



I CAST MY NET

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A Slave of Catiline

BY

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LGSA Yaccyho



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WITH AFFECTIONATE REGARD
THIS BOOK IS INSCRIBED TO
MY VALUED FRIEND OF MANY YEARS' STANDING
THE ORATOR, STATESMAN, AND PATRIOT
MARCUS TULLIUS CICERO

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CHAPTER I

Of the Coming of the Pirates; and How I Was Sold for a Gladiator

TO the hills! To the hills! The pirates are at hand! It is Gaza's ship!"

The ever-dreaded cry rang through the village, and out from cabin and hut there poured a frightened crowd, the men hastily girding on their swords, the women carrying what possessions they could lay quick hands on and urging their terrified children to greater speed. Stark fear gripped every one; these pirate raids were not uncommon along our coast, and they left behind them a trail of misery, of slaughtered men, looted cabins, villages in flames, and men and women and children of all ages carried from their homes to be sold in the slave-marts of Delos or Rome or Alexandria. And Gaza and his associate, Sportella, were known far and wide as the most ruthless, the most utterly merciless, of all the savage Cilicians who infested the shores of the Mare Internum.* I take it that these were assumed names, Gaza being the Persian word for riches, while Sportella of course signifies the little basket

* The Mediterranean.

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in which a wealthy patron hands out the daily dole of food to his clients. But whether real or false, they were of evil omen, and we tarried not a moment in our flight.

I had been engaged with my foster-father in mending our fishing-nets, but at the first shout we dropped our work, rushed into the hut, and seized our arms. He grasped his sword, and I took mine from the peg on which it hung, but in addition I took a stout bow—my favorite weapon—and a quiver of arrows. My foster-mother snatched up a loaf of bread, a bit of cheese, and a couple of dried fish, called to her daughter Polla, a maid of some thirteen years, and the four of us joined the ragged line of fugitives who sought safety in the hills.

The men cursing bitterly or grimly silent, the women shrieking their terror to the sky, the children sobbing and wailing their dread of they knew not what awful fate, so the pushing, jostling crowd streamed out in flight. A few of us kept our heads, helped on the weaker ones, watched over the fear-mad wretches, formed ourselves into a rear-guard. We knew that on our return we would find our homes in ashes, but what was that compared to death or—far worse—the auction-block and the bitter bread of slavery? Glancing back as I topped the first little rise, a half mile or so inland from

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our village, I saw the bireme of Gaza draw into our bay, its purple sails fluttering down as it lost its motion. Well, we had been warned in time; before the pirates could land and overtake us we would be hidden among the sheltering caves and rocks. Far to the north I caught a glimpse of a white sail against the ocean's blue, and I murmured a prayer to Neptunus, ruler of the sea, that it might be one of Pompeius' galleys; that general had of late, as we had heard, done much against the pirates.

But from the leaders of the flight there rose a wail of despair, and before us we saw deployed a long line of armed men; Sportella had landed farther up the coast, marched down to the hills back of our village, and cut off our retreat. And in that moment I knew there was no hope of rescue; it was not a Roman galley that I had seen.

Then the women ran madly to and fro, shrieking more wildly than ever; loosened hair flying in the breeze, garments fluttering, silly hands waving in futile gestures or lifted to implore mercy of those hearts of bronze, they were run down by the swifter-footed pirates and bound hand and foot with quick sailor skill. As for the men—in truth, only the veriest craven will hold back from fighting when his loved ones are in peril, and without shame I can say that we did what we could. But how might we, without protective armor and with but casual weap-

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ons, stand against the well armed and disciplined men of Sportella? It was no ordered battle, but a furious mêlée of sword and dagger, spear and pike, and in the end, fighting desperately, we stretched some score of pirates dead or wounded on the ground. But we suffered five times the damage we wrought, and the destiny of battle was foreordained. As to myself, I saw three fall before my arrows, and with my sword I accounted for two more, but even as I pushed the last one off my blade something descended with a stunning crash upon my head, I pitched forward into a vast abyss of midnight dark and for me the fight was over.

