



# *Quintus*

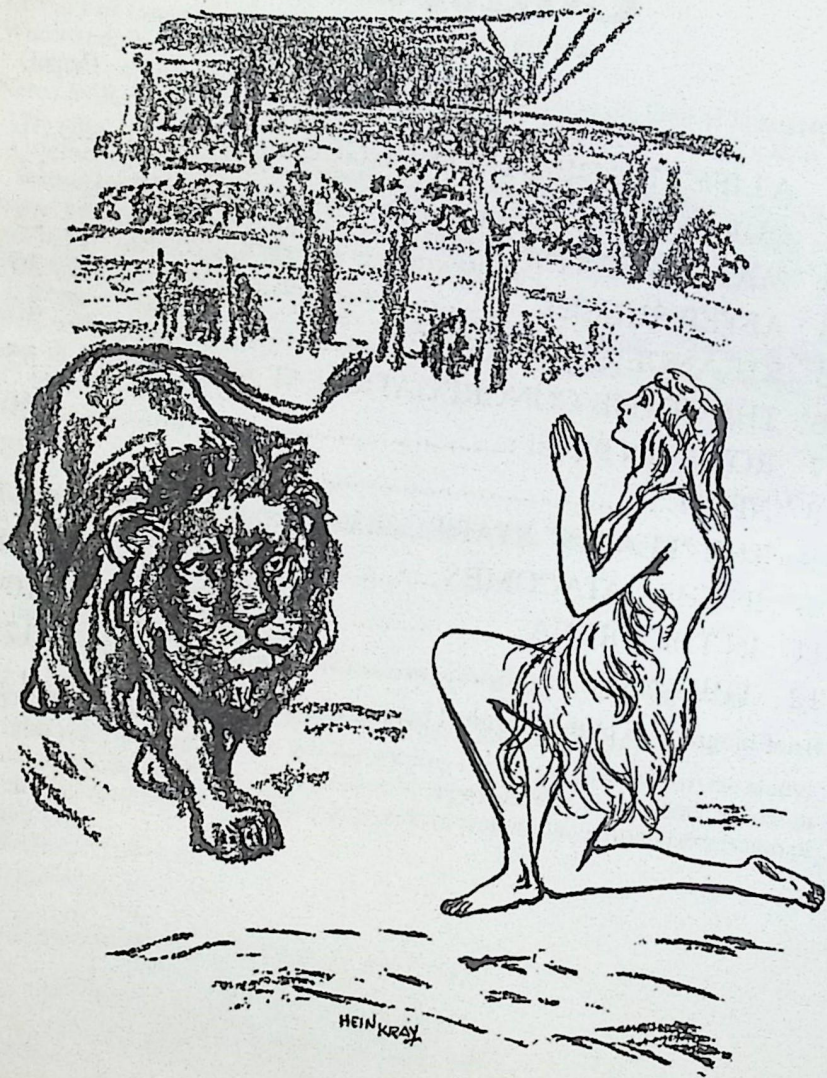
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A story about the  
persecution of Christians  
at the time of Emperor Nero

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## Chapter 1

### *A LIFE AND DEATH STRUGGLE*

Syrius thrust out but Gerdonius skillfully met the attack and the weapon slid off his shield. He immediately counter-attacked and Syrius dodged the deadly sword only in the nick of time. The two men circled each other again. The fear of death could be seen in their eyes, burning feverishly, as they looked for a weak spot in the defense of their adversary. An undefended side or perhaps a moment of carelessness could offer the chance of killing the opponent.

Thus these two men fought their life-and-death struggle; it was either victory or death. No other choice was possible.

Were Syrius and Gerdonius such irreconcilable enemies? On the contrary, they were good friends. But why then that merciless fight? It was obvious that it was not a mock battle. Syrius carried a net in his left hand and in his right hand a long pole topped by a steel trident with frightfully sharp points. He thrust the pole purposefully and with all his strength at Gerdonius' chest. Again Gerdonius met the attack with his shield. Was this the way friends treated each other? Certainly not, but then again they were not fighting by choice. They had been forced into this terrible combat because they were gladiators by profession.

In the past they had been free men and Syrius, the Syrian, and Gerdonius, the German, had belonged to the armies that had dared to fight against the Roman legions; the one in the woods and swamps of the north and the other on the hot plains of Asia Minor. Unfortunately, they had become prisoners of war and were taken to Rome by the triumphant army of Nero. As was the custom in those days, they had been sold as slaves and because of their athletic build and great physical strength, had been placed in the school for gladiators.

It was there that Syrius and Gerdonius — the names given to them — had first met each other. Soon they had become firm friends. Now they were opponents in the arena, with one instruction: that the one should kill the other. If they did not do that, or tried to spare each other by pretending to fight, both would be killed. So they had no choice. The victor would be the one who would survive. And both wanted to stay alive! That is why they could not think of their friendship. Each fought to save his life.

In this way they continued to fight. Gerdonius launched into his opponent and Syrius counter-attacked by attempting to render Gerdonius defenseless by throwing the net over his head.

Thousands of onlookers were watching the spectacle in the arena. They were all free Roman citizens, and it was for their enjoyment that these games were held. Being a nation of soldiers, one could not give the Romans anymore enjoyment than to let them watch a life-and-death struggle in which only deftness, strength, and courage could give a chance of victory.

And therefore, on this morning in March of the year 64, they had come to the amphitheatre to see the contest between Syrius and Gerdonius. There were more than one hundred thousand seats, most which were occupied, because the Syrian and the German were both well-known fighters.

The spectators, especially those in the seats at the rear, stretched their necks in order not to miss anything of the splendid scene. They encouraged the two fighters by shouting loudly. They cheered and clapped their hands when one of the two skillfully repelled an attack or cornered his opponent. Things were coming to a climax. Of the twenty-five groups that had started the combat, Syrius and Gerdonius were the only pair left fighting. The other forty-eight had finished their game. Consequently twenty-four bodies were lying in the arena in pools of blood, surrounded by broken weapons. Twenty-four strong young men had been killed to provide some amusement for the public.

Now everyone's attention was turned to the two remaining men. The tickets used for betting on the outcome of the fight, moved quickly from hand to hand. The stakes were very high. Sometimes the poor, who did not have any money, staked their freedom on it. This added to the excitement of the gamble.

