



Maud Hart and Delos Wheeler  
Lovelace Family Papers.

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Flight from Herod

CHAPTER ONE

"Keep walking!" Helius Naepor warned, scarcely moving his thick lips. "We won't go in until the street is empty. We don't need to run any extra risk. We've got lots of time."

The Primus Pilus of the Roman Tenth Legion was sometimes compared to a bull, and even to a hippopotamus. As a small hippopotamus he would have been just about right. As a man he was too fat and lurched too much. He drank and ate at all hours to take his mind off the disappointment which always gnawed at him because of the honors and success he had missed. But when, on rising in the morning, he sucked in his paunch and cinched it tight with a belt as wide as both his hands, he looked less the hippopotamus he had grown to be and more the fighting man he once had been.

Back in the Fortress of Antonia <sup>Early this morning</sup> today he had taken off everything -- helmet, garrison cloak, hobnailed marching shoes -- everything which would readily identify a Roman officer and he had made the centurion Panthera do the same. Of course they had kept breast plates and swords and daggers but long, striped native <sup>robes</sup> cloaks hid these and as they walked along the quiet <sup>Jerusalem</sup> street they might have passed for <sup>any two early-rising Jews.</sup> two Jerusalemites. They went around a maze of alleys and lanes and approached the house again.

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of page. Begin at 1

11  
~~Trypho~~  
Trypho, Herod's brother  
Tiro, an old soldier of  
Herod, and  
his son.

CHAPTER ONE *11 sp.*

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Back in the Fortress of Antonia early this morning he had left ~~behind~~ everything -- helmet, garrison cloak, hobnailed marching shoes -- everything which would readily identify a Roman officer, and he had made the centurion Panthera do the same. Of course they had kept breastplates, and swords and daggers but long, striped native robes hid these, and as they walked along the quiet Jerusalem street they might have passed for any two early-rising <sup>citizens.</sup> Jews. They went around a maze of alleys and lanes and

approached the <sup>mansion</sup> ~~mansion~~ again.

"Wasn't that boy watching when we went by before?" Panthera asked, motioning across the street. The centurion was taller and <sup>much</sup> younger than Naepor, with bold sleepy eyes in an olive-skinned face, and a small sensual mouth.

"Don't point! And the answer is 'No!'" Naepor's growl had an old campaigner's assurance. "The first time it was a girl. <sup>and</sup> ~~But~~ her cloak was gray <sup>but</sup> ~~and~~ his is blue <sup>and</sup> ~~and her hair was brown and his is black.~~ Still, it won't hurt to go around again."

He wanted a drink, he was getting downright dry, but he was willing to <sup>be</sup> ~~play~~ cautious. ~~And~~ not only because their errand was perilous. Most legionnaires who had won <sup>his</sup> rank, ~~such as his,~~ only a little below a legion's general, would have wiped their feet on such a summons. <sup>(if nothing else)</sup> Pride ~~would~~ have made them refuse, ~~even if honor had not.~~ Naepor's greed and jealousy had made him accept, as he had accepted summonses from the same source before.

It was impossible, he reassured himself, that any one could have discovered their mission. How could anyone have had time? They had set out as soon as he ~~had~~ received the Chief Eunuch's message. Of course, the Fortress might well be under the eyes of spies for the High Priest in the Temple next door, or for Herod <sup>The King</sup> in his palace across the bridge <sup>which spanned the</sup> ~~and~~ Tyropoean valley, or for General Proculus, or even for all three. You never knew and caution <sup>was</sup> ~~always~~ <sup>desirable.</sup> ~~paid off.~~ So they went around again and when they approached the mansion for the third time the street was, at last, empty.

"Quick, now!" Naepor elbowed Panthera and lurched after

him. The door was unlocked as the Chief Eunuch had promised. Measuring the contents of the broad hall with a shrewdness gained from ~~a thousand~~ <sup>many</sup> lootings, Naepor told himself that the Chief Eunuch -- or whoever was paying -- could pay ~~plenty~~ <sup>very well</sup> for ~~the thing he wanted done~~ <sup>the thing he wanted done</sup>. ~~And he would have to pay plenty if only because his summons had broken a badly needed rest. Even after two days, the memory of those lights all over the sky kept a man restless at night.~~

"Come in!" The Chief Eunuch advanced soundlessly across a rug so rich, soft and thick that it must have cost, Naepor reckoned, twenty times his own ~~whole~~ year's pay as Primus Pilus. "I hope you understand why I set this place for our meeting. It is so much more away from everything and everybody than the Fortress."

The Chief Eunuch spoke in a voice so deliberately hushed that it sounded more like a hiss. This was because he spoke most often within the hearing of ailing Herod who was ~~and~~ <sup>and</sup> tracked ~~and~~ beyond endurance by louder sounds.

He was a mincing, bony man, usually arrogant, ~~in manner~~. ~~This morning~~ <sup>This morning</sup> ~~Today~~, however, he was conciliatory, an attitude which the officers of Herod's court seldom assumed toward <sup>LESSER</sup> ~~any~~ Roman. His dress was elaborate. A multi-colored robe parted, as he moved, to reveal a tunic of lavender silk more suitable for a Greek or a Persian. His shoes were ~~Egyptian style~~, stitched across the toes with gold and silver thread.

"Any place suits me," Naepor growled. "But the walk has left me drier than sand in the sun."

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"There is wine," the Chief Eunuch said. "Some from my best Hebron vines." He led the way to a great, open, flowery court and Naepor, eyeing his host's rich clothing in ~~this flood~~ <sup>the increased</sup> ~~of sunshine~~, <sup>light</sup> set his price higher.

"He'll pay!" ~~he~~ resolved and, shaking off his robe, lumbered in his own soiled, knee-length tunic to the cushions scattered around ~~the~~ wine table. He was the more resolved because he knew that he could hope for only a few more such profitable assignments. He knew that General ~~Orfitus~~ Proculus would not permit him to stay on as Primus Pilus of the Tenth much longer. The exacting little general was after nothing less than the best legion in the Emperor Augustus's army. In battle a Primus Pilus who fought like a bull helped give it to him. But ~~he~~ <sup>the general</sup> was showing unmistakable dissatisfaction with a garrison Primus Pilus who enforced discipline ~~too~~ poorly and drank much too much.

Naepor knew he was on his way out. ~~and~~ he knew that on retirement he would ~~never~~ be offered any such fine civil post as the one for which his predecessor, Vedius Rusco, ~~Philippicus~~, had been drafted when he retired as Primus Pilus of the Tenth. All his life Naepor had tried to rival Vedius Rusco, but now he was fat and nearly finished and Rusco was still rising. Naepor sat down sullenly, broad head sinking between thick shoulders, coarse hair bristling, thick lips parched for wine.

