, whom he had often rewarded in the past with unusual generosity for co-operation in certain evil enterprises. They awaited until darkness had set in, and leaving the house by a rear exit set forth.

“Galbus, art thou sure thou canst get the companions thou needest for the business?” said Donatus to his companion.

“I make no mistakes, lord, for I know where there are roosting in a nest some vultures who fly wherever the carcass lies.”

“In this matter, Galbus, thou shalt be compelled to use thy dagger freely. The brutes that help thee must not live to remember the tale and suck from me the milk that I would much prefer to add to thy rewards.”

Galbus smiled with satisfaction, and replied:

“Feel this strong arm of mine. Once I thrust, I never fail to touch the core!”

* * * * *

The object of Donatus to secure a youth of unknown parentage who would fit into his plan of campaign against Decius and Artus, was by no means a difficult matter in dissolute Rome. The senator, however, required one who would be possessed of those necessary evil traits that would serve

to cut the soul of the proud Artus. Such an one he succeeded in finding, for he numbered among his clients a youth who was dissipated, effeminate, lean in stature, bore an evil reputation as a dishonest gambler and was much addicted to the wine-cups.

“Just such a tool as this will act as my worm of destruction, rotting the heart and pride of the posing Artus!” thought Donatus.

He summoned the youth and said to him:

“Bassus, thou knowest I have been a generous patron to thee, overlooking thy faults, for I reason that youth is youth. The day has come, however, when thou shouldst act as becomes a man worthy of Rome. Therefore, after much trouble and expense, I have succeeded in finding for thee thy rightful father. Ere long thou shalt go to him.”

“What sayest thou, great and noble senator, my rightful father! A shrine to Bacchus! Is he rich, O Donatus?”

“Well fixed in worldly possessions. He is of Equestrian rank and a man of coming greatness.”

“Truly, my most noble and merciful patron, thou hast made my fortune for me and I will remain thy debtor forever. My father found and—and rich!”

“Mention naught of the matter to anyone. Meanwhile take this purse and celebrate thy good fortune. Yet stay a moment,—there is one thing that I shall expect from thee as part payment of thy debt. I expect thee, in the future, to furnish me with any information that I may desire as to thy father and his friends. He is, as I told thee, a man of influence, and though I must withhold his name from thee, for these few days, such information as I may need would prove of mutual benefit to us all. Fur-

thermore, give me thy vow that he will never know that Donatus befriended him by finding his son whom he himself has unsuccessfully sought for years. He would come to me fawning and pouring out his thanks to me; I hate such things. Likewise I must coach thee on incidents of thy life of which thou dost remember naught. Thy vow, and go."

"I vow to thee by great Jupiter himself, good Donatus, that all shall be as thou dost command. Hasten thou the moment of our meeting, nor fear that I will not serve thee, for thou hast made my fortune by a single stroke. A shrine to Bacchus!"

Bassus rushed out to his favourite wine-shop.

When he had left, Donatus laughed long and loudly, and said, "Gods! how Artus would come with fawning thanks to me for giving him this rotten son! Methinks he would bring with him a double-edged dagger for my breast. How well the simple word-spouter Regus fits into my plans, for Artus believes much in him! The drunken son,—though I pray Bacchus to keep him sober on that day!—will be made doubly welcome with Regus's seal upon him. Truly this is a joke that Fortunæ created to make tears of laughter roll from the eyes of an Egyptian sphinx!"

Hearing his laughter, Mecinia entered.

"My lord Donatus, methinks thou art in most pleasant humour."

"I am drowning in tears of laughter!" replied Donatus, "and I will buy thee this very day, my Fortunæ, whatsoever thy heart is set upon, for truly I owe it to thee."

He proceeded to tell her of the development of his plans.

CHAPTER XXI

The evening following that on which Artus had last visited Decius, the latter walked, as was his usual custom, to the *rustica* where he greeted Aegea.

"How fares the youth this night?" he inquired. "But first tell me, how art thou? Thou art not becoming tired of thy duties?"

"No, Domine; yet I have my moods—at times. Glaccus, too, has been most serious throughout the day. He eats but little."

"Aegea," continued Decius, "thou dost hold a good place in his heart. Has he ever made a confidante of thee?"

"He has told me much, yet naught to make me think he worries, save at the delay in his mending."

"No more than this?" queried Decius, as he looked piercingly into her eyes.

"Good senator, I do not understand thy close questioning!"

"Patience, Aegea, and do not misinterpret my words. I have but two things in mind, the health of the youth, and thy comfort. I thought he may, perchance, have annoyed thee. That, thou knowest, is not my purpose in keeping thee here."

"I am most happy here, and I was but thinking this very day that I will leave this beautiful place with keen regret when I take up my work again in Rome. Nay, Glaccus has never annoyed me!"

Decius realized that it was impossible for him to question Aegea upon those matters suggested by Artus.

“I have in mind thy future. Soon we will see the departure of Glaccus. What, then, of thee? Most nearly every eve I look forward to seeing thee, and it is a pleasure. My words are blunt, yet I would have thee know how much I—I would miss thee if I did not find thee here at sundown. Can we not arrange it that when Glaccus leaves thou canst remain here? I could use thee in my household. The handmaidens of my daughter fill her ears with all sorts of things I would keep from her—for awhile. With thy good influence about her, I would feel more safe.”

“Thou dost not weigh thy words, O, Senator. What knowest thou of me? Who or what I am, save that I came from—from the Subura, and too, thou knowest the meaning of that word! Yet there, it doth appear, the gods believe that I belong. Therefore, acting on their judgment it is but meet that I return there when my services are no longer needed here. Too, thy daughter needs a woman of high station to guide her in accordance with patrician customs. There are indeed many impoverished widows of rank in Rome to-day who would most gladly welcome the opportunity thou dost, in thy thoughtless generosity, extend to me!”

“Thy words in part ring true. They remind me, too, of the injustice of rank sometimes. Yet hear me. This matter is important to me. Thou knowest how my motherless ‘lamb’ has always lived here on these grounds. Likewise thou canst realize that in this I have made a greivous error. In her inno-

cence she knows but little of life—and other things. Yet dost thou not think within thy heart, Aegea, that it is nobler to have her trained in those qualities of purity and gentleness than for her to study the secrets and the vices of our misnamed patrician ladies? To me it doth appear there is no problem in this, save that some day when she marries the man I have had in mind for her these many years—some day she will—Aegea, I must confess that the problem is beyond me. Canst thou suggest some help?”

Aegea was affected by his blunt speech, but said nothing. She realized that it was not only among the plebians that sorrow dwelt. Who, witnessing the stately villa and the large *familia*, who, hearing the great and hearty laugh of the “domine” would have thought that Decius carried within his heart a worry such as this?

“Aegea,” continued Decius, “think upon this thing for me. Perchance thy woman’s wit will aid me. I confess ignorance in these matters. Methinks my rightful place is in the tent rather than the nursery!”

Decius left her and, as he walked slowly across the little bridge, he mused:

“Now indeed, for the first time, I discover a flaw in the perception of Artus! ’Tis absurd to think that Aegea bears for the youth a lustful passion! I know her well, and will speak to Artus of the matter this very night.”

When he reached the portico he found Artus conversing with Decia.

“A greeting to the new praetor,” he shouted.

"Come, I must speak to thee upon important business."

Together they walked down the marbled pathway, ornamented on each side by many statues, which stood like spirits in the fast disappearing twilight.

"For once I claim the laurel from thee; for, by Hercules! I questioned Aegea upon the thing thou didst suggest. Thou art wrong, my Artus; wrong!"

"Didst thou question her direct upon this thing? Didst thou ask her if, or otherwise, Glaccus spoke to her of love?"

"I did not," said Decius, "yet I suggested it. I asked her if Glaccus annoyed her in any way. She replied in the negative."

"Ha!" laughed Artus, "then, methinks, I'll hold my laurel awhile! Love is no annoyance! I do not surrender upon such poor show of force!"

"Then seek evidence for thyself, for I must needs be through with it," said Decius seriously.

"I'll act upon thy suggestion. And, O, Decius, whilst I think upon it, hast thou heard of the difficulties being experienced in the establishing of the new provinces upon proper foundations?"

"Yes, I heard of them. I said that the increase in the number makes the movement of government more complex with added numbers of proconsuls, legates, procurators, and—all the rest who pile the senate with a weight of documents which detracts our minds from more important business."

"Methinks, Decius," said the tribune, "that thy life is making thee lazy. Thou art too rich! I remember campaigns during which thou didst work

the most entire day and night without complaint. Thou dost question the wisdom of the *princeps* because it makes work for the senate who are in session but three days each month! Lazy Decius! 'Men who hold office must work hard.' Canst thou not see that the policy of Augustus is commendable in this, that it aims to bring about more numerous central points in government of the several peoples?"

Decius was thoughtful for a moment and then said:

"Thy judicial mind wins the race. Now that I think upon it I must admit there is a chance for more prompt dispensing of law and justice. Our very courts in Rome are behind hand in their business, notwithstanding the fact that Julius increased the number of praetors, magistrates and others, manifold. Indeed he made the number of praetors alone sixteen!"

"Yet, Decius, that detracts not from the volume of work I must assume with my praetorship; therefore hide thy face in shame that thou, one of the august fathers of Rome, crieth out against some added labor! I agree with Livius when he speaks of the immense heaps of laws crowded one upon the other. He truly states that the laws of the Ten Tables remain the source of all public and private jurisprudence. I believe that praetors, magistrates, lawyers and all the rest would do well to adhere more closely to these original foundations. The creation of complications destroys the true value of justice. The principles of Livius will guide me, Decius, in my incumbency of the office of praetor."

“Thy decision is commendable, my Artus. I have no fear as to thy abilities.”

“I have not forgotten my suggestions as to those possible lovers.”

“Hold thy eyes, for I fear they’ll jump from beneath thy brows in thy endeavors to see wanton love between Aegea and the youth. Jupiter watch o’er thee.”

“Seek thy bed, lazy senator,” said Artus, “for I will walk another thousand steps.”

CHAPTER XXII

Early the following morning Glaccus found himself at the stream again. The scent of the acanthus, the cyprus, the olive, mingled in the air.

For the past three days he had visited the bank of the stream which held for him such sacred memories, and these were now all for which he could hope. Not one glimpse of the "nymph" had rewarded him during this period.

"I do not blame her," he said, as if to convince himself. "I was forward in crossing."

He stopped a moment to watch a robin cooing to his mate; again he saw flowers growing, sometimes in pairs, as though in desired isolation from the rest.

Eventually he arrived at the bank of the stream and wended his way close to the gently flowing water. He gazed at the tree under which he lay that morning on which she came to him and bathed his wound when he was unconscious; the tree, upon which the bark of which,—so different indeed from the sand of the arena!—he had fought his battle against his weakness, to save the birds, to win the laurel—the laurel of those few words which he now valued a thousand times more than any *auctoramentum*, or reward, given to victorious gladiators.

As he looked across the stream again he suddenly

beheld the face of Decia peering through the branches on the opposite shore. He feared to make any move that might perchance rob him of a sight of her. Love steals on us imperceptibly. Their eyes met in one long exchange of glances. The lily-white hand of Decia was resting gently on her bosom, as she held her light *palla* more closely together to hide, perchance, the unexpected emotion betrayed by her heaving bosom,—emotion kindled by the sight of the youth. As though drawn together by an invisible force, neither striving against the power of this mutual attraction, they walked slowly toward the bridge. Glaccus crossed to her.

“O, sweet maiden,” he said softly, “I have prayed to Jupiter to let me see thee again! Fear me not.”

Decia blushed, as she replied:

“I do not fear thee, Glaccus, for thou who didst strive to save birds would not harm a—maiden.”

“By Venus herself, I vow I would not—but thou hast learned my name!”

“Aye, the gods told me!” she replied smilingly.

“Soon I must leave these lands of thy noble master, Decius,—perchance never to return.”

Decia smiled, as Glaccus spoke of her father as “thy noble master.” Then her face paled slightly, and the manner of a petted patrician succeeded her former humility.

“Why dost thou tell me this,” she said; “dost thou think it means aught to me whether thou dost return or otherwise?”

A wave of colour overspread the face of Glaccus.

“Alas, I am a clumsy bungler—and though thou art a slave, I beg forgiveness of thee. I sought not to annoy thee. Vale!”

He turned and, sadly, though with head erect, due to his sense of injured pride, started to walk slowly from her.

At the sound of that terrible word "Vale," which Decia had read so often on the tomb of her mother,—a word which Glaccus had flung at her with all the tenderness and disappointment of his soul, it seemed that the sun had suddenly disappeared. Decia felt a catch in her throat, and as she saw him leaving her, perhaps forever, she said softly, "Glaccus!"

The youth heard her, and it seemed to him that the word was weighted down with tears. He turned suddenly and saw Decia leaning against the rail of the bridge, with one hand slightly extended toward him. He walked quickly toward her, his eyes illumined by an expression of tenderest love.

"I—I did wrong thee, Glaccus," she said, and he replied:

"Thou couldst do no wrong. Forgive me for reminding thee of thy bondage."

Her hand was still extended toward him, and gently he made it a willing prisoner in his own and raised it to his lips. When he released it, Decia took the chaplet of lilies from her golden hair and handed it to him in silence. She then rushed suddenly from him.

"Maiden! maiden!" he shouted, but the only answer that came to him was the sounds of the flowing stream. He held the little chaplet of flowers within both his hands, and lingered, regretting to tear himself from the spot on which she had stood. Aegea, who had come for him, saw him recrossing the bridge.

“Glaccus,” she said, “thou hast disobeyed orders—and—crossed the stream!”

The sight of his returning strength, however, was pleasing to her, and together they returned to the *rustica*.

Glaccus was unusually quiet, yet Aegea was startled by the expression of joyous hope that illumined his countenance.

“Where didst thou obtain those lilies?” she questioned.

“Indeed,” replied Glaccus, “the—gods—gave them to me,—though I had need to cross the stream—for them.”

That evening Decius was gratified at the progress of Glaccus.

“By the gods,” he said to Artus, whom he had left conversing with Decia at the portico, “another fortnight and Glaccus will set forth for me!”

“Forth where?” queried Artus.

But Decius remained silent.

CHAPTER XXIII

“Glaccus improves, Decius,” said Artus to the senator one evening as they slowly crossed the bridge, and the latter replied:

“Have we not well tended him? I remember when thousands lay upon the field at Philippi, we did not concern ourselves a decimal part about their welfare as we do that of this youth. I’ll not forget thy ride in haste from Rome.”

“Such importance didst thou attach to the fever of the youth that I was surprised. It doth not seem to me, Decius, that thou art the same man who once coldly gave orders to slay a hundred hostages because the enemy broke faith!”

“But those were times of war, Artus. By all the customs and usages of olden Rome, these hands of mine should now be guiding a plow; yet I live the life of a fat and wealthy tradesman! I sicken of it at times, and I tell thee that were it not for my lamb, I vow I would make the *princeps* much more warlike in his aims and purposes!”

Artus laughed. “These be wondrous times, Decius! I predict that ere long every Roman,—including the greasy plebians—will become a voluptuary,—and inaction means the decadence of a nation. Witness Egypt!”

Decius sighed. “I hope I’ll never see the day.

I would rather have my armor dented and cut through a hundred times on the field of war than join the shades straight from the shapely arms of some sensual damsel, who, when tired of my weighty charms, would perchance dismiss me for some effeminate youth!"

"Hast thou in mind our friend, Donatus, who formerly changed his mistresses at each new moon?" laughed Artus cynically.

"The curses of Cerebus and Hecate on that man, Artus! It sorely puzzles me how Augustus, in his cleansing process in the senate, overlooked the foulest stench of all!"

"Thumbs down, Decius! Mercy on fallen enemies. Thou hast won at each and every thrust!"

"Aye,—thus far, Artus, yet 'gainst such a man one fights blindfolded as the 'Andabatae'."

"Methinks, Decius, that that should make the combat more interesting. I would that I were in the fray!"

"Patience, for soon thou wilt be. As praetor, I hope to see thee, ere these bones loosen, helping my tottering form to present petitions at the *sella curulis* of the *princeps*!"

"Thou art a wondrous man who can thus face old age without a fear!"

"Thou wrongest me, for I have that fear. May Mars grant that the spear of some barbarian will pierce my heart before senility makes me helpless!"

Artus put his hand on the shoulder of Decius and said:

"And I hope that I may be there with thee and not survive thee!"

They walked onward in silence and came upon

Decia in the garden. She was strangely quiet, and her handmaids stood conversing in a group at some distance from her.

"Ho!" shouted Decius in lusty tones, "do we celebrate a funeral?"

"Father!" screamed Decia, "thou didst startle me!"

"Since when does thy father startle thee! Thy mother always said my armor'd tread was the only loud noise through which thou couldst sleep as a babe! Art thou drifting from me with the years?"

"My father," she replied, "they bring me closer."

"Hast thou no greeting for the tribune, Artus?" said the latter, as he enclosed her little hand in his.

"My father startled me," said Decia.

"Thy father did most right; this is no time or place for gloom!"

"What a poor slave I am," said Decia, "who cannot even close my lips because it doth annoy a senator and a tribune!"

Then she laughed merrily, bringing over the landscape a sudden flood of happiness.

"What is the programme for the afternoon?" said Artus. "Thou didst send for me?"

The eyes of Decius twinkled as he replied:

"Canst thou not guess?"

"I cannot," responded Artus.

"I will visit Taurus and will take thee with me."

"I read gladsome news from thy words, Decius, and thou art making me curious as a woman. Has it aught to do with the praetorship?"

"Aught, dost thou ask? Nay, all."

Calling a slave, he ordered the *rheda* to be made ready for early departure.

"Fortune smiles again," said Artus; "yet think not, Decius, that my ambition is founded on purely selfish motives. Always before me I have in my mind's eye the progress and welfare of Rome. It is the shrine at which I worship, as thou knowest."

"By Castor and Pollux! there is no better one to be found on earth! I'll give thee all the chances thou needest, for I realize full well that none will escape thee. I aim to make the Augustus stretch his neck and learn a thing or two!"

"Since when hast thou turned flatterer, Decius?" asked Artus.

"Since—since I chose thee for a praetorship," replied Decius as he laughed, and added:

"Decia, come and salute the new praetor—full upon the lips, I say!"

But Decia hesitated. Perchance her thoughts were at the stream, and Artus, observing her hesitancy, waved his hand and said:

"Alas, how womanhood blooms upon the moment! Thy lamb is now full grown and I must realize that she will henceforth kiss no man save thee, Decius,—and him who will some day take her from thee!"

He took her hand and kissed it, and then tipping her chin upward, looked long and intently into her eyes. He became serious as he continued to gaze at her, for it appeared to him that he observed an expression he had never before seen there in all the years gone by! The face of Decia became suffused with blushes.

"Hark, Decius!" he said, "the bud has bloomed into a rose! Fallen are the petals of innocence and now the flower of womanhood is disclosed! It has come at last, for even thy mighty father-love could

no longer retard it. Get the wine, Decius, and we will drink to the lady Decia!"

"Nay," said Decius, "not yet, not yet a while! I do not hold the strength to celebrate such calamity! On the morrow, on the morrow!"

The journey to Rome was made in silence.

CHAPTER XXIV

Glaccus set forth on his walk toward the stream. Though the hour was earlier than that at which he usually went there, his object was to lie beneath his favourite tree and dream. She had made no promise to meet him again, but with the confidence of youth, strengthened by his love, he felt that she would not, could not, disappoint him. What should he say to her?

“A slave girl!” Already thoughts flew through his mind that on his successful return from the mission for Decius, he would ask, as his reward, her freedom!

“Yet why free her,” he questioned himself. “Why should I not own her and then let the slave rule the master? How great a jest it would be if I should own her! I, who worship the very ground on which she walks! But, nay,” he continued, “rather shall I give her manumission and say to her, ‘Thou art free! I have earned thy freedom for thee! Repay me as thou wilt!’ What if Decius should refuse this reward to him! Who knows but that the little slave girl is his pet! The senator may not part from her!”

He sprang to his feet, agitated at the very thought, and then said, aloud:

“Then Glaccus will become the slave of Decius! Thus will I bind myself to guard her!”

This thought seemed to console him, and he resumed his place upon the ground. His thoughts came tumultuously from the excitement of anticipation. Several times he arose and paced to and fro, and frequently gazed at the opposite bank of the stream hoping to see her.

“How like a flower,—like the lilies she gave me, gentle and frail, yet strong in the possession of beauty! ’Tis not possible that any one could be harsh to her!”

Again he seated himself and was soon rewarded by a vision of white which appeared on the opposite shore. Quickly he crossed the bridge and, with both hands extended, whispered to her: “My nymph!”

Decia approached him calmly, but it seemed as if her speech had frozen. Hesitatingly she reached forth her hand to him. He clasped it in both of his, but this time had not the courage to press it to his lips.

“Venus has smiled upon me! Thou art good to come,” he said.

She turned her head from him.

“Fear not that I will gaze rudely at thee. Give me one glance from thine eyes and that will suffice me until thou dost favour me thus again of thine own free will. See, I did not hurt thee!”

He smiled at her, and she noted his strong white teeth embedded in the firm jaw, saw the gentle smile which started her heart throbbing anew.

“Now that thou hast looked upon me, speak. Say Glaccus, a name that I pray the gods will grant that I will make famous for thy sake, if so it would please thee. Speak! Why dost thou hesitate?”

With a smile she murmured, almost inaudibly, "Glaccus."

As he felt the mist of tenderness that enveloped the tone of her voice as it were, his heart beat with joy.

"What is thy name?" asked Glaccus. "I know a hundred that would not do thee justice,—yet, say, how art thou called?"

"I will not tell thee my name," said Decia.

"O, gracious words! I have made thee speak, and in the enjoyment of the music, did overlook their import. Thou didst say 'thou wilt not!'—and thou art right. I beg forgiveness. Say thou art not angry at me for thus approaching thee?"

These words, spoken with all the tenderness of his nature, and intensified by the yearning for affection that he had smothered through the years gone by, had an unwonted effect upon his auditor, for now there was no hesitation in her glances, no fear of this man who spoke to her so gently. Then she thought of Artus. How cold and distant the tribune now seemed beside this gentle youth! Glaccus did not dare to utter a sound or make a single movement that would, perchance, spoil the picture before him.

"Glaccus," she said softly, "thou didst not think it unmaidenly of me to come to see thee again?"

"Unmaidenly!" he said, "indeed it was but charity, for I was dying of a thirst to see thee, and thou hast given me the cup to start me again on my journey. I am but rough, I know; indeed it is not long since the cries of the bloodthirsty rabble

who pour through the *vomitoria*, goaded me on to slay men whose faces I had never before seen. Then thy good master, the noble Decius, brought me here to mend. Thou knowest I was sorely wounded. Thus canst thou perceive how poorly I was started in this life, and always I have been enwrapped in exercise for the arena. Yet hear me, since I have rested here,—thanks to thy noble master,—a new life awaits me, for ere long I set forth on a journey. Alas! perchance I may never return; though I do not believe the gods would be thus cruel!”

“Go forth, sayest thou?”

Glaccus did not fail to note the tone of anxiety in her voice.

“And does it not please thee that I go forth?” he asked gently; “fear not to tell me that thou dost care, for if thou dost, that knowledge will strengthen and console me.”

Decia remained silent. She knew not how to answer him, and, too, a lump had come into her throat, even as it had one day when she saw her strong father weeping at the tomb of her mother. Together they walked to the bushes and sat on the grass beneath the shade of a willow tree. He lay down before her, resting his chin on his hands and looking up at her.

“Dost thou care?” he said.

The eyes of Decia had become glazed, and she struggled mightily to withhold her tears.

“Tell me,” he asked, “that thou art not unhappy here. They say that the noble Decius is a most kind master and, too, with one so young and beautiful as thou, he could not be harsh. If he

were, I vow by Mars! I'd slay him, forgetting my debt of gratitude to him,—although it is indeed a heavy one!"

Decia could hardly repress a smile. She, the daughter of Decius, a slave! She, who would be heir to the very soil upon which Glaccus now lay before her! She remained silent.

"Thou art a slave, art thou not?" queried Glaccus.

"I would not change my master," she replied softly, as she lowered her eyes.

"Thy answer is music to my ears, for I can now go forth in peace knowing how well thou art kept. Yet when I return I'll buy thy freedom; then thou canst go wheresoe'er thou wilt, without restraint."

At the thought Glaccus sprang to his feet and clenched his hands, but Decia said: "Perhaps 'tis better that I be thus kept here,—for, see, I come to thee as—as—I am."

They had both become silent, for they were peering into the future. Slowly and instinctively his hand sought hers, and as he touched her finger, he drew back his arm as though it had been struck. He was amazed at himself. Here was this thing for which he had thirsted and starved,—this little hand of which he had dreamed through the still nights and the long stretching days,—this hand that now awaited his clasp and he without the courage to grasp it! However, his was not a nature to accept defeat the first thrust! The arena had proven that. He tried again. There lay her soft little hand resting on the grass, tempting him, drawing him toward it, making him almost powerless through fond anticipation. He looked into her eyes

and the tender light he found there, caressing him as it were, removed his fears, and gave him the needed added power. Not to win the entire combat at a single thrust, however! No, but gently to clasp one of her fingers, for slowly its unresisting companions must needs follow it along the roadway of delight that would lead to his lips. The minutes, the hours passed, most of them in silence. What need for words? Speech would have been fruitless. The humming of the bees was a tune that came forth as from a *cithara* of love; the gentle zephyrs whispering through the trees rendered an accompaniment to speechless rapture; the sounds of the flowing stream against the bank made melody, and the kissing of the leaves eased the lovers' fluttering hearts; and Glaccus, lying on the earth before her, holding her little hand in his, gazed silently at her as he worshipped at the shrine of love. He feared to awaken her to the realization that she had loaned to him that great possession, greater than the wealth and power of the "Cæsar Imperator,"—that little white hand. His hands stained with the blood of others, roughened by years of vicissitude, the palms hardened by the rough meshes of the net, the firm grasp on the *rudis* and trident,—his hands, holding the most beautiful thing that he had ever seen! Once her white tunic slipped upward from her ankle, and, all unconscious, Decia sat there gazing into vacancy. Slowly and slyly, as though he were a thief, Glaccus gently drew the garment downward until it hid the tiny sandal covered foot! Decia was the first to awaken from the dream; she withdrew her hand from his and, looking about her, said:

“Glaccus, I must go!”

With a sigh of dejection he looked upward and observed the position of the sun. At that moment neither could find words. Glaccus, however, with his usual impetuosity, saved the day.

“Thou wilt come to me again? Soon I must leave these grounds. Thou wilt not let me go without words of farewell?”

She was silent, and he continued:

“I have not wounded thee, have I, with my forwardness? Bear with me, for I love thee. I am rough and have had no experience with maidens,—too, I fear that each word I say may be the—wrong one. Say that some day thou’lt teach me how to speak to thee; until then, I plead, bear with me. I love thee,—love thee. Come to me on the morrow.”

Decia still remained silent, but her eyes were heavy with tears. Glaccus continued, unwilling to relinquish the combat:

“At least tell me that I may hope to see thee on the morrow. Let me live at least on hope until then. After that,—Mehercle!—what matters it! I must go forth ere long, for thy master, Decius. Who but the gods can say that I will return!”

With this final thrust Glaccus conquered, for, holding her hand forth to him, Decia said tenderly:

“Glaccus, I will come.”

Aegea at the *rustica*, worried at the long continued absence of Glaccus, shaded her eyes from the sun, as she gazed along the pathway, anxiously watching for his return. She beheld a man staggering along the roadway as though he were intoxicated,—and so he was. Glaccus, intoxicated be-

yond the greatest power of Bacchus, bereft of all reason save that of love, robbed of his very senses in all things save that love, walked, staggered, rolled blindly onward, unable as yet to realize that the fumes from the essence of love, brewed by Venus in the "Garden of the Gods" had permeated every atom of his body and conquered his soul.

CHAPTER XXV

The spies of Mecinia had told her of the happenings at the villa of Decius.

“The virgin brat! So they have met!” she mused. “How like a man to succumb to the wiles of innocence! Ecastor! I will block the game, though the time is not yet ripe to steal the child of Decius; I must act, however, ere this seed of attraction takes too deep a root in the heart of Glaccus.”

She arose and walked thoughtfully up and down the peristyle. The favourite of Donatus wore a *lacerna* of fine texture which was fastened by a jeweled *fibula*, or clasp. Many other jewels adorned her person and her fingers and thumbs held rings of considerable value. A snake of solid gold, with glistening scales, encircled her neck, and she wore amulets to match. It had taken her handmaids an hour to dress her hair.

“How the sight of Donatus jars me at times! Gods! would that I were far from it all!”

An idea was born within her mind, and she summoned a favourite handmaid to whom she said:

“I will go forth alone; give me a cloak with a hood and a dark veil. Hold thy tongue to save thy master’s frowns, and I will reward thee. Now make haste and get me out by a rear exit.”

Throwing the cloak about her and covering her face with a veil, ere long Mecinia found herself reclining in a public litter which she had hired.

"Canst thou make speed to the Capenan gate? I will pay thee well," she said to the *lecticarii*, or litter bearers.

"Aye, noble lady, our legs are fast."

"Speed!" she said, "there will be no argument about the price!"

The eyes of the carriers sparkled with avarice as they heard the jingle of coins in Mecinia's purse. Outside the Porta Capena she paid them, and hastily hired a public *rheda* near the grove of the Camoenae. The driver set out at a speedy pace along the Via Appia.

"Doth the little virgin think she can vie with my beauty?" she murmured, as she took a small silver mirror from the folds of her tunica and examined herself with satisfaction. "I know men's natures! No better place to learn them than in the wine-shop! The disgusting Donatus is now my slave; albeit, he is one of the greatest men in Rome, and has already tired of a hundred mistresses!"

When Mecinia arrived at the villa she ordered the driver to proceed slowly. She was endeavouring to discover some place of entrance other than the main roadway that connected with the Via Appia. They approached another road which branched off from "the great way." The grounds of Decius were practically surrounded by walls which, on the Appian side, were of considerable height. Mecinia ordered the driver to stop.

"Here is a full purse," she said.

"O, generous lady, how can I thank thee?"

"By telling me how to reach the top of yonder wall."

"I'll back my *rheda* and assist thee to the top. Wouldst thou enter?"

"Yes, but I aim not to break my neck in the attempt. I cannot jump it!"

"I have a rope," said the driver, "I'll lower thee, —but thy mission is dangerous, great lady,—and I have children who must eat!"

"Fear not," she said, "thou knowest I am generous. I'll act upon thy suggestion. Back thy cart."

She mounted to the top of the *rheda* and peered over the wall, but observed no sign of life. Indeed, a grove of trees hid her from the view of any possible strollers in the grounds.

"Quick, thy rope; fasten it tighter. Thus! Now quickly lower me."

She crouched within and ordered him to drive his team back and forth along the road and to await her call when she returned to the spot.

Following the wall for a short distance, Mecinia quickly sped through the trees, searching in vain for the stream which divided the villa proper, or *villa urbana*, from the *villa rustica* and *fructuaria*. She then proceeded through the grove, crawling at times on her hands and knees, stopping often and listening attentively, and fearing possible discovery which would unquestionably lead to publicity. The latter was the one thing she least desired. Soon she heard the gentle rush of flowing water. It was a small stream that fed the larger one and she followed its course cautiously. Ere long she heard sounds of activity at the *rustica*. It was the

season of farming, and slaves of Decius were bringing in loads of rich olives, grapes and other productions of the fertile soil. Mecinia crouched low. Save for these distant sounds of husbandry, however, one would have thought the place uninhabited. Mecinia feared to remain there too long owing to the fact that her driver might tire of waiting for her. She sat down beneath the protecting branches of a tree, striving to arrive at some decision regarding a definite course of action. The minutes passed slowly. There was no sign of Glaccus. She arose and clenched her hands.

“Perchance,” she said, “my spy has given me the wrong directions. I’ll follow the stream toward the sounds.”

Cautiously she hurried through the trees, toward the bank. Suddenly she heard a rustle and threw herself flat upon the ground. Her heart beat rapidly. The sound of cracking twigs indicated the approach of some one. She crawled behind the trunk of a tree from which point of vantage she peered forth and beheld a tall figure approaching, leaning on a staff. It was Glaccus!

He was walking slowly, evidently deeply engrossed in thought. As he drew nearer, she observed that his face wore an expression of joyous anticipation.

“Oh, Glaccus, would that thy look of joy was for me,” she murmured.

Hastily arising, she threw her mantle from her and stood before him in all her beauty. He sprang backward as though he had been struck, gazing at her as if he beheld a vision; and a vision indeed

it was,—a vision of that horrible past which he had striven so hard to forget—that past that he would leave behind him forever and forever, if he but could.

“Glaccus,” she said, “’tis I, Mecinia!”

“Thou—thou, here? Art thou a guest—of Decius?”

“Indeed, I am no guest of Decius! I have stolen in here to see thee. Hast thou no word of welcome?”

“Welcome, Mecinia? I am so startled!”

Perspiration stood out on his forehead and he drew the back of his hand across his brow.

“Dearest Glaccus!” she said, and she held forth her hands to him.