Nero was sitting in the imperial box, with his household and some of his senators. While a faint smile played about his thin, bloodless lips, his eyes wandered around the arena. He looked at the colourful scene of the well-filled amphitheatre: the flapping awnings with red, yellow, and blue stripes, the spectators, the Pretorians — the Emperor's bodyguard — in their splendid uniforms and plumed helmets, and the commoners in their scarlet and purple togas. Occasionally the traditional white toga was still seen, although its use was becoming increasingly rare as it was difficult to keep them clean.

"The people are very amused, Seneca," Nero said, turning to his tutor sitting next to him.

"That's not surprising! The duel of those two barbarians is first class, oh divine Caesar," the senator answered, "although it seems to me that Gerdonius is getting tired."

Seneca was correct. The gladiator's breath was becoming jerky. His bloodshot eyes were making his sight hazy. He tried to correct this by shaking his head vigorously. He must not lose the battle. His life was at stake! Oh, if only he could hang on a little bit longer than Syrius; then he would be safe. Safe, yes, but only till the next fight, which could be in a few days time. Still, he did not give that a thought. Any second could be a gladiator's last. He wondered if his opponent was also weakening.

Gerdonius felt strength ebbing rapidly. Then the net was thrown over him. His arm weighed heavily and could no longer ward it off. Yet he was able to block another stab of the trident with his shield, but the blow made him lose his balance and fall. According to the rules of the game, Gerdonius, although not injured severely, had lost the combat.

The spectators, wild with excitement, cheered Syrius. Yet they had great respect for the way in which the conquered gladiator had fought, and the cry "Thumb up, Caesar!" was heard throughout the stadium.

This meant that Nero was asked to spare Gerdonius' life. It was the custom that the Emperor decided whether the defeated man, if he had not been killed in combat, was allowed to live. He made his decision known by holding out his clenched fist with the thumb out. If the thumb pointed down the victor had to kill his opponent, while pointing the thumb up meant mercy.

Syrius had placed his right foot on Gerdonius' chest and turned toward Nero, awaiting his decision.

"The people are asking for mercy, Caesar," Seneca said.

"Let them ask." The reply sounded indifferent. Nero held out his fist without pointing his thumb up or down. The tension in the amphitheatre rose.

The onlookers cheered and shouted. Some more bets on the outcome of Nero's decision were made quickly.

"Aren't they excited?" said the Emperor, while his fat, round face broke into a cruel grin.

"The people are right in asking for mercy for Gerdonius, oh Caesar. He has fought courageously and doesn't deserve to be killed," the senator pleaded.

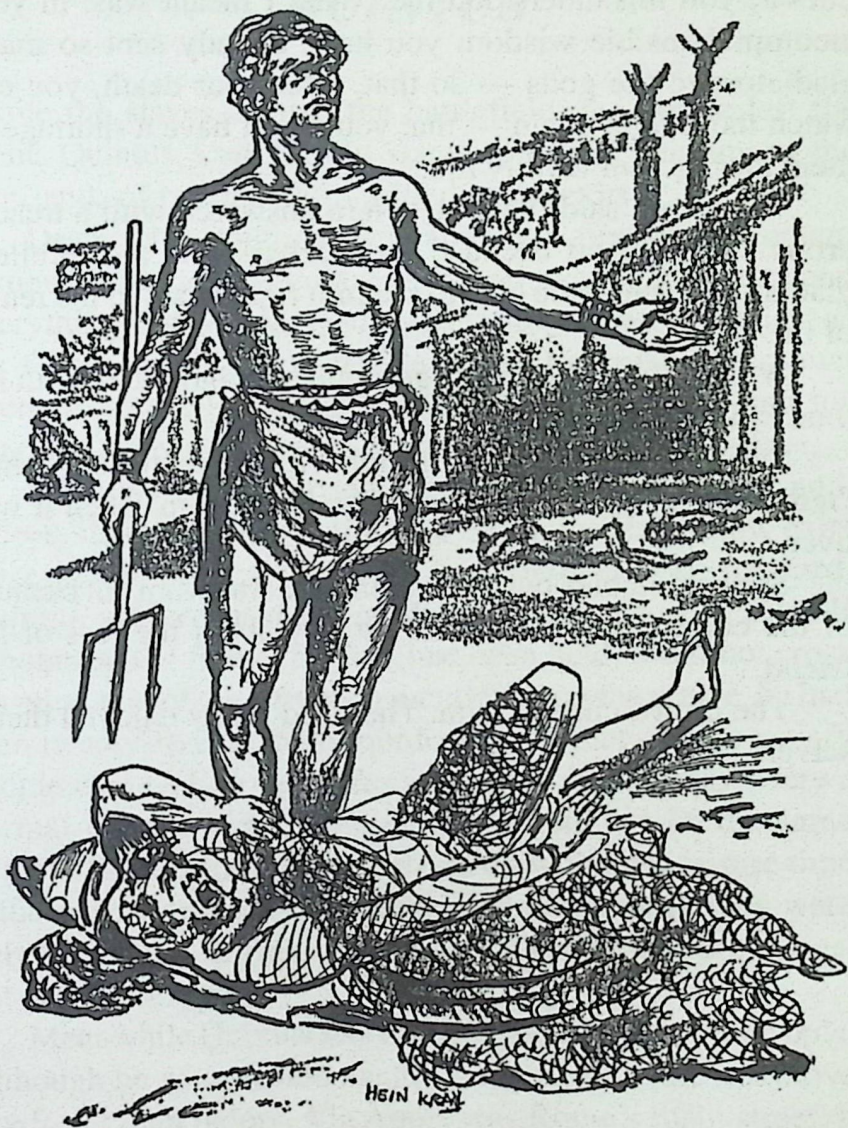
"A barbarian deserves nothing," was the cutting answer.

"But, oh divine Caesar, of late you have already ordered many gladiators to be killed. Their number diminishes more quickly than we can replenish them."

Nero frowned.

"So you openly confess that you are unable to maintain the number of gladiators?" he asked menacingly.

The senator paled. Such an accusation could mean his death. And Nero had a reputation for sowing death and ruin all around him. He did not care about anything; not about poor Gerdonius either who was waiting for his decision in





torturing uncertainty. Yet, the Emperor first wished to continue the conversation.