I have spoken of my foster-father and foster-mother, and indeed, I had no recollection of my real parents. My earliest memory was of being tossed about on a vessel that rocked and pitched under a gray-black sky, and of a kind-faced man who spoke soothing words and lashed me to a block of timber. I remembered also being slid into the water, and my terror thereat, a terror that made me want to scream aloud, while at the same time my childish pride bade me choke back my cries. Thereafter, a gap in my recollections, but in later years I learned that in a great storm a Roman pleasure-yacht was driven ashore and that I was the only one who escaped the fury of the waves. The

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vessel broke up on the eastern coast of Italia, in the Mare Adriaticum, between Barium and Cannae; and the folk of a nameless village, hunting amid the wreck for salvage, found me, a child of four years, the only living creature of the ship's company. The wreckage was scattered far and wide along the shore, together with bodies of the crew, and there was nothing to tell whose was the yacht, or whence it came. Nor was there anything to show who I was save a gold *bullæ* suspended about my neck by a chain, and on it the letters TIB, whence it was inferred that my parents had named me Tiberius. A certain fisherman had recently lost a child of about my age, and to his superstitious mind it seemed that Father Neptunus had sent me to replace his dead son, so he promptly adopted me and I grew up in his home, being variously known in the village as Tiberius or—from the color of my hair—Rufus. About a year after the wreck the fisherman's wife gave birth to a daughter, and Polla and I grew up as brother and sister, nor could any have told, from the treatment accorded us, that we were not of the same blood; my foster-parents were uniformly kind to me, and treated me like their own son. Of course, I was early put to work, but this represented no harshness; the living we got from the sea was by no means plentiful, and everyone must do what he was able. However, my tasks were suited to my

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strength, and I believe they helped rather than hindered my growth and the development of muscle and agility which later brought me some reputation and saved my life over and over again.

But if life in our village was hard, it was in the main peaceful. We went in dread of pirate raids, to be sure, but except for this we were untouched by battle or striving. Rumors came to us from time to time of fierce political warfare in the City, of conspiracy, proscription, and bitter struggles for power, but these things passed us by, nor did they disturb the quiet progress of our days. And I would have laughed in disbelief had some seer or prophet told me that I was destined to play no small part in the deadliest and most desperate of all the conspiracies that ever tortured our mighty State.

Growing older, I went with my foster-father on his voyages, helping him cast and draw his nets, and venturing with him to the coast of Illyricum or round the southern cape to Syracuse, Messana, or Rhegium, and once as far north as Baiae. And now, fourteen years after the wreck, in the year DCLXXXIX A.U.C.*, I was a tall and well-grown youth of eighteen, already as strong as many men, and able to pull an oar or haul a net or manage a boat with any in the village.

But it seemed that my fishing days were over, for

* 65 B.C.

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when I regained my senses I found myself manacled hand and foot, and from the tossing of the rough planks on which I lay I knew that I was in the hold of a ship at sea. It was black as the nethermost pit of the realm of Dis, and in truth I thought at first that I had died and gone to Pluto's kingdom, for my head ached sickeningly, my throat was parched and my tongue swollen from thirst, and all about me I could hear groans and wails of agony, the sobbing of children, and the retching of miserable creatures overtaken by that worst of all maladies, the sickness of the waves. Gradually, however, my head cleared, the pain grew less, and I understood what had happened; that the raid was successful, and that I was one of this unhappy company bound for the slave-market and the auction-block.

Unlike many biremes, Gaza's was decked over fore and aft to make a prison, so that whether by night or by day no glimmer of light reached us, and we could not tell the passage of the days. But from time to time sundry of our captors moved about among us with torches, bringing a scanty dole of bread and water and herding us around with kicks and blows and curses, and from these visits I was able to form some estimate of time. On the eighth day, as nearly as I could judge, we were ordered on deck, and shuffling in the chains that bound our feet,

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we obeyed, coming out into a blaze of light that smote our unaccustomed eyes with all the force of a blow. Adjusting my sight, I looked around, to see all about us the intense blue of the Mare Internum, and off to eastward a white-sailed ship—Sportella's. To westward I could descry the masts and towering marbles of Syracusee, from which port a small sailing-vessel came dancing toward us over the waves. We were hove to, and she drew even with us, heaving to likewise and putting over a small boat that was rowed swiftly to our side, from which boat there climbed over our bulwarks a figure such as I had never before seen.