“Mecinia, what is thy wish? Learn that I have left all of the past behind me. Thou dost not come to a gladiator, for no more the arena for me! Ere long I leave these parts, mayhap forever. Dost thou crave some service? If so, thou dost not need Glaccus, for I see that thou art now rich. Fortune has indeed smiled upon thee! and—I—I am a beggar, living on the bounty of Decius. What has brought thee here?”

Glaccus was annoyed at the interruption in his journey to the stream but several paces distant.

“I come, Glaccus, because I love thee. My wealth has made me powerful. I always get what I want, Glaccus, and I who once spurned thee, aye, injured thee,—I love thee, and—want thee. Bitter, bitter tears have I shed for my wrong to thee! Yet I will make full reparation. Look upon me, I am young; they call me beautiful. Thou canst

leave Rome with me and I will make thee great; thou canst go whereso'er thou wilt—and I will go with thee. No man can ask for more!”

“Mecinia, I know not what to say—save—save that I am sorry.”

“Sorry, sayest thou? What need for sorrow when the gods are thus bountiful to us! Once thou didst love me, even when I did not know that I loved thee,—as I love thee now. I did not know it, Glaccus, by Jupiter! I vow, I did not know it. Only when I saw thee stricken and thy precious blood flowing, did I realize how I loved thee, Glaccus!”

The ex-gadiator was speechless from surprise, nor was he insensible to her beauty and her wealth, as indicated by the rich jewels she wore.

However, no thought of his former love for her returned. Indeed, so firmly fixed in his heart was his new-born love for Decia that he realized that henceforth the attractions of any other woman would be fruitless. Yet he was a man of heart, or perchance his love for the little “slave-girl” had softened his nature. He realized that Mecinia must indeed love him, and he therefore sought a gentle, though firm, method of curing her, as it were; of sending her from him, if not with his love, at least with her pride preserved for her, for he remembered how proud indeed she had always been even in so foul an atmosphere as that of the wine-shop of Largus!

“Mecinia,” he said gently, “I am not insensible to the goodness that has prompted thy visit.”

“Goodness, dost thou call it, Glaccus! Nay, 'tis love,—I love thee, and have come to thee. I thought

—I thought that ere now I would be clasped in thy arms when thou didst realize how much I do love thee, Glaccus. I have come to offer thee all,—my all!”

“Mecinia, yet I must needs speak plainly. Thou art mistaken in thy love for me. Suffice it that I say a woman such as thou, young, beautiful, blessed with riches, shouldst mate more fittingly than with the beggar, Glaccus. Wouldst thou mix fire and water? Go, Mecinia,—go in peace. In the life that thou canst now live with thy new power, thou wilt some day bless these words of Glaccus, and may Fortune continue to smile on thee, Mecinia!”

He bowed his head as if to signify that no further words were necessary. Manlike, his thoughts had already reverted to Decia, nor did he notice that Mecinia had become white as the very *tunica* she wore; he did not observe the expression of hungry pain in her eyes nor that she clasped her heart. It was only when he saw her swaying form that he thought she had become suddenly ill, perchance from the excitement of the interview, or the strain of the journey from Rome. He sprang forward and caught her in his arms, and though she recovered herself somewhat she made no move to unclasp her arms which she had thrown about his neck.

“O, Glaccus, Glaccus, I cannot lose thee!” she sobbed.

In his predicament he knew not what to do. Venus must have frowned, however, at the condition of things and great Jupiter, himself, surely disapproved, for he who was supposed to rule the world of mortals as well as celestial gods, had led

Decia earlier than was her usual wont to the bank of the stream. She did not find Glaccus and thought to spend the intervening moments until he arrived in walking along the bank. So it chanced that she strayed instead of waited and came upon a sight that was to transform her in a moment from a maiden of hope into a woman of grief. She saw, on the opposite bank, Glaccus!—her Glaccus of whom she had thought half the night and dreamed the other half! Her Glaccus, holding close to his breast a beautiful woman, whose arms encircled his neck!

“Gods!” She clutched her heart with trembling hands and tried to shriek but could not. Her limbs refused to act. It was as though she had become rooted to the very ground, unable to move, still as the statues which adorned the pathway,—like them indeed, save for the terrible pain in her heart. At last the tension broke. She was the daughter of Decius! With will power, born of the desperation of agony and despair, she summoned her strength,—the strength of the Decii! Her blood appeared to circulate again! She ran from the scene, whispering, in gasps:

“He is an evil man! He is an evil man!”

The volume of sound coming from her now parched throat, increased as she gained added strength, until she arrived at the garden fronting the portico of the villa, where she fell, shrieking:

“He is an evil man!”

Her handmaids heard her and she was soon surrounded by them. Decius was summoned. They lifted her and placed her on a marble bench where she sat in a daze that had followed her last out-

cry. When Decius came upon the scene he took her in his arms. It was only then that the flood gates of tears opened for Decia, but Decius kissed them away, even as her mother would have done, and said to her:

"Thou hast seen an evil man, hast thou? Did I not tell thee thou shouldst not venture far? When thou art recovered thou shalt tell me which of my slaves has frightened thee and I will sell him. Thou art ill. Perchance the monotony here tires thee. When Artus takes the oath as praetor, I will take thee to Rome!"

She continued to sob in his arms. Later, as he sat beside her in her *cubiculum*, striving to stop her flow of tears, he said, half aloud:

"'Tis strange! There is no very evil man among my *familia!*—nor have I even one *compeditus* among them! None dare cross the stream without permission. By the gods, perchance in her new illness, she has seen a vision!"

She heard him and cried:

"No, father, I have seen an evil man!"

Decius went forth to question the *villicus*.

CHAPTER XXVI.

When Glaccus felt the arms of Mecinia enfolding him, a flush, as though of shame, overspread his countenance. He believed that her temporary weakness had been caused more by the distress of emotion than lack of physical strength, and it was therefore that, as he heard her sobbing, he gently but forcibly held her from him and said:

“Mecinia, surrender not thus to emotions of the moment. Time heals and to-morrow things will look different to thee. Again I say thou wilt live to some day bless the decision of Glaccus.”

“I care not, Glaccus,” said Mecinia. “I love thee and want thee. Come with me. Dost thou not hear? I will give thee my all, my all!”

Glaccus, however, was now master of himself, with thoughts of Decia uppermost.

“Mecinia, enough,” he said, “forget Glaccus. I can never, never be aught to thee!”

“Wilt thou leave me thus, Glaccus,” she sobbed, “with no word to comfort me? Hast thou lost all thy love for me?”

In the kindness of his nature, Glaccus put his hands on her shoulders and looked into her eyes—eyes now dimmed with tears,—tears that were as much a surprise to him now as they would have been in those days at the wine-shop of Largus, and he said to her:

“Mecinia, thou dost surprise me with thy gentleness! My heart goes forth to thee in pity,—yet, the past is dead!”

Mecinia covered her face with her hands as she turned from him. He picked her mantle from the ground and gently threw it across her shoulders.

With bowed head, and broken in spirit, she walked slowly from him. He watched her until she disappeared from view, and then stood for some moments in meditation.

His thoughts, however, soon reverted to Decia, and the great contrast between these two women, awakened within him a stronger love for the little “slave-girl.”

Youth is youth! It dwells not upon disturbances! It was not long therefore ere Glaccus was pacing tumultuously up and down the bank, glancing now and again upward at the sun to determine whether or not Decia was late at the tryst. No sound broke the stillness save the gentle flowing of the stream. No beautiful girlish face peered through the bushes on the opposite bank; naught but empty, empty solitude as minute succeeded minute. He went to the spot where they had sat together the previous day and there he pictured her in her beauty and purity.

“Gods, why does she not come?”

Then he thought perchance that she was ill and his heart beat faster at the very possibility of so direful a calamity; but he waited,—waited in vain,—waited until the sun was long past its highest point in the blue canopy overhead, and he realized, in his despair, that she had failed him! Then the idea grappled with his mind that some incident had

occurred to detain her, some duty of her slavery. Sorrowfully he returned to the *rustica*. Another long, long day to wait until the morrow when she would perchance come. When he entered his room, however, he was surprised not to find Aegea awaiting him. She had never before been thus absent at the meal hour. Such is human nature; we learn the value of things more in their loss than in their enjoyment. He walked to the entrance but saw no sign of life. It were as though the place had suddenly become depopulated! No sounds of husbandry, no grinding mill, no wine-press, was heard; sounds to which he had become accustomed. He became puzzled and perplexity soon gave way to worry.

He walked towards some outhouses, hungering for a sight of a human being. The solitude was unbearable. He feared that only calamity could thus hush all sounds of activity. He met a slave running quickly.

“Stop!” he cried, “is this a holiday? Where are thy brothers?”

The slave replied: “We have all been summoned by the *villicus*. I know not the meaning of the call.”

Then Glaccus smiled, “Perchance,” he thought, “Decius means some kindness to them.”

He retraced his steps. This time he was rewarded by seeing Aegea.

“O, Aegea, what means all this desolation?”

She replied: “The daughter of Decius has become ill and I must needs transfer my duties of nurse from thee to the new patient.”

“Alas,” said Glaccus, “that my kind patron should suffer grief of any kind. I pray the gods for her speedy recovery.”

He sighed as he watched Aegea preparing to depart.

CHAPTER XXVII

Mecinia returned to the vehicle that awaited her, and having arrived at the house of Donatus, secluded herself in her *cubiculum* during the remainder of the afternoon and evening. A handmaid had reported to the senator that the "domina" suffered from a severe headache. Unwittingly she told the truth, but the slave did not know of the heart-ache, the remorse, or the despair of her mistress, nor see the clenched hand striking the heaving bosom to deaden the pain of unrequited passion. Throughout the long night Mecinia reviewed her past life and peered into the future,—the long, loveless future,—the future with her, its victim, the plaything of men's fancies and passions. Then, strangely, she thought of coming old age with its wrinkles and loneliness.

Eventually the mental fungi planted by the surroundings of her past life grew in her crafty mind. Why thus accept defeat, she reasoned, so early in the fray? Why throw aside the sword and shield at the first pass-at-arms? She thought, planned and gained courage and hope. Early the following morning she emerged from a bath greatly refreshed, and save for the dark rings encircling her eyes, showed no sign of suffering.

Donatus, delighted at having her with him again

at the early *prandium*, or first meal of the day, did not attempt to conceal his joy and was untiring in his efforts to please her.

“Donatus,” she said to him calmly, “thou hast sorely disappointed me.”

“I disappoint thee, my only love, thou sister of Venus? I, thy slave, disappoint thee, my *domina*? Then let Jupiter hurl me to the Imperial realms of Cerebus and Hecate, if my fault be intentional! Speak, my Fortunæ, I implore thee.”

“I am in sore disappointment at this,” replied Mecinia, “that the plans of which I told thee to outwit thy enemies, have lain dormant,—aye, inactive indeed as yonder marble,” and she pointed to a statue of Harpocrates which adorned the peristyle between two of the numerous columns.

“Dost thou forget, Donatus, that I have no interest in these matters save that they concern thee?”

“The blessings of all the gods upon thee for thy sweet words,” he replied. “Learn that I await thy further counsels, my Fortunæ, ere I give the final thrust.”

“Have I not told thee enough? Yet forgive me, Donatus, if in my zeal for thy welfare I had become impatient.”

Without further loss of time Mecinia proceeded to tell him further details of her plans. In the days that followed, she struggled desperately to restrain her impatience and anxiety as to the outcome.

CHAPTER XXVIII

Artus was elected praetor through the influence of Decius, the latter being known as a favourite of Augustus and Taurus. The very desires of Augustus were law, notwithstanding the fact that the *Comitia* had resumed the elections. A generous expenditure, coupled with much strong endorsement, was fruitful of the desired results, and it was the senator in person who broke the glad-some news to Artus into whose house he walked one day just before *prandium*.

"I salute thee, Praetor," said Decius, in his powerful voice. "Taurus will welcome us to dine with him. Methinks he may advise thee as to certain policies Augustus desires to have followed."

"This is indeed gladsome news!" said Artus.

"Did I not tell thee thou couldst count the office already thine? Throw aside the robe of candidacy, for soon thou shalt take the oath and wear the proper *praetexta* in its place."

"Forgive me, Decius," said Artus, "if in my pleasure at thy news, I did not question thee on Decia's welfare. I hope that she progresses well."

"Well, yet not well enough," replied Decius. "Physicians say,—even the famous Greek!—that she suffers from no physical disease. She has no pain or illness we can discover, yet lacks energy to

even walk in the garden. Aegea, who is now her constant companion, is likewise sorely puzzled. Canst thou aid me in this, Artus?"

"I will go to thy villa this day. My new office will indeed bear a darkened tinge until thy 'lamb' is her own sweet self again."

Eurycele entered.

"Greet the new praetor," said Decius; "yet not as I did; methinks thy lips will please him better!"

Eurycele, however, stood silent and motionless.

"My mate disobeys thee, Decius," said Artus, "and I tell thee she is jealous of my other mistress, —Rome. Eurycele, thou knowest, favours not the praetorship! Alas!" and he laughed teasingly.

"Lord Decius," said Eurycele, "listen not to tales. Artus knows I pray the gods for all that he himself desires, yet thou knowest I am but a woman!"

"And in that fact I envy him," replied Decius. "How unlike me is thy new praetor! I am unloved by woman, save my daughter, and she now lies lifeless, save in the necessary acts to preserve the spark!" and he sighed aloud.

"I grieve with thee," said Eurycele softly.

After bidding her farewell, Decius and Artus issued forth and strolled leisurely in the direction of the Forum, discussing various details of the election, and went to the house of Statilius Taurus.

That night Artus sat in his *librarium*. Eurycele approached him, hesitatingly as it were, and as though she feared that her intrusion would be unwelcome. Gently she placed her hand on his arm. He raised his eyes from the scroll and arose.

"My Eurycele!" he said, as he seated her at the place he had vacated and placed the scroll on a

marble pedestal nearby. She gazed up at him, but spoke no word.

“Eurycele,” said Artus, “thy new childishness perplexes me. I perceive unflowing tears in thy pretty eyes. My credit, however, Eurycele, is now most excellent, owing to the fact that soon I will hold new office.”

The face of Eurycele flushed. She arose and took from within the folds of her tunic a small tablet.

“My lord Artus,” she said, as she handed it to him, “this may convince thee that thy generosity is unquestioned, for it shows that I have to my credit more than half of the money thou hast given me to spend. It is thine to help thee uphold thy praetorship fittingly; therefore, never again be unjust to me, nor breathe that I am not content with what thou callest ‘thy poverty’.”

Artus read the tablet and could hardly believe his eyes. He turned to her and said softly: “Eurycele, come.”

She arose and rested her head on his chest, where she wept softly.

“Forgive my words,” he said, “and were I not a Roman, I would say I am not fit to mate with thee. Go, little one, for I am due at the villa of Decius this night, as thou canst well imagine.”

She did not move.

“What!” he said with a laugh, as he frowned and kissed her, “is this insubordination?”

“Artus, dear Artus,” she replied, “hear me, yet scold me not,—at least not this night. What need hast thou for the praetorship? Albeit as things are now, I see too little of thee. All things engross

thee,—thy candidacy, thy new catapult, Decius and only the gods know what else besides, and,—I—I—am the last. I must content myself to see thee leave me,—to sit home and hope,—and hope for thy return,—and must console myself by saying: ‘Here he sat yesterday, and there he walked in the morning.’ I must needs wear out my heart in lonesomeness and hope. What, then, will I suffer when thou art praetor?”

In his cynical nature, however, he was still unconvinced. He lifted her face to his and gazed piercingly into her eyes.

“Eurycele, answer me. Dost thou read infidelity in my eyes? Is this the fear,—the sore that bleeds thy tears?”

Her voice broke as she replied:

“No, no! by Demeter and Persephone!—a thousand times no! I would not live to survive thy lost love for me.”

This time the stern nature of Artus was touched, and he whispered softly, as though to himself: “I am unworthy of so great a love.”

He glanced, with a look of disdain, at the unfinished scroll lying on the marble pedestal. With one arm encircling her waist, and clasping both of her white hands in his own free one, he gently led her forth into the *peristyle*. Night soon came. Overhead the purple woolen cloth had been stretched to afford protection from the night damp. A few small lamps were lighted and sent their rays through Alexandrian glass of varied colours, creating a beautiful effect upon the columns that had been wreathed with grape-vine. A nightingale began to call. Eurycele’s caresses of love made Artus

forget his ambition. Previously he had despatched a courier to Decius to inform the senator of a necessary postponement of the visit to the villa.

Eurycele toyed with his white forelock, curling it about her fingers. At times she would kiss his hand, again would sit on his knees and press his lips between her fingers and rest her head on his chest,—and weep. Then she would laugh, from the very joy of living, of having him again for her own! Thus the hours passed. Eventually she fell asleep through very weariness from the joy and excitement of the first entire evening he had given her for many, many days! Gently he carried her to her *cubiculum*.

CHAPTER XXIX

On the third day following the visit of Artus and Decius to the house of Statilius Taurus, and as the new praetor was seated in his *peristyle* studying the laws, a slave entered.

“Lord,” he said, as he handed Artus a tablet, “the bearer of this fled instantly upon handing it to the *ostiarius*.”

“What mean these strange lines!” Artus exclaimed, as he read the following:

“To the Praetor Artus. Greeting from a former
“ enemy, whom the gods have changed into
“ a friend:—
“ It is not my desire to bore thee with multitudi-
“ nous details. Jupiter has shown me the light!
“ Thou hast been wronged. As a boy, thou didst
“ grapple in the gutters, and—later, played the part
“ of impetuous youth. There was a maiden. She
“ is now dead. I know all! Yet there is much
“ within my mind of which thou art ignorant. Thy
“ youthful rape was not without fruit! This
“ maiden bore a son. Indeed, he resembles thee.
“ It is imperative that the machinery of my work-
“ ings be kept a secret; therefore must my identity
“ forever remain unknown. In the name of Justice
“ only, I will send that son to thee. He knows

“nothing save that thou art his sire,—nothing of thy base act in youth. If thou dost require further proof, go to the first span of the Pons Fabricius where thou’lt find a negro slave. Say to him the word ‘proof’ twice. Methinks, however, that the contents of this tablet should convince thee of the honest purpose of the writer. May the gods forgive me for my share in past wrongs to good Romans. Regus, thy friend, will tell thee more this day. Calchus, farewell!”

As the full meaning of these words became known to Artus he changed colour.

Composing himself, he clapped his hands and a slave entered, to whom he said: “Summon the *domina*.”

When Eurycele appeared at the entrance she was astonished to observe the expression of exultation on the face of Artus.

“My lord, what gladsome news has thus illumined thy countenance?”

“Read! read!” he said, as he handed the tablet to her. He paced hurriedly and in great excitement up and down the *peristyle*.

“My lord Artus,” said Eurycele, “I vow a shrine to Venus for this gift to thee!”

She reasoned that this at least might serve to bind Artus closer to the ties of home,—this son whom she would love and whose love she would strive to win. She would be his second mother, and hoped that this son was still a boy. With greatest anxiety she asked:

“My lord, how old is this son?”

“He is a youth full grown, and I hope, as tall in

stature as I am, for he is now near twenty years of age! Would that he were here and that I could embrace him."

"I promise thee, my Artus," said Eurycele softly, "I will not be jealous of the love thou dost bestow upon him, and in me he will find a mother."

Artus embraced her as he said:

"I doubt thee not, my good Eurycele. Now leave me to my thoughts. This night I am to visit Decius. How startled he will be at the news. Yet first I must go in person to the Pons Fabricius."

Quickly he was borne in his litter to the first span of the Pons Fabricius which crossed the Tiber to the little isle resting there on the bosom of Rome's great stream. There he alighted and had not long to wait ere he was approached by an aged negro slave whose head was partly covered by a hood.

"Hail, Lord, if thou art the praetor Artus?" he said.

"I am," replied Artus. "Proof! proof!"

"Thy watchword, noble lord, is right. My master, who sent me, commanded me to tell thee this. He said that he alone of all men knew thy name in thy youth, which name was written on the tablet he sent thee, and he said that when thou returnest to thy house thou wilt find one called 'Regus' awaiting thee."

"Tell him, who sent thee, that I remain his debtor forever!"

When Artus said these words, the slave moved away slowly. Artus entered his litter again. As the bearers carried him homeward hastily, he reasoned: "No man knows these things, no man save

Decius, to whom I told my story that day in the Forum, and Decius is above suspicion. The fates work strangely! Who knows but Euterpia confessed upon her deathbed to this man!"

When he arrived at his house Regus was there to greet him. The poet clasped the wrist of Artus and said:

"Artus, thou knowest that I love thee as a brother. Have trust in me. I say to thee that thy son will come,—the son of thy flesh!"

Artus held firm to the wrist of Regus and turned his head aside.

"Regus," he said, "that he comes through thee, is sufficient, for I would believe thy words against the vows of other Romans. Thou canst well imagine, Regus, that henceforth thou shalt be my brother."

"When Fortune smiles upon me," said Regus, "I vow a shrine to Venus and Mercury!"

"And, Regus, I will find the marble for it, which shall be as pure as thy sincerity," replied Artus.

"Jupiter protect thee and grant thee every blessing," said the poet, who immediately departed.

Artus at once ordered a messenger despatched to have a chariot ready for him outside the Porta Capena. He hastily followed, and ere long was madly driving his steeds to the villa of Decius.

CHAPTER XXX

Artus arrived at the villa of Decius, and entered the *peristyle*, where he found Decia reclining on a *lectus*, handmaids fanning her. Her face was pale, her eyes almost lustreless. No joyous laugh echoed, and everywhere all sounds seemed hushed. With bowed head Decius stood before her, gazing in ill-disguised worryment at her.

“I cannot tell this grieving man of my joy this day,” mused Artus.

Decia was the first to see him as he entered. She smiled sadly,—a smile which caused Decius to look in the direction of her glance. As he observed Artus, his face took on an expression of hope. There was Artus, the Artus who had never failed him! If he could tell the trouble, Artus could propound a cure,—Alas, could he but tell it! Though far from being a superstitious man, for many of the patricians of Rome had long since lost confidence and belief itself in the very gods, he was nevertheless inclined to think that a solution of his problem was “not within the scope of mortal efforts.”

“Some one has cast the evil eye upon her!” he said, “I left her well and happy. I see her now stricken! She has not been so fathered and mothered as to fear shadows! 'Tis a mystery beyond me, yet, that very night before, I heard the ominous hooting of the owl!” but he called to Artus:

“Welcome, welcome, in the name of Jupiter! Dost thou come as a messenger from Aesculapius? Canst thou cure this disease that saps my lamb—and too, my happiness?”

Artus clasped the wrist of the senator, to whose words he replied,

“Thou knowest, Decius, I would shake the foundations of Rome to serve thee—and Decia.”

He then walked to the couch and said to the patient lying there:

“Decia, I crave a favour of thee which thou must needs grant now.” Decia sighed.

He looked at her and smiled as he said:

“At this moment my Decia, my request may seem a selfish one, yet 'tis not so. Give me a brief period of confidential speech with thee. Dismiss thy maids—and too, thy father.”

She looked at him in astonishment. Artus pleading! She nodded her head in acquiescence, however, and he seated himself beside her couch.

“Decia,” he said gently, “I desire to tell thee with mine own lips of how Fortune has smiled upon me. Henceforth I shall wear the *praetexta* of praetorship. Tell me thou art glad?”

Decia placed her hand in his own extended one but said nothing.

“Hast thou naught to say to me, Decia?” he said softly.

“I am ill, Tribune Artus. I cannot talk,—yet I am glad at thy happiness.”

“And yet,” continued Artus, “I begged for these few moments that thou shouldst talk. I desire thy words, at this moment, more than any other thing! Remember, Decia, that I held thee on my knees when

thou wert a child; I have been thy second father and have loved thee as though I were the father of thy flesh,—mayhap even more because my blood cours-eth not through thy veins! Therefore I ask this thing,—that thou shouldst speak to me.”

“Speak?” she said, “Of what wouldst thou have me speak?”

“Of what, dost thou ask? O, what indeed save this ailment that keeps thee lying here as an infant,—that makes thy mighty father grieve as a woman, that makes me, thy second father, discontent with life itself! Say, is not this the most all absorbing topic of the times?”

Decia was silent, but said at length:

“I know not what to say to thee!”

“Decia,” said Artus, sternly, “thou art no longer a child—but a woman. A disease has grappled thee. It is not of the body but of the mind. Forgive me for what I must now say. I ask thee in plainest speech if thou lovest someone, and if thou dost, is Artus the man? Thou knowest I have loved thee through all the years. Thy father confines thee from all men save me, for he said he has chosen me for thy husband. That is his privilege by the laws of Rome. Yet answer me honestly. Dost thou love me?”

“O, thou dost confuse me with thy questioning! I do love thee—as I love my father. Thou didst say it, I love thee as my second father. Art thou not content with this, O, Tribune Artus? Thou knowest my father has smothered all my freedom. Admitting his love, I have been a slave. Truly, though I love him, I am ‘his lamb’ indeed!”

“O, Decia, Decia!” said Artus reproachfully.

“Now speak no more, Tribune Artus,” she continued. “I know what thou wouldst say, that I am an ingrate, but such I am not. I worship my father, yet being a woman, as thou thyself hast called me, it seems most natural that I should have power to think sometimes for myself!”

“Ah! perchance thy father’s wishes do not coincide with thine—I mean wherein I am concerned. Now tell me plainly, Decia, dost thou desire me for a husband? If thou dost not, is this the disease,—this fear, this worry that Artus will some day lift thee across his threshold and make thee place wolf-fat at his door? O, Decia, Decia, thou art indeed a woman, an unjust woman, methinks, if this worry is the cause of thy sickness! Answer me, dost thou for a moment think that thy two fathers have in mind aught but thy happiness? Dost thou not know that sooner we would lash ourselves unto the death ere we would condemn thee to a single moment of pain? O, Decia, thou art unjust!”

These words impressed Decia forcibly and she gave way to a paroxysm of weeping. Artus was pleased, and reasoned that now, when the flood gates of tears were opened, grief would loosen the unwilling tongue. He sat there sternly, patiently awaiting the tears to cease their flow.

“Thou dost wrong me, Tribune Artus,” Decia said. “Thou dost wrong me! I love my father and I love thee, yet sooner would I die than marry any man. I am the child of my father. He commands. Is it not fit then that I too should command, if but once, and that once in the choice of a husband? I care not for the laws of Rome. This seems right to me!”

“But thou hast no need to command,” said Artus softly. “Has not thy every wish, spoken or otherwise, been granted? After all these years, dost thou expect a change in policy? O, how unjust, unjust!”

“Now, Tribune Artus, thou art unkind and I will call my father.”

Gently Artus took her hand in his and knelt before her couch. A soft light crept into his eyes and as they sought hers again, he said:

“O, Decia, the first, the very first, unkind thing thou hast ever said to me!”

Decia arose from her reclining position. Artus knew the sex—and waited. Decius, peering from behind a distant column in the peristyle, saw her throw her arms about the neck of Artus and weep. Puzzled, the senator frowned, and continued to look anxiously in their direction.

“Can it be that she is confessing love to him?” Decius questioned himself, as a new hope was born in his mind.

Artus held the sobbing form of Decia close to him. The propriety of things were forgotten, for here was this virgin pressed in loving embrace to the heart of the man who loved her, though no betrothal rights had been celebrated, nor had he ever heard from her mouth the sacramental “Where thou art, Caius, there am I, Caia.”

Decia took her arms from about his neck, resumed her reclining position upon the couch and said to him:

“Artus, I do love thee even as I love my father. Mayhap I have wronged ye both. I desire not to marry. Would that I were a vestal, for no constraint of service to the goddess could be greater

than mine own is now! As for nuptial bonds,—I will never tie them, never! never! never!”

“And in that and in all other things, thou shalt be ‘domina’.”

“I will agree to arouse myself and follow my accustomed habits if thou wilt agree, and my father too, not to question me upon my illness, and to force no marriage on me. Dost thou agree, Tribune Artus?”

“A thousand, thousand times with thanks to thee and all the other goddesses of heaven and earth.”

He lifted her face to his and saw there a sad expression in her eyes, yet said:

“I now demand first payment on account. Thou shalt dress thyself fittingly, come into the *triclinium* and make thy father young again, for we will drink in joy that Decia hath become Decia once again.”

Turning, he shouted lustily:

“Ho, Decius, thou peeper, come here and greet the reborn Decia! The physician has enacted a cure! Now give me all thy money bags!”

He slapped Decius on the back as the loving father lifted Decia in his arms and carried her up and down the *peristyle*. The noise of his joyous laugh, unheard for many days, attracted the *familia*, and the slaves who gathered about clapped their hands, for to all it appeared that the sun had risen once again to shed its light upon the villa of Decius. Artus turned from them, however, walked toward the farther end of the peristyle and leaned against a myrtle-decked column. His brow wrinkled as he murmured:

“What means that new look of grief in the eyes of Decia?”

“Artus,” said Decius, “thy face beams with mine! How near indeed thou art to us that our joys and sorrows so affect thee.”

The tribune replied:

“Decius, I have received another welcome gift from life. Thou knowest the one thing for which I craved these many years?”

“Madman, what words are these?” asked the startled Decius, “Can it be that——?”

“Aye, Decius, read,” said Artus, as he took from within the folds of his tunic a tablet, the contents of which had become engrossed on his mind, word for word. In amazement Decius read, arose to his feet and, approaching Artus, said quietly:

“I am too glad for words. Thy son holds a place in my heart even before I see him, and we will make of him a man worthy of Rome.”

Decia did not comprehend the meaning of all this nor in her returning wistfulness did she strive for enlightenment. She was gratified at this interruption to the constant attention required of her. Her thoughts were elsewhere!

CHAPTER XXXI

Aegea had seen naught of the apparent "rejuvenation" of Decia. The nurse, true to her promise to Glaccus, and realizing her efforts to be unavailing, had left the daughter of Decius and walked slowly to the *rustica*, where she found the ex-gadiator sitting engrossed in gloomy thought.

"Greeting, and a thousand welcomes!" he said.

"A greeting to thee, Glaccus. How dost thou feel this day?"

"Stronger in body," he replied, "yet weak in mind—from inaction. Would that the moment were here for Decius to send me forth! Today I plowed the field to kill time. Yesterday I cut vines. I cannot sleep unless I am overtaxed with exertion. My walks each morn no more attract me!"

He did not tell the reason, however, nor that the vacant place at the stream had made his heart leaden,—that the songs of the birds in the trees no longer sounded as gladsome music. She noted the sad and disappointed expression on that heretofore hopeful countenance. With a shrug of his shoulders he turned to her as if to chase away unwelcome thoughts, and added:

"Thou hast not told me how fares the daughter of Decius, nor what disease it is that makes the senator grieve? I have not seen him for days!"

Does the maiden mend with thy gentle nursing, Aegea?"

"Alas, no. It is a strange disease and one not of the body. I think it is some hidden grief, the nature of which none can discover. The most learned physicians of Rome, including the famous Greek, have said that she suffers from no disease!"

"How strange!" exclaimed Glaccus. "How did it start? What are the symptoms?"

"There are no symptoms save these, that she lies throughout the days and nights inactive, and in apparent drowsiness. At times she will not even answer questions of her father! It is a most peculiar case. The senator thinks that some one has cast the evil eye upon her, though he is no man of superstition."

"When was she first ill?" persisted the now interested Glaccus.

"The tenth day back.—That very day on which I moved from here, she came running into the garden, screaming that she 'had seen an evil man!' 'Twas past midday. She fell fainting near the portico. Handmaids lifted her and summoned Decius. Since that moment she takes no interest in anything."

"How long didst thou say she has been ill?" queried Glaccus.

"Since the tenth day back, after midday."

Glaccus reeled as though he had been struck. Recovering himself, however, he leaned against the bench. Beads of perspiration stood out on his forehead, his face suddenly became drawn, and his jaws set.

"What trick of fate is this?" he asked himself.

He chased some unwelcome thought from him, however, as he reasoned:

“Ah, I see it all! It is the illness of the ‘domina’ that has kept the slave-girl from me! Perchance she will come to me again when the daughter of Decius has recovered. Thanks to the gods for the hope!”

“What ails thee?” asked Aegea.

“Naught! indeed, why dost thou ask?”

“I thought I saw thee become confused at my words?”

Ignoring her reply, Glaccus asked gently:

“Tell me, Aegea. I have never seen the daughter of Decius. Is she strong and heavy like her father?” Aegea laughed.

“Heavy? Nay, that she is not, but rather young and frail. She is fair indeed, beautiful as a picture. She is not as high as thy breast.”

“And Decius is so great and strong!” remarked Glaccus.

“Dost thou forget the part her mother played?” laughed Aegea.

“Alas, methinks I did! Yet thou didst say she was fair. Describe her to me.”

“Well, her beautiful white face is surmounted by hair of glorious gold, such as I have never seen before. She hath dark eyes,—a wonderful combination! Her teeth are white and even and set behind a tiny mouth, formed as a rosebud. Were I a man methinks I’d cut my way through the Parthians to kiss those lips. She often wears a chaplet of lilies. Her hair is held in place by a comb set with a gem that looks like blue glass, yet,—’tis a priceless gift that Decius——”

Aegea did not continue, however, for Glaccus had suddenly covered his face with his arms.

“Glaccus,” she cried, “what ails thee?”

“Aegea,” he said, “I am stricken—stricken—with a sudden weakness. Methinks I—toiled too long in the fields to-day.”