Meanwhile Seneca had found a suitable reply. "Oh divine Caesar, you misunderstood me. What I meant was: in your incomprehensible wisdom you have already sent so many gladiators to the gods — so that, after your death, you can watch them fight again — that you might have a shortage of them during your earthly life."

"Very well said, Seneca," Nero answered with a treacherous smile. "And because this barbarian is an excellent gladiator, I want to be sure to see him fight again in the realm of the gods."

While saying this, Nero gesticulated vigorously with his thumb down.

Syrius lifted the trident and with force thrust it into Gerdonius' chest. Briefly the body doubled up. Then it was over.

Syrius stumbled out of the arena. He was worn out because of the combat and he grieved bitterly about the loss of his friend.

The crowd cheered him. They had really enjoyed themselves.

## CHAPTER 2

### *QUINTUS*

While the slaves cleared the battlefield, the public left the arena. Quintus, a tall, sturdy, sixteen year old, was among the thousands of people who shuffled to the exits.

Despite his youth he was already a first class Roman: somewhat proud of his citizenship and treating everyone and everything that was not Roman with haughtiness. And, just as his fellow-countrymen, he placed all his trust in his own strength and abilities. His black hair was cut short and his laughing, brown eyes were set in an open and honest face.

Willingly he let himself be carried with the crowd and, indeed, this was the only thing he could do. The narrow exits were extremely crowded. As he slowly moved forward, Quintus glanced at a notice that hung next to the gate. It announced the fights that had just been held. It did not cross his mind that of the fifty men mentioned on the notice, he had seen twenty-five of them murdered, and that only to satisfy people who had a longing for sensation. The "games" were a normal Roman event. Life simply would not be the same without them. What else could one do with ones leisure time if there were no games? And the gladiators? Well, they were only barbarians, slaves, or criminals! Gladiators were things, not human beings.

Meanwhile Quintus had reached the street: the Via Appia. Although he was outside the theatre now, he could not move any faster than before. Via Appia was Rome's main street. It was only six metres wide and the enormous crowd, which had left the amphitheatre, now filled the entire street. The oncoming traffic, wanting to leave the city, struggled against the stream. The donkey-drivers pushed their way through with the greatest of difficulty. Shouting loudly, they drove the

animals on. Now and then their whips hit a passer-by, and it is doubtful whether this always occurred by accident.

A little further on the situation improved somewhat when the road divided in two. To the right, by passing under the two aqueducts, the Aqua Marcia and the Aqua Appia, one could reach the Coelian Hill. The headquarters of the Foreign Legion was situated here.

Quintus, however, took the Via Appia and it did not take him long to reach the point where this road changed into the Via Sacra — The Holy Road. This road was used for triumphal processions and was decorated extensively with sculptures. The victorious legions used it to pass the forum where the Emperor took salute.

When Quintus approached the centre of Rome the traffic chaos increased. As he was born and bred in the city he was used to this bustle. He had never known the narrow streets other than packed with people; people of all nationalities — Greek, Asians, Egyptians, Moors, Germans, and many more. The Jews, who formed a complete colony in Rome, were also there. Everyone spoke loudly in their native tongue, as they fought their way through the heavy traffic.

Suddenly the crowd was pressed together as they tried to make room for a senator who was seated in a palanquin — a covered chair that could be carried. The chair was carried by four big negro slaves. Other slaves went ahead shouting at the top of their voices: "Make room for the noble Artotrogus!" Their words were emphasised by the rods in their hands and they did not hesitate to use them. Quintus only just managed to avoid being hit. He yelled at the slaves, but they were used to this and did not take any notice.

"Who does Artotrogus think he is!" somebody asked.

"Tomorrow he will be dead anyway because Nero has ordered him to open his veins," someone else added.

The palanquin passed by and the congestion diminished. It looked like a ship sailing through the water, cleaving the waves with its bow and closing them immediately behind the

stern. Quintus let himself be carried along with the stream of people.

Among the public were numerous merchants who tried to sell their goods. This increased the chaos considerably. Quintus noticed a man who was selling grapes, and tried to reach him because he was thirsty. Yet it was in vain because before he had managed to get to the other side of the street he had passed the grape merchant by at least ten metres.

“Next time better,” he grumbled.

A bit further along there was a disturbance. Someone had fainted due to the crush of the crowd and was trampled on. This kind of “traffic accident” was an everyday occurrence in the city of Rome. Although Quintus was only a hundred metres from where it occurred, he did not see anything of the mishap. The victim had been taken away quickly and carried into a house. The beggars took advantage of these of “riots,” and sometimes even caused them. The more people that were together, the greater the chance to collect some money. One of them approached Quintus.

“Go away!” he snapped. “Tomorrow there will be distribution of free bread in Trans Tiber.”

“But I have to eat today too, don’t I?” whined the beggar.

The fellow had a firm grip of his tunic and to get rid of him Quintus handed him a coin out of his purse.

“Jupiter will reward you,” the beggar responded.

“I hope he will burn a hole in your hand with his lightning so that you will lose the coin,” Quintus said spitefully.

The beggar grinned, already grabbing hold of another victim.

At last Quintus had reached the Porticus Margaritaria, a wide street with bazaars. Here the congestion was less intense than at the Via Sacra. However, the noise at this shopping-centre, the most important in Rome, was bewildering. With loud shouts, the shopkeepers recommended the goods they had displayed on tables.

The greatest noise came from the corner where the sellers of wind-instruments were situated. Most customers wanted to try out an instrument before buying it.

Quintus stopped there briefly, not because he intended to buy a trumpet or another instrument but because he had spotted a street urchin who was loitering around the table displaying the instruments. The merchant was arguing with a customer about the sound of a horn. Both men were standing with their backs to the street. The urchin had approached unseen and suddenly Quintus realised what the boy had in mind. Among the instruments was an exceptionally long trumpet, the mouth-piece of which was facing the street. The bell of the trumpet lay very close to the customer and the shopkeeper.

The boy was ready to play his trick. He glanced at the men to make sure that they had not noticed him. Then he drew his lungs full of air and blew the trumpet as loud as he could. His face became as red as beetroot but the effect exceeded even his most hopeful expectations. The two men jumped in fright when they heard the high pitched noise behind them. The bystanders laughed while the boy bid a hasty retreat.