He was a man of medium size, dressed in a once-white woollen tunic and red leather sandals; his hair descended in glistening oily ringlets to his slightly stooped shoulders, and over his bosom there spread a curly, greasy beard that bore unmistakable traces of food; and to complete the picture, both his clothes and his person were of an utterly incredible filthiness, though on his fingers glittered several brilliant jewels. I could not make out whether he was Greek, Syrian, or Jew, but in any case Chiron—for so Gaza called him—was unwholesome enough to disgrace any country. He addressed the pirates with unctuous courtesy, speaking to the two leaders cringingly yet with an odd suggestion of boldness, as though his respect were

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more a politic outward showing than a genuine feeling; and Sportella bellowed an order to his men to draw us up in lines along the deck. While we shuffled to our places I looked about among the prisoners, some two hundred in all, fruit of more than one raid, but could see nothing of my foster-parents; I learned afterward that they had both been slain. Polla I did catch sight of, and nodded and smiled encouragingly to her; it went to my heart to see her pretty face streaked with tears and drawn with misery.

But now we were ranged in line, and Chiron, with Gaza and Sportella, marched along inspecting us. Sportella was a big man, huge of frame and heavily muscled, with round red face and booming voice, yet for all his bulk he deferred to the smaller but more deadly Gaza, who, with his straggly hair and moustache and his coldly cruel face, reminded me of some venomous spider. The inspection over, Chiron asked:

“Shall I bid on them one by one, or in the herd?”

“One by one,” answered Sportella, but Gaza contradicted him, saying:

“In the herd.”

“After all, that would be better,” amended Sportella. “Yes, in the herd, Chiron, in the herd.”

“There are some that are of no use to me,” said Chiron, and Gaza replied:

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"Point them out."

The slave-dealer indicated eight men and three women, bent and broken with years, and Gaza called an order to his men:

"Overboard with them."

"Shall we strike off their chains?" asked one of the pirates, and Gaza snarled:

"No! Do we want them swimming and squalling about the ship?"

And the eleven unfortunates, despite their screams and pleadings for mercy, were dragged to the bulwarks and incontinently tossed into the sea, where they sank at once.

I was sick with horror at this brutal callousness, but Chiron, unmoved, had been performing some mental arithmetic, and now he announced:

"There are a hundred and seventy-eight; twenty *denarii* apiece; three thousand five hundred *denarii** for the lot, landed at Tiber wharf."

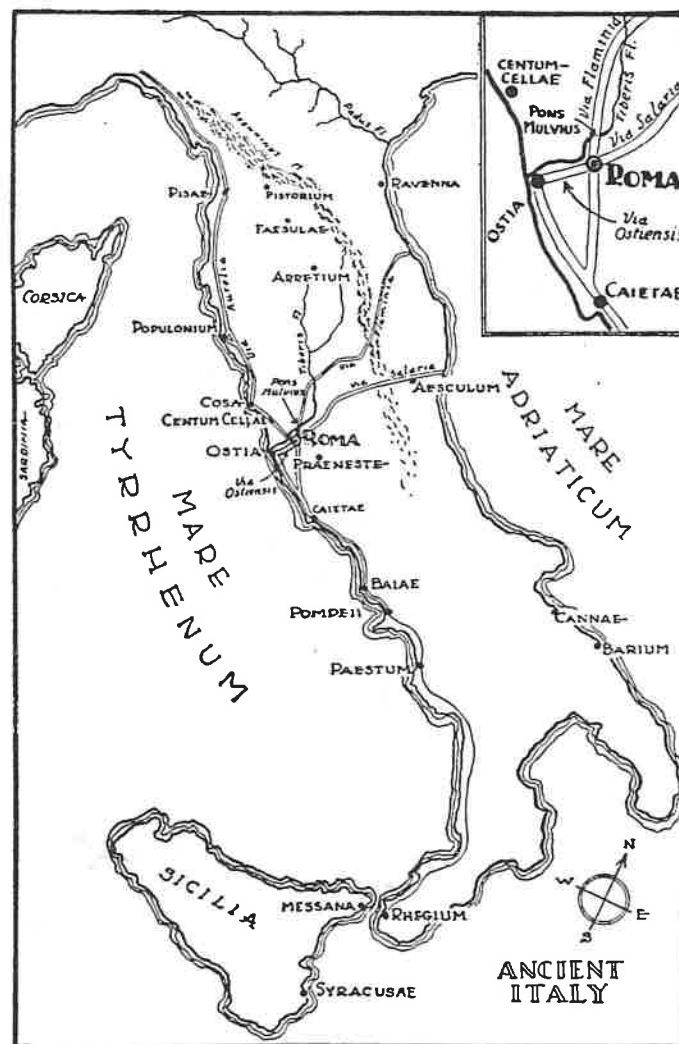
"*Per Deos Immortales!*" howled Sportella. "Twenty *denarii* apiece! And you will average two *sestertia*† apiece—perchance more."