She hastily brought him some wine.

“Thou shalt seek thy bed immediately, Glaccus, and rest to-morrow the entire day.”

She returned to the portico only after she had seen the light in his room extinguished.

Soon afterwards Glaccus came out into the moonlight.

“She said she saw an evil man,—and so she did! It was I! She saw Mecinia pressed to me! Gods! thou knowest I am innocent,—yet henceforth she will condemn me forever! ‘My nymph,’ the daughter of Decius,—and no slave! In the blindness of my love I did not see it all, yet poorly indeed have I repaid her for her gentleness!”

He walked out into the night.

“She played with my heart. I loved her and she knew it. She said she was a slave! ’Twas wrong, wrong!”

He spent the entire night wandering aimlessly through the grounds. Morning found him pale and hollow-eyed. In utter weariness he threw himself upon his couch, and it was there that Aegea found him the following evening when she came to tell him of the miraculous apparent recovery of the daughter of Decius through the efforts of Artus. Glaccus was buried in the sleep of exhaustion, however, and therefore she did not awaken him.

Soon his eyes opened, and seeing her, he sprang up and said:

“Aegea, wilt thou do for me a service? Wilt thou say to Decius that I would set forth on the morrow?”

CHAPTER XXXII

Artus rose at dawn the following morning. He had passed a restless and anxious night, beset by anxiety as to the character of his long lost son. He had received no information as to the identity of this youth; did not know whether the latter had been adopted perchance into some family of rank or else had been dragged from the gutters. He sprang from his couch and with troubled brow walked up and down his *cubiculum*. He could endure the confines of his room no longer, and entered the *peristyle* where the cool air of the early morn somewhat refreshed him. The rays of the rising sun soon imparted a touch of radiance to the scene. Artus summoned Hercules, to whom he said:

“Canst thou help to soothe my nerves with action? Let us wrestle.”

His startled slave, whose eyes were still heavy with sleep, obeyed nevertheless with alacrity, and soon master and slave were straining sinew and drawing the sweat of arduous effort through all pores.

“Loosen, master,” cried the slave, “By Tarann! thou hadst—the—strangle—hold!”

Artus relaxed his muscles and they both arose, the chest of the slave heaving.

“Lord, thou hast strength this morn!” he said.

“’Tis not strength, Hercules,—but anxiety that did win for me.”

Once more they grappled for the second bout. Artus soon tired of this pastime, however, and after a visit to his *frigidarium*, partook of his usual Spartan repast of the morning. It was while he was thus engaged that Eurycele found him.

“My Artus,” she said, “thou dost eat as a machine,—art staring straight ahead! Cease, else wilt thou empty the larder!” and laughingly she approached and kissed him.

“The hours drag!” he said.

“I heard thee throughout the entire night,” she continued, “but did not disturb thee. Thou didst arise soon after cock-crow! I know thy task is hard to wait thus, yet remember *pulcherrima*, at any moment now, he will come.”

At each appearance of a slave Artus would arise in hopes of hearing the announcement of the arrival of his son. At last he was rewarded. The *atriensis*, or slave who had charge of the atrium, entered hurriedly:

“Lord,” he said, “a youth who says he is thy son, desires to see thee!”

“Let him enter,” said Artus, almost in a whisper.

The expectant father grasped the wrist of Eurycele who was seated beside him on the marble bench,—grasped it in a hold so tight, she could have screamed from pain, but she pressed her lips together tightly and looked tenderly upon him with the love of ages in her eyes. The *peristyle* became a place of silence,—a silence disturbed only by the sound of approaching footsteps as the *atriensis* conducted a youth through the opening between the

atrium and the *peristyle*, the curtain having been partly drawn aside.

Bassus entered. He was comely and his curly black hair intensified, as it were, the sparkle of his eyes, which, however, was caused by the excitement, for they usually lacked lustre. Deep rims beneath them denoted over-indulgence. His limbs were lean, indicating waste through improper habits. His carriage was one of confidence, though of but little grace. His whole bearing, however, was characterized by a certain effeminacy which likewise denoted the lack of stability of character. Artus observed all these things at a glance, but reasoned:

“How else then could it be with a youth, fatherless and motherless! 'Tis not I who should condemn!”

In the hushed excitement of the moment Bassus stood there irresolute, not knowing the next move to make, or word to say, as he looked at Artus.

The latter, however, arose, and opening his arms said: “Come!”

Bassus lost no time and threw his arms about Artus in a manner which he had practiced for several days past.

“Have wine brought for thy new master,” said the tribune to the *atriensis*.

With a look of amazement in his eyes, the slave hastened away and soon returned with goblets and Falernian.

There was a peculiar current of dissatisfaction, as it were, in the very atmosphere, and a certain constraint fell upon them all.

“My son,” said Artus, who was the first to break

the silence, "this is the lady Eurycele, who holds the first and only place in my love."

Bassus approached Eurycele, whose extended hand he pressed to his lips. Thus far he had played his part well. Artus turned to Eurycele and said:

"Leave us, yet stray not far. I will call thee soon."

"Bassus," said Artus, when she had left, "thou art my son, and as such shouldst keep no secrets from thy father. Tell me all thou knowest—all."

Bassus drew from the folds of his tunic a scroll, that was sealed, and which had been prepared by Donatus. It was supposed to be the dying confession of the mother of Bassus.

"Regus gave me this for thee," said Bassus. "I do not know its contents."

And Artus mused, "Regus! Regus! would that thou hadst been my long lost son!" Aloud he said:

"Bassus, with the words of Regus to back thee, no further proof is necessary."

He broke the seal, however, and carefully read the scroll. It told of the love of the woman for her seducer, of the birth of the child, and her desertion of it because of poverty. The words on the scroll had ended in the middle of a sentence! Bassus spoke again.

"Regus said that the author of it died as it was being written." The lips of Artus quivered, but he said:

"Bassus, tell me of thy life. Hast thou lived in Rome always?"

"Aye, father, and the first that I can remember is being carried by my mother and left at some big

house. I was then, I judge, about five years old. A lady of some wealth cared for me,—after a fashion! In time I tired of her cruelties and ran out into the gutters. I have done everything to earn my bread, but lately I have played at dice for a living. I am expert at the game, and I know a trick or two. Indeed, I have made a somewhat comfortable living!”

At hearing these words Artus frowned, arose from his seat and walked silently up and down the *peristyle*.

“Father,” shouted the subtle Bassus, “do not condemn me. One must live! The nights are cool,—at certain seasons. I know, for I have felt them!”

At these words the face of Artus softened. He approached Bassus and placed his right hand on the shoulder of the youth.

“My son,” he said, “I do not condemn thee.”

He despatched a slave to summon Hercules, who soon entered.

“Here is another master for thee to wrestle with, for he is my son.”

Hercules looked at the youth, his amazement betrayed by the expression in his eyes.

“My son, I will show thee a new life and habits that will make of thee a man—as man should be. I warrant, Hercules,” he continued, turning to the slave, “he could not choke thee as I did this morn, yet thou shalt see to it that he improves. A great gold piece for thee on the day he shows a little more chest!”

CHAPTER XXXIII

The evening found Artus sorely disappointed in his son. Bassus, in his endeavours to be entertaining to his father and Eurycele, had but succeeded in being insipid. He talked of dice, or women of evil fame, and of bloody games. Much of this conversation entirely escaped the ears of Artus, who was engrossed in his own thoughts. The face of Eurycele, always a mirror of her mind, had taken on an expression akin to annoyance. Eventually Bassus said:

“Wilt thou permit me to leave now? I have some business that requires my attention and must get my clothes and things.”

“Wind up thy business, Bassus,” Artus replied, “but thy garments and things leave behind thee. A new life for thee starts here!”

“But, father,” argued Bassus, “I have many things I value. I have a sword which bears the stains of the blood of ‘The Supurbus’ who was slain that day in the arena,—a most famous gladiator! Too, I have a jewelled goblet that once touched the lips of Illyria, the famous concubine of——”

“Cease, Bassus!” said Artus, “leave such things behind thee! Bring the sword if so thou desirest and I hope the sight of it will inspire in thee the

ambition to own an arm capable of using such a weapon. Bring what thy hands can carry,—no more. Return ere the second vigil.”

“Thanks, father. It will be as thou sayest,” replied Bassus.

As he walked thoughtfully through the Janiculum, however, he mused:

“Methinks Donatus has found me no father, but a master! Well, so be it I get sufficient money, I care not what he is. Now for the dice! Fortune smile upon me and I vow thee a new-born calf!”

The more he thought about the change in his affairs, however, the less he liked it, and he decided to go immediately to the house of Donatus, to tell the senator of his reception.

He was ushered into the atrium of Donatus and a serious frown still adorned his countenance.

“Greeting, Bassus,” said the senator, who conducted him to the summer *triclinium* where they found Mecinia.

“Greeting to the beautiful lady Fortunæ,” said Bassus. He did not smile, however.

“Greeting, Bassus,” she said, “yet why thy frowns? Thy face bears no sign of joy at seeing thy father,—nay, one would think that hadst been to a funeral!”

Donatus laughed, but Bassus remained silent.

“’Tis easy to perceive that the son has not learned, as yet, to love the father. Tell us of thy visit, Bassus?”

“My generous patron,” replied the youth, “while I thank thee with heart full of gratitude, in truth I tell thee thou hast not found for me a father but a master,—and too, I will be legally under the *patria*

potestas! And what dost thou think? He hath a slave six times as large as thou art! This slave I am to wrestle with twice each day! Gods! once would suffice to kill me!"

At these words Mecinia shrieked with laughter, which was renewed when she beheld the frightened expression on the face of "the long lost son." Donatus, who had joined in her mirth, said:

"'Twas worth all the trouble and expense, Bassus, but to see Fortunæ laugh thus!"

"Yet, by Hecate! 'tis no laughing matter for me! The slave hath muscles round as yonder pillars; indeed, they call him 'Hercules!' Methinks he likes me not. He has a most fierce expression when he looks at me! Mayhap he thinks one master such as my father doth quite suffice! For thinking thus, I blame him not. He said my father nearly choked him this very morn, so strong is this Artus! Betwixt them both they'll surely kill me! I'll not go back! I'll not go back!"

Even the fear of a possible upsetting of their plans did not restrain the laughter of his auditors, as Bassus walked up and down the *peristyle* in great excitement, telling them of his fears and not hesitating to grossly exaggerate the facts.

"Aye, thou canst laugh, yet hear me. Artus did say 'strip him.' Gods, I knew not but that he meant split him! With no gentle touch, this barbarian Ajax did it. The elephant rent my garments from me and my father dug his fingers in my stomach, my arms, my back, my chest, and promised that the beast of a slave would be rewarded with gold if he made me strong! Thou, Donatus, canst perceive that there is but one condition to

the reward; I must needs live through it, which I vow by Pollux! I could not,—nor will I even try. I leave Rome this very night. I'll not go back!"

Eventually Donatus grew impatient.

"Bassus, thou art a two-legged ass. Thy very reception augurs future wealth and power for thee. Ere many days have passed Artus will be a praetor; even now he is comfortably rich and through Decius, is in high favour with the Consul Taurus, and will be with Augustus when the *princeps* returns. Canst thou not in thy mind's eye, Bassus, obtain one glimpse of what thy life will be henceforth? Wouldst lose all because thou dost fear a slave, who is bound by all the laws to fall flat upon his belly at thy word? I enjoy thy words as a jest, yet cannot think that thou art serious in thy fears."

"Yet, I will not wrestle with him!"

"Verbex! There is no need to wrestle with him; thou canst slay him if thou so desirest. Now tell us of how thy father greeted thee."

Bassus told the details, not omitting to refer frequently to the great size of Hercules. Donatus said:

"Obey thy father until thou hast trained him to obey thee. I will tell thee how to do it. To-morrow thou canst find excuses—not to wrestle. Meanwhile thank the gods and me, who have made thy fortune. Fail not to report to me each second day with all the information thou canst gather,—as thou didst promise."

Before the close of the second vigil, Bassus returned to the house of Artus.

"Bassus," said Artus, "Morpheus rest thee! We arise at daybreak each morn."

Slowly the tribune walked from the *librarium*. Bassus stood there apparently transfixed.

“At daybreak! First they would kill me by wrestling, then slay me by lack of sleep. At daybreak! The hour at which I am wont to retire! Ten thousand curses of Cerebus and Hecate on the damned soul of Donatus!”

CHAPTER XXXIV

A week later, Artus and Bassus visited the villa of Decius. It was the first time the latter had ever been to the villa. They were reclining in the summer *triclinium*. Decius said:

“Methinks that as a worshipper of Bacchus, Bassus excels his sire!”

The wine had flowed freely. The comparatively simple life led by Artus, however, had never weaned him from moderation. Decius had always been a heavy drinker, though he seldom showed ill effects from his indulgence. Decia was permitted to touch only the lightest of wines and of these, very little.

“Of this trait in the character of Bassus I am not proud,” said Artus. “Yet I hope to lead him into good habits. Excess in anything, as thou knowest, is not commendable. Then, too, Decius, forget not that he does not own thy great stomach nor thy massive frame to carry the contents of many of thy generous goblets!”

At last Decius arose and walked out into the garden with Artus.

When they had left Bassus said to Decia:

“Dost thou know how beautiful thou art, Decia?”

Instinctively, as it were, Decia compared his effeminate voice with that of Glaccus. The ex-gladiator's strong frame, firm jaws and courage had

likewise not been without impression. For the sake of Artus, however, she concealed her smile of disdain and answered:

“Truly, Bassus, thou canst not compare my rustic beauty with that of the great ladies of Rome whom thou hast met?”

Bassus answered enthusiastically: “Thy beauty is so wonderful because it is all thine and—and—canst thou keep a secret? I love thee!”

“Truly thou dost jest, Bassus, and I am angry. ’Tis wrong to jest on such matters. Say thou art sorry else I will tell thy father!”

“Nay, Decia, tell him not! He would be angry, most angry I know, yet, by Aphrodité! I vow I love thee! Thou art so beautiful!”

Decia, annoyed, with difficulty refrained from saying: “I would hate thee wert thou not the son of Artus!”

She again resolved that for the sake of the father she would be patient with the son. She compared the words of the youth to those of Glaccus, even though the latter was “an evil man,” and she sighed audibly.

Bassus, misinterpreting the sigh to indicate that his words had not been without impression, continued:

“Thou art not angry at me because I love thee?”

“Bassus,” said Decia, “speak of this some other time, not now,—not now.”

“Some other time, sayest thou? Then I may hope! Thanks, goddess, thanks! What other time dost thou mean?”

Annoyed at his insistence, and now out of all patience, Decia did not spare him.

“When the Gauls plunder Rome again!” she said.

The face of Bassus flushed with anger, coupled with humiliation. Rome was now in the zenith of her glory!

Fortunately Artus and Decius returned at that moment and as father and son walked in the garden together, Artus asked:

“What dost thou think of the daughter of Decius? Canst thou blame him for keeping her confined outside the walls of Rome?”

“I do blame him, father, I do blame him! She would shine in Rome as a radiant star of beauty. Who knows but that some day she would even conquer the Augustus himself!”

The face of Artus flushed with shame at the words of Bassus, and he said coldly:

“In this thou art mistaken, Bassus; the Cæsar has seen her several times and had her on his knees when she was a child. He does love her, yet not as thou dost mean. She is the child of Decius, a man whose friendship he prizes as much as that of any other man, and, too, I tell thee, thou dost wrong the Cæsar. He is the greatest man in this world. Such men do not reckon by passion!”

CHAPTER XXXV

It was evening at the *rustica* of Decius where Glaccus languished in impatience and uncertainty. He had learned that on the morrow Decia was to visit Rome for the first time. The weeks that had elapsed since he had first become aware of the identity of the "slave girl" had indeed been sad ones for him. In compliance with his earnest request Aegea had at the first opportunity broached to Decius the matter of the proposed mission of Glaccus, but the senator said:

"Tell Glaccus to nurse his strength a little longer."

Then came the bolt of disappointment, for Decius visited Glaccus one day,—the very evening that Artus had told the senator of the recovery of the long lost son. The senator walked slowly across the bridge leading to the *rustica*.

"How can I tell the ambitious Glaccus that the mission is now no longer necessary? My clue must indeed have been a false one, for the son is found! Therefore, it must have been another legend of the Tenth Legion!"

He despatched a slave to summon the youth.

"Glaccus, I have bad news for thee, yet perchance the gods so will it for thy welfare. The proposed journey is no longer necessary. What shall I do with thee?"

"What words are these! No journey for me!" said Glaccus in tones of bitterest disappointment.

"Even as thou sayest, Glaccus,—no journey!"

"What canst thou do with me? 'Tis simple. I will leave,—yet I return not to the gladiators' barracks," and he laughed harshly.

Appreciating the fact of the youth's disappointment, Decius pitied him.

"Glaccus," said Decius gently, "I like thy metal. What dost thou desire? Artus says each man on earth owes something to another."

"And mine is a mountainous debt to thee," said Glaccus, as he looked appreciatively at Decius.

"Cease, Glaccus, and speak thy wish. Wouldst thou tarry here in my service? I can use thee,—or wouldst thou join the legions? I'll give thee three days to think upon it, yet methinks thou art not yet strong enough to bear arms."

Decius recrossed the bridge and gave final orders for the journey to Rome on the morrow.

The weeks had been long and weary ones for the youth. Some days he toiled at the plow, or at cutting down trees for winter fire wood; on others, he did naught but lie for hours at that cherished spot by the stream, living again in his dreams the "moments of life," as he termed them, now gone,—gone forever. One thought, however, consoled him, and saved him from despair.

"She had become ill at seeing another in his arms! Then surely she must have borne love for him,—at least until the moment that she saw evidence of his supposed guilt."

He calmed himself, with the recollection that his "nymph," his "slave" was none other than a

great lady, the daughter of a senator, and that senator, Decius!

Then he would sigh and a soft light would creep into his eyes as he thought:

“She trusted me, for she came to me again!”

Thus the weeks had passed in contrasts of arduous manual labor, as he strove to forget, and quietude of thought, as he struggled to remember each word that had come from her sweet lips, as he pictured her that morning he had last seen her.

One day, however, the ex-gladiator shrugged his shoulders and said, half aloud:

“I care not what becomes of me! Suffice it that action plays the part and that distance lies between me and this spot. I would forget, I would forget! O, that the gods would help me in this!”

CHAPTER XXXVI

A young woman was pacing up and down near the approach to the Pons Fabricius.

Ere long, she was approached by a man whose face was muffled. He walked nervously, with hesitating steps, glancing now and again backwards to see if he had perchance been followed.

"Is it thee, Bassus," she asked tremulously.

"Aye, who else would be such a fool to thus risk discovery!"

The unkindness of his words prompted the woman to lay her hand on his arm, gently, even caressingly!

"Be not angry with me, Bassus, yet,—Bassus, it is not long since thou didst come to me unbidden and of thine own free will." She then wept softly.

"I am not denying it, am I," he retorted, "yet what is the business? Quick, I must return. Thou knowest that now I am the son of Artus, who on the morrow takes his oath as a praetor."

"O, Bassus, that is my fear! Yet thou didst win my love when thou wert plain Bassus—and—I denied thee naught, and—and—thou didst promise to marry me."

"Marriage!" he said, "aye, that I did, yet now thou knowest 'tis impossible. My father is of too high a rank. I cannot marry a plebian. Weep not,

for 'twill be of no avail, I cannot,—will not marry thee!”

“Yet, Bassus,” she continued pleadingly, “think of the life I now lead in the shop. The vile Drago-mus annoys me and sneers because—because—I—think—he—knows. He has even threatened me, if I comply not with his vile wishes. O, Bassus, dost thou no longer love me, that thou canst hear me tell this and yet offer me no word of kindness?”

“Nydia, I regret, aye, regret most deeply,—yet I am powerless to aid thee. My father gives me very little money.”

“But, Bassus, dear Bassus, hast thou no pity for me? Canst thou not see that I am ill?”

Impatiently and with hasty glances in all directions, Bassus delved into the folds of his tunic and took therefrom a small purse.

“Go, then, and consult a physician,” he said as he attempted to press the purse into her hands.

“No, Bassus, no! Give me not money for that which I gave thee freely. Thou didst promise to marry me! Bassus, O, Bassus, canst thou not guess?”

“Fool, fool,” he said, and in his rage he struck her, as the full meaning of her words sunk into his mind.

“O, Bassus,” she screamed, “thou hast struck me!”

He attempted to tear her hand from his shoulder and to make a hasty retreat. She screamed, not realizing at the moment the possible results of discovery. Her cries were heard by one of the *nocturnal apparitores* who chanced to be near by and he grasped Bassus in a firm hold.

“Didst thou cry for help?” he asked the young woman.

She was silent.

“Nay, 'twas I,” said Bassus, “she waylaid me—and—I struck in self-defense,” said the now frightened and perplexed Bassus.

The woman was now holding her hand to her face, for it pained her.

“Come with me, coward!” said the man to Bassus.

“Dare not to arrest me!” said Bassus, “dost thou know who I am? I am the son of Artus, the praetor. Dare not to arrest me!”

“Dare not, sayest thou? I would take thee to the Tullianum wert thou even the son of the *princeps* who I vow would ne'er beget a coward such as thou!” On raising his lantern the man noted the young woman's face, which indeed did not betoken that she was a robber of the highways!

“Thou, too, shalt come with me, poor maiden,—as witness,” he said softly.

“Maiden indeed!” sneered Bassus. “Thou wilt suffer roundly for this arrest!”

“Hold thy tongue, coward,” said the watch, “else I will crack thy teeth! Walk before me!”

“Here, take my purse,” said Bassus. “I will give thee more on the morrow. Let me go!”

The watch gave him a glance of scorn. “Coward!” he exclaimed.

That night Bassus was confined in the barracks of the *nocturnal triumviri capitales*. He had lost his purse or else it had been stolen from him, and he was therefore unable to send any message to friends for help. Even had he had the power, he would have feared to inform Artus of his arrest.

CHAPTER XXXVII

At dawn of the following morning the villa of Decius presented a scene of unwonted activity. On this day Artus was to take his oath at the temple and wear for the first time, the *praetexta* of the praetorship. Decius had resolved to fittingly celebrate the event by taking Decia to Rome. He had sent messages to various relatives, clients, and freedmen, stating his wish that they should gather and await him in the early morn at the grove of the Camoenae outside the Porta Capena, for the purpose of escorting him on important business. None who received word hesitated to obey the summons and many told their friends. Though not knowing the nature of the business, it sufficed that the noble senator Decius, their patron, loved and respected by all,—their protector and pillar of refuge in their difficulties,—desired their presence. Soon after sunrise, the grove was filled with impatient watchers. As minute succeeded minute, the number was increased to hundreds.

At the villa activity was manifest in every department. Handmaids rushed hither and thither with joyous shouts and laughter. Slaves busied themselves about the stables, harnessing Gallic palfreys to *rhedae*, and other fast horses to *petorrita* for the journey. The finest steeds of Decius, with

silver trimmed trappings, were harnessed to his handsomest chariot, which was trimmed with silver. Decia, in her gracefully draped *stola*, white as the lilies of Hebron, and covered by a light *paenula*, reclined on the cushions of the great *rheda*, with its purple hangings and protected from the sun by a hood of leather. Her companion was none other than Aegea, for between these two a strong affection had been formed in their brief companionship. Numidian riders vaulted on their light steeds and led the procession, riding two abreast. About a score of mounted freedmen in the employ of Decius, followed. Then came the senator, who frequently turned about in his chariot, his face beaming with happiness as he looked upon the *rheda* containing Decia and Aegea, which followed him. Then came several *rhedae* and other vehicles, containing handmaids of Decia, and groups of other young slave-girls, all brightly attired. These were in turn followed by two larger vehicles filled with roses, violets, lilies, crocusses and gladiolas that had been picked from the gardens that very morn. Mounted slaves, followed by freedmen, brought up the rear. The cortege travelled speedily. The view of Rome was not obstructed on the journey, for only the arches of the aqueducts ran toward the city. Ere an hour had elapsed, they had arrived within a mile of the Porta Capena. A courier galloped ahead to tell the waiting crowd in the grove of the approach of their patron. Even before Decius could distinguish them, however, a loud shout greeted his ears. A few moments later he discarded his *paenula*, and a slave called *vestiplica*, draped his *toga* which was woven of the softest and whitest Milesian wool. He

addressed the waiting crowd from his chariot as follows:—

“Thanks, brothers and friends, for thy numbers. Ye have greeted me before at triumph, yet as ye see me now, I am equally as proud and happy, for this day I celebrate a double event. My daughter, the lady Decia here, comes to Rome. ’Tis the first time she will pass the walls since she was a babe in arms!”

The crowd shouted and cheered. Decius raised his hand for silence and continued:

“She comes to join me and all of us, in doing honor to my friend, the new praetor Artus, whose scars, as ye know, reflect the courage and glory of Roman arms.”

More cheers, coupled with shouts of “Noble Artus!” rose on the air.

“It is my wish,” continued Decius, “that ye, one and all, follow me to wait upon the new praetor as he comes into the Forum Boarium, and—to fittingly escort him to the temple. Later in the day I will provide entertainment for ye,—games, at which champions will show their prowess,—nor will thy throats go parched nor thy stomachs empty.”

Enthusiastic cheers for Decius, Artus and the lady Decia greeted these words; when the roar had subsided, Decius continued:

“Now form orderly ranks and follow me. Let Rome hear her citizens cheer, as they did the day Camillus reached the Forum and saved her from the bloody greed of Brennus’s sword!”

Amidst continued cheers and enthusiasm, the horsemen dismounted, and continuing two abreast, passed through the Capenan gate, followed by a

lectica, borne by six stalwart Syrian slaves, which contained Decia and Aegea. The procession was joined by numerous idlers and curiosity seekers as it passed near the long extending walls of the Circus Maximus, situated between the Aventine and Palatine hills, the temples and other buildings on which towered on either side, and continued on its way to the Forum Boarium. Couriers had been despatched to summon Artus, whose face became illumined with pleasure when he saw the throng there to welcome him in the great square. Forgetting his dignity in the excitement of the moment, he ran forward hastily as the crowd made way for him, and grasped the extended wrist of Decius. At that moment he likewise spied Decia and Aegea in the litter, which had been set down on the ground.

The crowd shouted at this entire lack of ostentation on the part of the new incumbent of so high an office.

“Long live the noble Praetor Artus!” shouted one, and the cry was repeated from hundreds of throats. At a signal from Decius, handmaids and other slaves threw flowers on the ground, and Artus and Decius, followed by the procession, continued on their way to the Forum Boarium, walking over a veritable bed of roses, violets and other flowers.

Eurycele, who unperceived had come upon the scene, watched these doing with palpitating heart; her face, however, wore an expression of pride and joy. Indeed one could have seen that her glances betokened little less than worship of her lord, whose *praetexta* she had but recently draped, for she would not permit any hands save hers to perform the duties of the *vestiplica*.

Preceded by the freedmen walking shoulder to shoulder, the procession moved onward. By previous arrangement, a number of flute players, singers, and female slaves walked behind the freedmen, the women strewing flowers before Artus, upon whose brow Decius had placed a chaplet. Occasionally, and at a given signal, the flute players and choristers ceased their music and the sound of trumpets, the *tuba* and *lituus*, ringing forth the charge,—was borne through the air. It signified that the recipient of these honours had seen active service in campaigns. Decius now walked beside the litter that contained Decia and Aegea and which was surrounded by the handmaids who were in turn protected on all sides by slaves and clients of the senator. Then followed the cheering hundreds, borne along by the excitement, coupled with the enthusiasm of Decius himself,—and too, their hopes for entertainment at the games he had promised them later in the day!

This journey was indeed an event in the life of Decia, and one that ranked second only in importance to her meeting with Glaccus at the stream, and at times her thoughts wandered to the youth.

“Would that he were here now that I could but see him!” she thought, but her eyes were sparkling with excitement, and she turned to Aegea and said:

“O, how wonderful and beautiful it is! How I wish that I could live here always!” And Aegea replied:

“It is because the scenes are new to thee. I, who have lived here always, have learned the truer value of thy father’s villa, where love and sincerity rule. In Rome, all is hollow, pomp and show, and

vice governs! I sometimes wonder that the very gods do not cry out in shame!"

"Aegea," said Decia, "thou shalt not spoil my pleasure this day, I warn thee."

"Ah, Decia," replied the nurse, "that is not my desire, yet I would have thee truly value only that which is real."

The journey was a revelation to Decia. The description she had heard conveyed an idea of but a thousandth part of all she now saw. They crossed the Forum Boarium and entered the Vicus Tuscus, the street given to the forlorn and defeated Etruscans in the early days of Rome upon which to build their homes. Passing the Temple of Castor at their right, they arrived at "The Street of Rome,"—the Sacra Via, whose stones tell the story of the life of the city. The Sacra Via! The way of all the triumphs and the deaths of Roman greatness! Here the processions of victory, of the festivals, of funerals, marched past. As the cortege of Decius was about to enter the Sacra Via, however, it chanced that Decia was enabled to witness for the first time, a festival procession in honor of one of the many deities. The sound of melodious notes was borne to her ears, and she stood upright in the litter and looked upon the procession as it moved past. Youths led the way, followed by musicians, players of flutes and lyres, who made music for the dancers that followed. Some of the latter, decked with goat-skins and crowned with branches of the pine, represented fauns; more musicians preceded the carriers of incense, and through the perfumed smoke left in their wake could be seen the gold and silver objects carried in honour of the deity. Nobles followed,

dragging on small carriages images of the gods. Speechless at the beautiful sights, awed by the scenes of activity, the music, the laughter, the joy of life, Decia was entranced by the new picture now spread out before her, but she was soon borne past the temple of Castor and they entered the *forum Romanum*, that wondrous "oblong of the world," the scene and the story of Rome's rise and fall. Surrounded by porticos, embellished by statues and columns, the neighboring heights crowned by temples and magnificent buildings, it told its story; the story read by Decia and taught to her by the paid tutors during the course of her education. Yet could she have grasped by mere words the impressiveness and glory of it all? Could she have imagined the beauty of the temple of Jupiter Capitolinus, dedicated to the worship of Jupiter, Juno and Minerva on the *mons Capitolinus*? Its roof of golden tiles indeed vied in splendor with the Italian sun whose radiance it reflected. There at the opposite extremity of the Forum, stood the temple of the divine Julius, of whom her father ever spoke in homage, and erected on the spot where the body of the Cæsar had been consumed upon the funeral pyre! Backward her eyes roved again toward the Capitolinus and she beheld the great temple of Saturn, immortal protector of earth's precious increase, the oldest temple on the Forum! There, too, was the *Umbilicus urbis Romae*, the golden column which the people believed marked the veritable center of the world! She beheld the famed Rostra, where oratory had so often turned the tides of history, and at her earnest request she was borne in direction of the Curia Julia, the largest building

near the Forum, and which, begun by Julius Cæsar, had but recently been completed by Augustus. And here it was that her father sat with the other *patres conscripti!*

“What dost thou think of Rome?” inquired Decius of his daughter as he interrupted her roving eyes with which she attempted to see everything.

“I do but think how small a thing I am, my father, beside this great magnificence of which I did not even dream!”

“Small thing, sayest thou, my lamb?” said Decius, with a frown, “to me thou art a thousandfold larger than a hundred such. I love them just so long as thou art here with me,—or there to greet me when I come,” and he pointed in the direction of his distant villa. “I love my Rome, yet cannot bear to think how I would feel wert thou not part of her!”

The softness of his tones dimmed the eyes of Decia, who therefore did not see that Artus at that moment left them to take his oath at the temple of Jupiter Capitolinus.

“I can remember no happier moment in my life than this,” said Decius to Aegea, “save that on which the mother of my child first said she loved me!”

After hastily giving some orders, Decius turned to Decia and said:

“Thou hast seen enough for this day. I must join Artus. Go at once to the grove of the Camoenæ. There the horsemen and wagons wait. Go homewards,—I will return for a late *coena!* Come, chase thy frown and embrace me.”

Poutingly Decia obeyed him. Although public

demonstration of affection was not in strict accordance with the sterner Roman customs of the period, Decius would not deny himself a caress from his daughter though all of Rome looked on. With a last fond glance at her, he strode up the Forum, a few clients attending him. The crowd of its own free will made way for Decius, a fact which served to demonstrate his popularity. In the throng a cobbler from whom Hygeia had succeeded in removing but a small portion of the stains of his trade, said to a neighbour:

“There goes an honest noble whose shoes I would make without pay! When such men walk on leather, they do honour to my trade,—and too, he hath a muscle! Twice as great as mine! By Hercules! he could drive a nail!” Striking his two rough hands together in a mighty clacque, he shouted, “Hail, Decius!”

The senator glanced in his direction and smiled.

* * * * *

It had been a trying day for the new praetor, for lo! as he left the temple where he had taken his oath, a prisoner who was being transferred to a different place of confinement, had appealed to him for mercy—and that prisoner had proved to be none other than Bassus! Yet the new praetor had dispensed justice as his mind directed, justice unbiassed by aught save law!

Later that afternoon Decius and Artus, preceded by the two lictors of the praetor, walked through the Forum on the way to meet the litters which were to bear them to the Janiculum. A cheering crowd followed.

“What can I add to that which I have already told thee, Artus?” asked Decius.