Laughing, Quintus proceeded on his way. It had not been very clever of that merchant to display the instrument in that position. No lad can resist such an invitation.

Quintus now arrived at a quieter part of the street: a corner where the writers were found, where one could have ones letters written. The booksellers were also established there. A bit further on a quack tried to sell an ointment that — he claimed — could cure every disease. Attentively the audience listened to his explanation.

Quintus sniffed contemptuously. Oh yes, that fellow could tell a fine story but townspeople did not believe in this kind of talk. Perhaps a shepherd from the Campagna or a farmer from the province would believe this nonsense. Rome had exceptionally good doctors and if they could not cure you, then it would mean the end. Yet he was tempted to try out a pot. After all, it was not very expensive and perhaps it would

cure his mother. She had been ill for over a year and was almost totally paralysed. But what was he worrying about! Davus, the coppersmith who lived next-door, had told him so often that such miraculous remedies did not exist. Irritably, he turned around and cleared his way through the bystanders.

After that he stopped briefly to watch a furniture-maker who was making a table out of lemonwood. But Quintus was not in the right frame of mind to wander around the market any longer so he took the road for home. He left the bazaar-street and entered the tangle of nameless, narrow, stuffy streets of which Rome had so many.

Here the poor of the city lived. The alleys stank and because the tenement houses rose five or even more storeys high on both sides, the sunlight never penetrated there. They were built with wooden frames, and slabs of dried clay served as bricks. As they were poorly built, they collapsed quite frequently. They were also very flammable. The ground floors of these buildings consisted mainly of workshops and warehouses, while above these, apartments had been constructed. In one of these "flats" Quintus and his mother had rented some small rooms.

He was home now. He entered the inner court through a gate. It was quiet there compared to the street where street-vendors, screaming children, and scolding mothers made a tremendous amount of noise. Yet, even here, there was quite some activity: the square resounded with the noise of hammer blows. Quintus smiled when he saw Davus, the old coppersmith, sitting in the shade of an awning.

"Hello Quintus," Davus greeted the boy as soon as he had spotted him. He stopped his work for a moment.

"Good afternoon, Davus. What are you making? Oh, I see, a breastplate."

The old man nodded his head while he shifted the small stone which he always kept in his mouth from the left to the right. His hand caressed the shining sheet of bronze that was lying on a wooden mould.

“Yes, I’m making a breast-plate for Centurion Julius of Augusta’s cohort,” he said, picking up his hammer again. “It must be finished by tomorrow because Julius has to wear it when he has to report to Caesar,” he added, as if to apologise for continuing to work.

He usually took time off to have a chat with the boy who he had known from birth. Since the death of Quintus’ father, he had acted more or less as his foster-father and Quintus did not mind this at all. He liked Davus.

With interest he watched the old man working. He had placed the sheet of bronze on a wooden block in which the exact shape of the breast-plate, complete with artistic decorations, had been cut. Using a small hammer, Davus beat on the back of the sheet, so that the bronze was driven into shape. From the front of the breastplate it appeared as if the figures had been made there. Davus was working on a small figure of the goddess Diana surrounded by a laurel wreath.

“May I try it on?” Quintus asked suddenly.

The coppersmith laughed. He took the armour off the wooden block and held it in front of the boy.

“It’s almost the right size for you,” he said.

“Well, I am sixteen already!”

“Yes, it is a pity that little children grow up so quickly.”

“I don’t think so. Oh, I would love to be a soldier myself,” Quintus said when Davus put the harness back.

“Why?”

“Well, then you have the opportunity to travel through Africa, Egypt, Arabia, Armenia, Greece, Germany, Belgium, Britain, Gaul, Spain . . .”

“All right! I can hear you must have paid a lot of attention when the teacher told you where the borders of the vast Roman Empire are,” Davus laughed. “But don’t forget one thing: the barbarians who live at the other side of the borders know how to handle their weapons. Your father experienced that; he never returned from a battle in Britain.”

Briefly Quintus’ face clouded at the mention of his father.

“But isn’t it good to die bravely and honourably?” he said pensively.

“Yes, of course, but this privilege isn’t given to every Roman citizen, not even when he is a soldier. Don’t be blinded by the prospect of wearing a handsome uniform and breastplate either. Military service is hard and not everybody can become a centurion or serve in the mounted cohorts. I know this from experience. For many years I was the coppersmith of the eighth regiment of the Batavian mounted cohort. I have wandered through the whole of the Empire — from the river Euphrates to the Rhine. I’ve seen miserable soldiers who had to walk for days on end, carrying their heavy packs. They arrived at the battle-field dead-tired where they had to fight well-equipped barbarians. Their death wasn’t at all honourable or courageous. No! They were slaughtered like animals.”

Staring off into the distance, Quintus did not reply. He imagined himself as a centurion, seated on a fiery war-horse and rushing over the battle-field. He did not even notice that Davus had started working again.

“Well, I’ll go and see how Mother is,” he said suddenly.

He rose from the low wooden bench and after having said goodbye to Davus, entered the house. Climbing a stone staircase he reached the second storey where he and his mother lived. An unpleasant, sour smell, caused by crowded living conditions, met him. Inside the house it was far from quiet. The many occupants created a lot of noise and the sound carried easily through the walls.

Quintus was home. A door on the dimly-lit landing led directly into the living-room, which also served as a dining-room and his mother’s bedroom.

“Are you there, my boy?” a woman’s weak voice asked as soon as Quintus had entered.

“Yes, Mother,” he answered, going to the bed that stood in a corner of the room.

The woman on the bed showed every sign of having been ill for a long time. Her hollow cheeks were marked by the



pain she suffered and the lack of fresh air had made her very pale.

Quintus went over to the curtain that led out onto the small balcony. He opened them a little to let in some sunlight. Immediately the room brightened. Then he sat at the head of the bed.

“Did you have a good time, Quintus?” his mother asked.

“Oh yes, the games were terrific,” he answered enthusiastically. “They again started with that Greek — you know, the one who fought the wild animals. This morning he won against two lions. What courage that man has, don’t you think, Mother! All by himself, and armed only with a short dagger. He stood up against two of those savage beasts. It’s already the fifth time that he has had a victory over them!”