There was plenty of wine. Six jars! Two were half-buried in snow brought all the way from Mount Hermon under ~~thick~~ sawdust. There was also water for guests who desired their drinks

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thinned, ~~instead of undiluted, in Judean style.~~ Naepor pushed the water aside. Settling heavily among his cushions, he filled a goblet, drank noisily, wiped his mouth with a hamlike hand, wiped the hand on his already stained tunic and poured again.

PS Panthera sat opposite. He also had one insistent appetite. Other men dreamed of honors, estates, power, friendship, honorable sons, virtuous daughters. Panthera dreamed only of women and he dreamed with a singleness of desire that made inevitable his nickname which was the synonym, in his time and world, for lust. He took one drink but did not refill his goblet. He had been told to watch his tongue as long as he was in the Chief Eunuch's house.

"We'll have to bargain about pay as soon as we find out what he wants done," Naepor had warned. "And when you bargain with this hissing snake of Herod's you want a clear head."

Although Naepor went on drinking, he kept an entirely clear head. He did not appear in the least drunk. But then, Panthera reflected, he never appeared drunk.

The Chief Eunuch patiently waited to talk business until Naepor should pause long enough between drinks, and meantime he looked calculatingly at the olive-skinned, sleepy-eyed young centurion.

"I am sure," he felt forced at last to say to the Primus Pilus, "that you would not bring an ally of too little experience, but I know almost nothing of your friend here, scarcely more than his rank and name."

"The General of the Tenth thinks well of him. That

ought to be enough for you," Naepor said, impatiently, and Panthera's small mouth curved into a self-satisfied smile. "Only yesterday, on my recommendation, General Proculinus promoted him to be Pilus Prior of the Eighth Cohort. Don't worry. Just tell us what you need."

The Chief Eunuch settled softly among cushions on ~~the~~ <sup>his</sup> third side of the table and folded his womanish hands.

"Herod," he said, "requires that a thing be done which I cannot do."

~~"You know me!" Naepor said,~~ "Pay enough and I'll get it done for you," ~~Naepor said.~~

"Herod," the Chief Eunuch said, "has heard rumors of a child lately born who is supposed to fulfill old prophecies."

"Who hasn't?" Naepor said. "The rumors <sup>have been</sup> are up and down every highway <sup>for days.</sup> Everytime people <sup>have seen</sup> see a woman near bearing, they <sup>have</sup> wonder."

"That's right," Panthera broke in. "Only a few days ago, in Sebaste, I ran into some Galileans travelling this way to pay the new tax ~~Rome has put on the Jews,~~ and I tried ..."

But Naepor was not interested in anything Panthera had tried in the distant Samaritan city of Sebaste, and he interrupted.

~~And~~ then there was all that light the other night. And some say voices in the sky, and singing."

"Nonsense!" the Chief Eunuch said.

"Nonsense, nothing! I certainly heard something and saw something, too." Naepor grinned. "But maybe Panthera will <sup>agree</sup> go along with you. He was kept under covers by personal business

and he didn't see any lights and didn't need any, and the only voice he heard wasn't from the sky."

The Chief Eunuch, because of his condition, always suspected a double meaning in any such loose talk and he gave Naepor a look full of resentment.

"I, myself," he said, "do not hold with lights and voices."

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"But <sup>many</sup> plenty do," Panthera broke in again. "Some say they mean a great leader has been born to the Jews <sup>some who will</sup> who will help them lord it over all other people."

Fortress of Antonia

"Let me do the talking," Naepor said. "And don't worry about any Jews lording it over Romans. Not while the Tenth holds <sup>the</sup> Antonia and can throw a cohort into the Temple, day or night."

"This new-born -- whoever he is -- who may not have been born at all -- " The Chief Eunuch spoke with a rush. "Herod commands that he be found."

"Crazy old fox!" Naepor grunted. "Did he tell you where to look?"

The Chief Eunuch hesitated. He did not intend to say one word which could later be traced back to make trouble for him. He valued his Palace post too highly.

<sup>On the whole</sup> Year in and out that had ~~was~~ few disadvantages beyond <sup>the required</sup> so much ~~object~~ subservience to Herod. Such subservience to any whole man or woman was displeasing to the ~~southern~~ goddess whom <sup>a southern goddess who gave such as himself her special care</sup> the Chief Eunuch served. He had, however, been careful to propitiate her and he did not intend to be frightened into total <sup>revived</sup> silence by the <sup>recently</sup> prophecies which had frightened so many in the <sup>palace</sup>.

*Handwritten signature and scribbles at the bottom of the page.*

10  
~~palace.~~

~~"...I will raise unto David a righteous branch..."~~

~~and the Lord whom ye seek shall suddenly come to his temple."~~

~~palace. Why should he?~~ ¶ In seven hundred years they had failed to produce to conjure up a Messiah. They would fail now.

Only he must not say too much. This loose-mouthed Roman ~~Primas Pius~~ might blurt out enough to make Jews charge that the Chief Eunuch had betrayed their latest hope. Such a charge would lessen his value to Herod and Herod rarely protected, let alone kept, a servant of lessened value.

There was the chance, too, that the aging tyrant would forget his order. He seldom forgot. Still--it happened sometimes. If Herod forgot, the Chief Eunuch would surely be left unprotected and alone with swarms of furious Jews to overwhelm him.

The Chief Eunuch mused over his problem with the limber conscience which had enabled him, for so many years, to carry out Herod's ~~most debasing~~ <sup>every</sup> orders. He must, he decided, pretend at least to further the search Herod had ordered. But he did not need to pinpoint it.

¶ "No," he said, "Herod has told me nothing. Of course if you ask in any street you <sup>will</sup> get the <sup>same</sup> ~~stock~~ answer. Bethlehem! Ever since the prophets Micah and Isaiah, Bethlehem has been linked with <sup>a</sup> the Messiah's coming. Besides, King David was born in Bethlehem a thousand years ago and that makes it famous, although <sup>only</sup> just a little place." He gave his next words careful emphasis. "But many places are famous and should be searched ~~just~~ as carefully -- Tekoa, which was the home of the prophet, Amos; Beth-Shemesh, where the law of Moses long rested; Gibeah, where King Saul lived; and Anathoth, where the prophet, Jeremiah, was born. I mention only these which are near, but there are scores more

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all the way from Dan to Beersheba. All should be searched."