“I thank thee with my full heart, Decius, yet perchance thou canst not perceive the thrust that pains the most. 'Tis this; I have condemned my son to suffer for a crime the counterpart of that which I, myself, committed in my youth. The gods have denied me the opportunity to make proper reparation. The beloved sweetheart of my youth is now among the shades, yet this son, the result of my crime, remains to ever remind me of that—crime—to intensify the remorse I feel. My heart is dead and I am sick of it all. Methinks I can indeed no longer fittingly grace the praetorship!”

Decius replied:

“Artus, thou *verbex*! Do we or the gods regulate the universe? Taurus so highly commends thee that thy resignation would not be accepted.”

When Artus retired to the privacy of his *cubiculum*, he held his arm across his face and when he lowered it, tear drops glistened on his cheeks. He spoke but two words:

“My Euterpia!” he said.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

The litter containing Decia and Aegea proceeded on its way to the Capenan gate, clients of Decius escorting it as it passed through the crowded streets, with their booths, open cook-shops, tables of vintners, with chain-bound bottles to protect them from passing pilferers, and restaurants with festoons of greens and flowers. At every foot of the way, some scene or incident held Decia's interest. She saw gymnasts, clowns, Egyptian snake-charmers juggling the reptiles, hucksters of all sorts, beggars, and men of foreign costume and bearing. Gladiators proved attractive to her, and when she saw some of massive build and knotted muscles, her admiration for Glaccus increased. The youth had won his combats against such men! Then her lips would quiver. At times she would order a halt, perchance to watch a hairy native of Germania, at whose guttural commands, a large bear, muzzled and chained, would dance or turn a clumsy somersault for the amusement of the crowd. She saw the strange varieties of persons who were engaged in the service of idolatry. The *salii*, priests of Mars Gradivus, the *flamines* devoted to the service of a particular god, *sacerdotes*, and *feriales*. Again she would stop to have her fortune told for a piece of silver by an old hag, who claimed direct descent from the sirens who had enchanted Ulysses!

“Decia,” said the patient Aegea, “I must again remind thee that the hours pass; the escort awaits us at the gate!”

Eventually, and to the great relief of all, they passed the antique looking arch of the aqueduct and arrived outside the Porta Capena. Decia and Aegea, alighted from the *lectica*, and entered the *rheda*, and the cavalcade proceeded along the “Queen of Roads.”

For the hundredth time Aegea answered the tireless questioner.

“Is Rome always so bright and gay? Do the gladiators have wives? Did they have to beat the bear to train him thus? Did Aegea think her father would allow them to visit Rome again on the morrow?” At last the cavalcade stopped, the horses panting from the exertion of the speedy journey. Decius had announced a holiday for the *familia* and in point of numbers, the grounds were comparatively depopulated.

There was one, however, who viewed the return of Decia with palpitating heart. Hidden in the branches of a tree near the road, was Glaccus. He saw Decia’s face shining with excitement of the journey as she plied her questions to Aegea, and his face assumed an even more serious expression, and he murmured:

“She played with me, else how could she be thus happy while I—I suffer! Fool that I am to tarry here!”

After the cortege had disbanded, he walked slowly along the road to the *rustica* and entered his room.

Meanwhile, Aegea and Decia, after having visited

the tepidarium to remove the stains of travel, sat on the portico. Decia still continued her questions, relative to the wonderful city, but at last arose and said:

“Come, Aegea, and walk with me to the stream. Thou art not too tired, art thou, Aegea?”

They walked slowly toward the stream.

“That is the statue thy father pointed out to me. He laughed heartily while telling me that thou didst, when a child, attempt to scar the face because it did not resemble that of Artus! See, he keeps it at a post of honour!”

Decia blushed.

“Do not tease me, Aegea! My father said he keeps it there to remind me of my love for Artus whom I know it is their mutual desire that I love otherwise than as a second father. Alas, it cannot be!”

“I warrant thy father is in no haste to give thee in marriage to any man. What will he do when thou dost leave him to anoint some man’s door with wolf-fat?”

Decia laughed as she replied:

“He says he will take a place in my husband’s *familia* to be thus near me. Indeed, I worship him! Yet tell him not, else will he rule me even more than now. Indeed, ’twas not until I became ill that he took me to see Rome!”

“Tell me more,—of Artus,” said Aegea.

Thus conversing they arrived at the bank of the stream where they reclined upon nature’s pillows formed by the verdant grass of the rich soil.

CHAPTER XXXIX

At the section of the grounds of Decius where the stream passed the upper boundary, a low bridge had been constructed. When the water was low a boat could be rowed beneath.

Three men sat conversing in low tones on the bank of the stream just above this bridge.

“And I tell ye, blockheads, that we can lie flat upon our bellies on a raft and I can guide it beneath the bridge, thence to the grove. Do ye expect such generous pay without risk?”

The speaker was Galbus, who had undertaken to carry out the plans of Donatus. The three men composed a crew whose faces indicated their readiness to coöperate in all deeds, not excluding murder if needs be, suffice it they received reward. Planks that had been brought for the purpose, were hastily lashed together on long poles. A flooring of newly cut branches was made. The crew embarked, lying upon this raft, which slowly drifted with the mild current. Galbus steered it by means of a hastily improvised oar. To the casual observer, this craft would have appeared to be a mass of driftwood being borne onward by the flowing water. A plan of the grounds had been furnished to Donatus by a spy, and it was by means of this that Galbus eventually guided the raft, after it had come from

under the arch, toward the bank where pine, cypress and oak trees formed a grove. Fortune favoured the crew, for they succeeded in finding a spot on the bank where the branches of a willow tree extended over the water. They moored their craft, quickly climbed the bank, and put their heads together. Galbus gave his final instructions.

“Move quietly. Creep thus!” They moved forward in the direction of one of the pathways which led from the portico of the villa.

Voices were heard. Galbus crawled on his stomach, his companions following him.

Decia and Aegea were engaged in earnest conversation and were walking in the direction of the stream.

“Remember,” said Galbus, “no blood! Ye two, clap this bag over the head of the older woman. I’ll take the girl. Now, quietly, forward! Do not attack until I give the signal,—then act quickly!”

Decia and Aegea, seated on the bank, did not dream of their peril. The nurse was much interested in the various details of the life of Artus as told by her companions.

Suddenly, and without the slightest warning, Aegea saw blackness before her. She felt her throat clasped in a strong clutch. A piece of rope was wound about her face, her jaws were forced open, and a terrible pressure prevented utterance of a single sound. She then felt the rope twisted about her hands and encircle her waist, thence to her ankles which were also bound. Then she felt a blow, and lost consciousness.

The experience of Decia was similar to that of her companion, save that a piece of foul cloth had

been forced into her mouth. The last thing she saw before blackness enveloped her, was Aegea in the grasp of two men. Galbus lifted Decia in his strong arms and moved forward on his knees toward the raft. They left Aegea where she had fallen. Cautiously the evil crew embarked, with Decia in the middle of the raft, which Galbus had covered with leaves and boughs. It proceeded on its journey, passing through the grounds of Decius until it reached the bridge at the other boundary. Galbus grasped his oar and steered the craft through the arch. One thing, however, consoled Decia. By her father's orders, she never moved a step without having concealed about her a tiny jeweled dagger set with gems and encased in a sheath of carved ivory.

"Father," she murmured to herself, "I will die rather than live to be other than thou wouldst have me!"

Several hundred paces below the bridge Galbus steered the raft toward the bank and they landed. He lifted his burden in his arms, and, followed by his companions, entered a thick growth of bushes.

CHAPTER XL

It was past the tenth hour. The handmaidens of Decia, aware of the expected arrival of Decius from Rome, went forth to seek her at the stream. Not seeing her they called, and receiving no reply, scattered, and went to the bank at different points. Felicia came upon the form of Aegea and screamed. Her companions joined her and some ran for help. The old Thracian, who had been dozing on a marble seat at the main driveway, was the first to come upon the scene. Quickly he unbound Aegea, amidst screams of terror. The *villicus* was summoned. They placed Aegea upon a marble bench beneath the protecting branches of a tree. They dashed water on her face and she regained consciousness only to faint again. They continued to work over her, bathing her forehead with cool water, and clapping her hands. Their efforts were rewarded, and as she opened her eyes she shrieked:

“Decia, Decia! Where is Decia?” They did not know!

The truth began to dawn on Aegea. Upon hearing her story the *villicus* ran hurriedly from the scene toward the *rustica*, where he summoned those of the slaves who were on the grounds.

The thoughts of Aegea reverted to Decia. She could see in her mind's eye the face of Decius when

he heard the terrible news,—Decius, not as she had last seen him this day, with all the power of a senator of Rome, but as a stricken father who had lost his child.

At that moment the sounds of heavy footsteps were heard along the pathway. Decius had returned.

“Why is the *villicus* not at the gate?” he questioned.

Then he observed the white faces of the startled gathering.

“What means all this? Where is Decia?”

Aegea became hysterical. She could not speak. Several times she attempted to control herself, but each time failed. None about was able to speak.

“Speak,” shouted Decius, “are ye dumb? Where’s Decia?”

The old Thracian in a trembling voice told what had transpired.

Decius drew his fingers through his hair and his face turned livid.

“Aegea, where is my child?”

Summoning her strength, she told him all as he grasped her wrist in his strong hand almost crunching her bones, his chest heaving and his face becoming alternately pale and livid.

Then he sprang from her, discarding his light *paenula*, and rending his toga into strips because it impeded his progress as he ran toward the stream, roaring,—even as a Gaetulian lion, when robbed of his mate—and shouting:

“Decia, Decia!”

In a straight line he ran, bounding over marble benches, crunching the choice flowers in the garden,

conquering everything that lay in a pathway leading straight to that fatal stream. His voice echoed from the distance in a veritable roar. The handmaidens and other domestics gathered about the weeping form of Aegea, were speechless in the tension of the moment. The silence, however, was broken by one of the handmaids who shrieked. Women joined their cries to hers and some fainted as the voice of the grief-stricken father was borne to them. The slaves, with signs of lamentation and distress, began to gather near the portico whither they had been summoned by the *villicus*. Men looked at each other hopelessly.

A Gallic slave, huge and bearlike, struck his breast with clenched hand, his mouth open and his eyes staring wildly about him! It was as though this happy villa had suddenly been stricken by a blast of doom! With blanched faces they herded together, the women clinging to each other, the children crying from unknown fright. Men grasped hands in fear awaiting the return of their master with his new-born grief; and return to them he did, though not as he had left, terror-stricken, as a man condemned by great calamity thrust thus suddenly upon him, but rather as the master and one who would not tolerate disobedience! His eyes were blood-shot. He walked with firm tread. The line of his mouth was straight and hard. He looked the personification of determined vengeance. Vengeance on whom? On the very gods themselves, if needs be! Had he not but these few moments past at the stream, called upon the deities, pleadingly? Then had he not cursed them because no

answering cry had come to his hoarse shout of "Decia!"

The *familia*, gathered there before him as a trembling herd, waited—for they knew not what! Speechless they stood, as Decius strode toward them and said hoarsely:

"Have every man, woman and child assemble here!"

With folded arms he awaited the carrying out of his orders. Then he walked among the crowd, gazing now into the face of this one, now of that, as if striving to discover an enemy in the throng. The slaves to whom he had given holiday were now returning, for soon the sun would sink beneath the horizon.

They stood before him, none daring to breathe a sound. A slave-woman pressed her hands over her mouth to smother a shriek. A very aged freed-woman whose few strands of white hair caressed a thousand wrinkles,—a former slave to whom Decius had granted freedom to honour her few remaining days,—groped her way toward him. She had been led into the crowd for she was blind, and her sightless eyes were wide open in their sunken sockets. With bony arms extended, she now proceeded toward him, guided by the sounds from his heaving chest. Yet Decius, who had never before failed to grant her a kind word, looked at her this moment without the slightest spark of interest and as though he had not heard her weak cry of "Domine!" Then she seated herself on the ground before him, and comprehending naught, but guided by intuition, reasoned that he of whom she had never ceased to

think save as a beloved master, had become displeased with her, and from her lustreless eyes rolled tears! At last he spoke.

“Ye know,” he said sternly, “the calamity. If any among ye know aught of the crime speak, I command!”

One woman started to run screaming from the spot. Decius sprang after her and grasping her arm none too gently, dragged her back into the crowd. As though this was but a passing incident he resumed his place before them. He rolled his tongue in his mouth as though to loosen it and continued:

“By all the tortures of Cerberus and Hecate, I vow I’ll tear the flesh from thy bodies piece by piece, if I find not my child! Some of ye were here on these grounds with her. She did not pass the *villicus* at the gate. Therefore some among ye must have knowledge of this crime. Speak, ere I tear tongues from mouths to loosen them!”

He dug his nails into the flesh of his clenched hands. The women were now too terror stricken to scream or weep. The men were equally speechless. He strode among them, turning those about who feared to meet his glances. He saw naught but looks of terror and helplessness,—mayhap he saw their innocence, for he covered his eyes with his arm. None moved. He spoke again. His voice was now soft as a woman’s.

“If there are any among ye whom I have wronged,—and perchance there are, for I am thy *domine* and may have caused ye pain, though I use not the lash as do other Romans,—then have ye in these past moments repaid me a thousandfold. I know that the chains of slavery cut into the soul.

Who knows it better now than I,—I, who at sunrise was a master, am now a slave of grief!”

The aged freedwoman in her blindness groped until she felt a piece of tattered toga that still clung to his tunic, and she pressed it to her colourless lips!

A great wail of grief now rose on the air. Some women fainted in their emotion, which had changed from fear to sorrow. Strong men, whose half nude bodies displayed great strength, covered their faces and some wept! All,—all felt powerless, too powerless for words, though all indeed were innocent.

At last a huge Dacian slave stepped forward from the throng. He held in his hand a heavy piece of wood. Decius looked at him.

“Lord,” he said, brokenly, “though slaves, we are not beasts. Rend not our hearts with the grief we share with thee. If thou wouldst make us suffer in our innocence, then rend our flesh with this, yet cut not our hearts with thy grief laden words; though slaves, we are not beasts!”

Stripping his *exomis* to the waist, he knelt with bowed head, his naked back to Decius, the wood extended backward toward the master’s hands,—knelt, waiting for the blows to descend! Decius turned his back to them. He covered his face with his arms, and all they heard from him was a deep groan as though from a broken heart, for in his grief he seemed to have a premonition that all his efforts to recover his child would be futile.

CHAPTER XLI

Glaccus at the *rustica*, his mind engrossed in thoughts of his disappointment, was aroused from his reveries by the shouts of slaves.

“Come all! come all!”

In a spirit of curiosity he walked slowly toward one of the deep-voiced criers.

“What mean thy words?” he cried.

“The *domine* calls all men, women and children. Thou, too, hadst better come,” was the brief information vouchsafed by the slave who proceeded on his way, continuing his summoning cry.

Glaccus arrived near the portico in time to hear the words of Decius, whose voice he had hardly recognized. The ex-gadiator pushed his way into the crowd, his brain refusing to comprehend the meaning of the words he heard. He said to a slave who stood next to him:

“What is it all about? Who speaks?”

“Hast thou not listened?” was the reply, “the gentle *domina* has strangely disappeared. The master thinks his slaves have had a hand in it, we who love her! Jupiter, save the man his reason!”

The face of Glaccus became horror-stricken in its expression, his jaw dropped and he clinched his hands nervously. The slave shook him.

“What ails thee, man? Thou art no slave to fear punishment!” but if Glaccus heard him he made

no reply. He stood there transfixed. Thoughts that Decia had wronged him did not enter his mind. He gave a mighty groan, then dashed madly into the crowd bowling them right and left in his efforts to see—to see something! He saw the back of Decius, for the senator had ceased speaking, and was now passing his hands through his locks as if striving to collect his thoughts.

The heart of Glaccus ached to tell Decius that he, a gladiator, loved that daughter, had kissed her hand, had heard gentle words from her lips. Then he hated himself for the deceit. The sight of Glaccus seemed to bring Decius to his senses.

“Quick, to Artus! Gods hold back the hours!”

Glaccus started for the stables, but Decius called after him:

“Stay, stay, I cannot trouble him,—no—not—not this day.”

Then to himself he muttered, “Thus grief keep step with grief!”

Helplessly he walked up and down in the garden fronting his portico. Glaccus followed him.

“No, tempt me not,” continued Decius. “On the morrow,—for this day he——” said Decius weakly, cutting short his speech.

Aegea, however, had heard the voice of Glaccus and she arose and came toward him.

“My poor Aegea,” said Glaccus, as he noticed the reddened skin about her mouth. He grasped her arms.

“Do I dream, is this some nightmare?”

“Glaccus,” she said weakly, “mind not Decius, but fly, fly to Artus!”

Glaccus ran to the stables. None stopped him

and soon he was riding madly along the Appian Way attired in his single tunic, his knees pressed deep into the flanks of his mount, nor did he draw rein until he had reached the Porta Capena, which he was fortunate in doing before the gates were closed. There he inquired for the house of the Praetor Artus, and having been told that it stood in the Janiculum, dismounted and ran madly through the streets. Pedestrians attempted to stop him and some pursued him thinking he was a madman. He succeeded, however, in finding the "insula" of Artus. The *ostiarius* opened the door, and seeing the dust-begrimed youth with heaving chest and a wild look in his eyes, said gruffly:

"What wouldst thou here? Begone!"

"Thy master,—quick!" panted Glaccus.

"My master left strictest orders not to be disturbed."

"Yet I come from Aegea," said Glaccus, as in a semi-daze, he drew the back of his hand across his forehead.

"And who may 'Aegea' be!" laughed the *ostiarius*.

This was too much for the heated blood of Glaccus, who forcibly threw the slave against the wall of the vestibule and ran into the atrium shouting, "Artus! Artus!"

He then rushed to the *peristyle*, followed by the *ostiarius*, who was loudly shouting for help. Seated on a marble bench with Eurycele, Artus was seeking consolation at this moment of his sorrow—his sorrow of having been compelled to sentence his own son! Eurycele was saying:

"Brutus did the same, my lord. Did not Brutus in the Forum, perform a harder task? He ordered

the axeman to sever the heads of his own sons! Thou art no less a Roman than he was! Such things must be, and too, 'twill make a man of Bassus, who sorely needed some such severe lesson,—and think, thou hast but sentenced him to happiness,—to marry a gentle girl who worships him! Forget the grief which grows such good fruit. All Rome will love thee more, nor value thee less highly for it.”

“Yet think, Eurycele, think that he struck her! O, that a limb of mine should be thus cowardly! With that blow, Eurycele, he stunned my heart!”

“But, dearest, the blow was not struck with purpose to injure her!—’twas delivered in excitement and thoughtlessness,—the youth, while——”

At this moment Artus heard the commotion in the atrium and arose in a rage. Glaccus burst into the *peristyle* pursued by the *ostiarius* and other members of the household.

“Glaccus, is this the way to break unbidden into my presence?” he asked sternly.

“Decia has been stolen! Aegea sent me to thee! Give me drink!” said the youth as he fell, his tongue hanging from his mouth, his chest heaving from the strain. A slave brought cool water mixed with a little wine. He also bathed the face, head and feet of Glaccus.

“Eurycele, hast thou heard?” said Artus hastily.

This stern Roman who was known for his habitual self-possession was now in a fever of uncontrolled excitement. He knelt to the ground and lifted Glaccus, supporting his head, and said:

“Glaccus, tell me quickly. Glaccus, hold thyself for the debt thou owest the father!”

Shortly afterwards Artus and Glaccus ran through

the Porta Capena. Although it was past sundown the gates were always opened for those who desired to leave the city. Horses were secured and they rode madly along the Via Appia, skillfully guiding their steeds between all obstructions. By a strange trick of fate, although unknown to them, they passed a covered fruit-wagon containing Decia.

Galbus, the driver, smiled as they rode past, for he had recognized Artus. The riders were walking their horses to give the beasts a brief breathing spell. Galbus laughed long and loudly.

"Ye had better hasten to keep her from riding thus in triumph to Rome!" he said.

Artus and Glaccus did not draw rein until they reached the short road leading to the villa. Artus vaulted lightly from his horse even before the beast had stopped and was closely followed by Glaccus, who already took consolation and hope from having this remarkable man on the scene.

Hastily they ran up the road, past the *villicus*.

Night had come and lamps, flaming torches, and lanterns already illumined the grounds about the portico of the villa. They found Decius pacing up and down. He had recovered himself during the absence of Glaccus, had sent couriers in all directions to friends and clients in Rome and along the great roadways, spreading the alarm for he had again become a man of action.

He was surprised to see Artus walking along the pathway.

"Mercury, who sent my message to thee be praised! A friend is a second self and thou art the one man I hungered for in my grief. Hast thou stilled thine own to comfort mine?"

“Decius, my grief takes second place beside thine and yet—and yet, methinks thou dost grossly exaggerate the danger!”

“What cold words are these? Man, what dost thou mean?”

“Patience, Decius,” said Artus coldly, “and hear me. Canst thou not discern it? Thou art a man of wealth,—much wealth,—therefore some villains, coveting thy money, have taken thy child to hold for ransom.”

“Forgive me, Artus! already thou hast given me some food for hope!”

“Hear me further, Decius. Thou hast pursued the wrong course of action, for I doubt not that even now thy messengers speed throughout all Rome giving the alarm. Why didst thou not wait until the morrow?”

“Wait until the morrow and my lamb not here?” said Decius, as he started to pace anew up and down the garden fronting the portico.

“On the morrow I said, Decius. Wouldst thou frighten the rogues? On the morrow I say,—or mayhap the next day,—thou’lt receive a tablet. Pay the price. Thou canst well afford it!”

“Dost—dost thou think thus?” said Decius as an expression of hope illumined his countenance.

“Decius, hast thou not heard that ’tis not long since the little child of Lentilus,—a man thou knowest but slightly,—was returned to him upon the payment of ten thousand sesterces?”

“No, I did not hear it, and methinks ’tis not long since I saw the man in quiet contentment.”

“Aye, and thus can Lentilus shame thee at thy fright. When men need money they do not stop

at scruples. Let them have it. Meanwhile we will walk to the spot whence she was taken."

"Artus, thou hast given me courage already. Aegea was roughly used. I warrant, however, that the villains know better than to harm my child."

"Right, Decius, right. Well they know thou wouldst not pay for damaged goods!"

In the darkness Decius did not observe that under the terrible strain the face of Artus had become ashen, nor did he hear the whispered words of the praetor:

"Jupiter forgive these necessary lies!"

They proceeded to the stream, slaves lighting the way with flaming torches and lanterns.

When they had arrived at the bank of the stream, Artus took a lantern and peered close to the ground, examining the close cut grass. He continued his search even to the edge of the water. As he climbed the bank again he was rewarded by seeing something bright glistening in the light of his lantern. He picked the object from the ground and thrust it into his tunic. He walked away from Decius and then drew the object forth and examined it. He gave vent to a sigh of relief, for though it was a knife, he observed that the blade was not blood stained!

"Look, Decius," he shouted, "a fool has dropped his weapon! The blade is clean."

With trembling hands Decius took it from him and said, excitedly: "Her precious blood at least is safe!"

"Bah," laughed Artus, "'Twas but to frighten her. I doubt not that ere I leave on the morrow thy money-chest will be lighter. Thou knowest

the property of others is always more inviting than our own!"

"And I would give all my money to see her, Artus, for a single moment before then. Yet know that as my blessed lamb entered the *rheda*, she unfortunately, in the excitement of the occasion, placed her left foot foremost!"

"Bah!" said Artus, "thou art becoming superstitious as a woman!"

They returned to the portico and Artus said:

"Take me to Aegea, then go and rest thyself."

"Thou art a friend sent by the gods themselves!" said Decius.

They entered the room in which Aegea was reclining. When Decius had left Artus said:

"Good Aegea, I regret thy experience. Calamity has indeed visited this place!"

The pale face of his auditor bore an expression of deep despair.

"Oh, how terrible it is!" she answered.

"It is indeed most serious," whispered Artus, "yet make light of it to Decius whom I told that his child is doubtless held for ransom. I do not think thus. Yet desperate maladies require desperate remedies. We must save the man his reason. Send for Glaccus."

Aegea summoned a slave whom she instructed to find the youth, and Glaccus entered soon afterwards.

"Glaccus," said Artus, "dost thou see this knife?"

He drew from the folds of his tunic the weapon he had picked up at the stream.

"Aye," replied the youth, "'tis a sailor's weapon, —I have seen a hundred such in the wine-shops near the Tiber."

“Yet none so valuable as this, Glaccus, for it is our only clue. ’Twas dropped at the stream. Begrime thyself with dirt, and take on a character that will enable thee to visit those places without suspicion. Alas; my scar bars me, else would I go—yet thou canst do the work. Here is a purse, but keep it hidden. Go through those wine-shops, mingle with the crowds, drink, curse, shout, be one of them. Conviviality reveals secrets, and if I judge not wrong, soon thou’lt discover some rogue whose bulging purse fits not his trade. Join the murderous crew and bring Decius his child!”

The face of Glaccus brightened. Aegea arose from her couch.

“I pray the gods to lead me to her!” said Glaccus.

Artus walked close to him and placed his hand upon the shoulder of the youth.

“Thou canst have my praetorship if success attends thee! Now fly!”

Glaccus quickly embraced Aegea, an action which did not escape the eagle eye of Artus. The youth quickly sped to the stables and soon the sound of galloping hoofs were heard as he tore madly along the short road leading to the Via Appia.

CHAPTER XLII

Donatus and Mecinia were seated in the atrium, engaged in earnest conversation.

"Ere now we should have heard some word from Galbus!" said Donatus, as he arose and paced up and down.

"Calm thyself, Donatus, thou dost quite upset me with thy impatience. Thou knowest that even if he fails there is no evidence against thee."

"Aye, Fortunæ, but this very day Artus took the praetorship. My enemies thus multiply. O, but they will pay for it, by Mars the Avenger! if Galbus succeeds!"

At that moment a step was heard in the vestibule. Galbus entered, and said in a low voice:

"All went well. I have the girl safe with old Calpurnia."

In subdued tones he told the details of the abduction.

"'Twas ably done," said Donatus, "yet, Galbus, do not forget to make thy friends take a long journey."

Galbus smiled evilly as he replied:

"On the morrow they will get their reward."

"And for it, Galbus, thou shalt live in comfort when I reward thee," but Donatus added to himself, "with a knife in thy heart!"

Then he smiled and said aloud:

“Come to me on the morrow. This night I will see ‘the bird.’” Galbus made his exit.

“Didst thou hear, Fortunæ? A good beginning ensures a good ending,” said Donatus, as he put his hands tremblingly on the arm of Mecinia, “A clever man is that,—aye, too clever!”

“Watch him closely, Donatus.”

“Fear not, Fortunæ, for I seal his lips with bounties. Thou knowest ‘where the carrion lies, there fly the vultures.’”

“And what dost thou intend to do with her?” inquired Fortunæ.

“I have not thought upon it; yet I must visit her this night to see if Galbus tells the truth.”

He ordered his litter and covering himself with a dark Gallic cloak with a hood, was carried in the direction of the Forum Boarium and close to the Tiber, where he alighted and ordered the *lecticarii* to await him. He continued the remainder of his journey alone and soon arrived at an alleyway near the wharves. A single light shining before the entrance to a dilapidated structure was his only guide, and it was likewise a signal. He reached a rough door against which he kicked thrice. An answering signal came from within.

“Who comes?” cried a screechy voice in a high key.

“The friend of Galbus,” was the reply of Donatus.

“What is thy will?” he heard from the interior.

“To see a bird whose wings are clipped.”

Chains rattled and a bolt was drawn. Donatus entered. An old woman, whose hair hung in knotted and unkempt strands, stood before him. A lantern

which she held faintly illuminated the dim interior. Keeping his face well muffled in his hood, Donatus said:

“Quick, where is the bird? I warn thee no harm must come to her, dost hear? Take this.”

He pressed a gold piece into the hand of the old woman, who kissed the coin before she buried it in the rags which covered her. She led him to a room at the end of a passageway. There, as she unlocked a door and held the lantern on high, Donatus beheld within the foul room the weeping figure of Decia lying on a bed of straw. He left immediately. When he had departed the old hag returned to the room where Decia lay and laughed harshly as she rubbed her bony hands together.

Decia turned her head and beheld the old woman, the rays of whose lantern served to bring out in sharpest accents the cruel lines of her face. As the lips of the old hag parted one of her teeth protruded prominently, glistening as a white fang.

The face of Decia was now pale as the lilies of Hebron, and her locks of golden hair were now in tangles. Approaching closely the old woman shook her fist in the face of the prisoner, muttering:

“’Twas such as thou and thy patrician breed, curse ye, that killed my boy, my poor boy,—and now they leave one of thy kind in my hands and think I will let ye escape! He! he! I guess not, else let Jove hurl me into Hades! I have ye in my cage, my pretty bird! Ha!”

She looked gloatingly over Decia and suddenly a new thought entered her mind.

“Get up! Dost think thou canst lie there in such comfort?”

She shook her bony fist in the face of the maiden, who arose, her beautiful eyes now flashing in anger.

“Come with me,” said the old woman.

Decia followed her, looking about, as if studying some possible means of escape. The old hag dug her long nails into the arm of Decia and forced the maiden the length of the narrow hall which divided the ground floor of the structure into several apartments. The old woman opened a door leading to a dark cellar. She pushed Decia, who, as she stumbled down a short flight of steps, heard the door above her close, and the sound of a hammer at the top of the steps. Hope had almost fled, but as she felt the handle of her jewelled dagger she gained courage and murmured:

“Thanks, father, thanks, for this blessed gift! It can free me from the tortures!” for already her throat had become parched and a weakness was stealing over her due to hunger.

CHAPTER XLIII

When Glaccus reached Rome the gates of the Porta Capena were closed and would remain so until sunrise. From his experiences as a boy, however, he knew that there were ways and means of gaining entrance to the city at night, and cautiously he followed the walls until he found a spot that he remembered. With great difficulty he eventually managed to enter the city. Closely hugging the walls, wherever possible, he proceeded to the region of the Circus Maximus, passed through the Forum Boarium and arrived near the Tiber. There he entered one of the taverns by a rear door, and saw a number of rough men in the room. Assuming a drunken expression he leaned against the wall, from which point of vantage he surveyed the occupants. He threw a coin upon a table and called for "*lora!*" When the wine was brought to him he overturned it as if by accident and shouted:

"Curses—on my luck,—my last coin!"

He then looked about him pleadingly, as if begging for a drink. No invitations, however, were extended to him and he reasoned:

"They could not raise an *as* between them all!"

He staggered through the doorway still cursing loudly. He then visited the next *taberna* and again spilled his wine. The occupants, however, did not display the slightest interest in his actions. They

were a crowd of low browed denizens of the quarter.

“Poorer than the last!” he said as he proceeded on his way. He had repeated this performance perhaps a dozen times and nothing had developed to give him the slightest hope. He was about to give up the task for the night when he observed a flickering light further down the thoroughfare.

He hoped it was some place where he could pass the remainder of the night, for the air was chilly and he was overcome with fatigue. As he approached this tavern, he observed that it was one which evidently enjoyed more patronage than the rest. The host was about to close for the night, notwithstanding the protestations of several occupants who preferred the warm, though foul-smelling interior to the night damp. Glaccus entered, however. The host looked angrily at him.

“By Pollux!” said Glaccus, “must a man go parched because thou—hic—art lazy as Marius’s mule? Here’s thy pay. *Lora,—bring lora!*”

Seeing the coin, the host brought a jug of wine from which he poured some of the contents into a filthy earthen cup. Glaccus spilled it as if by accident, and cursed roundly.

“Curses on my luck, and on thee, clumsy water-seller! My last—hic—coin! Damn all patricians and everything that reeks of money! I am—done!”

One of the occupants laughed.

“No, thou shalt not go parched! I like the courage of thy speech and will pay for it!”

Glaccus turned around with a roll and throwing his arms firmly about the neck of the rough man who had spoken, said:

“Thou art a Cæsar in generosity!”

“Loosen thy hold! Gods! thou hast strength!” gasped the man.

Glaccus could scarce refrain from smiling with satisfaction. Here was his first hope, for this man owned a purse!

“Thy pardon,” he said drunkenly, “but—my heart bleeds,—thanks—hic—I was so—parched. Thou art a Cæsar!”

“Nay, my name is Priamus,” said the man.

“That art—a Cæsar—in generosity! I was—so—parched!”

“Methinks thy belly then absorbed all the moisture of the wine,” laughed the man, for Glaccus had tasted of the contents of several cups for the purpose of ladening his breath with the fumes of wines to carry out the deception of apparent intoxication.

“How great—a sum—hic—is a *sesterce*,” continued Glaccus, “when a—hic—man’s purse is flat! The *lora* has made a new man of me, yet—hic—friend,—good friend, hic—canst thou tell me,—O,—canst—thou tell me—hic—hic—how to—hic—fill my purse. I am desperate and I—see that—hic—thou hast plenty!”

He looked hungrily toward the purse which the man had opened to pay for the wine.

“I worked for it,” was the answer.

“Then canst thou—hic—get such work—hic—for me? I have not eaten—this entire day.”

“Host,” shouted the new friend of Glaccus, “bring food for my friend.”

The host responded to the order, and Glaccus was forced to partake of greasy beans and stale bread.