It did not dawn on Quintus that a gladiator did not fight the lions because he was so brave. He was simply put into the arena and the animals were released. If he did not want to be torn to pieces he had to defend himself.

The sick woman nodded. “Yes, my boy, it must have been exciting to see a fight like that. I can still remember that from earlier days when your father and I went to the games.

“But now I have been in bed, paralysed, for two years,” she added bitterly.

“How are you now, Mother?” Quintus asked, realising suddenly that he was only talking about his pleasure without thinking about his mother.

“Oh, not too bad,” she answered. “But how I wish that I had the money to pay for a doctor. He could bleed me perhaps, and I might feel much better then.”

“By the way, there’s something I want to ask you,” Quintus remembered. “In the street I heard that a senator Artotrogus has been ordered by Nero to have his veins opened. What does this mean?”

“Well, that means that he has fallen out of favour with the Emperor and according to his divine judgment has deserved

death. Yet, being a friend of Nero, he does not have to die on the scaffold but, as a favour, can slash his wrists.”

Quintus nodded to indicate that he understood. “Lately many of Nero’s friends must have fallen out of favour,” he said, “because I’ve heard this expression quite often but always forgot to ask what it meant.”

“Yes, my boy, Emperor Nero is hard to please, but the divine Caesar knows what he is doing. We, ordinary people, don’t always understand these things, but the gods do many things that are beyond our understanding. I made many sacrifices to goddess Fortuna and yet your father was killed in battle.”

She sighed deeply and tried to change her position in bed. Quintus came forward to assist her.

“Shall we eat first?” he asked.

Without waiting for an answer, he stood up and went to the other corner of the room where a shelf was fastened to the wall. On it was food and a few simple pieces of crockery. It was dark in that corner. The opening to the balcony was the only source of light as the small room did not have windows.

“Do you want something to eat, Mother?” he asked.

“No thank you, I’ll have some porridge tonight. Just give me a glass of diluted wine, please,” she said listlessly.

Quintus poured the wine that his mother had asked for. He took some bread and a few dates from the shelf for himself. After he had helped his mother drink, he sat at the rough, wooden table and broke the bread into four pieces. He dipped a piece into a bowl of sauce and put it in his mouth.

“Did you have any visitors this morning?” he asked between mouthfuls.

“Yes, your uncle Scipio has been here,” she answered with apparent reluctance.

The boy pricked up his ears. Since the death of his father, his uncle Scipio had been Quintus’ guardian and had kept an eye on his mother. However, he only visited them when there

was something special afoot. For the rest he was not very interested in his nephew and sister.

“Did he have any news?”

“Yes, he was talking about you,” his mother said hesitantly, as if she did not dare to tell what had been discussed.

“What did he say then?” Quintus insisted.

“Well, he feels that a healthy boy like you should work.”

“He has been saying that since I left school but I can’t find anything suitable. Really, I’m always looking for work. Did you tell him that?”

“Yes, I did, but now Scipio has found a job for you.”

“Where?”

“On the Aventine Hill with Aquila, the tentmaker. You are expected there tomorrow.”

Quintus’ face clouded over. Must he become a tentmaker? Surely that was not a trade for a strong boy? His dreams were shattered. Tentmaker! That was something entirely different from being a soldier or a centurion. If only it had been armourer or, at worst, coppersmith, like Davus. But tentmaker!!

Frowning, he stared off into the distance. Angrily he plucked off some bread and bolted it down. Yet he had to accept Scipio’s decision. A guardian had the same rights as a father, and a father’s will was law. That implied that a father was even allowed to kill his children when they transgressed his commandments.

Sulkily, Quintus cleared away the dishes. Without uttering a word, he withdrew himself into the small room that served as his bedroom. As was the custom in the south of the country, he took a rest in the afternoon while the sun was at its peak. Roughly he jerked the curtain across the opening.

Tentmaker! Whatever made his uncle think of that!

## Chapter 3

### *MAKING TENTS*

With her first rays the morning sun brushed playfully along the gilded, bronze shields that decorated the facades of the Basilica-Aemillia, the second largest building of the Forum. The biggest building was the Basilica Julia. In the colonnade it was still quiet. In a few hours time it would be different when the merchants would meet to do business. The Basilica would then serve as an exchange building. A division of the Vigilantes — night watchmen and fire-brigade — marched past on its way to the barracks.

This was always a sign that Rome was awakening. For a Roman the working day started at sunrise. This did not mean that during the night hours the city was quiet and deserted. On the contrary! During the night hours the transporters were doing their jobs because during the day it was impossible to drive through the streets. And it was forbidden. For that reason the market-halls were stocked up during the night. Bricks, for example, were delivered to the work sites for the many buildings being constructed in Rome. Toward the morning the heavy carts disappeared from the streets to make room for the crowds.

Some small groups of men were already on their way to work. They greeted the Vigilantes as well as some men dressed in white togas hurrying along the street. The latter were those who owed a rich man some money. They were obliged to report in white togas to the person to whom they owed the money and, with the rest of his employees, bring him the usual morning salutation.

Quintus, too, was among the workers. That morning he had set out early to go to the Aventine Hill to his first employer. As it was nearly an hour's walk, he left home at dawn. Arriving

at the foot of the hill, he asked a passer-by for directions to the house of Aquila, the tentmaker.

“Oh, that’s easy to find,” he was told. “It is nearly at the top of the hill on the left hand side between two large houses.”

Quintus thanked him for the information and continued on his way. Soon he reached the tentmaker’s house where he let the knocker fall on the bronze plate of the front gate. Almost at once the gate was opened. He stated who he was and why he had come, after which the door-keeper asked him to come inside and wait.

It struck Quintus that the door-keeper was not tied by a chain, as was usually the case. In those days the door-keeper and his dog guarded the door; the dog was chained so why make an exception for the door-keeper? Therefore Quintus was surprised to see the guard walking about freely. Still, in Aquila’s house he would see and hear more things that would amaze him.

The guard returned, accompanied by a middle-aged man whose features, despite the luxuriant beard, clearly showed that he was a Jew.

“Peace be with you,” the man greeted Quintus.

“Lord, may the gods give you a long and healthy life and may you meet Lady Fortuna on your way,” Quintus replied, and made his bow.

The Jew touched the boy’s shoulder and said, “My name is Aquila; don’t call me ‘lord.’ That’s what a slave says to his master, and in this house there are no slaves.”