He paused, satisfied. That was certainly confusing the trail.

Naepor, however, did not seem confused. "Crazy old fox!" he repeated. "He must be ~~really~~ scared. What does he mean to do if he does find this Messiah? Strangle him, as he strangled his own uncle? Smother him, as he smothered his queen <sup>Miriamme?</sup> ~~Miriamme?~~ Drown him, as he drowned <sup>Miriamme's</sup> ~~Miriamme's~~ brother? Execute him on a <sup>false</sup> ~~faked~~ charge of treason, as he executed that earless High Priest, Hyrcanus?"

"Herod only wishes to join other Jews in worshipping, ~~the Messiah,~~" the Chief Eunuch said, flushing.

Naepor bellowed scornful laughter.

"~~And what a double lie that is!~~ Since when has Herod ever worshipped anybody ~~in Judea~~ except Herod? And when did he get to be a Jew? He <sup>is</sup> still a swine of an Idumaeen in spite of what he calls his conversion."

~~The Chief Eunuch raised his hand in shocked protest but Naepor did not stop. He knew that no disrespect of Herod would get him into trouble. He was too valuable to this agent of Judea's client king; moreover, he was a Roman citizen.~~

~~"Herod's sand-flea grandfathers below Beersheba bit the backsides of Jews at every chance," Naepor bellowed. "And even though Herod is a convert he bites their backsides, too. Remember the golden Roman eagle he tried to put up in the Temple? I wouldn't give this goblet of wine for any Messiah's chances if~~

The Chief Eunuch raised his hand in shocked protest, but Naepor would not stop. Disrespect of Herod would involve him in no trouble; ~~with this agent of Judea's client king~~ he was too useful to this agent of Judea's client king. Moreover, Roman citizens, sure of the far-flung protection of the Empire, dared be independent. They were in no way like Jews who were forced to bend these days under a double oppression: the conquering sword of Rome and the tyrant heel of Herod the Great.

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The Chief Eunuch raised his hand in shocked protest, but Naepor would not stop. He knew that disrespect of Herod would involve him in no trouble, <sup>with his friend as Judea's client-king</sup> Roman citizens, sure of the far-flung <sup>independent, and Naepor, known to</sup> protection of the Empire, dared be indifferent to the anger of <sup>who were</sup> ~~Judea's client king~~. They were in no way like Jews, forced to ~~bedd~~ these days under a double oppression, the conquering sword of Rome and the <sup>tyrant</sup> ~~tyrannical~~ heel of Herod the Great.

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Herod finds out where he is."

The Chief Eunuch had no good answer so he tried to make a quick one convincing.

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"Herod doesn't harm anyone any more," he said. "He's just a sick, feeble..."

"He's a killer!" Naepor grunted. "And he'll be one till he <sup>dies</sup> ~~rots~~. If it wasn't that most of the time he's too sick to think straight, he'd be killing right and left every day."

"He's a ~~half-dead~~, feeble old man," the Chief Eunuch insisted. "But he has as much shrewdness as ever and that tells him to honor any Messiah who may appear. If he does this, he may win over many Jews who now hate him."

He drew up grandly, as though conferring a favor.

"It is because I thought you would like to win Herod's patronage, and make a little money <sup>also,</sup> ~~into the bargain~~, that I asked you here. I shall be glad to let you both make this search that Herod has commanded."

"Of course we <sup>will</sup> ~~ll~~ make it," Panthera said eagerly.

Naepor scowled at the man he had just succeeded in elevating to the command of six hundred legionnaires. "You talk too much, Panthera," he growled. He turned to the Chief Eunuch.

"Why do you need us? Herod could use the high Priest's spies and never pay out a copper."

"We -- we prefer not," the Chief Eunuch said coldly.

"Come <sup>now</sup> ~~on, come on~~," Naepor said. "Why do you have to buy our help?"

As the Chief Eunuch hesitated, Naepor suddenly leaned

closer, his heavily veined nose almost touching the other's flushed face.

"I see! I see!" he shouted. "You're afraid to use Jews. You know what could happen, even to the Chief Eunuch of the Palace, if a Jew<sup>ish</sup> spy ~~began to worry, and talked, and spread word of~~ what you were up to. Those who believe in the old prophecies, ~~almost~~ any honest Jew, would chop your head clear from your neck for helping <sup>this dirty plan of</sup> Herod's ~~dirty work~~ along."

"Herod means no harm," the Chief Eunuch shouted. He pushed erect and strode to the end of the sunny court, his multi-colored robe swinging like a tumbled rainbow.

"A favor to Herod might be worth our while," Panthera said at Naepor's ear. "I'm willing if you are."

"Of course <sup>I am</sup> willing!" Naepor spoke quietly also. "But let's not tell this hissing snake too soon. We <sup>have</sup> got him where we want him. Herod has told him to get this thing done; ~~and if it isn't done, Herod will break him.~~ And he doesn't dare do it himself, or use the Palace spies, for fear he'll be tied in. He <sup>must</sup> ~~got~~ to use us, and the more we hold off, the more he <sup>will</sup> be willing to pay." The Primus Pilus was triumphant when their host returned, his <sup>manner</sup> ~~expression~~ once more conciliatory, and sat down again.

"<sup>Very well!</sup> All right," the Chief Eunuch confessed softly. "I am inviting you in because I need you. But do not <sup>over estimate</sup> ~~mis-judge~~ my necessity. What I need is not much and I shall not pay much. Herod wants only to find a lately-born child whom some <sup>Jews</sup> ~~Jews~~ call their Messiah, if any such has been born at all."

<sup>will</sup>  
"We ~~will~~ find him ---if---" Naepor's pause made the Chief Eunuch wince ---" you make it worth our while. ~~We'll have to cut some sharp corners ---~~ <sup>It won't be easy, you know."</sup>

He ~~paused~~, <sup>ruminating</sup> on the assignment. He and Panthera, ~~he~~ saw clearly, could not handle it alone. The military Tribune of Panthera's Cohort must be brought in.

Luckily this Tribune could be <sup>bribed</sup> ~~bought~~. He was a Roman patrician, but not rich. Sly, foxy, pink-faced <sup>Julius</sup> ~~Salvidinius~~ Muso always needed money.

<sup>It won't be easy, ☺</sup>  
"yes," Naepor repeated, "we'll have to cut some sharp corners, and you'll have to make it worth our while. <sup>☺</sup> And there ~~is~~ <sup>must</sup> be three of us...."