He ate all of it as if with great relish, stopping now and again to strike his new acquaintance on the back and to utter words of thanks.

“Gods!—hic—I am new in Rome! I come from—Can—hic—Candium! They—hic—told me one could find money in the gutters,—hic—yet I am starv—starv—starving here.”

The confidence of Glaccus appeared to please his new found friend mightily, and in appreciation the latter said:

“Have one more drink to the health of Priamus,—that’s my name,—I promise thee that if I meet thee again, I’ll buy thee better wine!”

At that moment a man entered. He was dirty and unkempt and a leer on his face gave to it an expression of certain villainy. He approached Glaccus:

“Is it thy habit to spill wine and cry poor?” he said.

The companion of Glaccus moved away from him. Glaccus cursed to hide his change of colour at the interruption.

“Who—hic—art thou, goat? Dost thou—hic—beg to share in the generosity—of my friend?” said Glaccus.

“Villain!” cried the stranger, “thou art a spy! Thy performance of spilling thy wine is a twin to that I saw thee do at the ‘Split Bullock’ this very night! A spy! Seize him!”

As he attempted to take hold of Glaccus the latter, accustomed to the use of the *cestus*, struck the intruder behind the ear. Rage had lent strength to the force of the blow, and the ex-gliadiator felled his man.

The host came forward.

"Peace!" he cried, "ye'll have the watch upon us!"

The adversary of Glaccus arose half dazed, still muttering: "Seize him! seize him!"

"Drunken—hic—fool!" said Glaccus, "wouldst thou feel—hic—my other arm?"

Priamus, the new found friend of Glaccus, looked puzzled, but he did not fail to note the strength displayed by the youth. The adversary of Glaccus, however, now maddened with hatred, advanced again threateningly.

"Spy," he hissed, "I'll stay thy arm!" and suddenly drawing a knife he aimed a thrust at the youth. The latter dodged it, however, and swinging his left arm, struck the man between the eyes. This ended the combat.

"Friend," said Priamus, "thou canst fight well, yet what mean his words? Come to the 'Split Bullock' with me and prove thy innocence, else I will show thee that I am more than a match for thee!"

"Aye,—hic—gladly," said Glaccus, "yet—hic—thou—art—unjust."

The other occupants of the room arose as if to follow, but Priamus said:

"This is my business," as he and Glaccus left the shop.

The youth thought quickly. He could not go to the "Split Bullock." This would disclose his guilt; therefore, as he crossed one of the narrow streets, he purposely slipped, and fell and lay there as if unconscious. Priamus looked puzzled.

"I take no chances," he murmured, as he turned upon his heel, quickly leaving Glaccus, who was soon surrounded by several inhabitants of the quarter.

From the corner of his eye Glaccus watched the

departure of Priamus, and when the man was out of hearing, said to the people surrounding him:

“Where is my friend?”

“Thy friend!” laughed one of the people.

“Aye!—where is he?”

“Gone to the house of Maecenas on the Esquiline!” said another and they all joined in the laughter.

Glaccus looked about him and spied Priamus turning a corner. Quickly he sped after him and the “generous stranger,” believing that his new found friend was still lying unconscious in the street, was not aware that he was being followed, as he proceeded in the direction of the “Split Bullock.”

Glaccus stood in the shadows nearby and heard Priamus curse as the landlord told of a youth “spilling wine.”

“The cursed spy! I’ll have his blood, the dog,—ingrate! May he rot in the realms of Hecate! I’ll have his blood!”

Priamus soon came into the street again and Glaccus took up the trail.

“Do the gods so favour me? Can this be one of the villains? He is a plebian, yet carries the purse of a patrician. Such a man could not earn that money by labour!”

As the man, now apparently sobered, walked through the streets, Glaccus, hugging the shadows as much as possible, followed him until he saw his quarry enter one of the tenements near the Forum Boarium.

Glaccus resolved to force his way into the place, which was evidently the man’s abode. On second thought, however, he decided to watch, and lying

in the shadow of a house on the other side of the narrow *vicus* waited there until dawn. He then resolved to seek Artus again for advice and further instructions and to report upon the discovery of this possible clue. It was the only result that rewarded all his efforts. With difficulty he managed to keep awake and proceeded to the Porta Capena, passing through which he obtained a mount and rode to the villa of Decius.

The *villicus* immediately despatched a slave to summon Artus.

“Glaccus,” said Artus harshly, “why didst thou return so soon?”

Glaccus told all that had transpired, and added:

“Alas! this was all I could gain and I have not rested for a moment since I left thee.”

“All, Glaccus? ’Tis enough indeed and was most ably done,—more than I did expect so soon. Didst thou say the man had much money?”

“His purse was well filled,” replied Glaccus, “and as I told thee, he said he would buy me better wine. Perchance he means,—some reward!”

“That man may be one of them. Do not lose the scent. It is our only hope; Glaccus, thou shalt watch that house. I will arrange it for thee. Disguise thyself again and keep thy eyes riveted to that house. I’ll give thee a dozen aids, likewise disguised, and instructed to obey thy every order. Have each man who leaves that house followed. This Priamus,—follow him thyself. I will go to Rome and thou canst summon me at any moment, for I will remain at my *insula* until I hear from thee. Fortune grant thee success! We will return to Rome at once. Canst thou stand the strain?”

Artus went immediately to Decius to whom he said:

“I must go at once to Rome. Follow later and leave word that thou canst be found at my house. Bear up, Decius, and join me without fail. We may be able to do some necessary work in Rome about this matter.”

Decius said: “As thou sayest, I will be there.”

“Remember, Decius,” said Artus, “that I have never failed thee.”

CHAPTER XLIV

When Artus and Glaccus arrived at the house of the former in the Janiculum, they completed their plans, and the youth received final instructions.

“Remember, Glaccus,” said Artus, “I will have a dozen men about that house. They will be dressed as plebians, and will travel in pairs ready to obey thee when thou dost cry ‘Mars!’ Thou wilt recognize them by their tunics which will be rent beneath the right arm. It is not necessary for thee to know these men. The name of ‘Mars’ and the rent tunics will be sufficient to identify them. Two will be detailed to follow thee closely.”

These and other details having been perfected, Glaccus now disguised as a huckster went to the tenement he had left shortly before dawn. He leaned against a wall on the opposite side of the *vicus* with a tray of sweetmeats before him and remained in the vicinity during almost the entire day, but it was not until near sundown that he was rewarded by the appearance of Priamus of the *tabernae*, who proceeded toward the Subura, Glaccus trailing him. The youth noted that he himself was in turn followed by two figures who were darkly cloaked. Priamus continued on his way until he arrived near the Servian walls in the region of the Circus Maximus. Noiselessly Glaccus followed Pri-

amus, whom he saw meet a hooded figure. He then heard a shriek,—the sound of the death agony, which he indeed recognized because he had so often heard it in the arena!

He had no use for dead men who could give no clues, so he followed the assassin, murmuring as he did so:

“Priamus has paid the price!”

He heard the sound of coarse laughter from the figure which he now followed in the night, closely hugging the shadows.

“Now for this murderer! He is my only hope!” said Glaccus.

Galbus, the freedman of Donatus,—for it was he,—walked hastily toward the Forum Boarium, Glaccus still trailing him. Eventually he saw the man stop before a dilapidated looking structure near the Tiber, lighted by a single lamp over the doorway. He heard bolts drawn and saw the man enter. The door closed again, then all was silent. Stealthily Glaccus crept to the door against which he pressed his ears, but heard no sound. He observed two figures approaching. He grasped his knife and his heart beat faster as he pondered over the possible identity of these two newcomers, and then he smiled, for he remembered that they were friends. When they approached he said “Mars.” They answered him with the same word.

“Let me see thy tunics,” said Glaccus.

“They are rent beneath the arm,” was the reply.

Glaccus whispered his instructions to them.

“Thou,” he said to one of them, “shalt watch this door!” To the other he whispered: “Stay near me; yet do not come until I call for help!”

He then returned to the entrance of the house through which the murderer had passed, but just as he heard the bolts drawn again, a man came into the street. Glaccus suddenly threw himself upon the ground, singing in drunken accents. The man laughed and as he passed gave Glaccus a none too gentle kick. The youth gave vent to a howl, but this was for the purpose of attracting the attention of the man he had detailed to follow any one who should perchance come from the interior.

He then summoned the other man to whom he said:

“I must enter. Thy companion follows a murderer!”

His auditor advised summoning confederates in the neighborhood, but the youth feared loss of time.

“Wait there in the shadows. I’ll knock and beg shelter. I must see beyond yonder doorway!”

Glaccus rapped on the door. Thinking possibly that it was Galbus who had returned, the old hag drew the bolts and partly opened the door, between which and the threshold Glaccus placed his foot.

“Who art thou to thus disturb poor people in the night?” she said to him.

“Canst thou give me shelter?” said Glaccus plaintively.

“Out with thee, villain!” retorted the hag, as she attempted to close the door. Glaccus forced it open, however, and clutched her throat. He was joined by his confederate who had come from the shadows. They gagged and bound her, and left her lying in a corner. They visited each of the rooms, holding their daggers exposed and ready for instant use. No sound disturbed the silence. The rooms were

deserted. In disappointment, Glaccus had decided to torture the old woman to see if he could learn anything from her, when suddenly they heard a muffled cry almost at their elbow. Their faces blanched, and the companion of Glaccus muttered a prayer to the gods for protection. This deserted house of mysteries in care of an old hag, who would have made a most excellent model for a witch, gave forth sounds from the dead! Glaccus grasped the arm of his companion and said: "Fool, 'tis a human cry!"

As he turned he observed what appeared to be a wooden partition. With a piece of furniture he broke it down. A flight of wooden steps was disclosed. Firmly grasping his dagger in one hand and holding the lantern high in the other, he started cautiously to descend. The sight that met his eyes caused a cry of joy to escape from him. Then his blood froze in his veins. The light from his lantern penetrated to the distant parts of the room and he saw a figure robed in white! The rays reflected from shining steel and as his eyes became accustomed to the disappearing gloom, he observed that it was a dagger held to the breast of a maiden.

It was Decia! She spoke calmly.

"I know thee, Glaccus, thou evil man! 'Twas thou who stole me from my father who saved thee! I will foil thee thus, if thou darest to move!"

Her white hand firmly grasped the dagger. The face of Glaccus changed colour.

"Decia! Decia!" was all he was able to whisper. His puzzled companion on the steps above stared first at the maiden and then at Glaccus. The face of the latter flushed with rage, as he thought:

“She thinks this thing of me! She thinks I have stolen her!”

“Listen,” he said firmly, “save thy accusations until another time. We have come to save thee,—to return thee to thy father.”

“Nay,” she replied, “ye shall not trick me thus to dishonour me! Move not, else I will force this dagger into my heart!”

“Decia,” said Glaccus hoarsely, not daring to move, “Decia, thou canst not believe this thing of me!”

Beads of perspiration now stood upon his forehead.

“Move not,” said Decia. “Sooner will I—die!”

“Decia, by all the gods of heaven, earth and hell, I vow that I have come to save thee!”

“Move not, beast and perjurer, move not!” she said, as her other hand moved to the dagger.

Glaccus drew his arm across his forehead and inwardly cursed himself for his gentleness to Mecinia in the grove. It was that which had first destroyed Decia’s faith in him! Decia stood immovable and ready to press her dagger into her heart.

Glaccus thought quickly, for he realized that immediate action was imperative. He told his companion to await him at the entrance. He then said in a voice calm and gentle, even such as he had used when he had spoken to her at the stream:

“Decia, hear the last words of Glaccus. The time has come for me to pay my debt of gratitude to thy father,—and to convince thee of my innocence. I cannot leave thee here. Thy abductors may return any moment. I cannot convince thee of my innocence whilst I live. Therefore I will now

slay myself with this blade if thou wilt promise that at my death thou wilt go with my companion to thy father who awaits thee with face tear-stained as a woman's."

He tore his tunic open, bared his chest and held his naked dagger to his heart. His companion, loathe to leave, had tarried near the opening at the top of the steps, and shouted:

"Madman! what art thou doing?"

"Silence," replied Glaccus, "and obey orders. The reward for finding her will be thine. Leave us."

His companion stepped backward and Glaccus continued:

"Decia, promise me and I will press this blade,—forgiving thee."

Decia screamed, "No! Thou art tricking me!" she said.

Glaccus raised his dagger to strike his breast, but Decia screamed and again shouted:

"No! no! stop!—I cannot,—cannot see it! O, gods! help me! what shall I do?"

"Decia, promise, and thou shalt have freedom and will save thy father's reason. Speak quickly for each moment is precious!"

She stood gazing at him as she endeavoured to discover if sincerity or subterfuge underlied his words. However, it seemed that she was powerless to decide. She believed,—when she heard the soft tones of his voice,—yet feared! What if her judgment should be wrong in trusting him! More than aught else in the world she feared the loss of that one thing her father had taught her to value above life itself. Had not her jewelled dagger which she now held as the one saviour of her purity, been

given to her for the protection it could perchance some time afford? Had the time come?

"Father!" she whispered brokenly, as she swayed. Glaccus broke the silence.

"Thou dost not believe me!" he said sadly, "then I will decide for thee. Farewell!"

He pressed his knife into his flesh. Decia shrieked. His companion on the steps above, however, had descended to him and grasped the arm of Glaccus at the first movement. This action prevented the knife from penetrating deeply. Decia dropped her jeweled dagger and sank to the floor in a swoon. The companion of Glaccus sprang toward her.

"Foolish maiden!" he said, "whose eyes cannot believe such evidence!"

He lifted her in his arms and mounted the steps. Glaccus was now lying there. His companion shook him, then lay Decia down.

"Come, man, come! hold thyself together!"

Glaccus was now bleeding freely from his wound, but managed to stagger to his feet, and leaning heavily on his companion, who had again taken Decia in his arms, followed along the hall leading to the street. In the excitement they had entirely forgotten the very existence of the old woman who lay bound and gagged in one of the rooms. When they reached the street the night air served to more fully revive Glaccus and he held the folds of his tunic to his wound to stay the flow of blood as he followed his companion through the "vicus." They secured a crude litter and this, containing Decia, who had been revived, followed by Glaccus, who was supported by his companion, soon passed into

the Forum Boarium. There they met some of the *nocturnal apparitores*, who secured another litter in which they placed Glaccus. The latter, before he had lost consciousness, cried:

“To the house of the Praetor Artus!”

CHAPTER XLV

Artus waited at his house during the entire morning, hoping for some message from Glaccus. Eventually he was rewarded by the appearance of one of the men who had been instructed to report to him during the day, and who said:

“Three people have come from the house thus far, all of whom are being followed. Our leader, however, still watches there.”

This was the only news that had been received previous to the arrival of Decius.

“Decius,” said Artus, “we will hear something this night,—I give thee my word on it!”

“What hast thou heard?” said Decius hoarsely as he sprang to his feet.

“Decius,—I cannot tell thee for I fear possible disappointment. Suffice it that all things possible are being done. Were I not scarred of face, I would not be here with thee! Each move is necessarily being made by strangers. Our presence would upset my most careful plans!”

“What strange words are these, that are already drying my tears with hope!” said Decius, brokenly.

“They are not strange, for I told thee that thou wouldst hear something this night,—or the next. Now my lips will be silent as a mummy’s upon this thing.”

He did not leave the senator, however, for a single moment, and thus the balance of the afternoon dragged wearily, as messenger after messenger arrived with no report of success in any direction. The evening came, and this in turn was succeeded by night. Ere the first vigil had passed, however, Decius, no longer able to restrain himself, arose tempestuously, interrupting the speech of Artus.

“Cease! cease! dost thou think, Artus, I can remain here inactive, listening to all things save that which concerns my child? By the gods, I want my ‘lamb’ and thou and Rome be damned until I get her,—or vengeance! My cloak! my cloak!”

Artus changed colour, arose, and walked slowly toward him.

“Decius,” he said, “I beg of thee to wait awhile. What couldst thou gain in the streets? Wait until the end of the next vigil and I will go forth with thee.”

“Wait! why wait? Why not now? I demand to know the locality of that place and I vow by Jupiter! that single handed, I will burn, torture, slay, and gain the information that in thy cruelty thou dost dare to withhold from me!”

He brought his great fist down upon a small table of cedarwood on goats’ feet of bronze, splitting it.

“Decius,” said Artus firmly, “thy manner is unmanly!”

“Unmanly, sayest thou? Now, by Hercules! I will not forgive thee, if thou hast made me waste a single precious moment in false hope!—Even now the second vigil is close at hand!”

Pale and calm, Artus walked to the end of the atrium, where he took from the wall his sword,—the sword he had worn when he had first met Decius at Philippi! Slowly he handed it to the senator. He held the weapon, handle foremost, toward Decius, who took it mechanically. Then Artus said gently:

“Thou canst slay me, Decius, for the grief I share with thee!”

Decius turned from him and held his disarranged toga before his eyes, but Artus placed his arm across the shoulder of the senator and said:

“Forgive me, Decius, I was wrong to answer thee, yet thou didst stab me with thy words.”

“Forgive thee?” queried the now surprised Decius as he turned, “I, forgive thee, I who thrust! Nay, bear with me, my Artus,—bear with me yet awhile.”

“And have I made complaint, O, Decius?” They clasped wrists.

The third vigil was close at hand when they were aroused by the sound of a loud voice in the *vestibulum* and the *ostiarius* rushed into the atrium stuttering in his excitement. He had been followed by the old Thracian slave of Decius, who had come unbidden to the “insula” of Artus, to be thus near the master, whom he worshipped. Tears were streaming down his aged cheeks, as he stood before Decius and in a voice almost a whisper, said: “Noble master!”

Decius, observing his emotion, and fearing possibly that the news he brought would be the worst that could possibly be borne to his ears in this life, quickly clapped his hands over the mouth of the slave, saying:

“Wait! wait! until I summon courage to hear thy words! O, great gods have mercy on me!”

Artus had rushed to the *vestibulum*, unable to bear the suspense. Meanwhile Decius had loosened his hold on the Thracian and said:

“Now speak quickly, does—does she live?”

“Alive and here, praised be the gods!” was the reply.

Decius heard a great shout of joy. It was the voice of Artus, who now rushed speedily in the atrium carrying in his arms a burden, covered by a cloak. Decius saw some golden curls peeping from beneath. With hasty strides he rushed forward, clasped the precious burden to his chest.

Eurycele had been aroused by the excitement and peeped into the atrium. She went to Artus and threw her arms about him and wept as if for joy, though hardly knowing why, for the recovery of the maiden had again brought into her life the woman who was her one and only rival! Artus, however, overcome with joy at the success of his plans, had but little time for Eurycele this moment. Meanwhile Decius had been caressing Decia even as her mother would have done had she been there to clasp her child to her bosom. Decia was now weeping softly, as a tired child.

Decius was calling her by a dozen endearing terms,—called upon the shade of his wife to witness the recovery of her child,—and vowed a hundred times that henceforth Decia must needs remain forever within his sight!

They had forgotten the chief combatant in this battle against the unknown. Glaccus remained at

the *vestibulum*, where his wound was being roughly bandaged by a slave.

Artus was gazing fondly at Decia and did not observe the questioning glances of Eurycele, who, with wavering steps, now left the atrium, nor was her absence noted, but in the privacy of her *cubiculum*, she sank upon a couch and murmured hoarsely:

“Fortunæ speaks the truth! Artus loves her!”

The praetor at this moment was standing before Decius and his child. His face was clouded as he listened to Decia.

“And thou sayest,” he queried, “that no harm was done to thee save by the old woman?”

“Aye, yet she blamed me and all patricians for the loss of her son,—a beast indeed, if like his mother!”

The brow of Artus wrinkled.

“No word of ransom!” he mused, “Then ’tis some enemy of Decius who aimed to strike his heart with a shot as excellent indeed as that of the Balearic archers!”

He then walked to the *vestibulum*, and led Glaccus into the atrium.

“Thy work was nobly done, Glaccus,” he said. “Thou shalt rest here with me this night, and on the morrow tell me the details. A slave will take thee to a *cubiculum*. Yet stay, first thou shalt hear the thanks of Decius. I doubt not that the maiden has already told thee hers.” But Glaccus replied:

“At this moment I would rather rest. I strove to repay my debt. No thanks are needed.”

“Yet, Glaccus, thou hast changed thy station from

that of debtor to creditor! On the morrow then thou shalt hear such thanks from a father as ne'er before was given in Rome! This, I promise thee, Glaccus, my friend."

They clasped hands. Glaccus smiled sadly as he followed a slave who led him to a *cubiculum* which adjoined the *peristyle*.

The strain was beginning to tell on the youth, and he whispered inaudibly:

"Aye, she has indeed told me her thanks! accused me of being a perpetrator of the crime! Yet I thank the gods that it was I that saved her!"

"Spread the news of my joy, Artus," said Decius, "and take measures to punish the ruffians."

"Alas, Decius! In the excitement, that part of it was neglected by those who served us. At this moment, too, Glaccus suffers from a wound. He now rests yonder in a *cubiculum*."

"Glaccus, sayest thou,—the young gladiator?" said Decius in astonishment. "How comes he into this matter?"

"Aye, Glaccus," replied Artus, "who has done his work ably, upon a single clue that I gave him! It was the knife we found at the stream that led us to Decia."

"Now by the gods, I know not what to say! Glaccus, suffering from wounds received while saving my child, though he had never seen her! How strange is life, for thus he repays me a thousand-fold,—yet stay, can it be, think you, Artus, that he could have had a hand in this to share a reward? While admitting his courage and service, I know naught of him save that he is a product of the glad-

iators' barracks,—and too, thou knowest, 'of much importance is early training.' ”

These thoughtless words of Decius, whose mind now dwelt upon the punishment of the guilty, served to convince Decia even more forcibly that the opinion she had formed of Glaccus was the correct one, nor had his dagger-play on the steps removed the impression. She reasoned that perchance he had been compelled to “rescue” her speedily, fearing that suspicion might fall on him.

“He is an evil man,” she thought, “who sought to make love to me and embraced another woman, whilst I, the daughter of Decius, awaited him!”

Artus was disappointed at the words of Decius.

“Thou dost surprise me, Decius! This is the first time I have ever seen thee unjust—or ungrateful!”

“Nay, mistake not my words, Artus,—yet I confess that I am all at sea, and too, am most surprised that he doth not show himself for thanks and the reward!”

“And that very fact, Decius, makes him more a man. And thou, too, Decia! Hast thou no word of praise for thy rescuer?”

“There were two of them,” she replied, “and father will reward them.”

“Thou art mistaken, Decia, there was but one, and that one, Glaccus. The other is a man I sent, together with a dozen of his kind, to scatter nearby and to aid Glaccus if called upon. To Glaccus goes the honour and reward, else will the justice of the new praetor be a thing at which all Rome can sneer.”

“Attach no importance to my hasty words, Artus,” said Decius, “I will be guided by thee.”

“Thou shalt indeed in this, if in no other thing henceforth. Justice prompts my words.”

“Artus, be not annoyed at me. Send the youth to me at once.”

“That I cannot. He is wounded, has not closed his eyes since the third day back, and I promised he shall rest undisturbed until the morrow.”

At that moment, however, a figure, bandaged at the chest, walked from the *fauces* behind Decius.

“Thou hast no need to send for me,” said Glaccus, as his eyes flashed. “The room I lay in was there behind thee and I was compelled to hear thy words. I seek no reward. I strove to partly repay my debt to thee. I am a free man,—no slave—and if it please the noble praetor Artus I will henceforth look to him for patronage.”

“My speech was hasty, Glaccus. I will reward thee. I am not such a man as pleads, Glaccus, yet I say I will do right by thee.”

“Yet,” said Glaccus, “I have heard thee plead, aye, even to thy slaves, when thy child was absent!”

At these words Artus interrupted.

“Silence, Glaccus! Retire to thy *cubiculum*. Forget not that thou art my guest!”

“If thou too, Praetor Artus, doth not believe in me, then I will be a guest this night at the gladiators’ barrack whence I come.”

“Nay, Glaccus,” said Artus, as he approached the youth, upon whose shoulder he placed his hand, “I do believe in thee, albeit thou didst neglect to cage a single guilty wretch, though thy companion said

that one was bound and gagged! On the morrow we will speak further of the matter."

"Aye, on the morrow, we will speak, yet never more of this. The senator can keep his reward. I did not work for that."

With these words, and head erect, Glaccus returned to the *cubiculum*.

"Gods!" said Decius when he left, "I like that youth and he shall have double the reward and aught else that pleases his fancy, but thou knowest he is young;—therefore I did not give way too much to him. Youth needs a master to control it. So be it, Artus, that thou sayest he 'snatched my lamb from the wolf,' I will believe I owe him the happiness of my future life. Send him to me early on the morrow."

"I'll try," said Artus calmly.

Artus despatched couriers to the villa and to friends in Rome. He then summoned Hercules, and accompanied by several other strong armed slaves, sallied forth, led by the companion of Glaccus who guided them in the direction of the hovel whence Decia had been rescued.

When they approached the *vicus*, however, they observed that a crowd had gathered. There was a fire which sent forth dense smoke from a row of houses.

"By Hercules!" said the companion of Glaccus, "one of those houses that burns is that from which we rescued her!"

Artus frowned. He was deeply disappointed.

"The villains have covered their trail. There is more in this than the mere stealing of a maiden.

O, Glaccus, thou didst complete but half thy work!" he mused.

When he arrived home again, he found Eurycele awaiting him. Tears were on her cheeks.

"O, my Artus, dost thou no longer love me?" she asked.

"Tears, Eurycele!" he said, "nay, this should be a house of joy! Come to my arms and tell me of thy new fancied trouble,—or is it perchance that thou hast taken the contagion of sadness in these past two days?"

Not knowing what to say, or how to tell the story of her fears, Eurycele remained silent, amidst the gentle caresses that Artus bestowed on her.

Decia reclined on the bed in the *cubiculum* striving to keep her eyes open. Not so Decius, who forgot this fact in his joy of the moment.

"And thou shalt tell me everything that happened," he said.

"O, dearest father, I am so tired. On the morrow we will talk of it, yet—yet, thou wouldst please me better by helping me forget the hours I was away from thee."

"Aye, thou art right, my lamb, yet I must tell thee this, that kind actions oft beget rewards beyond measure! I saved a bleeding thing from the sand of the arena. He has now saved thee for me. Who says that the gods see not our smallest actions? Know, that each hour thou wert absent thy blessed mother,—the gods guard her shade!—was with me in spirit. She, thou knowest, would weep if a fly fell into the wine. She was all tenderness and heart even as thou art, and—and has made me better."

"Nay, father, not as I am, not as I am," she said

as she started to weep. She thought of Glaccus, and his wound,—and of her harsh words which he had overheard.

“Cease, precious one, cease! no tears now, save tears of joy,—a thousand thousand joys, for Decius has his ‘lamb’ again!”

CHAPTER XLVI

Bassus walked thoughtfully through the Forum during the first vigil. Many of the shops were now deserted, but a number of people were on their way to resorts of pleasure in the Subura, there to spend their time carousing and drinking in the *tabernae* where they would be entertained by dancing girls.

He had just left the cozy little home that had been provided by Artus for him and Nydia. He could still feel her warm kiss on his lips. Her parting words: "Do not tarry long, my Bassus," still rang in his ears.

"She's a good little woman!" he thought, "aye, treats me gently, yet this life is most tiresome. I am worse than a slave! I dare not breathe for fear it be against the orders of my father! My money allowance, too, is not generous."

Eventually he arrived at the house of Donatus, who received him cordially.

"Welcome, Bassus! yet why thus serious? Has not Fortune smiled on thee? Art thou not happy in thy home with the gentle wife of thy bosom?"

"Aye, that's the trouble, Donatus, she is too gentle! yet I would not see a gold piece were it not for Nydia. My father holds me to each sesterce."

Suddenly his face brightened and he approached Donatus, into whose ears he whispered:

"Hast thou the girl safe? When—can I see her?"

Donatus smiled disgustedly.

“Bide thy time, Bassus. Thou art not aged yet! Wouldst thou have wine? The *atrinensis* will see that thou art served. I must speak to Fortunæ upon important business.”

Mecinia entered.

“Art thou satisfied, Donatus, that things go so well?”

“Aye, beautiful one, yet all Rome is roused. I dare not dream of the result of discovery.”

“Donatus, thou dost tire me,—yet what dost thou propose to do with the girl? Why not slay her and have done with it? Surely thou dost not intend to give her to yonder dog.”

She looked in the direction in which Bassus had gone.

“Not—not yet, but who knows, perchance some day I will fasten this crime upon him and thus split for all time the friendship of the damned Decius and the prowling praetor Artus. Thou knowest, Fortunæ,” he continued, with an evil smile, “men love not the fathers of sons when the latter rape the beloved daughters of——”

“And dost thou so intend,—with Bassus?” queried Fortunæ.

Donatus laughed.

“Fortunæ, it would be no mean jest to make Bassus commit a crime that will send Decius back his child with a most different character to that she owned when he had last seen her!”

At that moment Galbus rushed into the atrium, his garments awry, his face pale. Bassus at this moment entered with a half emptied goblet in his hand which trembled visibly.

“Donatus,” said Galbus, “ten thousand furies on the luck!” He then stooped forward and whispered, “Decia has been rescued!”

The senator sprang to his feet as though he had been struck. The face of Mecinia turned ashen. Bassus dropped his goblet on the mosaic floor.

“What! Galbus, what! nay, thou art mad!”

“Aye, mad from rage—though not in mind!”

He then told them his story, concluding: “and when I returned I found the old woman lying bound and gagged in a corner. Why they did not take her I know not! In this at least, Fortune did not desert us. I feared, however, they might return for the purpose and——” bending low he whispered in the ear of Donatus, “I set fire to the house—have destroyed her and all other evidence,—even now half the street is ablaze!”

“Ah, Galbus, then we are safe,—at least for awhile! That was ably done. What further hast thou learned?”

“Naught else, for I fled, as I saw the house consumed. Thou knowest I rented it and the owner suspects nothing,—yet, alas, Decius has his child again! O, fool, fool that I was, not to slay her, even against thy orders!”

“Fool, Galbus, what hast thou against Decius?”

“I hate the man,—for certain reasons,—else I vow, Donatus, I would not have joined thee in this risky business. Come, give me my reward,—I must have it now!”

“What sayest thou? Dost demand reward for capturing a ‘bird’ that thou didst release?”

“’Twas no fault of mine. Thou shouldst have kept her. I did my work. I got her whilst thou

didst lie here at ease on thy soft cushions. Give me my money. I leave Rome at sunrise."

"Galbus, art thou weakening? Nay, man, I have other work for thee. Thou shalt remain!"

"Nay, I want my money; no treachery now; remember I am desperate! I must seek safety in flight. Thou canst well advise, 'remain,' for thy name is not mixed in with it!"

"Galbus, thou art a fool! Thy very flight might create suspicion. I have the money for thee, yet stay in Rome I say. Thou didst not use thine own name when thou didst rent the house, didst thou?"

"I was no such fool, yet if I should be recognized!"

"Then thou hadst best remain indoors, here with me," said Donatus, who was gratified to discover some means that would enable him to keep his fellow-conspirator under surveillance.

"Perchance thou art right, Donatus, I'll remain for awhile. Lock up this little toy for me and do not forget that it is my booty,—for 'tis valuable. The gems are precious!"

He took from his waist a little jewelled dagger which had been dropped by Decia in the cellar where she had been kept a prisoner.

"I found it, for the girl dropped it. Forget not that 'tis mine!"

"O," said Fortunæ, "'tis beautiful! Would that I could own it!"

"Thou canst own it, Fortunæ, suffice Galbus name a reasonable price."

"'Tis worth at least five thousand *sesterces*. The stones are real," said Galbus.

"Then take it, Fortunæ. I will add that amount,

Galbus, to thy reward, but thou, Fortunæ, shalt keep it far from the sight of human eyes!"

The eyes of Bassus sparkled with avarice.

"Would that it were mine!" he thought. "I'd pick the stones and sell them to old Simonides!"

He noted that Fortunæ had placed it in the folds of her *stola*.

"Fortunæ," said Donatus, "the hour grows late. Seek thy bed. I have important business with Galbus, yet on thy way, pour out for Bassus here a goblet of old Falernian."

Thus he dismissed Bassus, who walked with Mecinia to a small *triclinium* adjoining.

As Mecinia raised her arm to pour the wine, and in her haste to rid herself of Bassus, the dagger of Decia fell to the floor, which, being covered by a rug, gave forth no sound. Bassus dropped his cloak, as though accidentally, thus covering the dagger.

"Thou hast no need to tarry, good Fortunæ," he said, "this wine tastes so good that methinks I'll stay,—and take another," and he laughed.

"As thou wilt, Bassus. Fortune sleep with thee," she said as she retired.

Quickly Bassus stooped and placed the dagger in the folds of his tunic. He then bade adieu to Donatus and hastened into the street.

CHAPTER XLVII

Artus entered his atrium the following morning and he found Glaccus awaiting him.

“Ha, Glaccus, so thou hast returned! That was a shabby trick,—for Decius asked for thee. Thy wound then cannot be serious, and I am glad. Yet why didst thou flee like a thief in the night?”

Glaccus made no answer.

“I—I left to breathe the morning air. When I returned they had gone.”