That was something new! Quintus was astonished. In every well-to-do house in Rome there were slaves. Some noblemen possessed no less than four hundred and in a house like Aquila’s one would expect at least fifty or sixty of them. All at once his thoughts went back to the guard who was not chained. Perhaps Aquila had been blessed so exceptionally well by the gods that he, out of thankfulness, had freed his slaves. Quintus followed his new master to the atrium, the largest main room of every private Roman house and the centre

of daily activities. Several small rooms serving as bedrooms opened up into the atrium. The roof of the atrium sloped to the middle giving it the form of a square saucer. An opening had been made in the roof through which sunlight entered. During the rainy season, however, rainwater could run in freely and for that reason a pond was made right under the opening. The pond sometimes contained fish or selected water-plants, and it was surrounded by bronze or marble statues.

When Quintus entered the atrium the other labourers had already started work. Quintus counted at least twenty. Aquila walked with him to the edge of the pond and with a loud voice introduced the new servant to his fellow-workers.

“Have you ever made tents before?” his employer asked.

“No, Aquila.”

“Well, then you have to learn this trade right from the start.” Thoughtfully, the Jew looked about the room and rubbed his bent nose with his finger. “I think the best thing to do, is to help make a travelling-tent for Petronius. That’s only a small job but all the tricks of the tent-maker’s trade are involved.”

Quintus followed him to a corner where a boy was working. As he approached, Quintus sized the boy up with his eyes. The boy looked about two years older than himself and seemed a decent chap. Being a true Roman who always paid extra attention to people’s figures, Quintus was impressed by the athletic build of this muscular, young boy. To see such a fellow wrestle, clad only in a loin-cloth, so that his muscles stood out clearly, would be a magnificent sight, he reflected.

“Demas, this is Quintus,” Aquila introduced him.

“Peace be with you,” was Demas’ greeting.

“By Hercules, may you have a long and healthy life,” Quintus replied.

Soon after, the Jew left them by themselves and both boys started working. Demas explained what had to be done.

“We are making a travelling-tent for Petronius. We use leather, because leather is strong and can resist rain and sun

as well as sandstorms. It's also light and easy to fold. We'll first select the leather and cut it into strips. We then sew them together to make the tent ready to try on the wooden frame that can be dismantled. I have already made that frame; look, it's over there."

Without interest Quintus nodded. He still was not enthusiastic about the tentmaking trade.

"Making a frame is really the most difficult part of the whole job, especially when you have to make a big one," Demas continued. "It should be strong and stable, as well as light and simple to take apart."

The boys had walked over to where the rolls of leather were stored. With an expert eye Demas selected the material. He lifted the heavy rolls as if they weighed nothing. With open admiration Quintus looked on.

"Are you a slave or a freeman?" he asked suddenly.

"A freeman! But why do you ask that?" Demas replied in surprise.

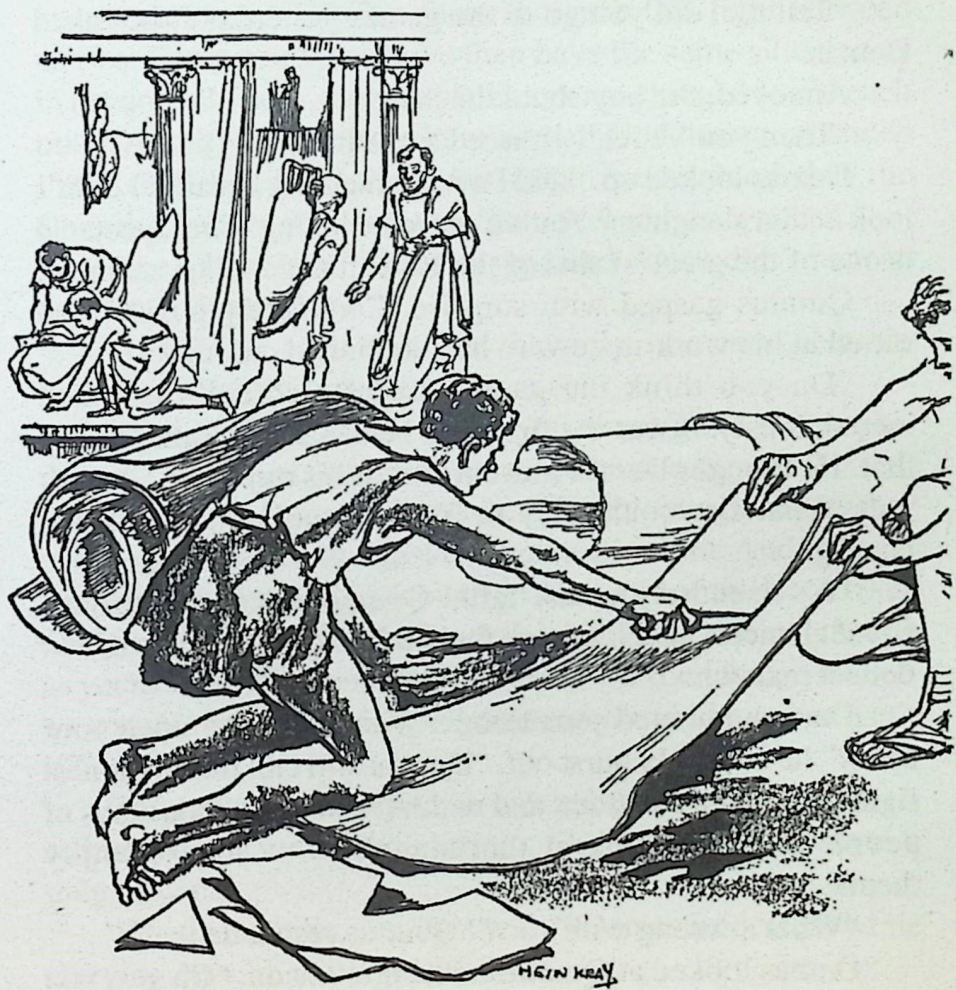
"Well, of course it's nice for you to be a freeman but on the other hand it's a pity. If you were a slave, we might have a chance of seeing you wrestle in the arena one day. What a beautiful strong body you have!"