"Three!" the Chief Eunuch's ~~shrill~~ <sup>tone</sup> showed dismay.

"Myself and Panthera and the Tribune ~~Salvidinius~~ Muso." Naepor fixed the nervous little man with challenging eyes.

"I can send Panthera and some of his cohort out to search, and if General Proculus asks questions I have a fine answer. <sup>The</sup> ~~That~~ new tax which is being collected for Rome. ~~Every~~ <sup>The</sup> ~~Jew~~ <sup>hates</sup> ~~it~~. Thousands are complaining. I'll <sup>merely</sup> ~~just~~ be using Panthera to hunt for <sup>the</sup> beginnings of tax riots here and there.

"But I can't tell such a <sup>story</sup> ~~word~~ to General Proculus unless the Tribune Muso <sup>supports</sup> ~~backs~~ me <sup>up</sup>. Muso is assigned to the Eighth Cohort. He won't be there long; the General is <sup>assigning him to</sup> ~~kicking~~ <sup>headquarters</sup> ~~him upstairs~~ to make room for a new Tribune, and a good thing, too. As a fighting officer, Muso is <sup>worthless</sup> ~~a joke~~. But he will be <sup>around</sup> ~~there~~ while this search is on, and if he <sup>suspends</sup> ~~gets suspicious~~ he could spoil everything. You <sup>will have</sup> ~~ve got~~ to pay him, too."

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"No," the Chief Eunuch said. "Not <sup>Julius</sup> ~~Salvidinius~~ Muso. Patrician though he is, I have never trusted him."

"Musos won't let himself be squeezed out. He needs money too much," Naepor said. "He is on leave, on the seacoast, at Caesarea; But when he comes back he <sup>will</sup> have to be taken in. At that, you're lucky. It isn't often Herod can buy three such Romans. A Panthera, yes. But not a Primus Pilus. And what chance do you think you <sup>would</sup> have of buying another <sup>top</sup> lieutenant of the patrician order?"

"Three are too many," the Chief Eunuch said wearily. "I <sup>will</sup> give up the whole thing."

"You can't and you know you can't," Naepor scoffed. "Herod's sickness may make him forget, and it may kill him tomorrow, but if he lives, and remembers, and you haven't done what he ordered, you <sup>will</sup> ~~be~~ <sup>end</sup> ~~land~~ in one of the dungeons he <sup>is</sup> filling up all over Judea. ~~You've got to see this through.~~"

"I can pay only what Herod has allowed me," the Chief Eunuch said slyly, "and that isn't much."

"How much?"

"Five thousand denarii."

"You'll ~~have to~~ do better than that." Naepor grinned. "Five thousand will have to go to Panthera alone. And twice as much to Muso, and twice as much again to me. I wouldn't stir for less than twenty thousand."

"Impossible!" The Chief Eunuch dry-washed his soft hands ~~of the whole <sup>messing</sup> ~~proposition~~ proposition.~~

"You know Herod gave you a lot more than five thousand."

Naepor eyed his host. <sup>Probably</sup> ~~"I'll bet you get thirty or thirty-five thousand."~~

"Thirty-five thousand?" The Chief Eunuch fell back on his cushions as though he had been struck.

"I caught you!" Naepor roared with laughter. "As sure as I'm drinking your prize Hebron wine, you're <sup>are</sup> getting thirty-five thousand," ~~as though.~~

*P 14*  
"I can give you <sup>only</sup> ~~ten~~ ten thousand! Not a penny more," the Chief Eunuch cried desperately. He knew ~~that~~ he was ~~being~~ cornered <sup>but continued to try for an</sup> and he ~~could see no way of escape.~~

"Five thousand for Panthera. Ten for Muso. Twenty for me," ~~Naepor told him.~~

"No!" the Chief Eunuch cried.

"No?" Naepor brimmed his goblet slowly.

"No!"

Naepor lurched up from his cushions. "Come on!" he told Panthera and snatched his robe.

"Fifteen thousand!" The Chief Eunuch was now a man willing to reason even with the most unreasonable.

Panthera got up reluctantly. Naepor was already in the court's exit.

"Twenty thousand!"

"You're wasting our time! Thirty-five."

"All right, all that you ask," the Chief Eunuch wheezed.

Naepor lumbered back to his cushions.

"Give Panthera a thousand now," he grunted. "And I want two for the Tribune and five for myself. And let's have a

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drink."

The Chief Eunuch clapped his hands for a moneybox and paid. Tightlipped, defeated, he watched while the Primus Pilus poured from a snow-chilled jar, drank and poured again and again before lurching once more to his feet.

O-O-O

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Out in the street Naepor refused to share Panthera's mood of triumph. This hunting down a baby! Any way you looked at it, the thing made a man ~~shy~~ *feel sick*.

His thoughts turned to Vedius Rusco, the rival he most envied and most desired to surpass. He knew how Vedius Rusco would have replied to the offer of such a ~~job~~ *Commission*.

Panthera started to gabble jubilantly but Naepor hushed him, and clumped along in silence.

Fuzzy with wine, he found himself recalling an experience of his youth. When he was the newest of recruits he had been marched over the Alps and <sup>had</sup> found himself high above the clouds. ~~Literally!~~ On every side a fleecy white meadow stretched as far as he could see, and he had marvelled in youthful awe and reverence. This, he had thought, was a meadow for the gods.

"This," he had whispered, "is what Jupiter, Ceres and Venus walk on when they stroll from their palaces." ~~And~~ he had almost cried out, thinking he glimpsed, upon the immaculate field, the majesty of Jupiter, the purity of Ceres, the rosy robe of Venus.

→ *all the way*  
~~clean~~ "Why not?" he had whispered. "This meadow must run ~~clean~~ to Olympus. Some of the gods could be here this very day.

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I might see any of them this very minute."

Never before, or <sup>later</sup> after, had he felt so strong a desire to be swift after virtue, to be wrapped in the cloak of truth, so that he, even he, might deserve the favor of the Olympians who seemed so near.

The desire had not lasted. Naturally! He scarcely had got down the mountains when he felt only his usual thirst, a budding torment even then, and in the first town he had drowned his vision of fleecy meadows, strolling Olympians and virtue and truth. But it had come back sometimes, although less and less often, to be sure. It was years now, he realized, since it had come back.

And it had never come, ~~his~~ his fumbling mind recalled, except when he was ashamed, when, as now, he had some dim awareness of letting slip a virtue, ~~a truth~~ which, briefly, he had almost had in his hand.

Heliuss Naepor shook his head. He decided that he needed another drink.