“Thou liest, Glaccus! Thou meanest that thou didst return when thou didst know they had gone.”

“Well, good praetor,—thou—thou dost not understand.”

“I understand thee too well, Glaccus. Stubbornness is a sore trait. Decius hath a splendid heart. He is more than grateful and said that he was grieved because thou wert not here when he left. He invites thee to his villa with me.”

“I am grateful to thee, good Praetor Artus, yet in this one thing I am firm. I will trouble Decius no further. Thou canst do a service for me. I wish to join the foreign legions. Canst thou place me where there is action?”

“O, thou youth of impulse!” said Artus. “Still grieved at the words of Decius! Well, I’ll think

upon it, but I warn thee, I like thee too well, Glaccus, to lose thee hastily. Decius, too, is a man of power."

"In this thing I am set. He accused me unjustly and—yet it matters not. I desire one thing—to get away from Rome. Wilt thou do this for me? I will be grateful and will not stain thy patronage."

"Peace, Glaccus, peace! Come, eat with me, for I am starved. Thou too art empty. Let me see thy wound."

He opened the tunic of Glaccus at the breast and remarked:

"'Tis a deep scratch and thou art not fit to join the foreign legions this moment!"

Glaccus looked disappointed.

Artus laughed, and they walked in silence to the summer *triclinium* where they partook of a light meal. At its close Artus handed a purse to Glaccus.

"Glaccus, here is some money; whil'st thou dost remain here with me, I will supply thy wants and charge it up to thee,—at some future time."

The indefatigable Hercules came into the *triclinium*, stripped for exercise with his master.

"Hercules, this youth here would prove a most apt pupil for thee! He doth not even realize how famous he has become! His combat against 'The Brute' is still talked about when games are held!"

The face of Glaccus brightened. Hercules felt the muscles of the youth.

"Thou hast good sinews, but thou art too lean," he said.

"Go forth, Glaccus, and buy some proper garments. Thou art ill-robed as a beggar!" said Artus.

The youth left the *peristyle*, and Artus said to Hercules:

“Now that is what I call a man,—unlike—unlike my Bassus, whom thou knowest hath the falling sickness if his cloak bears the smallest stain!”

At that moment Bassus entered.

“I come, father,” he said, “to express my great joy at the recovery of Decia!”

“How fares Nydia? I trust she has no cause for complaint?”

“No, father, for I am most kind to her and love her well.”

“That I doubt not,—so long as she is not sick. Soon I will have office for thee. An idle youth becomes in age a beggar. No lazy life for a son of mine! I’ll speak further on it next *calends*.”

The face of Bassus almost paled. The one thing that he dreaded most would ere long be his portion!

“Work! Gods!” he mused. “Damn the soul of Donatus! He got me into this, which hath small profits! Work! Nay, sooner would I starve!”

“Now remain, Bassus, and take thy exercise with Hercules.”

When the exercise was over, Bassus again donned his garments and left the house. After he had gone, Eurycele, coming into the *peristyle*, was attracted by a glittering object lying at the base of a column which partly hid it. She picked it up and was startled at its beauty. It was a small dagger, glittering with gems! She took it to her *cubiculum* to examine it closely. After she had left the *peristyle*, Bassus returned to it.

He was in a fever of excitement, which he suc-

ceeded in hiding, however, but his glances sought the floor as he slyly searched for the jewelled dagger that had formerly belonged to Decia. Not finding it, he walked to the street. "At least none saw me lose it, thanks to Fortune!" he murmured.

Meanwhile Eurycele turned the dagger about in her hands, admiring the vari-coloured rays that came from it.

Artus, who had returned unexpectedly, passed the entrance to her room. He saw her sitting there examining a jewelled object. He entered softly, and as he approached her was struck dumb, for he recognized it!

"What hast thou there?" he said in a whisper. His face in the meantime had become ashen in colour.

"'Tis a pretty trinket I have found. O, Artus, why dost thou stare thus at me?"

"Found, sayest thou, found where?"

"Artus!—lying in the—atrium! Artus don't stare at me thus! What ails thee, lord?"

"'Tis thou that aileth me! thou foul carrion! Give it to me! I see it all now! Thou didst cause all the anguish, thou didst inspire the foul deed! Confess it to me, else wilt thou go forth into the streets!"

Eurycele shrieked and clasped her hands to her heart.

She was unable to speak.

"Confess thy crime! I say!" he continued, his face now livid with anger. "Confess thy intrigues with ruffians and stealers of maidens! Now I take no stock in thy fidelity, else how couldst thou consort with such company! Confess, I say!"

Eurycele stretched out both her hands toward him and approached him with mouth open and hesitating steps.

“Artus, O,—my Artus,—thou art ill in mind! I do not understand thy words!” she managed to utter.

“Foul thing,” he cried, “whom I have nurtured in my heart. O, I will go mad to think how I was duped! Full well I know the punishment that should be meted out to thee, sexless one. The blade should cut the FVR upon thy brow!—yet—yet go forth forever! Thus I mitigate thy punishment, although by Jupiter! I know it is against the very laws of justice! Go forth!”

He pointed to the door of the *cubiculum*.

“Go—forth,—sayest—thou!” said the now dazed Eurycele, “forth—O!” She swayed and fell against the wall.

Artus turned, and placing his arm across his forehead, staggered from the *cubiculum*.

She, who knew his nature, realized that his words were final. She went forth indeed, and as she passed through the atrium, and the *vestibulum*, the slaves stared at her, bewildered at this sudden change in their beautiful mistress! Mechanically she walked across the Pons Cestius and the Pons Fabricius, and although the distance was far, passed through the Forum Boarium and the Vicus Tuscus in the Via Sacra, and entered the Forum. She heard nothing, saw nothing, although hundreds of pairs of eyes stared strangely at her. She walked as though she were in her sleep and they all made way for her. When she entered the Forum she came upon a statue of one of Rome’s former heroes. Then she laughed.

The white marble attracted her eyes and she stared at it, then walked around it. A number of people gathered about her.

One of the crowd was a legionary. Before they could stay her hand she had rushed up to him and taking his sword from its sheath, threw herself upon it and the weapon entered her heart. A great shriek came from her—a shriek that ended in a sob!

Shortly afterwards, Artus, preceded by lictors, crossed the Forum on his way to the Curia nearby. The crowd gave way before him, and as he looked he beheld the form of a woman whose face was now covered. One of the men volunteered the information that the woman had slain herself.

“Look, noble Praetor!” continued the man in excitement, “hast thou ever seen a face so beautiful!” He drew the cloth from the face of Eurycele. Artus staggered, and for a moment it seemed that he would fall! His emotion touched a responsive chord in the hearts of the crowd.

“Hail! noble Artus!” shouted some one in the crowd. “Rome is safe when such praetors guard her!” The people cheered, and a man cried: “He weeps at the death of a stranger!” “He loves the people!” said another. “Artus! Noble Artus.”

This served to bring the praetor somewhat to himself. He lifted his toga up before his eyes and continued on his way to the curia, though his steps were faltering. With the courage of his race, he went to assume the duties of his office. None who heard him that day knew of the rent that had been made in the heart of the cold, calm magistrate, who, invested in his *praetexta* of office, decided the cases

that were brought successively before him. They would, however, have seen a far, far different picture in the house of Artus in the Janiculum, for when he returned there he went to the *cubiculum* of Eurycele and sat on her bed—and buried his head in his hands!

CHAPTER XLVIII

A week succeeding this tragic event, Artus and Decius were walking in the gardens of the villa.

“Alas, Artus,” said the latter, “it is not meet that I should strive to bend thy will in this, yet I cannot bear to think of losing thee. Well I know that the great metropolis must henceforth be to thee—an—empty promise. How quickly events have moved,—and too, in the wrong direction!”

“Thus speak the inexorable Fates, Decius. Mortals move when they pull the strings,” he said softly.

“Thou already one of the *praetorii*!” continued Decius, “and I had such great hopes for thee! I tell thee, were it not for my ‘lamb’ I would go with thee to Egypt! I must confess that upon hearing of Eurycele’s end I hoped to marry Decia to thee. Neither thou nor she would hear of it and I thought ye loved! Thus am I crossed again in my hopes!”

“Decius, things are better as they are. We love—yet—not as lovers. From her own lips thou didst hear it.”

“Nor, Artus, will she think of any other man! Thou knowest marriage is the proper state; now she plagues my ears with her desires to go to Athens! Gods, what next! Truly I have spoiled her! Yet, thou canst not blind me; thy aim is to find oblivion! Again I vow by Jupiter! were it not for her, I would go with thee!”

“And none would be so welcome, Decius. Now, as to Bassus; keep close watch on him. Guide him firmly,—if thou canst!—O, sorry task! The stated sum is to be given each *calends* to Nydia. In case I die, save for the portion the law decrees to Bassus, all is to go to Decia. Meanwhile most of my slaves will go to thy villa.”

Decius grasped the hand of Artus and said: “Jupiter grant that thou wilt return to us,” but Artus remained silent.

“Artus,” said Decius, “but one thing more. Thou didst neglect to discover and punish the abductors of my child.”

“Alas, Decius, I cannot answer thee!”

“Then blame me not, if I ask, what assurance canst thou give me that the foul deed will not be repeated?”

“None save this: the misled instigator of it has been consumed upon a funeral pyre.”

He turned his head aside.

“I do not understand thee, Artus,” said Decius.

“Decius, why dost thou not spare me. Eurycele, through jealousy, was the cause. Let her shade rest in peace!”

“What sayest thou, Eurycele? Gentle, loving, Eurycele, who cut her heart when she lost her reason?”

“No, Decius, she cut her heart because I sent her from my door. I could not deliver to chains the mate that shared my life. I sought no further vengeance.”

“O, Artus, hold thy steps, for I am dazed! Eurycele, beautiful, gentle Eurycele, who worshipped thee! I could weep in disappointment! By Castor!

I do forgive her! She knew not what she did! It was her love for thee that led her wrong! Poor Eurycele!”

The lips of Artus quivered as he asked:

“Hast thou had the urn containing the ashes deposited in the sepulchre, Decius?”

“Aye, Artus, nor do I regret that I was grieved, although it was my ‘lamb’ she had sought to strike! ’Twas love for thee did cause it. Poor, misguided thing of the Fates,—may thy shade rest in peace!”

They continued their walk in silence for a period.

“So Regus, Claudius and Lucius go with thee,—and Glaccus too!” said Decius, “Stubborn youth. Think of it! Refused to come to me, the young rascal! Yet I like him. I was wrong.”

“Hercules, too, goes with me! Thou knowest I have manumitted him, but he loves me,—and still clings to his former master. I could not gain for him, however, a place in the legion. He is a freedman. The law of Augustus is strict in this. By Pollux! that all Romans but had the courage and the strength of my Gallic freedman! This completes the number,—saving the squadron for escort. We also take supplies to Gallus. Many other Romans pleaded to accompany me. Fools! they are avaricious for the jewels and gold they think can be picked up in the very sands of Arabia Felix! Regus and Hercules alone go because they love me, for Regus, thou knowest, is more fit to measure arms with women than with men! With heart joyous to serve me, he sent Bassus to me. Yet, ’tis not meet that I complain against a youth for whose very existence I am responsible. Regus holds a firm place

in my heart,—would that he were my son! May Fortune smile upon them all!”

They came upon Decia surrounded by her handmaids. Aegea sat reading in the shade of a tree nearby, and as she arose and joined the group, Decius said:

“Tell me, Aegea, who will take the place of Artus?”

“Will not the sojourn in Egypt be brief?” she asked.

“Brief! Now, Aegea, thou hast touched a sore spot. Egypt is but a stopping place for him! An army will invade Arabia Felix,—Arabia the Happy! Nay, Arabia the Miserable I call it now! Artus will hold command under Aelius Gallus, Legatus of Augustus.”

Aegea looked up at him in surprise.

“I thought—I thought it is to be a trip of pleasure!”

“Of pain, rather,” said Decius. “The *triremes* sail from Brundisium within a month.”

“Alas, Praetor Artus,” exclaimed Aegea, “that thou shouldst desert Decius!—and Decia—and all thy friends; yet I have heard of thy grief. Such is the common lot of most of us!”

“Yet time heals all things, good Aegea,” said Artus.

“Nay, not all of them,—not all of them,” she replied.

Artus and Aegea sat together on a marble bench. In the distant fields they heard slaves whose frequent habit to mitigate their toil was to break into songs of their Fatherland! The Fatherland from which

the Roman eagles had torn them and brought them into slavery! Often, however, their music conveyed notes of joy and contentment! Artus spoke.

"Listen to yonder singers! 'Tis not power or wealth that brings happiness, O Aegea! Yonder slaves sing, while a man who wore the *praetexta* of praetorship leaves Rome to seek forgetfulness amidst the strife and action of war!"

"O, the gods make sorry things of people!"

"The gods!" he said, then he smiled cynically, "Nay, blame not the gods for crimes of men! Jupiter and all the rest of them have enough trouble, managing their own affairs,—if we are to believe Homer and rest!"

"Thou'lt never win happiness until thou canst believe in something!" she said gently.

"Happiness! Ha! happiness is another myth! The only truly happy man I ever knew was one called Severus,—and he was drunk each moment of the day and night,—and then he died!"

Artus laughed, but strange to say, Aegea, the plebian woman, felt a spark of pity kindle for this cold and cynical man who sat beside her, and she said:

"I—I am sorry that thou art leaving Rome,——" and as he turned his head suddenly and looked at her, she added hastily, "because—because Decius is most unhappy about it."

He said nothing, but his lips formed the word, "Decius."

CHAPTER XLIX

A week passed. The day after the morrow he would leave Rome! He drove along the Via Appia to spend the night and part of the next day with Decius, whom he found awaiting his arrival on the short road leading to the Via Appia.

“Till *coena*, thy time belongs to me, Artus; after that,—well—I have a surprise for thee; the friends who go with thee have been invited to a feast here.”

“Decius! Thy intention is noble and I must needs forgive thee!”

“No women will grace the feast, yet I have invited Hercules, as a reward for his love for thee.”

“That was right. Hercules is now a freedman and, too, my friend.”

“I rest more easy when I know that his great body will be beside thee,” said Decius.

“And now,” said Artus, “I would speak to Decia alone for awhile. Send for her.”

She soon appeared, and as he walked toward the stream with her, he said:

“Decia, this may be the last time, though I wish that I could carry with me through sun-scorched deserts, a memory of Decia,—not Decia of the world of men and women,—but as a child, that I carried upon my shoulder when her tiny fingers toyed with the horse-hair on my helmet those many years gone

by,—for thou hast indeed bloomed to womanhood!”

Decia pressed his arm affectionately.

“I wish that I could do something for thee,” she said earnestly. Tears glistened in her eyes.

“Thou canst do something, Decia. Perchance it is the last thing I may ask of thee. ’Tis this: remain with thy father here for two years. He wants those years, aye, needs them. Be cheerful and strive to be happy,—though I know now what worries thee! He is the most noble and affectionate of Romans and worships thee. He has his sorrows, for he still grieves for thy mother. Thou dost owe him two solid years of added happiness. Thou art young and canst well spare them! Give me thy vow.”

“I could not refuse,—thy last request—ere thou dost leave,” she said. “Two years! A long time to remain here unhappy! Ecastor! thou hast my vow, so be it the Fates do not interfere!”

She pressed her hands to her eyes.

“The gods would not be so unjust to thy father, my Decia,” he said, as he kissed her forehead and held her to his breast.

They returned to Decius to whom Artus said:

“By Pollux! One thing more I have done for thee. I’ve saved ‘thy lamb’ for thee,—for two full years! Aye, I have her vow that she will not leave this place for two years! That period longer canst thou have her as—a child!”

“And dost thou mean, Artus, she will no longer plague my ears to go to—to Athens, to Baiae,—and the gods know where else besides? Thou art indeed a wond’rous man who succeeds in gaining happiness for others, yet fails to win his own!”

“The thing was simple. Thy daughter feared

that thou wouldst marry her against her desires. This fear removed, her golden vow was easy to obtain."

Decius had not been sparing in his efforts to make the banquet a notable one. The great *triclinium* was lighted by double the usual number of lamps. His finest silverware, and richest iridescent glass were used, and festoons of acanthus and greens were hung in profusion. Indeed, the preparations had been under way for several days past! Choicest Falernian wines were taken from the cellars for the occasion. Numerous slaves sped hither and thither and there was much feasting and drinking amidst the buzz of conversation of the guests who wore the coloured *synthesis*, and whose brows were adorned with chaplets of young myrtle and Milesian roses.

"What further news of Arabia, Artus?" queried Decius.

"Little more than I told thee. It is said that the great emporium of the spice trade there holds a treasury of ages past. They say Augustus is hungry for success in this,—although thou knowest his plan of government does not aim evidently at the continual extension of dominion."

A murmur of excitement flowed through the assembly, the guests discussing with each other the possibility of rich spoils for those fortunate enough to take part in the campaign.

"Has further word been heard from Gallus?" continued Decius.

"Aye, he said," replied Artus, "that Syllaeus, a minister of Obodas, the king, will guide the galleys and transports across the sea to a landing point of

vantage. Thus, Gallus hopes to save a tiresome march of many days! I go holding rank under Gallus."

In their anxiety to lose no word each guest leaned forward, and it was while Artus was speaking that two women quietly entered the *fauces*. They were Aegea and Decia, the latter having coaxed the "gentle widow" to steal unbidden on the scene. Thus she hoped to glean some news of the dreaded campaign.

"They say our Cappadocian steeds are no match for Arabian horses," said Claudius. "Small chance for sword play if our cavalry with weight of metal cannot overtake the enemy! Canst thou tell us, noble Decius, aught of this?"

"A mounted legionary is a match for a dozen such barbarians in actual combat!" said the senator.

Decia asked Aegea tremulously:

"Dost thou think father speaks the truth, or are his words to lend courage to Roman arms?"

"Thy father is brave and sees no danger in anything, Decia, save that which concerns thee."

"Gallus," continued Artus, "will rely more upon his infantry and said that he will take with him a thousand Nabathaeans and five hundred Jews; the latter should know the country and its habits well, and too, they make most excellent slingers,—abilities they inherit, no doubt, from little David, who reached the throne through just such a shot!"

Decius now spoke.

"But one thing has crossed me at this banquet—which I hope to see in duplicate when ye return, laden with spoils and honour,—but one thing, and

laugh not,—Glaccus of the arena is not here! I am angry that he, small as a woman in this, holds out against me for some hastily spoken words!”

Aegea and Decia leaned forward in excitement, as Artus replied:

“Forgive the youth. I admit his stubbornness. However, I can assure thee, Decius, that the feeling he holds in his heart for thee is far different from hatred!”

“Yet,” continued Decius, “it is not meet that he who goes as thy personal attendant, should be absent.”

As he uttered these words a shriek was heard, and the guests looked in the direction whence it had come. Decia had thrown herself into the arms of Aegea, for those words gave to the daughter of Decius her first intimation that Glaccus was to go on the campaign.

Quickly Aegea led Decia to a *cubiculum*.

Decius sent slaves to discover the meaning of the interruption, and Aegea told one of them to say that a handmaid had become ill. The gathering at length dispersed. The guests, who were all to remain at the villa over night, were conducted to the guests' *cubiculæ*. An hour later the entire villa was shrouded in silence.

Decius, however, walked up and down the *peristyle* for an hour before he sought his bed.

“Aedepol! Damn this campaign!” was all he said.

CHAPTER L

The morning dawned clear and warm.

“’Tis a favourable omen,” said Decius to Aegea as they walked toward the gateway. Decia loitered behind them. “I am surprised to see how sadly Decia takes it! Truly she loves Artus though, alas! not as a lover!”

To the *villicus* at the entrance, Decius said:

“Summon the entire *familia*, and get the flowers ready to speed the soldiers royally.”

The *villicus* rushed quickly away. Decius, Decia, and Aegea sat in the small summer-house near the main pathway. Soon the *decuriae* of slaves came through by-paths. All carried flowers or freshly cut branches from the trees and shrubs. Early indications betokened marked enthusiasm.

Ere long they heard a noise growing louder each moment,—a metallic sound accompanied by a rumbling. Sounds of mounted men and heavy wagons came from the paved “way.” These became louder as the greave-covered legs of horsemen came in frequent contact with other accoutrements. The notes of the *lituus* were borne through the air and soon the crested helmets of the vanguard could be seen as it wheeled from the Via Appia into the branch road. These halted and from behind them rode a figure mounted on a superb black horse which danced with action. The rider wore a plumed helmet of chased

silver, and a corselet composed of chiseled metal scales overlapping each other and shining forth from beneath the *sagum*, or military cloak, fastened over his shoulders from which it had been thrown back. The greaves on his legs were in keeping with the helmet. It was Artus. Closely following him was a rider on a steed smaller than that of his commander, but one that was almost as fiery. This was Glaccus, the personal attendant of Artus. They were in turn followed by Claudius, Regus, and Lucius, the two latter, however, garbed as civilians. Hercules brought up the rear, but was not in uniform, for no freedmen were enrolled in the ranks at this period.

The *turma*, or troop of cavalry, and the baggage wagons halted on the Via Appia while Artus and the rest rode up the branch road to the entrance of the villa. Artus sprang from his horse which he left in charge of Glaccus, and walked toward Decius, who gave a signal and a tremendous shout arose on the air. Artus was showered with a hail of roses, violets, and other flowers, from the hands of hundreds of slaves. The troop on the Via Appia heard the shouts and cheered and clanged their swords on their shields. Decius placed his hand on the shoulder of Artus. In the other he held a sparkling jewel.

“This to Fortune! my Artus. ’Tis my most precious and lucky *fibula* which I carried through all my campaigns; it is for thee and my prayers to the gods for thy welfare go with it!”

Artus clasped the wrist of Decius,—a tight hold,—as though perchance it was to be the last! The eyes of Aegea had filled, but she said, as she took the hand of Artus in both her own;

“I, too, pray that the gods will give thee back to us again!”

“My thanks,” said Artus, “and may Jupiter protect thee!”

Decia now rushed forward and threw her arms about him. He pressed her close to his breast and kissed her forehead. She gave him something she had made for him! It was a little bag, embroidered in silk with the word “Decia.”

“This I made,” she said through her tears, “for the rich jewels thou wilt gain!”

“And the richest ones of all shall be for thee!” he said.

Then she left him and walked a few steps down the roadway. Her handmaids followed her. “Where love is, thither turns the eye,” and soon her glances sought Glaccus! It seemed that the attraction of her eyes caught his! He saw her, though as he gazed steadily at her, gave no sign of recognition! Then he reached forward and stroked the mane of Artus’s steed, even as though there was no such thing in all the world as Decia! She knew not what to do, but O, she longed to hear his voice,—longed to tell him she was sorry for her cruel words that night in the atrium of Artus! If she could get some word from him to let her know that he did not hate her, she would give all her prized possessions! She was rewarded, for Artus had signalled Glaccus to approach.

The youth dared not disobey the orders of his commander, and, though much against his will, dismounted and strode across the road. He stood in the attitude of attention.

“Glaccus,” said Artus severely, “the noble Decius

granted my request to clasp thy hand and wish thee well."

With precise military step Glaccus approached the senator.

"Save thy steps for the field, Glaccus," said Decius. "Artus lied. I asked to shake thy hand as a friend, for I am thy debtor and regret any words of mine that may have hurt thee."

Without a word Glaccus grasped the wrist of Decius in both his hands, then bowed his head.

"My thanks, noble Decius, my thanks to thee," he said, as he continued to hold the wrist of Decius. The latter smiled with satisfaction.

Glaccus then took Aegea in his arms. She wept, but did not speak. He then turned and there beheld Decia, who held her hand to her heart. Tears were in her eyes.

"Decia," said Decius, "give thy good wishes to Glaccus. Forget not that he was thy rescuer."

Tremblingly Decia approached the youth.

"Glaccus," she said brokenly, "Glaccus—I wish—thee—the protection of the gods. I am most—most grieved—to—to——"

"Jupiter protect thee, my—nymph!" whispered Glaccus.

She turned suddenly from him and buried her head in the bosom of Aegea. Once more Decius embraced Artus.

"Vale, Decius!" said Artus.

"Vale, my Artus!" replied Decius.

At a signal from the *villicus* a great roar virtually shook the air. Roses and violets again assailed the military tribune and his companions. This was the metal of love and Decius murmured to himself:

“Would that thy enemies were so armed!”

Decius gave the military salute. Artus strode down the roadway, followed by Glaccus. They vaulted on their steeds. Artus drew his sword, pointed toward the Via Appia, gave one sweep downward. They galloped to the Via Appia.

The notes of the *lituus* rang forth,—a long blast! The troop moved.

The rumble of the baggage wagons, rolling over the stones, was again borne through the air. It was all that remained to remind the occupants of the villa that Artus was still of this world! These sounds soon faded in the distance. The interrupted traffic of the Via Appia was resumed. This, however, was but an incident in the life of Rome!

CHAPTER LI

The Arabian desert at night! Overhead a canopy of dark gray, illumined by a clear full moon and myriads of stars! On the sands lay the remnants of the legions of Gallus! In the silvery light can be seen small banks of sand. It is the result of the attempt to make camp in accordance with the stern discipline of the Romans. Divested of their armor, which is piled in heaps about them, lie man and beast. At times a wave of groans floats through the air, but not borne on the breeze, for the atmosphere is still with oppressiveness. Another of those torture-nights,—when the tongues of man and beast hang from parched throats,—when thirst intensifies the agony of wounds. They still suffer from the destructive diseases of the country, *Stomacacce* and *Scelotyrbe*, the former of the mouth, the latter of the legs and causing a paralysis, induced by impure water and certain plants which the soldiers used in their food.

The remnants of the army of invasion into Arabia Felix!—Arabia the fruitful! Long months had passed and what an age it seemed!—months of marches and suffering, that had been prolonged by the treachery of guides! The veterans of the campaign into Yemen! Arabia the fruitful! Arabia the happy!

Who cares now for the wealth of the Sabaeans?

Precious drops of water are the jewels this night. A legionary suddenly goes mad in the midst of his comrades. He grasps his sword and shouting wildly, slashes right and left. A comrade stabs him to the heart.

“There is enough trouble now without madmen in the ranks who slay their comrades!” he murmurs as he lies down again and strives to rest. Insects hover over the legions. Stings bring curses to the lips of those who are almost powerless against this new attacking army on the wing! The wounded beg and scream,—scream for “Water! Water!”, and curse the very gods whose protection they had sought!

What matter now the hopeful departure from Leuce-Come, the long marches, and the past victories of those desert tracts,—the bloody battle of Asca, where ten thousand of their enemies lay, food for vultures after the fray! What matters now the capture of Asca, nor that last failure before the very walls of Mariba, the capitol of the Rhammanitae, where scarcity of water had proven to be a stronger foe than the enemy!

And then backward,—a long weary way backward to Negrana, of “Seven Wells”,—through the desert country to Chaalla and to Malothas on the blessed river, for there was to be found the precious water! But now more of the cursed desert country with so few watering places—and to think that but seven men perished in battle! Disease, famine, thirst,—these are the unconquerable enemies against whom the thrust of sword is powerless! O, that they had but arrived at Negra!

“What we want now is water! The curses of Aeacus, Hecate, Cerberus and all the rest on this

infernial region!" groaned a legionary in his ravings.

Another shouted :

"Not a gold piece to show,—naught but wounds, parched throats, swollen bodies,—stricken limbs and—Gods! Thirst! Retreat? Why retreat? Is it not better ten thousand times to die where there is water than live in these infernal tortures, whilst other Romans lie on their cushions, their fevered brows cooled by snow?"

"Who said fevered brows?" shouted a companion. "Fevered brows!—amidst the riches of the city where one has food and water—and tickets for the games for the asking,—there to be fed and entertained! What cursed fool said fevered? We are the fevered,—we who fight for Rome whilst others wait in comfort for the jewels and gold we did not get!"

"Fool! canst thou not hold thy tongue? I would have slept hadst thou not cried! Lie still!" shouts a centurion, who must needs sleep in the ranks with his men to preserve peace amongst the sufferers.

"Good Calchius, stick thy sword here!" said another, "I cannot bear this thirst,—my legs don't move,—fire consumes my wounded stomach! Help! help! I burn!"

With variations, these words and scenes were repeated throughout the entire camp.

Within the tent of Gallus was Artus. Outside lay Glaccus and Hercules; "giant Hercules," who that day at Negrani, grasped the eagle as the bearer fell, and carried it to victory with Artus slashing at the right of him, the naked sword of the tribune red with blood—and Glaccus bringing up the rear, with the legionaries following. Hercules, who, owing to

the laws of Rome, could not be enrolled in the legions!

“Here is a tribune who leads!” said one, as Artus had sprung forward.

“Hail! Artus!” they shouted as he carved a path.

Hercules, fighting in the ranks of the Romans, had used the eagle as a spear to stab the desert barbarians that day! Hercules, who once was a slave! “Peck, eagle, peck!” he had shouted.

Gallus gave him a chain of gold, Artus, a clasp of the hand, and Glaccus placed his arm upon the shoulder of Hercules,—and Hercules could have wept! Pale, sick Regus composed lines of poetry on the courage of the freedman, comparing him to Horatius at the bridge! Lucius wrote a chapter on philosophy, treating of the power of excitement in battle over physical ability!

“Gods! canst thou sleep, Artus?” said Gallus.

In the months of the campaign, misfortune had brought them closer to each other. Artus made no reply.

“O! for sleep, Artus,—sleep!” continued Gallus, “I have not closed my eyes since we left Malothas! Ten thousand curses on my ambition! I would give my house in Alexandria for a mouthful of *posca!*”

Artus arose and went forth. His old wound in his side troubled him, had worried him throughout the entire campaign. His grief intensified his suffering. He went to the entrance of the tent. Hercules and Glaccus both arose.

“Whither goest thou, tribune?” asked the former, who strove to roll his parched tongue to ease his speech. Artus, as though he had not heard, continued

onward, his eyes flashing feverishly. He was closely followed by Hercules and Glaccus, the latter limping slightly from a wound in the leg.

“Our commander is indeed ill! Didst thou note he did not answer me?” said Hercules.

“He suffers in the side,” replied Glaccus hoarsely.

Artus sat down on the sand at the outskirts of the camp and stared straight ahead into vacancy. Hercules brought some wood with which he built a fire, the smoke of which served to keep away swarms of insects. Soon Artus began to mumble, and as his voice grew louder his ravings were heard.

“Good Aegea, give me some snow! Glaccus will not miss it! I would not take it if he needed it!”

Suddenly he arose with a shriek.

“Eurycele! Eurycele, thou hast taken all of it! Oh, 'tis for thy wound! a wound, the gods did guide thy arm to give in justice! Yet—take the snow!”

He then leaned his head on his hands. Soon his eyes closed in a sleep of weakness.

“Glaccus,” whispered Hercules, “thus do men speak when they prepare for death!”

Glaccus reeled at the words.

“Hercules! O, Hercules! Is there not one drop of water in the camp?”

“And dost thou think I would not get it if there was,—aye, even though it belonged to selfish Gallus himself?”

“But, Hercules, must he die thus,—the greatest man among them all? O, Gods, I would give this, the only thing I value,—this piece of gold for a cup of water. Dost thou think that we could get a little water from some man who perchance has saved some?”

“Peace, Glaccus, peace. Who can strive against the gods!”

Artus eventually sprang to his feet.

“Peace, tribune,” said Hercules.

“Ha! Then I dreamed!” he said as he seated himself weakly. Glaccus lay on one side of him, Hercules sat nearby.

“Regus, poor Regus!” said Artus, “can nothing be done for Regus? He lies consumed with fever.”

“And thou, too, art consumed with spells of fever,” said Hercules.

Artus now stretched himself on the sand and held his forearm over his eyes.

“Hold thyself together, until the morrow, tribune. Let not Rome hear of the failure from other lips than thine. Gallus did retreat too soon! Two more days and we would have been in Mariba! therefore thou shouldst live to tell the story and vindicate the honour of the legions,” said Hercules.

Artus remained silent, but Glaccus spoke.

“On the morrow, we may get water. Green plants are in the sand and the wretch Syllaesus said, water is nearby. On the morrow we must get it, else will every living thing lie dead!”

“Glaccus,” said Artus, “how is thy leg?”

“It heals splendidly.”

Artus examined the wound.

“Water will wash it out,—it is not serious. Ha, what hast thou there about thy waist? A jewel, Glaccus?”

“Nay, ’tis but a trinket.”

Hercules, anxious to have the mind of Artus occupied, signalled Glaccus to show the trinket to Artus. The youth took it from his waist where it

was tied with a cord that encircled his body several times.

Artus took it mechanically.

"'Tis heavy! 'Tis gold!"

"Aye, gold," Glaccus replied.

Artus fingered the small piece of cloth that covered it.

"It is strangely formed," he said, and as he looked at Glaccus, it dropped out of his hand into the sand. Glaccus groped madly for it.

"Mind it not, Glaccus," said Artus, "thou canst not find it in the sand. I will give thee gold in place of it when we reach Alexandria!"

"Nay, tribune, for that one piece of gold is of more value to me than the wealth of the *princeps*. It may tell me some day who my father is!"

He continued his search madly and eventually found it. He quickly placed it in his bosom.

"Nay, Glaccus, cut the cloth that I may look upon it!"

Glaccus obeyed, and as Artus glanced at the trinket he arose in haste.