"For some," replied Chiron, deprecatingly. "For others, less."

"And landed at Tiber wharf! *Di bene vortant!*" And with extended fore and little fingers he made

*\$612.50. A *denarius* was 17½ cents.

†A *sestertium* was about \$43.



ANCIENT ITALY, SHOWING THE PLACES MENTIONED
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the sign of the horns, to ward off evil fortune. "Do you think we seek the cross? We will land them at Paestum, but no nearer Rome—Pompeius is too active and too ready to crucify gentlemen of our trade."

Chiron bowed and rubbed his hands.

"In that case," he said, "the price will be fifteen *denarii* a head. Not a few would die on the march from Paestum to Rome, and some would slay themselves or escape."

"Any that escape you—!" boomed Sportella. "And do you think to dictate terms to us, you filthy *mango*? You greasy-whiskered, foul-smelling, blood-sucking scum of the Alexandrian gutters—"

"Enough!" broke in Gaza's cold voice.

"But—" and Sportella turned to his associate.

"Enough! Chiron, we will land them at Ostia, and you will pay us six thousand *denarii* for the lot."

"But, most noble sir—" began Chiron, only to be cut off by Gaza with:

"You heard me! Thus will there be ample profit for you; take it, or I throw the herd to the waves."

"Very well, noble sir," responded Chiron, humbly, and betook himself to his boat, while the pirates, at a word from Gaza, got under way.

We were landed at Ostia, our leg-irons and bracelets were removed, we were shackled neck to neck, and Chiron and half a dozen of his servants started

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us on the fourteen-mile march from Tiber mouth to Rome.

For me it was an easy enough journey, but difficult for some of the weaker ones, and the *lorarii* plied the lash freely ere we caught our first glimpse of the City of Quirinus. But when we did come within view of that mighty City, towering on its seven hills, the white marble stucco of the patrician homes on the Palatine glowing warm in the sun of late afternoon, for a moment I forgot my weariness, forgot that I was a wretched slave, and stood lost in awe and wonder. I have since learned that the approach along the Via Ostiensis does not give so fine a view of Rome as the approaches on the other side of the City, namely, the Via Tiburtina and the Via Flaminia, but at that time the City housed more than half a million souls, and any aspect of it was impressive enough to a fisher lad who knew no place larger than Syracusae. And when to this were added all the stories and traditions of Rome's greatness, small wonder that I stood and stared until the biting whip reminded me that I was no longer my own man, but had been sold as one of a herd, like some lowly bullock.

We entered through the Porta Ostiensis, marched along the Vicus Tuscus, skirted to the south of the Forum, where we saw on our left, above the shops and other buildings, the Temple of Jupiter Capi-

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tolinus, and so into the Subura, a place of narrow streets, tall tenements, and evil stench. Eye-filling marvels were all about us, and not least of them the height of the Suburan buildings, for though the palaces of the patricians never rise more than two stories, and often only one, these rickety frame tenements tower five and six and even seven floors above the street. Into a dark, damp, and reeking cellar under one of these we were thrust, our neck-irons were removed and our ankles once more shackled, we were given a loaf of bread and a pitcher of water apiece, and there we were left in obscurity to wonder what the coming day had in store.

In this noisome hole we remained for six days, awaiting the date set by the aedile—the magistrate in charge of such affairs—for the public auction; then early one morning our guards roused us and drove us out and back the way we had come until we reached the Forum Boarium, the cattle-market near the Porta Flumentana. The open space was more or less crowded with cattle, together with buyers and sellers, and the stalls about the sides were full, but at one end a place had been cleared, the block set up, and all preparations for the auction were complete. Two other slave-dealers besides Chiron had arrived to offer their wares, and as we marched in their gangs drew near, coming from the other side of the market, until there were at least

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five hundred men, women, and children to be sold. It did not seem to me that all could be sold in one day, and in truth I was right, for other like sales that I afterward attended consumed several days. But now a crier mounted the stand beside the block and barked an announcement, whereat a number of those loitering about the market turned and drew near. The crier stepped down, to be replaced by the auctioneer, and the sale began.

