

SOL INVICTUS by Ben Gartner

EXCERPT

John's whole body shook. His irregular breathing created a feedback loop of anxious nerves. On one side of him, Lucas was now armed. On the other, a squad or regiment or whatever you call it of Roman soldiers pointed spears at them, and they looked very, very serious. John's worrying spiraled and he couldn't steady himself and—

If only he could trace the eye of Ra again. Why on Earth had he thought tracing it would be a good idea in the first place? What was he thinking?!

Then Sarah asked for him to hand it over. Of course! She would save them. She got them out of ancient Egypt. She'd save them again.

He couldn't get the leather cord over his head, so Sarah leaned in close and put her finger on the pendant. With the loop still around his neck, their foreheads pressed together.

"We're going to get out of here, Johnny," she whispered.

"Get up!" the boy standing over him said again.

Given that he was one of the fighters about to face a lion, John assumed he was a venator and thus wasn't trying to kill them, or the other people in the ring. They were supposed to work together to overcome the lion, right? In fact, this boy had offered to help them. John examined Sarah's face—her single pointed look of determination as she traced the eye. Why was she reluctant to accept this boy's help, to work together?

Sarah finished tracing the almond eye and moved to the line with the curlicue finish while mumbling to herself in some kind of mantra, "Please work, please work, please work."