"Take it, take it from me! Fever comes again! I see things in my fancy!"

"What dost thou see, master?" asked Hercules.

"Gods, see! Visions, visions! I saw—half a ring!—I saw a forearm—and a hand holding a broken sword! Once I gave such a ring to the love of my youth! Euterpia! Euterpia!"

It appeared that the fever was returning again and Artus sank upon the sand.

"Yet that is cut upon it," said Hercules, "a hand holding a broken sword! 'Tis not thy fever, noble Artus!"

Artus gazed strangely at the freedman.

“Hercules speaks truly,” said Glaccus.

“Where didst thou get this thing, Glaccus?” said Artus hastily, a wild look now in his eyes.

Then Glaccus told his story of how it had been placed about his neck by the people who had cared for him—told their parting words, “Lose it not, child, lose it not, for it may lead thee to thy people!” He further told that these people had said that the Tenth Legion had placed him with them for keeping. Glaccus also told that the family had been dispossessed and he cast into the streets.

Artus was too overcome to speak.

“He is ill indeed,” said Hercules, “thou wouldst think the trinket held his very life!”

“And so it does,” said Artus, “for Glaccus, I gave it to thy mother. I am—thy—father!”

He fell to the sand and they carried him to the tent of Gallus.

“Alas,” said Glaccus, “he is ill indeed! He fancies he is my father!”

Throughout the remainder of the night Artus raved. Glaccus stood at the foot of the rough couch. Hercules was fanning air—and fanning it madly,—into the heaving chest of Artus, who soon sank into a deep sleep.

“Yet dost thou know, Glaccus,” said Hercules, “that thy build, thy hair and thy very movements are at times, the counterpart of his! Were it not that thy eyes art blue, I would surely think thou art a son of his!”

“And thou, Hercules, art a fool,—and yet I like thee. That thou wert once a slave carries no weight

with me and, to the legion, thou art a hero, Hercules!"

"Nay, Artus is the hero! He cut the path that day and too, Gallus, commended thee, Glaccus; I but carried the eagle."

"And by thine own thunder—good Tarann! thou didst make the eagle peck, good Hercules!" replied Glaccus.

At dawn the army broke camp and moved slowly through the sand. They had tortured Syllaeus and threatened to blind his eyes should he not find water for them that day. Therefore he guided them to an oasis where a watering place was found. The precious water saved the lives of many. When the sun had risen that morn and Glaccus gazed at the face of Artus, he discovered that the hair of the tribune had turned snow white over night! .

CHAPTER LII

After man and beast had slaked their thirst with the precious fluid, the remnants of the army of Gallus continued on their way through the desert country toward the village of Negra, in the territory of Obodas, and situated upon the sea. Many were ill and helped along by more fortunate comrades. Artus was now being carried on a litter by some of his soldiers. If he remembered that incident at the camp he gave no sign of it. One night, however, found him tranquil. They were close to Negra, "blessed Negra!" Glaccus did not again refer to his trinket nor to the words of Artus, and both the former and Hercules concluded that the strange words of their commander had been caused by the fever.

That night he accompanied Artus to the roughly constructed tent where Regus lay suffering.

"Alas, Glaccus!" said Artus, "I have lost all hope for Regus! He bore himself nobly, yet natures, such as his, thrive better in the halls of pleasure than on the fields of campaign. It grieves me, for I love Regus!"

They entered the tent. None would have recognized in the sick man lying there the youth of golden promise, whose beautiful auburn hair had so often been encircled by the chaplets of the feast; for this hair now lay in tangled and disordered

masses upon the cushion! His eyes were sunken deep in their sockets. Artus approached and took his hand.

“Regus,” he said softly, “dost thou recognize me?”

Glaccus stood at the entrance and Lucius sat beside the couch. The poet slowly raised his eyes until they met those of his friend.

“Jupiter protect thee, for thou art Artus! Hast thou come to say farewell?”

“No, Regus, for thou shalt live to grace my *triclinium* again with thy honeyed words. Hold to life, Regus, hold to life, for ere long we will be in Myus Hormas!”

Regus shook his head. “The end is near for me!” he said.

Artus was silent and turned his head aside, for he realized that Regus spoke the truth. Indeed, death came sooner than they expected, for suddenly Regus sprang from the couch. He fell forward and was caught in the arms of Lucius and Artus, who tenderly placed him upon the couch. His face was adorned with a smile of radiance, of joy beyond earth! Thus he passed away, beautiful now in that spiritual touch of death as he had been when clad in the *synthesis* of pleasure! The lips of Artus quivered. Lucius broke down and wept like a child; Glaccus left the tent and sought Claudius, who was on duty. As the latter entered he beheld the weeping form of Lucius whose hand clasped the wrist of Regus,—Regus, who had been his bosom friend since they were children!

“O, Regus,” said Claudius, “hast thou gone?” He turned aside and covered his eyes.

“Come,” said Artus, “let us erect a funeral pyre and thou, Lucius, shalt say the farewell words.”

* * * * *

That night Artus, Glaccus and Hercules sat together.

“Hercules, what words did I utter that night,—after Malothas! It seems that in my mind,—else I dreamed,—Glaccus, here, did have some trinket that I lost many years gone by! Say, did I dream?—or—did I see—the thing?”

Glaccus sat there, pale and silent, as Hercules repeated, to the best of his memory, all that had been said that night before the last spell of sickness from which Artus had just recovered.

“Is this so, is this so?” said Artus; “hast thou—hast thou the trinket there, Glaccus?”

As if in a dream Glaccus took the little piece of gold from about his waist, cutting the string with his sword to speed the action. He placed it in the trembling had of Artus.

“Glaccus! Glaccus!” he screamed, “thou art my son!”

Still Glaccus did not move nor utter a sound, but stared at Artus as though he did not comprehend the meaning of it all! Then Artus arose.

“Who, then, is Bassus? Hercules, say,—who is Bassus? Summon Regus to me,—O, Regus—has gone!”

“Bassus is thy son,” said Hercules, “for so thou didst say in Rome!”

“Aye, for Regus sent him to me! and Regus—is gone! O, my head swims!”

The breast of Glaccus was now heaving, and Hercules, himself, leaned forward in excitement.

“Ah, I see it now! Some enemy has foisted Bassus upon me—and, too, Regus was a victim! Thanks to the gods, Bassus is no limb of mine! And thou—thou, Glaccus,—indeed,—thy eyes of blue do seal thee! Blind fool that I have been!” He started toward Glaccus.

“Thou, Glaccus, art flesh of my flesh, for thy mother gave herself to me in my youth, and as a thief in the night I robbed her of the precious jewel that she saved for none but me. Thou art the fruit of my rape,—yet be lenient in thy judgment, Glaccus, and hear me ere thou dost sentence me to thy hatred.”

When he heard these words Glaccus moved away from Artus and turned his back on him.

So this was the goal, he thought, to which his trinket had led him!

“Glaccus,” said Artus, “hear me.” He related the story,—the story of that event in his life which had changed him from a youth of impulse to a man of cold calculation and remorse. As he told his tale, he used the gentlest terms of affection and endearment in speaking of Euterpia, and even Hercules was moved! Indeed, once the freedman interrupted him, saying:

“Thy action was manly and none can condemn thee!”

The story was told. In the many months of their close association Artus had learned to love Glaccus even as he would have loved a son. Vicissitude breeds close companionship among men! Yet justice must be satisfied, and Artus realized that he must now hear curses of reproach from the lips of this, his rightful son!

“Nay, justice demands too much!” he reasoned, as he dropped his cloak from before his eyes and stood before Glaccus, his arms relaxed, his head bowed in shame,—standing as a prisoner awaiting sentence! Then Glaccus turned to him. Hercules clinched his hands in the tension of the moment. The youth gave one bound forward and enclosed Artus in his arms, as he said:

“I care not. Thou—thou art my father, and I love thee.”

Hercules clapped his great hands together and shouted:

“Now, though I was born in Gaul, I vow I believe in the power of Jupiter and all thy Roman gods!”

CHAPTER LIII

Time passed tranquilly at the villa of Decius. More than two years had gone by since Artus had left Rome for Egypt. No recent news had been received from the army of invasion in Arabia. The legions were now supposed to be continuing a march of conquest, accumulating wealth for Augustus and his works. On numerous occasions Decius had expressed his worryment, for no word had been received since the army had set forth from Leuce-Come, where the winter had been spent.

Aegea continued to live at the villa as companion to Decia. She had, however, gone regularly to her work in behalf of the sick poor in Rome. Decius had lent his financial support for her plans.

The change that had taken place in Aegea had been remarkable. "We benefit by affection," and the healthy life at the villa, the peaceful and comfortable surroundings, coupled with her enthusiasm in her work, had practically transformed her! At times, when Decius would entertain friends, Aegea and Decia would lend their presence to the *triclinium*. At the pleadings of the latter, Aegea paid more attention to dress, and Felicia, the hairdresser, who was a handmaid of Decia, had been responsible for much of the added attractiveness of the "gentle widow." Save for the melancholy expression that

at times touched her countenance, one would have thought this woman to be among the happiest of Rome. In Decia, likewise, there had been a change,—a change that had caused Decius to broach the subject to Aegea a hundred times. From a light-hearted girl, she had, even over night it seemed, become a quiet, thoughtful woman. No longer did her handmaids join in her hearty laughter of yore; no longer her joyous shouts rang through the columned *peristyle*, carrying a message of happiness.

“Alas! good Aegea,” said Decius one day. “My conquered wealth at least has failed in this, ‘my lamb’ is not happy!”

And Aegea replied:

“Good senator, thou dost satisfy her every want. No more can mortal do. The rest is for the gods—and, too, thou shouldst not forget she is no longer a child!”

Decius was much in the company of Aegea, and though he spoke of a thousand different things, always uppermost would come the subject of Artus and the campaign. Then he would call for wine and drink and drink until Aegea would say:

“Good senator! In the excitement of thy stories, thou dost forget that this is thy eighth goblet!” and gently she would take the vessel from his hand. Every man has his peculiar habit, and Decius had always been fond of the wine-cup.

“Save thee,” he once said to Aegea, “Bacchus is now my only friend—since Artus went forth!”

A thousand times a day the thoughts of Decia reverted to Glaccus. How handsome he looked in his armor! How tall and brave he was, and, too, how tenderly he had looked at her that morning

he went away. More than once Aegea came upon her as she sat weeping beside the stream, at that spot now so sacred to her because Glaccus had once sat there beside her. Yonder, on the opposite bank, he had saved the birds. How ill, indeed, she had thought of him and O, how keenly she regretted her unkind words that night in the atrium of Artus! Then she would see again in her mind's eye, his eyes flashing in anger at her father's suggestion that he had abducted her,—and he, the youth who truly worshipped her! Again she would recall, for the thousandth time each gentle word he said to her,—said to her even when he thought she was a slave! She would smile through her tears as she again recalled his words: "I will win thy freedom!" Then she would weep again, as she remembered that she had seen his arms about a beautiful woman! One day Aegea sat reading on the portico. Two handmaids, who had not observed her, were conversing nearby.

"Didst thou note, Felicia," said one, "the glances of love our master bestows upon Aegea?—and she, too, a plebian!"

"Aye, I saw it a hundred times! But yesterday he stood near her, but she did not see him,—stood there, gazing softly at her! Truly I believe he loves her!"

Aegea sprang to her feet and the handmaids screamed.

"Away!" she said sternly, "nor give thy minds nor tongues such silly evil thoughts and words,—else I will tell thy master!"

Shamefaced and frightened, they fled.

"O, gods, I pray that this is not true, else must

I leave here," she murmured. The thought, however, took root, for now she recalled a hundred words and actions of Decius! She had indeed been blind all along, yet she would not have such a thing be true for all the wealth of Rome! Affection for him she had indeed, yet no such love or passion.

The words he spoke to her that evening convinced her that an immediate decision was imperative.

"Tell me, Aegea," said Decius, "what would I do wert thou not of my *familia*? Thou knowest I have no taste for feasts and pleasures. My life is here, and only thy sweet words console me in my disappointments." Then he sat silent, gazing at Decia yonder, who was staring straight ahead into vacancy. Then Aegea felt that she must needs postpone telling him of this thing she had resolved upon. "On the morrow I will tell him; I cannot now," she decided. And thus many "to-morrows" passed! One day, however, she broached the matter to him, giving as excuse the pressure of her increasing work in Rome.

"Now, by the gods, I cry out at this," said Decius. "I will not have it so. My child unhappy, Artus gone, and now thou wouldst rob me of thy presence here. Nay, I will double, quadruple my allowance for thy noble work, yet will not have thee go to such perpetual slavery for an ungrateful multitude of begging plebs."

"Yet, I too, am a plebian, good Decius!" she said.

"Thou art plebian only in name. Thy soul is noble. I know, for yonder is the child of the noblest woman who ever drew breath. With such

experience dost thou think I cannot judge? Thou shalt not go,—at least—at least not yet a while,—I beg of thee. Stay with me until my child leaves me,—a short time hence I must take her—” He suddenly ceased speaking.

Then Aegea decided that she would say nothing more about the matter for a week, but that night wrung her hands in her perplexity.

“What shall I do; what shall I do?” she asked herself for the hundredth time!

CHAPTER LIV

From Negra, the remnants of Gallus's legions proceeded to Myus Hormas, thence across the country to Coptus; eventually they arrived at Alexandria. When the legionaries caught the first glimpse of the city, a mighty shout arose on the air and many wept at this, the end of their long continued sufferings. One day, during the march from Myus Hormas, Artus and Gallus were riding side by side, and the latter said:

"Truly, Artus, I understand thee not! Here we return with the remnants of our forces, and empty-handed. No ovation will greet us, but rather the censure of Augustus for our failure! Yet thou dost ride beside me throughout the entire days as though we were returning laden with spoils! It is no business of mine, yet I do not understand thy joyous countenance. I hate to see the walls of Alexandria!"

Artus looked piercingly at him and a cynical smile crept to his mouth.

"Ha!—I'll tell thee, Gallus, I gained through this campaign a treasure greater than the *aerarium*,—else would I feel down in the mouth as thou!"

Gallus looked at him in bewilderment and shook his head.

“And lost thy mind to gain it?” he murmured.

Artus smiled. “Nay, rather have I found it, Gallus!”

During the long days of the march from Negra, Artus and Glaccus often rode side by side. One day Artus said to the youth:

“I will rid myself of that carrion, Bassus, and will formally adopt thee, Glaccus. Thus, though we preserve the secret of our relationship for a while, thou wilt live in proper station as my son.”

One evening Glaccus and Hercules sat conversing aboard a swift galley that was bearing them to Brundisium. Artus was ill in the cabin, for the fever had again attacked him.

“Alas!” said Hercules, “thy father begins to feel the strain. It is a bad business!”

Glaccus shook his head moodily.

“Jupiter, grant that I have not gained a father but to lose him, O Hercules,” he said.

“Didst thou tell him of the woman?” said the freedman.

“Aye, and when he learned that I was proof against her charms, he took my wrist and said, ‘lovers are madmen,’ and that I was ‘a Roman after his own fancy,’ and added that Claudius is now doubly his friend,—because she took him as a lover in my place!”

Hercules laughed, and said:

“To think she was a former wine-maid! Mecinia, didst thou call her?”

“Aye, that was her name—in the wine-shops!—until she changed it, when Fortune smiled upon her, and called herself—Fortunæ! Dost thou believe, Hercules, that she deserted Donatus to be in

Egypt near me? Alas, small reward she got, poor woman, if it be the truth!"

"Women do strange things, Glaccus. She seemed plentifully supplied with gold. I knew a woman once whom I loved—and she—ah! what matters it now!"

"And truly Fortunæ earned the gold, if that old Donatus, whom I once saw, was her lover," said Glaccus, "and what dost thou think of Claudius's connection with the matter? 'Twas through his innocent agency she went to Donatus, who took her from the *insula* of Claudius's aged grandmother! The centurion saw her at the gate the morning she returned from the villa of Decius, and loved her forthwith! At last he is rewarded! Good Claudius! Dost thou think she will tire of him? May Fortune and Fortunæ both continue to smile on honest Claudius!"

"And though she smiles on him, I tell thee, Glaccus, that this Fortunæ's heart is with thee."

Glaccus remained silent. His thoughts had flown to the villa of Decius!

One of the physicians approached them at that moment.

"The tribune Artus raves," he said, "methinks his mind has gone forever!"

"Nay, good physician! Thy words pierce my heart. Is there no hope?" said Glaccus hoarsely.

The physician did not reply, and the youth and Hercules sought the cabin where Artus lay.

"I tell thee, Glaccus," said the freedman, "I do not believe entirely in thy Roman gods,—not yet,—not yet!"

CHAPTER LV

The hand of the sun dial near Aricia was casting its shadow on the ninth hour. The Via Appia was crowded with the usual number of vehicles of all descriptions, from the gilded chariots of equally gaudy youths to the small carts pushed along by hawkers of all kinds of merchandise. "The Queen of Roads," paved with skilfully joined slabs, offered no obstructions to the easy rolling of the wheels. Numerous pedestrians going from town to town, or perchance the entire way to Rome, lined the *margines*, or walk, each side of the roadway. A huge horseman was riding ahead of a light-covered *rheda* which was opened at the sides. At times he would gallop his horse ahead and shout:

"Make way! Make way for a wounded tribune!"

When this small cortege, consisting of the single rider and the *rheda* rolling after him, had traveled past Aricia, better speed was made.

At times Hercules would rein his steed and peer into the *rheda* when it caught up with him, and an expression of deepest anxiety could then be observed on his bronzed and bearded face as he saw his former master lying there suffering, and he would say to the driver:

"Lash thy steeds! The sun moves fast!"

At the villa of Decius, the senator, together with Aegea and Decia, sat within the elevated summer-house at the entrance to his grounds. They were watching the many vehicles and pedestrians that moved along the great roadway. Decius broke the silence.

“What a multitude of travel! The works of Augustus draw to the city many who, I doubt not, dream that wealth may there be picked up in the streets!”

“Aye,” replied Aegea, “Rome becomes more beautiful each day!” She cast her eyes in a southeasterly direction and suddenly said:

“Look yonder! Here comes a rider in haste! See, he deftly guides a *rheda* that closely follows him!”

From the distance they watched the efforts of Hercules to clear the roadway. At last he came closer to the short roadway that led to the grounds of Decius, and the latter exclaimed excitedly:

“By Pollux! There was but one man in Rome as large as he!”

He held fast to the marble railing a second longer, then without another word, swiftly descended and fled speedily down the roadway. Hercules saw him and waved his hands as the senator ran swiftly as an athlete at the games.

“What news, what news? Does Artus live?”

“Aye, until now, noble senator. I cannot tell thee of the morrow, for he lies sick to death,” replied Hercules.

“Where, where?” cried Decius, forgetting, in the excitement, the very existence of the *rheda*.

The vehicle, however, at this moment caught up with Hercules.

“There yonder, stricken with Arabian fever, and other ills. His mind—is gone,—gone!”

Without waiting to hear more, Decius, his throat now stopped from speech by the lump that had suddenly arisen there, sprang toward the *rheda*, tearing the curtains aside. He reached his strong arms inside, lifted the lean form of Artus, and enclosed it as though it were that of a child. He then sped quickly up the roadway where he met the puzzled Aegea and Decia, followed by the *villicus*, who had been quickly walking after him. They saw Decius running toward them, his breast heaving from exertion, and when he arrived close to them he shouted:

“’Tis he, ’tis he!”

Decia saw the hair that had turned snow-white over night, the pale sunken cheeks, the feverish eyes, burning with no look of intelligence, and too, she saw that he had returned alone! Then she clapped one hand to her side and covered her mouth with the other to smother a shriek. Not so Aegea! The instincts of the nurse came uppermost, and almost mechanically she said:

“Senator, order snow and water. Place him on this bench.”

Decius despatched the *villicus* on the errand, and immediately slaves came bringing, ice, snow, water and cloths.

“Aegea, is it serious, dost thou think? He does not speak!”

Helpless and speechless, Decia leaned against the pedestal of a statue nearby. Quickly Aegea took

some of the snow water and forced it into the mouth of Artus. Then, assisted by handmaids of Decia, she applied cool cloths to his forehead and body. Suddenly Artus sprang from the marble, throwing to the ground those who stood before him and pushing and thrusting to right and left as though he held a shield and sword, he shouted:

“First cohort; forward! sound the *tubae*! Move, move! Would ye take root upon the desert? Come, for Rome!” and as though leading the legionaries, he rushed through the ranks of a few slaves who had gathered nearby in a puzzled multitude, and struck some of them to the ground. Decius sprang after him, and folding Artus in his strong arms, shouted:

“Artus, my Artus, dost thou not know me? Decius, thy friend, here in Rome!”

The limbs of Artus relaxed and gazing strangely at Decius, he said:

“Where is thy passport?—Guard this man!”

Gently they placed him on the marble bench again, as, overcome with weakness, a cold sweat had suddenly succeeded the fever. Then they carried him into the summer *triclinium*, aye, even there where they had been wont to sit in the evening, discussing their many past experiences together in the wars!

All had forgotten Hercules,—all save Decia! Fatigued by his exertions during the long ride towards Rome and having paid and dismissed the driver of the *rheda*, the Gaul lay down on the grass beside the roadway wiping the perspiration from his forehead and his exposed chest.

He had closed his eyes to rest them for a few minutes,—eyes tired by the sun of many months

in Arabia! As he opened them again he saw a pale and beautiful maiden standing before him, her hands held meekly together as though in supplication to the gods! Hercules rubbed his eyes when he saw Decia, and then sat upright.

“Shades of Wodan! Who art thou?” he asked.

“Good soldier, canst thou tell me, did—did the tribune Artus come to Rome alone?” she said meekly.

“Aye, save for me, and too, some others—and Glaccus,” he replied.

Decia held herself firmly together, as it were, though tears had come into her eyes. Quickly taking a thick gold bracelet from her arm, she said:

“My thanks to thee, brave soldier. This for thy silence!”

She gently forced it into his great hairy hand, and ran quickly from him, even before he could recover from his surprise.

He then arose and walking slowly along the pathway, soon arrived at the portico. Decius at that moment had come from the *triclinium*. Spying Hercules, he said:

“Hercules, I forget thee in my joy and sorrow at having Artus with me again! Thou shalt rest here this night and tell me of this campaign.”

He then turned and entered the atrium, where he found Aegea, busily writing on some tablets.

“Good senator, send these by swift *tabellarii*. We need the best physicians in Rome.”

The beginning of the second vigil had already set in when Hercules and Decius sat conversing in the moonlight. The former had been telling many

details of the campaign, but he withheld the news of the discovery of the parentage of Glaccus. The honest freedman reasoned that it was not meet that he should be the one to tell it.

“And dost thou say,” continued Decius, “that but seven men were killed in battle?”

“Aye, ’tis true, yet none but the strongest could endure the heat and thirst—and fevers! The sun poured down upon our armor until one felt as though a furnace were hanging to one’s back. Like many others, I cast mine into the sands.”

“Where didst thou get that gold chain, Hercules?”

“From Gallus himself,—after Asca. I grasped the eagle that day, ten thousand of our enemies fell. Artus clasped my wrist in friendship,—my hand! I, a former slave of his, now call him friend! I tell thee, noble Decius, that clasp of hand I value more than I would a hundred gold chains from Gallus—and I still call Artus, Lord, though the records of Rome show that I have been manumitted!”

Hercules continued, telling details of the campaign:

“The youth Glaccus gained his first wound that day. He is a soldier after mine own heart and well deserved his promotion. He holds the rank of *optio* now!”

Suddenly they heard the sounds of clanking accoutrements along the pathway leading to the portico. The rays of the moon illumined the countenance of Glaccus, and Hercules arose, saying:

“Here comes a soldier who will some day be a tribune!”

Decius stretched forth his hand to the youth.

“Glaccus, welcome in the name of Jupiter! I am

glad to see thee. Hercules told me of thy courage and fidelity to Artus. Thus again I am indebted to thee for services rendered."

Glaccus grasped the wrist of Decius and said:

"I thank thee, noble Decius. Tell me quickly, how fares my—my commander?"

"He sleeps, yet I will take thee to him that thou mayest judge for thyself. Gods grant health and life to Artus, then mayhap, happiness will once more enfold this luxurious villa!"

As they entered the *cubiculum* to which Artus had been removed they did not notice Decia peering from behind a curtain. She ran quickly to Aegea and said:

"Glaccus is here!"

"Is this so, Decia? Now I feel as though Fortune begins to smile on us again."

Aegea hastily proceeded to the apartment where Artus lay. She saw Glaccus standing at the entrance, and spying her, he folded her in his arms. They entered the *cubiculum* of Artus, who was again raving:

"I have gained more wealth, Gallus, than Cæsar in Gaul! Damn thy Arabian gold,—I have gained a son!—Thou canst not take him from me, Gallus! Thou canst not! Help! help!"

Aegea knelt beside the couch.

CHAPTER LVI

The weeks passed quietly at the villa of Decius. The physicians had been successful, though the convalescence of Artus was slow. One afternoon Artus and Glaccus were conversing in the garden.

"I understand thee not,—speak further," said the former.

"She misjudges me, father. She thinks I bear a sore in my heart because of her words that night in thy atrium. In this Decia wrongs me, yet until this idea is removed from her gentle mind,—and too clumsy am I to do it!—until then, I must needs be an infrequent visitor here!"

"And thou hast kept our secret, my son? That is well. Vengeance must be satisfied first. As to Decia,—now truly I am disappointed in thee. Thou didst have more courage at Asca!"

Then he laughed.

"Decius! Decius!" called Artus, as the senator came down the path holding the hand of Decia. The latter blushed at seeing Glaccus.

"Decius," said Artus, "is it not meet that everything be pleasant here? Glaccus whom thou knowest I will adopt, hesitates to visit here, because my other child,—aye, thou Decia!—dost think some thing of him and he, my son to be,—a fool of double quantity!—thinks the same of her! Can we not settle matters now?"

His eyes twinkled as he continued, and Decius laughed.

“Glaccus,” continued Artus, “I order thee to walk alone with Decia. Go yonder to the stream and there fight thy battle,—and win if thou canst. Dost thou not agree with me, Decius, when I say we must have no friction in our families?”

“Now, Artus,” replied Decius, “thou hast spoken good words. My lamb rules me whilst thou rulest thy adopted son. Canst perceive the differenc? Go, children, and if ye come back not in friendship, we will banish ye.”

Silently Glaccus and Decia walked toward the stream. Love brooks no delay! Unconsciously they sought that hallowed spot near the bridge where he had crossed to her that morning more than two years gone by! The hours passed, and when they returned to the portico, Artus and Decius smiled and the latter winked.

“Love and a cough cannot be hidden!” said Decius, and Artus added:

“Let’s buy some wolf-fat!”

That evening Decia and Glaccus sat together on a white marble bench in the elevated summer house where they had first spied Hercules that day on which he had brought Artus to the villa.

These lovers now faced life with every hope for joys to be. Decius was satisfied with the announcement that Artus would formally adopt Glaccus as his son. Indeed, the event of the adoption but awaited the full recovery of the tribune, when at the Forum, the name of Glaccus would be enrolled among those of the Equestrian rank and he would then assume the name of the adoptive father. None

knew that Glaccus was of the same flesh and blood as Artus, for the latter, having in mind the discovery of the perpetrators of the crime of foisting Bassus upon him, had bound Glaccus and faithful Hercules to secrecy. Yet it sufficed Decius that this youth should woo his lamb, for would he not be the son of Artus? Was not Glaccus a youth of courage and character? Had he not "snatched the lamb from the wolf?"

During this long period Aegea had been untiring in her attendance upon Artus. One evening they sat together on the portico. The night was warm and balmy and the pale moon shone through light clouds overhead. Aegea spoke.

"Alas, I know that thou dost grieve in disappointment at the failure of the campaign,—yet thou art too experienced a soldier not to realize the uncertainty of war!"

"Nay, good Aegea, thou dost mistake the thought, for I must tell thee this. I gained a wondrous victory in that campaign. My words will startle thee, for even Decius has not heard them. I found in Arabia Felix,—aye, Arabia the Fruitful, Arabia the Happy, for me!—I found a jewel! a precious, precious jewel! I found my son,—limb of this own body! Aye, 'tis true and I can prove it!"

Aegea arose.

"Nay, be still; 'tis not the fever that speaks! Listen."

He told her the story of that retreat from Mariba, the discovery of the identity of Glaccus, but no details.

"Can this thing be true? Glaccus, Glaccus, sayest

thou? Then why thy sighs, O, thou most fortunate of men!"

"'Tis this," he said sadly, "that she who gave that son to me is not here to share the joy!"

"So runs life! Yet what proof hast thou that he is thy son? Who, then, is Bassus?"

"Who indeed!—yet—hear me. Glaccus holds half a ring I gave to his mother,—gave her ere he was born—ere I was impressed in the legions! This ring hath no duplicate in all Rome and Glaccus holds half of it!"

Aegea arose and stood tremblingly before him.

"Ring? Sayest thou a ring?" Then she sat upon the bench again, pushing back her hair from her forehead and drawing the back of her hand across her eyes, as if to clear her thoughts,—and whispered hoarsely:

"Describe this ring to me." She was forcing the words through her lips.

"It bore a seal—a hand holding a broken sword! 'Twas given to my——"

Aegea had fallen forward, and buried her eyes in her hands, but Artus did not realize that she had been overcome with emotion. When she recovered herself, however, she knew not what to do. She feared to tell him that she was the "Euterpia of the past"—that she had tied half of this ring about the neck of the babe she had been compelled to desert at the camp of the Tenth Legion. She feared the shock would be too much for Artus, yet it took all the strength and courage she could summon to prevent her from shrieking out her joy. She wrung her hands hysterically, arose and seated herself several times.

“Aegea, good Aegea, I have overtaxed thee with my business!” said Artus, “Say thou art not grieved that he thou lovest is a son of this flesh—even though thou dost not know his mother?”

“Know his mother?” she repeated after him. “Look, look upon me!—backward cast thy mind! Is there naught about me to remind thee of Euterpia, my Calchus?”

At hearing these words, Artus arose to his feet, tottering:

“But two people in this life knew me by that name,—the other was the aged father of Euterpia and he is dead!” he whispered. “Ah,—I—am—dazed!”

He sank upon the bench again, and Aegea came and knelt before him, put her arms about him and lifted her face to the moonlight.

“O, Calchus, Calchus, dost thou not know thy Euterpia?”

With a mad cry, as though of the bursting of all the reservoirs of all the joys of life, Artus clasped her to his breast. A silence of many minutes ensued, interrupted only by the sobbings of these reunited lovers from the past. Then Aegea took from her bosom the other half of the ring!

“This to prove that I am genuine!” she said.

“Proof! O, the veil is torn aside,—the veil that blinded me! Again I see the Euterpia I wronged! Canst thou forgive me for the years of which I robbed thee?”

For answer she lay her head upon his breast, sobbing.

Decius came upon the scene. His face paled as he saw them in fond embrace, but he retired without

a word. None knew of his thoughts or disappointment.

“Artus wins where I have lost,” he murmured.

Entirely ignorant of the scene being enacted on the portico, Glaccus said to Decia as he held her hand pressed to his breast:

“And, Decia, dost thou love me?” asking the question for the hundredth time, “Dost thou love me? Canst thou take me to thy bosom through this life—and forever—and—forever—through all aeons of time?”

Decia entwined her fingers in his, and said softly:

“For thou art Glaccus, Glaccus saved from the sand of the arena by my father. Thou lovest me, and sought to woo me when thou didst think I was a slave and thou a free man! Is it not meet that I should love thee, Glaccus—I who loved thee through all the weary months and months when I did cry myself to sleep each night, thinking of thee and that I had lost thee? O, Glaccus, are not the gods good?”

A lump arose in the throat of Glaccus. How good life now seemed! How he craved the coming of that day when he could say to her:

“I am the son of Artus, and of his own flesh!”

Yet how happy it made him to realize that she loved him for whatsoever he might be, knight or plebian!

Her fingers sought his eyes to caress them, and she felt a single tear forced from his lids by her gentle touch. Yet Glaccus was no man of tears! In silence these two lovers arose from their marble seat,

to them cushioned with down of heaven! Perfume sprinkled by Eros from the *amphoræ* of Venus was sprayed about them and the odours of love clung to them,—enveloped the very atmosphere through which they moved!

And thus they arrived at the portico where Artus arose to greet them as he saw them coming.

“Glaccus,” he said to the youth, “go to her.” His voice trembled and he pointed toward Aegea, who was sitting there in silence.

“And thou, my Decia,” he continued hoarsely, “shalt walk with me for I have a wondrous tale to tell,—if my voice fails me not.” As Decia rested her hand on his arm she noted that it was trembling, and said to him:

“My dear, dear father!”

Then she placed her other hand on his arm as though to enclose him in her affection! Thus they walked down the path through which she had just come with Glaccus.

Glaccus went to Aegea. His body was bathed, as it were, in the *tepidarium* of love, happiness and hope! And, too, he loved this woman, to whose devoted nursing he owed so much,—mayhap life itself!

How else then, that at this moment he should love her more than any other woman in life, save Decia,—and Decia he did not love,—but worshipped. He could see naught but the faintly outlined form of Aegea hidden in the shadows, as she held her hand to her heart.