Most of the slaves to be sold had their feet whitened with chalk, in token that they were newly imported and that the customs duty had been paid, and of these practically none had scrolls of guarantee hung about their necks, but were sold with a cap on their heads as a sign that the dealer gave no warrant of health or character with them. Of those with unwhitened feet, however, almost all were guaranteed; they were being sold, for one reason or another, by private owners. I saw blacks from Nubia, Greeks of evident education and refinement, uncouth barbarians from the North, sharp-featured and dark-skinned men and women from Egypt—people of every land and nation, until it seemed that all the world had been laid under tribute to furnish slaves to Rome. I caught sight of my sister Polla, but she was too far away for me to speak to her, though I did manage to catch her eye and throw her a smile and a nod.

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It chanced that I stood near the block, and I was able in some measure to forget my wretchedness in listening to the comments of the crowd that pressed close about us and to the patter of the auctioneer, and in admiring the clever way in which he coaxed up the bidding. But I felt my cheeks grow hot with vicarious shame when the first woman was offered for sale. She was a young Greek of perhaps twenty years, with a gentle and refined face and a charming figure; her garments were expensive though now torn and soiled; and she gazed about her with a wondering look in which fear and grief played no small part. It seemed that she could not understand the Latin tongue, for when told to step up on the block she only stared blankly; and when one of Chiron's men grasped her arm and thrust her forward she shrank from him in dread. But when she realized what was wanted she mounted with docility, and it was plain that her appearance attracted attention, for there was a stir of interest among the crowd.

"She will make a good *vestiplica* for me," commented a fat, red-faced man in the toga of a curule magistrate. "The one I have now grows lazy, and I am sending her to my farm."

"No *vestiplica* could make a toga lie in graceful folds over that paunch of yours, my Lentulus," laughed a patrician dame, tapping him playfully on

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the arm with her fan. "Better let me have her for a hair-dresser."

"I wonder if she is educated," another bejeweled woman remarked. She spoke to the girl in some language that I did not know, though I took it to be Greek, for I caught the word "*Homeros*."

The slave's face brightened, and she replied at length in the same flowing tongue, whereat the woman nodded as though satisfied. Other questions were asked and answered, then the first woman spoke to the auctioneer.

"Is she sound of limb and in good health?"

The man smiled and responded:

"She is sold *sine titulo*. But you can inspect her."

He nodded to two of his assistants, and stepping forward they laid hands on the girl's clothing. As though warned by instinct, she tried to protect herself, but one of them caught and held her wrists while the other stripped off her garments, leaving her naked before the crowd. With a little cry, she buried her face in her hands and tried to turn her back to the multitude, but was dragged around and made to lift her head and to face the people while the patrician dame pinched and poked her, felt of her limbs, and satisfied herself as to the girl's condition, even having her hair unbound, to judge its length and thickness. For myself, I was furious at such indignity laid on a girl of good birth, and when

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the men first stripped her I started involuntarily forward to protect her. But my shackles tripped me, and as I picked myself up amid the laughter of the crowd I realized how futile such an effort would be; realized, too, that we were no longer human beings, but merely cattle; and I stood silent though raging in my place. Nor did it help my mood to know that Polla would undoubtedly be given the same brutal treatment.

The girl was quickly knocked down, being sold, after some brisk bidding, to the woman who had asked about her education; twelve *sestertia* was the price paid, a most unusual figure; however, captives of her quality were rare and brought good sums. She was allowed to dress and was led away weeping, and the sale continued.

At length it came my turn, and I mounted the block, removing my clothes when ordered; in truth, after the adventures of the past fortnight I had but little left to remove.

"Here, now," said the auctioneer, "is a strong, sound, tall, well-formed youth, as you can see for yourselves. He would make a good litter-bearer, or he would last long at the mill or in the quarry. Who will start the bidding? What am I offered? Do I hear ten *sestertia*?"

"Two *sestertia*," called the woman who had bought the Greek.