"It's the Chief Eunuch's worry," he grunted, pulling free of his own worries. He nodded two or three times. "This hunt isn't <sup>a thing to be held against us</sup> ~~our funeral~~. The Chief Eunuch is responsible. We ~~are~~ <sup>are</sup> just taking orders. We ~~are~~ <sup>are</sup> just doing what we ~~are~~ <sup>are</sup> hired to do. If any harm comes, the blame ~~is~~ <sup>will</sup> be on the ~~fellow~~ <sup>our</sup> who did the hiring. That ~~is~~ <sup>will</sup> be the Chief Eunuch, or maybe Herod."

"I suppose you're right," Panthera said.

<sup>I know</sup> "Sure I'm right," Naepor nodded craftily and blinked against the bright early sunlight. For the first time in Panthera's experience the Primus Pilus did not seem quite sober.

47

17

CHAPTER TWO — 11

At intervals, as the bright early sunlight reached farther through the window, the strapping, copper-haired girl glanced toward the curtain which cut off one end of the room she was cleaning. No sound came from that quarter. The baby behind the makeshift partition did not rouse to cry and his mother ~~there~~ turned on her invisible pallet only once, so softly that it scarcely rustled.

The copper-haired girl was named Judith and she was a girl only in years. She was a wife, and her own six-weeks-old son blinked placidly ~~and~~ on a sheepskin in the middle of the newly swept dirt floor. She glanced again at the curtain and, reassured again by silence, soundlessly opened ~~wider~~ the shutters of the room's single window to coax in more warmth.

Outdoors the sun ~~was~~ was pouring down warmth all around, and on the surrounding brown hills the night frost had melted everywhere except in a few bleak pockets.

"It's too bad," Judith <sup>whispered to</sup> ~~told~~ the sun, ~~recalling the chilly walk of a few hours earlier,~~ "that you couldn't have been up to warm us when we brought them here."

Her <sup>whisper</sup> voice was a little breathless, <sup>which</sup> ~~that~~ was understandable. She had been <sup>hurrying for hours</sup> ~~on the go since sun-up,~~ helping the two behind the

sun to  
help  
213

~~17-A~~ ~~17~~  
17  
curatin from a stable under the inn in Bethlehem, across holly  
country to this house; and it had needed cleaning badly.

She was almost finished. There was on<sup>ly</sup> a single  
room, although that offered the

and full of promise.

~~I wonder what I am going to find,~~ thought  
~~Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo.~~

-----

At first the San Salvador and the Victoria kept close to the Mexican coast. They went slowly for the winds were unfavorable.

If the wind is not blowing in the direction the Master of a sailing ship wishes to take, he has to sail first this way and then that. He goes forward in a zig zag line. This is called tacking.

(It is not very convenient but it is better than standing still which happens when there is no wind at all.)

~~Juan Rodriguez wished to go first to a rocky~~  
 As soon as the winds permitted, ~~Cabrillo~~ headed for  
 that pointed ~~finger of land pointing down from the north.~~ This  
 It had been dis-  
 covered some years earlier. Pearls had been found nearby, and  
 Cortes <sup>himself</sup> had tried to make a settlement there. ~~but~~ It had not  
 succeeded.

Later ~~he~~ <sup>the Marquis</sup> had sent out three more ships under that  
 Ulloa who had taken dogs along. ~~One ship was soon lost, with the other two~~  
 the Mexican coast. ~~He~~ had come to the mouth of a great river.  
 (It was later called the Colorado <sup>River</sup>) He had passed it and turned  
 south, and found himself following the rocky finger of land.

Passing the place where Cortes had made his settle-  
 ment, Ulloa had kept on going south. And when he reached the end  
 of the finger, he had gone triumphantly around it and started sail-

~~curtain from a stable under the inn in Bethlehem, across hilly country to this small house which she was so vigorously cleaning.~~

~~The house had needed cleaning, <sup>badly</sup> ~~Lazy~~ cobwebs had festooned every nook and corner. It had no cobwebs now. Judith looked around in satisfaction. Not one! ~~But her task was almost finished now.~~~~

~~There was only a single room, although that offered the decent elevated section which at night kept human occupants a few inches higher than the beasts they brought in for safety from leopards and wolves.~~

The new tenants had no beasts, except for a donkey named Briar. The master ~~was~~ <sup>was</sup> tethering him now, Judith ~~saw~~ <sup>noticed</sup> as she ~~turned to look again~~ <sup>looked out</sup> at the boldly climbing sun.

o-o-o

The sun had been below the dark horizon when she and Aram, her husband, ~~had been~~ <sup>were</sup> awakened by the warm, insistent voice of a woman.

~~"I am Elizabeth, the wife of Zacharias," the woman had said, and had added that she needed a helper.~~

While Judith, on her pallet, ~~had~~ rubbed sleep from her eyes, the woman had looked down anxiously in the light of the wall lamp.

~~"Do come. The innkeeper told me about you. I'll pay a penny. <sup>At that wonderful offer Judith had bounced from her pallet, and while she braided her heavy, bright hair, Elizabeth had explained.</sup> ~~Off~~ cousin of hers must be moved out of the inn's stable, Elizabeth had said. The cousin -- her name was Mary -- had given birth to a child there.~~

"Which Mary?" Judith had asked drowsily. She knew a dozen

11  
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19

"Do come. The Innkeeper told me about you. I'll pay a penny."

At that wonderful offer Judith had bounced from her pallet, and while she braided her heavy bright hair, Elizabeth had explained.

A cousin of hers must be moved out of the inn's stable. The cousin --- her name was Mary ---- had given birth to a child there.

"Which Mary?" Judith had asked drowsily. She knew a dozen Marys around Bethlehem, but she had not known that any of them was near bearing.

Pg 19 ← "My cousin is from Nazareth."

Judith, of course, did not know any Mary from that ~~tax~~ faraway place. She had barely heard of Nazareth; just a few houses, she had been told, around a crossroads farther north than most Judeans ever bothered to go.

"She came to Bethlehem with her husband because of the tax."

That ~~tax~~, Judith had thought! It had brought crowds and crowds pouring into Bethlehem, upsetting the <sup>normal</sup> ~~next~~ life of the small place. But these had been less upsetting than the great ~~great star~~ ~~strange~~ ~~light~~ ~~the~~ strange light the other night. That had filled the sky and spread over the hills for miles. It had not seemed to come from star, moon, sun or fire. It had not been a light familiar to men, and people were talking of it still.