Demas did not answer. His face set and he tightened his lips. It appeared to Quintus that Demas now lifted the rolls of leather with more vigour than was really necessary.

"We'll take this piece," Demas said abruptly. "Come with me and I'll teach you how to cut the strips."

The leather was spread out on the floor and with a piece of charcoal Demas drew the lines where it had to be cut. He told Quintus how to keep the leather tight and, taking a knife, he cut the leather in a perfectly straight line. Quintus, however, was more interested in the hand that handled the knife. With pleasure he looked at the swelling arm muscles. "I myself am no softie," he thought, "but this fellow definitely beats me!"

Without realising it, Quintus was sinning against the Lord. The Romans had adopted the Grecian ideas of glorification





of the body. The Greeks saw it from the point of art, but in general the Romans were not artistic at all and glorified the human body only at their sinful feasts and at the "games" in the arena. Both nations, however, forgot to honour the Creator of men. That is why Paul warned the Corinthians to consider their bodies to be temples of God.

Looking at Demas' arm, Quintus' thoughts wandered to the amphitheatre. What if such an arm handled a trident! It would surely poke right through the shield.

"Tell me, did you go to the games yesterday?" he asked Demas.

Annoyed, the boy shook his head.

"Then you've really missed something!"

Demas looked up. "Did I miss something because I didn't look at that slaughter? You've got to be joking! That spectacle is one of the greatest sins of the Roman nation," he snapped.

Quintus gasped with surprise. Completely puzzled, he stared at his work-mate who had continued cutting.

"Do you think the games are massacres?" he asked incredulously. It was the first time he had heard someone say that. He thought Demas must be out of his mind.

"What else could they be?" Demas asked and stopped cutting.

"It's an entirely honest fight," Quintus argued. "Both have equal chances, haven't they? Only the strongest, bravest, and deftest man wins!"

Demas muttered something. "Won't you ever open your eyes?" he suddenly burst out. "Do you still call that an honest fight? It's simply murder, and nothing else! And thousands of people come to look at that slaughter — just to enjoy themselves.

"What's wrong with you?" Quintus responded.

Demas looked at Quintus with compassion. "Oh yes, you poor blind people. You don't know any better. But I'll ask you a few questions; perhaps then your eyes will be opened. Just imagine that Aquila came to me and said, 'Demas, this

afternoon, at 3 o'clock, you have to kill Quintus; here is a sword.' Would that be murder?"

"Of course," Quintus answered readily.

"Fine. But now Aquila also comes to you and says, 'At 3 o'clock you have to kill Demas; here is a trident.' Would that be murder?"

"Yes, I think so," Quintus answered, not quite understanding what Demas was driving at.

"Correct. And now Aquila goes to all his friends and acquaintances and invites them to watch this fight between us two. Can't you see that we then have the same situation as in the arena? There, too, the gladiators are charged to kill each other. And if you also bear in mind that God has commanded 'You shall not kill,' then you might understand that the Christians abhor the so-called 'games' and never attend."

"The Christians?" Quintus repeated. "You don't happen to be a Christian then?"

"Yes, I am, and I'm not the only one here. Nearly everybody in this house is a Christian."

"Well, well! And that's why you never go to the amphitheatre? You must be bored when you have a day off."

"Not at all. Quite the opposite. We can't imagine that other people go to the theatre just for their enjoyment. And, what is shown there is entirely against the command of the Lord Jesus Christ: 'You shall love the Lord above all and your neighbour as yourself.' That's completely different from enjoying yourself by watching the suffering and death of your fellow-men, isn't it?"

Quintus was just about to ask another question when a robust woman entered the atrium. She gave each labourer a mug of wine.

"That's Priscilla, Aquila's wife," Demas informed, while carrying on with cutting the leather.

The woman approached the boys. "Peace be with you," was her friendly greeting. Quintus looked at her and at the same moment knew he liked her.

“Good morning, Priscilla. May Vesta and Lars protect your life and home,” he said getting up.

“Thank you, Quintus. May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ work in your heart as well. Here you are, a mug of wine for you. It’s ten o’clock, so you must be thirsty.”

“What? Is it already ten o’clock, Priscilla?” Quintus was surprised. He could not imagine that time had passed so quickly. He was also puzzled about the serving of the mugs of wine and asked Priscilla about it. He had never heard of that before. Usually when the labourers were thirsty, they scooped up some water from the pond or fountain.

“As you did it to one of the least of my brethren, you did it to Me,” the woman said.

However, for the boy they were incomprehensible words and sounded like a magic formula. Priscilla noticed this and explained the meaning of the words.

“Christ, the Son of God, loves all His people and it is His will that the people love each other, too. That’s why He commanded us to do good to all people. He says that when you have done your neighbour a good turn out of love, then He regards this as having been done to Himself.”

Quintus nodded but he hardly understood what Priscilla was talking about. A Roman did not know anything about doing good to a neighbour. He lacked regard for his fellow-man.

“Your uncle Scipio told me that your mother is rather ill. Is she all by herself, now that you are away the whole day?” she continued.

“Perhaps a neighbour will look in, but apart from that she never has any visitors,” Quintus answered.

“That’s terrible,” Priscilla said sympathetically. “We will do something about that immediately. I can manage without one of the girls during the morning. Yes, I will send Cornelia; then at least she’ll have some company and help,” she said to herself. Turning to Quintus she asked, “What is wrong with your mother?”

"I don't know, Priscilla. The doctors who look after the poor are at their wits' end. They scratch their heads and disappear again. And we don't have money to consult other doctors."

"Oh, but that will soon be fixed, Quintus. I'll ask our neighbour Pudens to send their family doctor to your mother. He is a very wise doctor. He studied at the famous School of Medicine of Hippocrates, on the island Cos. With God's blessing he may cure your mother."

The woman left to carry out her promise.

"She seems a lovely woman," Quintus said after Priscilla had left.

"Yes, she is," Demas confirmed. He had listened silently to the conversation. "And what she is doing is showing love to her neighbour, just as she explained to you a minute ago. And don't forget," he added, laughingly, "she is the boss of this house. She is a woman who, with a laugh and a bit of fun, knows how to get her way. Yet, most of the time she's right. Often we are too easy-going or lazy, but she sets you to work."

The boys went on with their work and by noon all the strips of leather had been cut.

