



The Lion's Brood

Duffield Osborne

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Centuries come and go; but the plot of the drama is unchanged, and the same characters play the same parts. Only the actors cast for them are new.

It is much worn,—this denarius,—and the lines are softened and blurred,—as of right they should be, when you think that more than two thousand years have passed since it felt the die. It is lying before me now on my table, and my eyes rest dreamily on its helmeted head of Pallas Nicephora. There, behind her, is the mint-mark and that word of ancient power and glory, “Roma.” Below are letters so worn and indistinct that I must bend close to read them: “—M. SERGI,” and then others that I cannot trace.

Perhaps I have dozed a bit, for I must have turned the coin, unthinking, and now I see the reverse: a horseman, in full panoply, galloping, with naked sword brandished in his left hand, from which depends a severed head tight-clutched by long, flowing hair.

The clouds hang low over the city, as I peer from my tower window,—driving, ever driving, from the east, and changing, ever changing, their fantastic shapes. Now they are the waving hands and gowns of a closely packed multitude surging with human passions; now they are the headlong rout of a flying army upon which press hordes of riders, dark, fierce, and barbarous—horses with tumultuous manes, and hands with brandished darts. Surely it is a sleepy, workless day! It will be vain to drive my pen across the pages.

I do not see the cloud forms now—not with my eyes, for they have closed themselves perforce; but my brain is awake, and I know that the eyes of Pallas Nicephora see them, and grow brighter as if gazing on well-remembered scenes.

Why not? How many thousand clinkings of coin against coin in purse and pouch, how many hundred impacts of hands that long since are dust, have served to dim your once clear relief!

Surely, Pallas, you have looked upon all this and much more. Shall I see aught with your eyes, lady of my Sergian denarius? Shall I see, if, with you before me, I look fixedly at the legions of clouds that cross my window an hour—two—three—even until the night closes in?

Grant but a grain of this, O Goddess, and lo! I vow to thee a troop of pipe-players upon the Ides of June...

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