"Of course I'll come," Judith was sorry that

~~coastal plain~~ ~~course~~ ~~58~~ ~~58~~  
The King had given Viceroy Mendoza a share in Alvarado's expedition.

The fleet sailed on, and on Christmas Day, 1540, it entered another small Mexican harbor. <sup>This</sup> It is still called Navidad, the Spanish word for Christmas. <sup>the</sup> Bishop <sup>of Santiago</sup> Harroquin said later that Cabrillo discovered this port. Perhaps he named it, too. <sup>⊗</sup>

There was an Indian rebellion in the mountains <sup>That</sup> ~~which~~ rose behind the ~~east~~ <sup>narrow coastal plain.</sup> Alvarado rushed off to join in the fighting. <sup>Captain Cabrillo</sup>

"I'll soon be back," he said and ~~he~~ <sup>Juan Rodriguez</sup> put Cabrillo in charge of the fleet.

<sup>Juan Rodriguez</sup> Cabrillo waited on the sweltering beach named for Christmas Day.

It was in tropical country. Palm trees grew all around. The men built huts and thatched them with palm leaves. The ships rocked idly on the surface of the water.

Cabrillo kept looking for Alvarado. He never returned.

An Indian runner brought the news, <sup>at last.</sup>

<sup>⊗</sup> The Sun, so long feared by the Indian people, had set. The famous Conqueror who had lived through so many great battles had lost his life in <sup>this</sup> the little mountain rebellion. Another man's horse had rolled down hill <sup>upon</sup> upon him.

Cruel, brave, handsome Pedro de Alvarado was dead.

Cabrillo looked across the harbor of Navidad. A little breeze was blowing. The <sup>ships</sup> ships of the fleet left in his charge seemed to sway in a solemn invitation.

<sup>Juan Rodriguez</sup> "Now what happens?" he wondered.



was a pleasure to Judith. It was part of living and she loved all living--- sweeping a floor, <sup>preparing</sup> making a meal, digging in the earth, <sup>st</sup> having a husband, having a baby, nursing him, swaddling him.

"I must take my baby," she had said importantly.

pg 20 ←

"Well, naturally," Elizabeth ~~had~~ agreed and had added that she, too, had a new son. Six months old. An only child.

The <sup>stet</sup> announcement had surprised Judith. Stealing a guarded look, ~~respectful at this wife of a senior priest~~ she had decided that <sup>this wife</sup> of a senior priest ~~she had decided that~~ Elizabeth was lucky, at her age, to have <sup>had</sup> a ~~new son~~ first child. Her face was lined with years, even though her grey gaze was youthfully spirited and her tall, ~~graceful~~ body was erect.

Starting toward the stable, as the first ~~rim~~ of light began to ~~glow~~ at the dark edge of the world, Judith had been somewhat afraid of the determined Elizabeth. ~~She seemed ready to scold anyone and anything.~~ She had scolded as they ~~had~~ hurried along because <sup>it seemed</sup> her cousin's husband had not reached Bethlehem in time to find a room in the inn.

W A stable! Of all places for a child to be born! ~~And it~~ wasn't even a real stable, just a ~~limestone~~ cave under the inn, full of horses, cows, goats, even a couple of camels. And afterward what fuss and confusion! People coming. People going. <sup>W</sup> ~~People coming and going.~~

"Your poor cousin!" Judith had said. "Has she had any rest at all?"

"Not much, but she was serene through everything," That was Mary's way, Elizabeth had added in a softer tone, <sup>but she</sup> ~~then she had~~ begun to scold again.

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She had wanted, she complained, to move them into her own home. But Mary's husband, a carpenter named Joseph, thought that a senior priest's house would be too disturbing, with petitioners coming at all hours.

"So I had to find another place. It was pure luck that I came upon a little empty house less than a <sup>half</sup> ~~quarter~~ of a mile from my own. And," Elizabeth had ended warmly, "luck that the innkeeper told me about you, and that you would come to help me with the cleaning."

pg 21

Her scolding didn't mean a thing, Judith had decided as they walked. Her liking for the priest's wife increased with every step and she had liked the carpenter, too. Tall in the early gloom, he had been waiting outside the stable with the donkey on which his wife would ride to her new dwelling. He had rolled two blankets and tied them with cords to make a ~~sort~~ ~~of~~ seat for her.

He too had thanked Judith, and the women <sup>went</sup> ~~had gone~~ into the cave.

When they set out for the house which Elizabeth had found for Mary, doves on the inn roof were beginning to send forth their soft consolations.

o-o-o  
~~o-o-o-o-o~~

The <sup>house</sup> ~~house~~ ~~was~~ ~~made~~ ~~of~~ small house was made of plastered limestone and had the usual flat roof,

whales are found, too. Cape Lucas is a great place for  
whales. When the two ships started north, the ocean current 74

~~roughly~~ tried to push them back.  
was guarded by a towering wall of rock which made the ships  
seem very tiny, and other rocks both large and small with  
sheets of spray glittering around them. Sea birds screamed  
from the rocks.

*They were  
in the  
free  
sweep of  
the unknown  
sea*

They were probably whales around too. This  
was a great place for whales.

Soon they were out on the great Unknown Sea  
sailing north. They crept very slowly up that coast. But it was  
the coast of the Unknown Sea. The Captain must have felt both awe  
Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo must have been happy

and excited to be here. <sup>and joy.</sup> Not that he expected to find any  
wonders yet. If there had been any wonders Ulloa would have  
found them.

~~It was 9 days after...~~

strane and mysterious and exciting  
"There will be nothing until we have passed  
Cape Deceit," Juan Rodriguez told himself.

Going north the two small vessels battled  
against the ocean current. They sailed close to the shore  
but they did not dare to sail too close. There were too many  
unexpected reefs and shoals and rocks. ~~XXXXX~~

There were no light houses along the shore to  
warn them of such dangers. They went slowly.

Another Version

Not that he expected to find wonders yet! If  
there had been any wonders Bolanos would have seen them and  
Correa would have told him. Bolanos had seen only the rocky  
finger which looked as though it were carved from black vol-  
canic rock.

~~which Elizabeth had found for many~~  
 The house, ~~which Elizabeth had found for many~~ was indeed humble. It was small, of plastered limestone, and had the usual flat roof,

topped by mixed clay, brush and grass, all rolled flat. It blended so inconspicuously into the countryside that passersby scarcely saw it, and ~~certainly forgot it as soon as they got out of sight.~~

There were few passersby. No road ran before it, only a by-way.

Judith looked down the by-way now, ~~to see if~~ Elizabeth were in sight. She had gone, ~~only~~ a little while before, to make sure that servants in her own home were giving proper care to her own baby.