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"Three!" cried another, in a different part of the crowd. "It is my fancy to have a full set of red-haired litter-bearers, and I already have six. Three *sestertia*."

"Does he know anything of swordsmanship?" shouted a burly, yellow-haired, blue-eyed man, and the auctioneer turned to me, repeating the question.

I thought of the pirates whom I had slain, and smiled a trifle grimly as I replied:

"Ask of Sportella's men."

"*Per Martes!*" laughed a soldier. "If that is needful to answer you, Dumnorix, then shall you never know."

"Why not?" boomed the giant.

"Have you not heard? Four days since, Pompeius overtook Gaza and Sportella off Caieta and adorned some two hundred crosses with what was left of their men after the fighting was over. They dared too greatly when they landed this herd at Ostia."

"The Gods give them peace," said Dumnorix. "They were brave men. Three and a half."

I whispered to an attendant standing near:

"Who is the big man?"

"Dumnorix," he answered. "A *lanista*."

"A *lanista*? What is that?" For the word was new to me.

The attendant glanced at me curiously.

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"Whence do you come, barbarian? From some coast town, by your speech. He is a trainer of gladiators for the arena—as you will learn if he bids you in."

"Four!" shouted someone else.

The first woman shook her head when the auctioneer glanced at her, but the second nodded, and he said:

"Four and a half I am offered. Who will make it five? Will you?" This to the magistrate.

The latter shook his head.

"My urban family is complete," he answered. "And it is too much for a farm slave."

"Five!" bellowed Dumnorix.

The dame nodded again.

"Five and a half I am offered. Who will make it six? Do I hear six? No? Shame on the Roman people, to let a handsome and sturdy youth go for such a price! Dumnorix, your gladiators have brought you many a good purse; surely you can afford six *sestertia* to add another to their list. Think of all the good gold he will earn for you in the arena!"

"Aye!" answered the *lanista*. "If he be not slain in his tyro bout! Well—Pluto seize you!—six."

The auctioneer turned to the woman who was bidding on me.

"Will you forego your red-haired litter-bearer

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for a mere half *sestertium*, *Domina*? If I remember correctly, he would match well with the others in size, would he not? And then you will need but one to complete the tale. Will you say six and a half?"

"My man vowed that if I paid more than five he would sell them all—but I can talk him over. So be it!"

The crowd cheered and laughed, while Dumnorix' hard face flushed with anger.

"*Habet!*" cried someone. "Dumnorix has it!" It was the cry that greets a vanquished gladiator, and the *lanista* grew still redder.

"*Non habeo!*" he cried. "I have not got it. Seven!"

By now the crowd was cheering both contestants, and the woman glanced angrily about, biting her lip.

"And a half!" she called.

"Eight!" boomed the Gaul.

"And a half!"

Suddenly Dumnorix jumped his bid.

"Ten!" he shouted, and the spectators howled with delight.

The woman shook her head at the auctioneer.

"The Gods blast you, Dumnorix!" she said. "But at least I have made you pay well for him."

"*Mehercle*, yes!" agreed the *lanista*, ruefully, now

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that the heat of strife had left him. "Twice what he is worth. Well, it is a gamble, and we live by taking chances. Pluto have mercy on him if I lose money by my bargain!"

He paid over the money, then turned to me.

"Come along, you. Put on your tunic. What is your name?"

"Tiberius."

"Come along, then, Tiberius. And Mars hear me, if you do not earn me your price I will pay the priests of Cybele to lay a curse on you in the next world."

He started off, I shuffling behind him, but before we had gone more than a few paces I stopped him.

"*Domine,*" I begged, "may I ask a favor?"

"What is it?" he growled.

"My sister Polla is to be sold to-day. Would you not buy her also, that we may not be separated?"

He stared at me.

"In the name of Mars!" he exploded. "When I have paid such a price for you? And what would a girl be doing in a stable of gladiators? If she is a good girl it would be a living death, and if she is not I would not have her there. My darlings have other tools than distaff and needle!"

"Then you will not?"

"*Per Martes!*" he grunted, and resumed his swaggering march.

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Heartsick, I fell in behind, and followed him to the barrack which was to be my home for two long years, where the Gods had destined me to know both hope and despair, both joy and misery unspeakable, until it was Their good pleasure to set me free from that hell of savage men.