“My foster-mother!” he said, “father sends me to thee,—yet I would have come myself for I must thank thee—thank thee again and again,—and a

thousand times again—for all I owe thee. How can I repay a decimal part of my great debt to thee?"

He noted now her silence, and reasoned that perchance Aegea had a recurrence of one of the periods of sadness such as he had observed during his convalescence in "the old days at the *rustica*." And so he thought, she suffered now. Yet he would comfort her! Therefore he knelt before her, even as a child would have done, clasped her in his strong arms, and said:

"Mother!"

And Aegea, striving to speak, was only able to whisper through her tears:

"My son, my own son!"

"Aye, thy son forever and ever! I could not love thee more hadst thou borne me!"

Then Aegea, her tension overwrought at his words, gave vent to a shriek which brought some relief to her, and cried:

"Flesh of my flesh, thou art my child!—Fruit of thy father's love for me,—Artus is thy true sire,—and I did bear thee! I am thy mother!"

Then she fell forward on his shoulders moaning from joy and kissed him a dozen, dozen times,—kissed his hair, his eyes, his lips,—and pressed him close to her heart for the hundredth time.

The breast of Glaccus was heaving and he could only say:

"My mother! my own mother! O, how could it have been otherwise! Gods! what have I done to gain this added joy?"

Then he arose and called "Decia! Decia! my mother! my mother!"

Decius in his *cubiculum*, was aroused by the

shriek of Aegea. Artus had returned with Decia,—the latter's eyes tear-stained, for she had heard the story of this twofold joy!

When Decius came from his *cubiculum* and saw these two united couples, heart pressed to heart, he murmured, even as though he endeavored to convince himself:

“Is it not meet that I, too, should praise the gods who thus bless my roof? Doth not happiness beget happiness? Who knows but that some share of it may come to me—even though I must share thee, ‘my lamb’—and lose thee, O, Aegea!”

Then he turned and softly retired to his *cubiculum* again, where he seated himself in solitude upon his bed,—and there he remained until they sought him, charging him with weapons of love and gratitude, the women clinging to him and calling him father, and saviour of all their joys, and a hundred other endearing terms! The two men, with their arms about his shoulders, told him all; and then some share of their happiness indeed came to Decius; and Artus, the cynic, had melted, had become as other men! The cold smile of cynicism had departed! An expression signifying manhood's belief that life was more than a journey of cold sorrow, now replaced that of questioning disbelief in the very wisdom of human existence! And, too, joy of youth flashed from his eyes,—stood forth hallowed by his snow-white locks,—the price the gods demanded for so much happiness!

And Decius, great, strong, honest Decius,—Decius, a commander on the field of war, yet now the shepherd of a fold,—a fold wherein his flock had once consisted of a single ‘lamb,’—his Decia,—De-

cius who the legionaries called the "man of metal,"—walked down that night to the far end of his grounds,—to the tomb of his wife Aurelia, gone from him these many years! There he leaned his massive frame against the white stones and said:

"Thou, my absent Aurelia!—thou alone who gave me all my happiness, forgive me, if in my loneliness for thee, I sought another to comfort me!"

His eyes sought the memorium carved in the marble:

VALE, AURELIA.

"Aye, 'Vale' indeed, until I join thee there!" he said, as he covered his face with his mantle; and it seemed to him that she came and caressed him and whispered:

"I am with thee, my Decius; tarry long, until I come for thee."

CHAPTER LVII

Late in the afternoon of the second day following, Artus sat in the atrium of his house in the Janiculum. Tightly clasped in his hand he held a small scroll and a sealed packet.

Again and again he examined the scroll and contents of the packet. The latter was stamped with a seal,—a hand holding a broken sword upraised!

“Truth conquers all things,” he said, “and reveals all.”

Then he arose and walked up and down the atrium. Soon the slaves lighted the lamps, for night had come. Hercules entered.

“Hail, noble patron! Is thy freedman the first of thy guests?” said the Gaul.

“Freedman, dost thou still call thyself, Hercules? Nay, ‘freedman’ must needs give way to friend. Yet hear, I promise thee that henceforth thou wilt have even greater belief in the power of our Roman gods! Artus now lives but in the memory of a name. Henceforth salute me as Publicus. Such was my sire’s name.”

“Publicus! Of the family that even now Romans mention the name with homage, because its members served the state through generations past?” said the freedman in astonishment.

“Aye, even so, good Hercules.”

“Then I vow a shrine to thy great Jupiter.”

At that moment, Decius and Glaccus entered. Hercules gave a mighty shout.

“Hail, noble senator, and thou, too, Glaccus! Alas, that Artus should not be among us!”

With a frown, Decius said:

“What ails the freedman? Has he lost his senses?”

“Aye, senator, I have. Artus is not here, but rather one of the tribe of the Publicii!”

“What words are these?” said Decius. Artus was now standing before him silent. Quietly he handed the scroll and packet to Decius who perused them hastily. The senator then arose in wonderment.

“Gods! Artus! thou whom I picked that day at Philippi! Thou, Caius Publicus, of patrician blood! Now, I vow by Jupiter! I will match my judgment against the world!”

He strode forward and clasped the hand of Artus in both his own, and Artus said:

“Yet forever I remain to thee but plain Artus,—until—until we part forever, my Decius.”

The latter turned to Glaccus, who had been a silent witness of the scene.

“Thou hast a new father, Glaccus,” he said, “one great in Roman blood, as in deeds!”

Father and son embraced, and at that moment Lucius entered. He shared in their joy.

“Yet in the excitement, friends,” said Artus, “ye have forgotten the instrument through whom the gods sent me this added gift. Here, Lucius, read aloud!”

The philosopher took the small scroll, the contents of which were as follows:

“To Artus,—Greetings from Claudius:

“From Alexandria, I send this letter and packet by my friend Appius, of my legion. As thou knowest, I am no master of words, as our poor departed Regus—may his shade rest in peace, I sorely miss him,—and doubt not that thou and Lucius, too, likewise often think of him. I am remaining here in Egypt where Gallus, through thy commendation, has given me an excellent post. He has well rewarded my efforts to serve Rome and, too, I must confess to thee, another strong attraction keeps me here. Fortunæ! For, thanks to Eros, I have won her love! More than that, because she truly loves me, and me alone, she has severed her mysterious source of wealth—this source I enclose to thee, for she bled the Senator Donatus of wealth, using as a weapon this which I enclose to thee. Because she has learned to love me—because of these things,—she gave the enclosures to me to send to thee. More than this, I know not, nor did I press her for further information.

“May these things I send thee, the seals of which should be unbroken, bring thee added fortune and happiness. Send thy reply and the golden powder to the barracks at Alexandria. May Fortune make thee as happy as thy friend, Claudius.”

* * * * *

At the beginning of the first vigil, these friends were still seated in close consultation. They awaited the arrival of an expected guest.

Eventually the *ostiarius* announced Bassus, who came bounding into the *peristyle*, shouting:

“Welcome! welcome, my father, to thy house again!”

“Welcome,” said Artus, dryly, “a hundred thous-

and times, welcome." Then he held his lips tightly together. He clapped his hands and ordered a slave to place the folding doors in position and the screens of *talc*, and that he was not to be disturbed.

Surprise gave place to fear as Bassus noted the preparations and thought of the strange reception he had received, nor did he fail to observe that the eyes of Hercules were following him.

The small *peristyle* was soon enclosed. To Bassus the very air seemed permeated with horror!

"Father," he said, "what means thy coldness,—and this enclosure?"

"Silence, Bassus! thou art on trial for thy life!"

"Father," said Bassus, as he paled, "am I not thy son, thy very loving son?"

"Aye," replied Artus, "as the wolf loves the lamb! Silence!"

"Bassus," he said, in the firm voice that was formerly heard when he rendered his decisions as praetor, "Bassus, confess!"

Only then did the youth realize the meaning of the words.

He sank to his knees before Artus and moaned:

"He made me do it, he made me do it."

"Speak!" said Artus.

All present now moved forward. Tremblingly Bassus told the tale, naming Donatus and Mecinia, whose villainy he did not strive to hide, hoping to mitigate the terrible sentence that he realized would be imposed on him.

It took their united efforts to quiet Decius, whose rage knew no bounds. He threatened forthwith to seek Donatus for the purpose of slaying him. Artus spoke:

“As judges,” he said, “it is but meet that ye individually express the punishments ye think compatible with the crime. Ye know the facts. Donatus ruined my family, robbed us of all our wealth and our good name, through lies and treachery. So these enclosures from Claudius prove. As Bassus has said, no man’s business in Rome is safe from the spies of this beast, Donatus. Now as to the punishment,—thou, Hercules, shalt speak first.”

The Gaul, who had hated Bassus from the moment he had seen him that day in the atrium of Artus, said :

“Death to the dogs!”

Bassus would have shrieked had he not pressed his hand to his mouth.

“Now, Decius, what sayest thou?”

“Death, yet through the courts of justice. The laws of Rome will give just sentence in this, for thou knowest that they decree death even as did Hercules here.”

Bassus was now too terror stricken to moan.

“Now, Lucius,” continued Artus, “what is thy philosophy?”

“My philosophy tells me that life with the pangs of remorse gives the greatest punishments that man can endure. I say that the villains should be placed in solitary confinement in the Tullianum—and forever,—and that such recommendation should be made to the courts of justice.”

Bassus fell flat on the floor, and shook as though he had the ague.

“What sayest thou, Glaccus?” said Artus.

“Hear me patiently, for my words will sound strange. My mind tells me that the innocent should

not suffer for the guilty. But yesterday I was told that Bassus here had been enriched by another child! His wife now lies upon the sick bed, awaiting the return of the father of her two children—innocent children, whom we seek to sentence to a life of shame, through the sins of the father. I advise vengeance on Donatus at once,—yet,—the postponement of the punishment of Bassus! Vengeance, though it may be slow, must still be stern; who knows but that Bassus here is perchance another victim of the base senator's villainy!"

Artus stared at Glaccus when he heard these words, and then he said:

"Bassus, the father of another child!"

"Glaccus," he continued, "I do agree with thee as to the immediate punishment of Donatus, yet as to Bassus here, procrastination thou knowest, is the thief of justice."

All were now silent. Glaccus spoke again:

"Forget not the innocent children whom thou wouldst make fatherless! I once was fatherless. I cannot cast my vote to make the innocent suffer."

"What sayest thou, Decius?" said Artus.

"The words of Glaccus are noble," said Decius, "yet thou, Artus, shouldst advise us of thine own thoughts. I will take vengeance on Donatus. Decia is my child and I will avenge her!"

Bassus was now lying terror-stricken upon the floor.

"Glaccus is right," said Artus, "yet, Decius, I, too, have my grievance against Donatus and I must therefore share in thy vengeance. For the sake of the child new-born,—and the other one,—it seemeth as though the gods stay our hands—and, too, for

the sake of the gentle wife, equally innocent as the babes, it is perhaps meet that Bassus should be spared." He thought deeply for a few minutes and then said:

"Bassus, hast thou seen this toy before?"

He reached his hand into the folds of his tunic and took therefrom the jewelled dagger that had belonged to Decia.

"Aye," moaned Bassus, "Galbus took it from the lady Decia, and gave it to me to keep for him. I lost it,—one night that I visited here."

Artus sprang to his feet; his face had suddenly become pale.

"What! wretched man!" he said.

He then seated himself and covered his eyes with his arm.

"O, Eurycele," he moaned, "thou art vindicated!"

For a long time he sat thus and none disturbed him. After darkness comes light. He spoke, but his voice had become harsh again.

"Bassus," he said, "this is thy only chance for life."

He then unfolded his plan. Even Decius was now convinced that justice would be done.

Ere long Bassus and Hercules went out into the night together. The latter was disguised as an *antiambulo*, or waymaker, and carried a flaming torch. They were followed by a *lectica*, borne by four men in the dark red livery of the *lecticarii*. These four were Artus, Decius, Glaccus and Lucius. Their faces were blackened to aid in the disguise. All had been sworn to secrecy forever. Bassus led them and eventually the litter arrived at the house

of Donatus in the Palatine. Bassus plied the knock-er on the door and the *ostiensis*, who opened, recognized Bassus as a frequent visitor.

"Summon thy master," said Bassus, "tell him to arise and come to me at once, for a fortune weighs upon my words. Haste!"

The *ostiensis* called a slave who immediately hurried away to carry out the orders of Bassus. Hercules stood in the shadow of the door. He held a naked dagger and Bassus had been warned that it would be used in case of treachery.

Donatus came to the door.

"Why didst thou not come within, *verbex*?" he said, "to thus drag me from my bed at this time of night!"

"Peace, Donatus, wouldst thou lose a fortune for thy temper? Come, and come quickly to yonder street; there the man awaits me who will tell thee such a tale that if it proves true, as I believe, will make thee richer than the Augustus! Come, ere he seeks another!"

"And what fool words are these?" said Donatus. He looked closely at the face of Bassus, and then said:

"Gods! the blaze in thy eyes bespeaks a matter of great importance! I'll go with thee!"

"I tell thee, Donatus, that this man has the key to heaven for us! Haste!"

Donatus required no further coaxing. With his usual caution, however, he said:

"Give me some clue, Bassus."

"Clue! Bah! then I'll go forthwith to my 'father,' Artus, who loves gold as much as thou dost. I am

faithful to thee and give thee the first chance to gain this treasure. Please thyself,—I care not. Who-soever gains it, I am to get my share!”

Donatus hastily followed Bassus to the corner of the *vicus*, where he saw a litter in the shadow of a house. When Donatus reached it, he suddenly felt a weight pressed on his mouth into which a gag was forced. Strong arms enfolded him. He was next bound with ropes and thrown heavily into the *lectica*.

The bearers immediately lifted it to their shoulders, and preceded by Hercules, continued on their way.

They passed the *nocturnal triumviri* on their rounds, who, however, suspected nothing. Who could have guessed that the powerful senator Donatus lay bound and gagged behind the drawn curtains of the litter, preceded by Hercules?

Artus said to Bassus:

“For thy silence, we will spare thee,—yet thy very life and those of thy wife and children depend upon thy silence. It is a Roman’s way of punishing thee!”

“Thanks, noble, thanks, for thy mercy. I vow by all the gods a new life will start for me!”

The litter proceeded on its way in silence save for the loud cry of Hercules, the unnecessary cry, “Make way, make way!”—for the streets were almost deserted! The night was dark, and naught interrupted the passage of the litter bearing its load. Soon it arrived at the summit of the Tarpeian Rock on the Capitolinus. They lifted Donatus from within. Artus spoke:

“Thou fiend!—go woo the maiden Tarpeia, the betrayer; the shade of Eurycele demands it!”

Donatus would have shrieked had he not been gagged. Artus gave a signal.

“Heave!”

A dull sound re-echoed from the depths. No words were spoken, yet the clasp of wrists, such as Romans gave when a deed was well done, marked their several partings.

It was Roman vengeance!

EPILOGUE

Late in the summer of the year 9 A. D., a *rheda* was rolling along the Via Flaminia, escorted by a *turma*, or squadron, of Roman cavalry. The curtains of the vehicle had been drawn aside and within could be seen a very aged man. The cortege moved as speedily as the condition of the roadway and the volume of traffic permitted, and when it arrived at the various towns on the way, its occupant was received with high honors by the *aediles municipales* and other officials who had learned of the approach of Marcus Decius, one of the few surviving veterans of the army that had fought under Julius Cæsar! This day, the aged man summoned the commanding *decurio* and said to him:

“Canst thou not arrange to stop this continual ceremony? My journey is no triumph! Speed, speed, is my desire!”

The *decurio* replied:

“Noble senator, ‘renown is denied the living,’ yet Romans are showing gratitude for thy many honored years of service. By travelling more at night time, however, we can pass the gates of many towns without a halt.”

Decius nodded his head affirmatively, and said:

“Arrange it so.”

The ceremonies, however, were repeated many

times during the long journey of the Flaminian Way, but eventually, the cortege arrived at Etera on the Rhine River, where Decius alighted in a manner that almost belied the fourscore and eight years he carried!

“At last, Hercules, at last!” he exclaimed, for the freedman of Artus was now in the service of Decius and had pleaded to accompany the latter on the journey.

“Take one farewell glance toward Rome!” continued the senator, “Soon we leave for rougher regions. Thou knowest that the triumphs were in my opinion, premature, for ‘songs of triumph before final victory are tuneless.’ Germania was delayed, not conquered. These very words I said to Augustus, and thou knowest my belief caused me to carry my gray hairs to that wild country.”

“And right thou art, O, Decius. Born in Gaul, I know those people even better than thou. The German spirit can be bent, not broken, for they have men whose very blood is metal and who despise life when it separates them from freedom. Would not revenge be sweeter than life itself to them when they remember, O Decius, the violations by Romans of the sanctity of their domestic shrines? Thou hast seen Arminius of the Cherusci, valiant of heart and arm, eyes flashing the fire of his soul and who, though sired by Segimerus, is a son even greater than the father! Albeit young in years, he is distinguished by military service in the auxiliary legions, and has been honored by Rome with the rank of knight. His tribe fairly worships him; likewise he holds highest respect of the Marsi, the Bructeri and the Chatti. I tell thee, Decius, that while such men

remained unchained, their country will never remain a Roman province!"

"O, Hercules, I would that Augustus had heard thy words! Then I vow by Jupiter! he would not have left during this long period,—for even a single day is long when aught is wrong,—would not have left, I say, the avaricious and rapacious Quintilius Varus, indolent in body as in mind, to rule that war-like country. Germania offers no pro-consulate, such as that of Syria! O, how Romans tire me with their love of the triumphal car in which they ride in state that the rabble may gaze in wonderment at their greatness, and yet, by Pollux! they descend in haste when their stomachs ache!"

Hercules laughed, and then said seriously:

"And this thing further they truly tell. The victories of the Germans take no form of triumph, but are given as offerings to their gods, Wodan, Thor and the rest. The flames of worship consume the spoils of war upon the altars of deities!"

"And therefore it is strange," replied Decius, "that Fortune does not smile on them! Meanwhile Rome becomes foul with wealth!"

He folded his arms and gazed in the direction of distant Rome, then said gently:

"Yet I am content. O Hercules, that the gods have so favored me in my old age. Those I love I have left happy. Decia is still the worshipper of Glaccus, who rises steadily in life; their children's children, too, cry the name of Decius! Alas! Artus and Aegea have preceded me to the regions of the shades where soon, however, I will join them! Great Augustus, too, loves and clings to me. I have power, fame, wealth—and a share of happiness! Truly

when man reaches this stage in life, is it not time for him to die?"

Hercules replied:

"I do not follow thy Roman philosophy. Methinks it is but the time to live!"

"Thy judgment errs, O, Hercules. I say it is the most proper time to die, that in his last moments a man may survey all that for which he struggled through the years,—and—and when the soul hungers as mine hungers now for my Aurelia, gone from me these near fifty years, even a thing, so bitter as death, would taste sweet!"

Hercules turned his head aside and murmured:

"O, great noble, to have loved a shade for fifty years!"

Decius walked up and down with halting steps. During these few minutes it appeared as though the weight of years bore heavily upon him, yet none could have failed to recognize in him one of the *patre conscripti* of whom Rome could well be proud.

Having deserted the *rheda* for the horse, he followed the road which led from Vetera on the *Rhenus*, eastward to Aliso, the headquarters of Varus, whence he continued his journey, guided by the line of small posts that had been established by Varus to preserve the connection between the Rhine River and the summer quarters on the Weser. Eventually, Decius accompanied by his mounted escort, rode into the camp of Quintilius Varus one day in the autumn. Though his reception by the commander was marked by certain courtesy, it was easy to perceive that Varus was not pleased at the arrival of this senator, a member of the Imperial Concilium.

"Welcome in the name of Jupiter!" said Varus,

“yet may I ask,” he added, haughtily, “if Rome trusts not my courage or my mind that thou shouldst be sent to watch my government here? See, yonder are all commodities we need, brought by my orders to feed my legions. Thus I serve Rome without added cost of money for her greatness, for I make the people hereabouts provide us with necessities. Cæsar himself could have done no better!”

A frown appeared on the face of Decius, who said:

“Varus, I like not thy words. I come, not as an enemy to stir dissension in thy camp, but as a friend and with the Imperial sphinx of Augustus to vouch for me. Thou canst not deny that my gray hairs and temples worn bare by the helmet, can aid thee in solidifying our hold upon these wild men!—Aye, Cæsar himself would indeed have done otherwise, if it is to the shade of Julius thou dost refer, for I was with him when he crossed the Rubicon!—and I know! Rome is not too poor to give payment for supplies her legions need! Exactions of tribute, when unjust, may cost a thousand times their value. Within the *praetorium* we will discuss it further.”

Varus led the way, and as they walked through the camp, Decius was greeted with loud shouts and cheers from the legionaries, who thus paid homage to this veteran, an honored survivor of the bloody wars of the past! Decius saluted them.

The following day Segimerus and his son, Arminius, accompanied by a number of chieftains, were announced.

“I have invited them to a feast this night,” said Varus to Decius; “I take all measures to cement their friendship with us,” and when they entered, he

added: "These are my friends and allies; Arminius here holds the rank of Roman Knighthood! They have all learned to respect Rome's power and to realize her good intentions toward their people."

When the Germans had left to wander about the camp until the banquet was ready to be served, Decius said:

"Varus, thou canst well judge a man by his countenance and I warn thee to trust them not. They act too much in concert, like wine-merchants in the Velabrum. Thy campaign into strange lands denotes poor judgment. Remember, Varus, war gives no opportunity for repeating a mistake! Thou hast over-confidence in supposed allies upon whom the yoke of Roman laws and functions and, too, licentious outrages, cannot but weigh most heavily. Remember, repentance follows hasty counsel; therefore think more upon this matter. A beaten path is a safe one; ponder, ere thou dost invade forest and morass to conquer strange hordes where thy supposed friends, the chiefs themselves, have lost!"

"Thou hast no need to come with me," said Varus, haughtily.

"Varus," said Decius quietly, "thy speech is unwarranted. The many honors that have been bestowed upon me, prove my courage and ability in both war and peace, whilst thou, with thy life of ease behind thee, and reckoning, as thou dost, thy poor experience in the government of the debased natives of Syria, dost place thy judgment against mine! I come to advise thee for the good of Rome. Prudence is the charioteer of all virtues, yet—thou canst lead or follow,—to me it matters not—I will go with thee even to the Imperial realms of Hecate!

By Hercules! this sword arm with its fourscore years and more can give as keen a thrust as thine! I admire thy courage, deplore thy hot temper, regret thy inexperience and predict that thou wilt never live to carry as many honored years as Decius!"

"Pardon, noble Decius, my temper; I come by it honestly. Thou knowest even in animals there exists the spirit of their sires. Yet I must march. I have given my word—and, too, it is necessary to crush that rebellion, for thus only can I preserve these tribes as my allies. Rome's power is strengthened by union. 'Tis most necessary policy!"

"It is too heavily burdened with the element of chance to be the best," said Decius, "yet thou dost wear the *paludamentum* here. I can but advise."

* * * * *

The 17th, 18th and 19th Legions of Rome, together with a large body of cavalry, numerous auxiliaries, many women and children and a vast number of baggage wagons, had been set in motion at the word of Varus. The line of march was southwesterly and rain had, in many places, caused the soil to become sodden, impracticable alike for cavalry and infantry. For some distance the route lay along a level plain. It was necessary, however, to make a rough roadway that would permit the passage of the army which soon arrived close to the thickly grown woods of the *saltus Teutoburgiensis*. Trees were hewn, pits and morasses filled up and even bridges built across ravines to enable the army with its great volume of baggage to continue its difficult march, rendered more so by the heavy rains of the season. The watchful discipline usually observed in the Roman armies during their progress through

suspected countries, was not enforced. In silence, Quintilius Varus watched the activity of the working parties of his soldiers. Beside him rode Decius and the latter's constant attendant, Hercules. Arminius and his chieftains had already left under a pretext. Ere long, the Roman army arrived at the tract between the curve of the upper part of the Lippe and the sources of the Ems. This was the spot Arminius had fixed upon for his blow! A storm was raging and rain had already rendered many of the weapons of the Romans useless. Decius spoke to Varus.

“By the gods, I like it not! Desperate maladies require desperate remedies! For the last time I advise thee to boldly summon Arminius and his chieftains and hold them as hostages for the safety of the legions, else, Varus, will Rome's welfare pay for it. Why, O why, didst thou turn a deaf ear to Segestes?”

“Segestes bears personal enmity to Arminius, whom he charges with ravishing a daughter, Thusnelda. Thy fears are founded on thy weight of years,—the words of Segestes, upon lies and cowardice. I will return a double conqueror.”

“Sing not of triumph before victory, Varus,” said Decius.

Hardly had he ceased speaking, when a hushed roar travelled through the legions. It soon arose above the thunder of the tempest, for Arminius, after having again harangued the barbarians, had given the signal and the hordes let fly their bolts of war! The Roman army was practically surrounded and the rear guard had been attacked. The Roman legions stretched out in a lengthy line, scattered by

entanglements of forest and morass, were at first too dazed to return a single blow. On both flanks and from surrounding heights with lofty forests of oak, the darts of death descended. The light armed auxiliaries of Germany had deserted! It was impossible to deploy the heavily-armed legionaries and form line of battle. The madness of one makes many mad; the fear of death is worse than death itself. Panic reigned, aided and abetted by the very appearance of the Germans, many of whom wore skins of wild beasts, arranged in such manner that the fur of the animal's head formed a hood out of which the eyes of the barbarians could be seen glaring fiercely beneath the grinning tusks of a boar or the horns of a wild bull. Arminius had given orders to aim at the steeds and these wounded and slipping in the mire of mud and blood, created havoc in the ranks. Loud shouts of tribunes and centurions, however, aided by continual blasts of the *tuba* and *lituus*, brought some order out of chaos. Still the darts and spears played havoc with the legions as thousands upon thousands of barbarians charged upon their hated enemies, with wild chants, rude trumpets pealing, prayers for victory to their gods and curses on their lips,—swept downward in mighty hordes! The rain fell in torrents, the elements indeed aiding Germania, and it seemed as though the vials of their wrath were being poured upon the Romans! Pent-up hatred of years now rushed forth in a fury of insane excitement; thoughts of ravished daughters, of hearthstones defiled, caused a veritable thirst for Roman blood!

Varus completely lost his head. The firm grasp of Decius on his arm, however, served to rouse him.

“Break through, Varus, break through! Forward! We must make camp for the night; on the morrow we will fight them in the open!”

Varus gave the necessary orders, trumpets again sent forth blasts, and the weight of Roman arms served to enable the army to reach an open stretch of marshy ground before evening. The women, children and the baggage having been placed in the center, camp was made and fortified. The Romans had left a long blood stained track in their wake!

Night folded over the scene.

The army was safe within the camp, and each man seemed to feel that the morrow would bring victory. Had not Roman arms often been extricated from difficult positions! Hope had again arisen, for Varus announced that on the morrow, the legions would cut through to Aliso. None slept, for outside of the Roman camp could be seen the fires of the barbarians and the altars of their deities adorned with tortured bodies of centurions and lawyers, the latter the despised *jurisconsulti*, who had been captured that day and whose shrieks of agony resounded throughout the night. When the lightning flashed, these victims could be seen hung on trees, surrounding the camp. Indeed the sounds of their brothers now in agony, coupled with cries of the wounded and wails from the women and children within the camp, heard at intervals between peals of thunder, prevented all from closing their eyes.

Decius sat conversing with Hercules and Lucius Eggius, the latter one of the prefects of the camp who had distinguished himself that day.

“Gods! Eggius,” said Decius, “it was a joy to see thee fight!”

Hope was their comfort in adversity and all took courage.

On the morrow they would fight their way to Aliso! All unnecessary baggage was burnt during the night, and soon after dawn the women and children having been placed in the center, the army was set in motion. In the open stretch of ground, the Roman lines were formed in battle array. Varus knew that in combat in the open, the clumsily armed Germans with their ineffective protective armor, would be no match for the legionaries. Arminius too, realizing this fact, refused to give battle. The Roman formation was therefore necessarily changed, a column was formed for the march, and soon the Romans again entered dense woods. Their enemies, taking courage from the success of the previous day, became more aggressive and attacked in close combat with their long two-handed swords, heavy spears, battle axes and clubs. The battle waged throughout the entire day; the weight of the German wedges was invincible, and the bloody line in the wake of the Romans had been lengthened! Varus, who had been wounded, was bandaged. The Romans were surrounded by frenzied hordes of thousands and thousands of Germans who, in the excitement of battle and their hatred, struggled to get at their enemies, virtually climbing over their wounded comrades to gain a single blow at Rome! The legionaries struggled up the glens and floundered in the morasses. The Germans, watching every opportunity, charged through the disjointed column, breaking the line into numerous parts. The Roman cavalry, commanded by the cowardly Numonius Vala, had de-

served. Piece by piece, the Roman army became practically decimated. The overpowering numbers of their enemies had cast the Roman pride and power of the morning into the mud of Germania!

Varus, with tears in his eyes, stood silent beside Decius. It was too late for reproach.

Suddenly the commander threw himself upon the ground, his form shaking with sobs.

"Yield not to calamity, Varus, but face it boldly," said Decius, but Varus shouted:

"O Rome, forgive me!" and threw himself upon his sword, which pierced his heart. His example was followed by his officers. Decius, however, looked disdainfully at them.

"To die thus! To die thus! while many of their men still live! Nay, I will not!"

At that moment a legionary bleeding in the breast, ran up to Decius. He had come from a body of veterans who were fighting nearby.

"Will some one lead us?" he shouted, "We will not surrender!—O, Varus, dead!" he exclaimed, as he saw the body of his commander lying at the feet of Decius.

"Come!" cried Decius, "I will lead ye!"

"Thou! thou!" said the legionary, as he gazed at the aged man.

"Aye, Decius, who fought at Philippi, shall lead ye! Come!" he shouted as he guided his horse, followed by Hercules, in the direction in which the veteran led them.

When Decius reached the heroic legionaries they sent forth a mighty cheer. It was as though the gods had sent them,—a god to lead them!

“Hail, Decius!” they shouted as they clanged their swords on their shields and cried: “*Eu! Eu! Io!*” and Decius smiled upon them.

Ere nightfall the few survivors fought their way to a small mound where they formed a circle. Night folded over the scene. The enemy ceased the attack. The quarry was caged! The morrow would come! There was no need for haste—before dawn!

Again the barbarians offered up victims to their deities, and in the lull of the storm were heard the shrieks of tortured prisoners, though many captives were saved for future ceremonies.

“O, noble Decius!” said Hercules in the night, “I beg thee let me pierce thy breast! Live not to adorn such sacrifices! Thy gods will give me strength to serve thee with my sword arm!” for the Gaul had been wounded.

Decius clasped the wrist of the freedman and said: “No, Hercules, my armor is not even dented!”

Morning dawned gray and misty. From all around could be heard the shouts and laughter of the Germans.

Arminius, surrounded by his chieftains, approached the mound whence the hopeless survivors peered forth.

“Surrender, and we will spare the tortures!” said Arminius.

Decius answered him:

“Thou foul traitor of Cerberus! The gods curse thee! Rome will avenge us! Come!”

He raised his naked sword on high, presenting a wonderful picture of courage. Fallen were the years from the aged shoulders of Decius! The metal of young Roman manhood resounded as this aged

man clanged his sword on his shield and dared the thousands and the thousands to assail him! A single ray from the rising sun penetrating the surrounding oaks, illuminated his countenance. The barbarians paused and gazed at him in admiration not unmixed with superstitious awe, for they saw a strange figure with a flowing white strand of hair peering forth from beneath his helmet, a flash of supernatural fire playing about his eyes.

Many of the barbarians shouted: "Spare him, Arminius, spare him!" for valor, even in an enemy, is worthy of praise! But Arminius shook his head negatively and the vast hordes, grasping their weapons with tighter holds, closed in upon the survivors.

"Take them alive!" was the order carried from mouth to mouth.

Decius as he saw the enemy pouring down upon him shouted:

"Cut thy heart, Hercules! Farewell, O my Decia, my Glaccus and all my children! Open thy arms, Aurelia, I come, I come!"

At the approaching enemy he again shouted:

"Rome will avenge us!" and threw himself upon his sword, and "the gods" fulfilled his wish of years and years ago, for his armor was soon "dented and cut through a hundred times"!

In death a smile crept to his noble face! Arminius, surrounded by his chieftains and standing with folded arms over the lifeless body of Decius, was deeply engrossed in thought. The inspired words of Decius still range through his ears:

"Rome will avenge us!"

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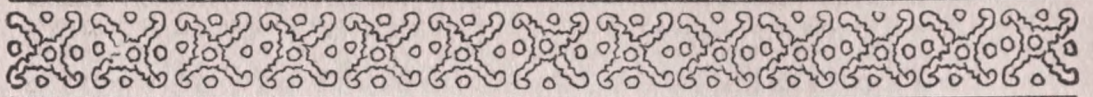
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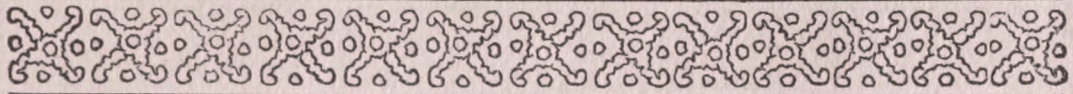
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