"Babies, babies!" Judith whispered merrily. Everyone was having babies in this warm cloudless world. ~~The sky now was as blue as the robe worn by the carpenter's young wife on her early morning journey.~~

There was no sign of Elizabeth, but a beggar slouched into ~~Judith's~~ view along the unfrequented ~~by-~~way. A beggar outside a house so humble and lonely! Whatever was he doing here, Judith wondered? He must believe he could get blood from a stone!

The sturdy son of Aram, on his sheepskin, murmured hungrily <sup>and</sup> Judith whirled. She stooped for her treasure, came erect, uncovered a blooming breast and filled his rosebud mouth before any louder complaint could disturb the two behind the curtain. Mother and child there slept on.

And a good thing, too, after the time they had had! Judith thought back to the stable and said, "Imagine!" as her son nuzzled for a good hold.

A gentle knock fell on the door. *she*

~~Judith~~ settled her child, now content with his milky ration, back on the sheepskin.

"If that's the beggar!" she said, "he'll get a piece of my mind." She opened the door trying to look determined like Elizabeth.

A reverent "Peace!" greeted her. A brown hand lifted from the doorpost box with its twenty-two sacred lines and a shepherd entered, passing the surprised Judith as confidently as though he had been invited.

Like most shepherds he seemed ferocious. He ~~had~~ <sup>carried</sup> the usual ~~alarmingly tousled head of hair and carried a staff with a crook big enough to hook a leopard. Draped over a shoulder he wore the usual villainous, red-dyed sheepskin and at his belt swung the usual pouch crammed, as though to mock the daintier fare of townfolk, with rank cheese, musty olives, dried figs and stale bread, all mixed in with stones for his sling. The sling swung alongside the pouch. But in spite of all this he seemed only kind, perhaps because he carried under one arm a set of pipes, with their promise of gentle music.~~

"We thought there might be something we could do," he murmured. His brown hand waved vaguely to explain how uncertain "they" were of what might be needed and how willing -- no matter what.

"I've heard about you," Judith whispered. She nodded toward the curtain in a signal for him to keep his voice low.

"There?" whispered the shepherd, ~~looking toward it.~~  
his  
Silently he touched/hand to head and heart.

no  
p  
like

"You are one of the four who came to see the <sup>baby</sup> ~~my~~ at the stable," Judith <sup>whispered</sup> ~~said~~. "But where are the rest, <sup>?</sup> ~~of you?~~ The ~~other~~ three who came with you before?"

"Well, ~~of course~~, some <sup>body</sup> ~~had~~ had to stay with the flocks."

"I don't remember your names, although Elizabeth told me."

"I am Esrom, and the others are Obed and Zorobabel and Beor."

"Oh, yes! Beor, Elizabeth said, has a yellow beard like a half-moon."

"That's Beor, all right. And the quiet one is Obed and the excited one is Zorobabel."

"But <sup>Esrom!</sup> ~~see here!~~" Judith threw <sup>her whisper</sup> ~~the exclamation~~ like a stick. "We didn't say at the inn where we were going, and on the way we didn't meet a soul. So how did you know where to come?"

"Where else could I have come?" Esrom asked mildly.

o-o-o

Page 24

The door opened and Joseph, tall and sun-blackened, ~~and~~ with a crisp black beard, stooped clear of the lintel and entered.

"Judith!" he said in a low voice keyed to the curtain. "Do we <sup>have</sup> ~~run to~~ a little spare bread and cheese? A man can't turn his back on beggars strayed into such an out-of-the-way spot as this. And there are two outside."

Tardily, he noticed the shepherd. "Why, good morning, Esrom."

SUPERASE BOND  
22 1/2 COTTON FIBRE

"Peace!" Esrom <sup>again</sup> put hand to head and heart.

"Two beggars?" Judith asked. "I saw only one." She turned back to the window. "Why, there are three!"

Joseph went to look, <sup>and</sup> ~~sure~~ <sup>indeed</sup> enough, there were three. ~~And~~ the newest arrival, skinny, barefooted, and wearing only a tattered ~~burlap~~ loincloth, resembled Peleg, <sup>an</sup> the odd beggar who had walked worshipfully alongside Mary for part of the journey down from Nazareth.

Three-fourths naked and apparently half-starved, Peleg <sup>nevertheless</sup> had ~~still~~ been <sup>a</sup> the biggest braggart Joseph had ever heard. He had <sup>drawing</sup> drawn jeers from the travelling party which had joined together for protection against robbers. ~~But~~ Mary, of course, had taken his part. ~~Mary~~ <sup>Mary</sup> seemed to love everyone, Joseph marvelled. ~~She~~ <sup>she</sup> was ~~love~~ <sup>loving</sup> herself. ~~And Peleg had fallen at once, as almost everyone did, under her gentle spell.~~

But Peleg, Joseph remembered, had turned west for Meggido, fifty miles to the north. How then could he be down here now? Joseph decided that he had been deceived by a singular resemblance. His confusion at so many beggars, however, held on.

He had seen beggars in many places, but always there had been a plain reason for their presence. He could not see any reason for their presence in this remote spot. He had hardly reached this conclusion when he was struck by a reason which was startling although still anything but plain. Plain? It was impossible. Just the same it stuck like a burr. He looked toward the curtain.

"I read a thing once," he said to no one in

025

26

26

particular. "At least I think I read it. Or maybe someone said it to me. Or," he pulled down the corners of his strong mouth to <sup>discount</sup> deprecate in advance what he was about to add, "maybe I thought it up myself. When something must be defended, it is always the poor who first stand forth. They can afford to be brave, having only their lives to lose."

Judith widened her eyes at this ~~sort of~~ talk.

Joseph smiled at Esrom and took a staff from behind the door. It exuded a faint cinnamon odor. He had made it of storax wood because storax wood never lost its pleasant, spicy smell.

"Well," he said to Judith, "Briar is tethered just a little way off, in plain sight. And I don't see anything here that needs me. I'll be off to work."

"You have found work already --" Judith stopped short. She hoped Joseph had not noticed the "already." Of course a master carpenter would find work easily, and at <sup>good</sup> wages. Her own husband was lucky to work three or four days a week picking grapes, spreading figs to dry, plowing, and at only his penny a day.

"I'm to repair a room in a villa over toward Jerusalem. If Mary asks where I am, tell her at the home of Vedius Rusco, the Roman Road Commissioner who helped us in Sebaste."