"Well, that was done quickly! We'd better have lunch first," Demas said with satisfaction. He stood up wearily and stretched his back, which had become stiff and painful from working in a bent position.

In the mean-time some pots with steaming-hot porridge made with wheat flour had been placed on the wooden table in the middle of the atrium. The workers drew up round the table with Aquila and Priscilla. Aquila prayed aloud the Lord's prayer.

Quintus did not quite know how to behave. The pagan Roman was totally unacquainted with prayers. What they — the pagans — always did, was to spill a few drops of wine as a sacrifice for the gods.

Demas noticed his embarrassment. "Just do as you are used to," he said, "That's what we are doing."

Quintus was thankful for this remark. He started eating as he was rather hungry. During the meal he had the opportunity to get to know his fellow-workers a bit better. Most of them had the slave-mark branded on their cheek. Quintus was surprised at that. Had not Aquila told him that there were no slaves in his house? He asked Demas about it.

“These slaves are freed men,” Demas replied. “When, two years ago, the apostle Paul was acquitted by Nero, Aquila was so thankful that he gave all his slaves their freedom.”

“The apostle Paul? Who’s that?”

Demas shrugged his shoulders. “That’s rather a long story,” he said. “I’ll tell you after the afternoon-rest.”

Quintus continued his meal in silence. He was rather displeased with the delay but Demas seemed determined not to say another word about Paul during lunch. Stealthily, he looked around the table. Almost opposite him, sat a middle-aged man who, like Aquila, had a luxuriant beard. Quintus could not help looking at him, because every time the man put a spoonful of porridge into his mouth, it seemed as if a dark hole was opened. Later he learnt the reason for this strange appearance. Marcus — as he was called — had formerly been the slave of another master. This man had ordered to have Marcus’ tongue cut out because, in his opinion, he had been insolent. This information did not surprise Quintus at all. People in Rome were used to that sort of thing. A slave was a thing, not a human being, and they should be treated harshly to teach them submissiveness and obedience.

After lunch everybody had a rest till the midday-heat had passed. Quintus, however, could not sleep. That morning he had heard so many things that now occupied his mind. There was Priscilla, a true Roman woman and yet full of care and compassion for her fellow-man. She seemed to be on very good terms with Pudens, the senator. Would he perhaps be a Christian, too? He must be, otherwise Quintus could not explain why such a high-placed person would have dealings with Aquila and Priscilla who were just ordinary members of

the working class. Pudens had also made his family doctor available to treat mother. A doctor like him, coming from the School of Hippocrates, would cost a lot of money if you had to buy him for yourself. Such a valuable asset would not be lent out to just anybody. No, Quintus did not understand it at all. To him it was all topsy-turvy.

“You promised to tell me about that apostle Paul,” Quintus said as soon as he was sitting with Demas at the canvas again.

The latter nodded, and after a short pause — as if to arrange his thoughts — he said, “The apostle Paul was in prison here in Rome from the year 60 till 62. All that time he lived in a room in the inner part of the city, not so far away from where you are now living. Although he was guarded by a soldier, he was free to receive visitors and we made thankful use of this opportunity. When people came to him, Paul didn’t miss a single chance to talk about Christ.”

At this point Quintus interrupted him.

“Perhaps you should first tell me who Christ is, then I may understand things somewhat better.”

“Have you never heard of Christ?”

Quintus shook his head.

“Well, I mean Christ the Son of God.”

“Of which god?” Quintus asked again, for pagan Rome knew more gods than one could count on ten fingers.

“Christ, the one and only Son of the Almighty God, who created heaven and earth.”

“Oh, you mean Withra.”

“No, I’m not talking about gods of stone or wood; they are idols made by men. I mean the only living God who is our Father in heaven. In the beginning He created heaven and earth and afterward He created men to live on the earth and to do this to His glory. But men wanted to be like God and rebelled against Him. Then God cursed the earth and punished men. They couldn’t be on good terms with Him any longer, and they also lost the right to go to Him in heaven. God, however,

is a God of love and that's why He gave mankind another chance. His Son, Jesus Christ, came to earth as a human being."

"Just like Jupiter and Mercurius," Quintus commented.

Demas ignored this remark and continued. "So Christ came to earth, in Judea, and preached that He wanted to pay God for the sins of the people so that they could go freely to God again, if only they believed in Him. To make up for the people's guilt, Jesus Christ offered Himself and died on the cross outside Jerusalem. This happened about thirty years ago."

Quintus was disappointed. "Do you believe in a God who let himself be nailed to a cross?" he called out in disbelief. "That's punishment for a slave! I've seen many die in that way."

Demas nodded. "You're right, Quintus. Jesus came to take our place and people are slaves, slaves of sin. God then said to Christ: 'Are You willing to become a slave to grant the people freedom? Then You will have to die like a slave too, on the cross.' "

"That will do. I know enough about that Christ," Quintus interrupted. "Now tell me more about Paul."

"As you wish." Demas continued, "Paul was an apostle of Christ. He travelled from city to city and country to country to tell the people about Jesus. He preached that there aren't numerous gods but that there is only One, and that by the death of Jesus the way to God was opened again for everyone who believes. The most glorious part of his message was that Jesus had conquered death. Three days after He died He rose again from the grave . . ."

"Like Attis."

"No, not like Attis. In the first place, Attis doesn't exist and in the second place — supposing he exists — he is so powerless that he by himself cannot rise out of the grave; priests have to assist the poor fellow. And what's more, nobody can recognise him anymore because he has changed into a pine-tree. Anybody can say: 'When I'm dead, I'll change

# Quintus

by R. WEERSTAND

**The history of the Church in 64 A.D. is written with blood and tears.**

This book, based on historical facts, relates what happened in Rome in the summer of that year. It is a gripping chronicle. However, the actual events that occurred are worse than can be related in a book for adolescents.

In the story we meet Quintus, the central character. He is a typical Roman boy, who through a number of ordeals experiences the grace of God.

His mentor is Davus, a copper-smith. He shows us some of the prejudices held by the heathen people in Rome against the Christians.

The story retells some of the most shocking deeds performed against the followers of Christ by Emperor Nero and his aides. We also meet Aquilla, Priscilla, Demas, Caecillia, and others, all faithful Christians, called to witness of their faith.

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Through God's grace believers held onto their faith.

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