

CONFESSIONS OF NERO

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in terms of Skimmed Milk. He was a helpless Moth who fluttered around the Footlights for the pleasure of getting his wings singed. And whenever he saw a Stage Door he froze to it so Tight that you couldn't pry him away from it with the sharp end of an Adze. What little he knew of Life could easily be printed on the back of a Theatre Program and still leave plenty of Space for General Advertising Matter. He combed his hair before a photograph of John Drew and he copied the cut of his Toga after the kind Faversham wears.

When the good road show slid into the Old Town from Athens, one with half an Eye could see a certain Limousine Chariot drawn up to the curb nearest the Stage Door, and after the Grand Finale, Our Hero could be seen in the Foremost Ranks of the gilded youth of Rome, wig-wagging out and quoting from the poet Flippicus, "O ye gods, O you Kid!"

No one, it is said, since Marcus the Easy, has lavished so much Substance in riotous Chariot Rides or rich Collations, including Lobsters from Brittain and Falernian cocktails. In the best Restaurants of Rome you could always tell when Johannus was coming by the Way the Head Waiter acted. There was almost a riot among the Chauffeurs whenever he rang for a taxi-chariot. But the sober-minded Conscript Fathers, at his approach, combed their long, white Chin Drapes and remarked in the words of Plato, "There's no Fool like a Darn fool."

About this Period of Antiquity there swung into Rome from the Western Circuit a tuneful Athenian skit entitled "The Diana Darlings." It was one of those shows we do Often see—the kind that haven't anything Good in them, but remind you Vaguely of Something you have heard last season. The Chorus was not exactly hideous, nor yet did it contain sufficient Beauty to sink a Roman Galley. And 'way at the End of the Third Row, Rear, stood Little Calliope holding a Spear.

It is needless to say that Johannus, the Walking Wad, occupied an Aisle Seat on Row One and that several Sandals were kicked in his Direction during the course of the Performance. It is also needless to Add that, about the Point in Act III when the Comedy King is saying, "Well, now that all is settled so happily, I hope you will all join me in a pleasure cruise," Johannus had moved Outside to Peach Lane where he stood Carelessly Chatting with the Property Man and pretending not to Notice.

O Fortuna semper mutabilis! By what whim-wham of Fate did it chance that, when the Nifty Baby-Talkers emerged from the Temple of Thespis, our Friend Johannus was introduced by the Property Man to Little Calliope of the third row Rear? For Calliope was neither rich nor beautiful, as so many Chorus Ladies are. Her eyes were a washy blue and her Hat was so plain that she was often mistaken for the Star. Yet there was about her Voice and Bearing a vague, indefinite You Know What that sort of got At you.

"Maid of Athens," said Johannus, removing his laurel-wreath politely, "Wouldst thou goest to sup with me at the restaurant of Rectorius the Epicurean?"

"I wouldst not!" replied Calliope firmly. "I regard such frivolity as a waste of time."

"The Chori who have supped with me previously have never complained on that Score," said Our Hero with a certain touch of Pride.

"I am not like Other Maidens," cried She, "I have entered the

seriously and systematically with an eye to Advancement. A Girl, to succeed, should be like a Bookkeeper or Stenographer, sober and industrious. Art is more difficult than a Trade, is it not? Yet any Plumber's Apprentice who partook of Lobster Bubbles Night after Night would lose his Job in a Week. Reformers are constantly Crying that the Stage should be Elevated. But I, I am a Girl of Ideals and Ambition. By constant application to Study, by Self-denial some day I may succeed, nay I may even touch the pinnacle of Art and be offered a Thinking Place in the New Theatre."

At the end of this utterance Johannus nearly Swallowed his Brette.

"I have followed the Show Business from Macedonia to Ultima Thule," he Gasp'd, "but never Before have I heard Conversation like this coming from the Chorus."

So he offered to See her as far as her Hotel, and as they Walked by one who stood near might have been Aware of the following Dialogue:

"How do you like Sudermann?"

"Fried."

Well, Johannus Simplex was seen no more at Cafe Rectorius. The Chori at the Center Table vainly turned their golden Phryges for the approach of One who Did Not Come. The Head Waiter died of Grief because the Profits dropped off so.

But every Night Johannus walked beside Calliope to her Hotel carrying her copy of Aristophanes and conversing earnestly on such topics as What would G. Bernard Shaw Have Done to the Greek Drama had he Been There at the Time? She even convinced him that he had a Voice and induced him to take Lessons of a Cousin Hers.

The Gossips of Rome said, "We knew Johannus would go off with that Knob some Day, but didn't think he'd go That way!"

Finally it got so thick that, ere the Month of Augustus, Johannus had bought up a Show by Sophocles and put Calliope in the Star. After a Brief Week in Rome the production Blew to the Wall Circuit in Cis-Alpine Gaul. Johannus followed as a matter of Course. And the next real Chatty News in the Papers was to the effect that Mr. Johannus Simplex of Rome and Miss Calliope formerly of Athens had applied to a Justice of Peace for the privilege of placing their Signatures on Adjacent Lines in the Hotel Register. And the Younger Set were heard to Remark, "What does he mean by Tying Up to such an Unworldly Child?"

Marcus Claudius Rhino, before closing, I again urge you to sell your Province with all possible haste—while our friends are on top in the Senate. I'll see Senators Brutus and Cassius tomorrow, so that when the Timber Scandal comes up it can be hatched to death in a quiet committee room.

By all the Furies, Marcus, I charge you with another precaution. When you read this letter, burn it and destroy the ashes. Because you don't who knows but that it may be discovered by a reporter and subsequently published in the Hearst papers, even as the private correspondence of so many other venal Politicians has been.

May Pluto keep it dark.

Vale!

NERO, Imperator.