~~"Vedius Rusco Philippicus!" Judith said slowly, as one says the name of a great man. The ~~name~~ ex-Prinus Pilus was the one Roman of rank in Judea whom most Jews admired.~~

~~"Your wife will be so proud!" she said. "Don't you~~

P26  
 The Philippicus was taken out of the text by the author.

adding the honorary name which had been bestowed on the great ex-Roman Pilus. He was

~~"Vedius Rusco Philippicus!" Judith said slowly, adding  
 the <sup>honorary</sup> name which <sup>authority bestowed</sup> had been added to <sup>mark</sup> show that the great ex-  
 Primus Pilus <sup>was</sup> a man of distinguished achievements. He was also  
 the one Roman of rank <sup>in Judea</sup> whom most <sup>Jews</sup> Jews admired.~~

~~"Your wife must be proud," she said. "Don't you~~

27  
26

"Vedius <sup>R</sup>usco Philippicus!" Judith said slowly, adding the  
 honorary name which authority had bestowed, <sup>because of the distinguished achievements of</sup>  
 Pilus, <sup>as a man of distinguished achievements.</sup> He was also the one  
 Roman in Judea whom most Jews admired.

"Your wife must be proud," she said, "Don't you want to

or

Page 28

You capitalized Inn on  
page 20A because the text  
refers to a particular inn —

"the Inn" — rather than  
a categorical inn.

~~28~~  
20

? ~~want to tell her yourself?~~ say goodby? She will be waking soon."

"Let them sleep." Joseph shook his head smilingly and looked toward the curtain.

Behind that hastily hung shelter, in the shallow chest pressed into duty as a crib, the child would be sleeping safely in his white cocoon. A craft perfectionist, Joseph nodded approval as he recalled the skill with which Mary had drawn the swaddling cloth free of every wrinkle, almost, and criss-crossed its band from neck to toes.

Mary would be lying on her pallet, ~~he thought~~, with the brown brook of her hair flowing over her blue dress embroidered in mellow yellow. One hand almost surely would be touching her spindle. That was always near. She had spun all the way from Nazareth to Bethlehem, looking happily around at the new sights and scenes, and spreading the gentle light of serenity and love which ~~was, he had often told himself, Mary's as it was no one else's.~~ <sup>he</sup> belonged to Mary as to no one else.

He looked ~~toward~~ <sup>at</sup> the curtain with an expression of resolute protection which Judith had noticed before, <sup>on the walk</sup> ~~when they~~ ~~all were walking~~ over the hills from the inn. Then he turned to the door and Esrom joined him.

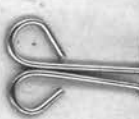
Page 27

"I'll bid you goodby," the shepherd whispered. "I have an errand in Bethlehem." <sup>(see top of pg.)</sup>

"Thank you for coming," Joseph said.

"Here!" Judith called softly.

Joseph was lifting the latch, but he turned and she heaped his hands with slabs of bread and a wedge of pale, yellow cheese.



(will retype if so desired.)  
(See pg. 20A)

~~28~~  
/

~~28~~  
~~29~~

"For your three beggars," she reminded him.  
Joseph and Esrom went out.  
There were four beggars now.

27A

GILBERT  
SUPERFINE BOND  
52% COTTON FIBRE

31

20  
28

CHAPTER THREE - 13<sup>th</sup>

*consequent directions*

Five men were approaching, from three compass points, the new, walled, Roman-style villa of Vedius Rusco Philippicus, on a high hill south of Jerusalem.

One was Vedius Rusco himself, ex-Primus Pilus ~~Pilus~~ of four tough legions in his day and now, by special appointment of great Caesar Augustus, Road Commissioner of Palestine. He was trotting his black gelding southward through dangerous country, ~~now made~~ a little less dangerous by the new Capernaum-Gaza highway lately completed <sup>To</sup> well below Jerusalem. He was followed, on a big roan, by the giant half-naked Bracae, his bodyguard abroad and his majordomo at home.

Another was a young Roman Tribune riding north near the end of a rugged journey with an infantry detachment up from Egypt. An armed slave as thick as a wrestler and as black as soot loped alongside the Tribune's mount, a finger hooked around a stirrup strap.

The last was Joseph. He strode north by east over roadless limestone hills, his sandalled feet now and then calling hollow echoes through the roofs of the caves with which the country side was honeycombed.

As he began to follow a descending stream-bed, a

distant, yellow-bearded shepherd drew away from two companions and standing among browsing flocks, signalled with upflung arms. The ~~arms thrashed~~ <sup>arms thrashed</sup> ~~the rollicking inventions of a happy-go-lucky mind.~~ First they thrashed <sup>like</sup> small, <sup>energetic</sup> fretful legs, then they made a gentle rocking. Joseph was quick at signals. He rocked his own arms gently and jovially to reassure his yellow-bearded questioner that the baby was ~~coming along fine.~~ <sup>doing very well.</sup>

o-o-o

Vedius Rusco still had several miles to ride and Joseph still had several hills to cross, so only the young Tribune was in view from the Rusco villa when Deborah, the fifteen-year-old daughter of the master, climbed a cramped stairway and came out onto a balcony. So isolated a villa in such a troubled land needed a look-out. And the balcony, facing east, provided an unbroken view along a great arc which began with Jerusalem's towers to the north and curved southward through brown hills to the walls of Bethlehem.

Deborah was a rounded, amber girl wearing that morning a flowing green dress narrowed at the waist by a wide silver belt. Her foaming jet hair was bound by a bar of soft gold bent to form a small clasp. Her mouth was full and wide and very quick to smile. She was munching a honey cake.

About the beauty, more or less, of the only daughter and only child of the famous Vedius Rusco Philippicus there were, admittedly, several schools of opinion.

Beauty is as beauty does, was the only statement on record from Bria, the <sup>largest</sup> blonde Cantabrian wife of Bracae who

(D)

Pg 30

reused

ran the Rusco household in his absence. She would not say more for fear of making her young mistress vain.

She is almost <sup>Naomi,</sup> ~~Miriam~~, Vedius Rusco often thought. For him the remembered loveliness of the Judean wife he had lost when Deborah was born would always be matchless.

If I had her beauty the master would surely desire me, was the forlorn opinion of Numidian Candace, Deborah's dusky attendant -- and companion and friend -- for twelve years.

Give me nothing to do but smooth and sweeten myself and who would ever notice her, was the opinion of Egyptian Nepte. Nepte was the villa's newest slave, purchased a month before at the Joppa slave market outside Jerusalem where she had stood modestly downcast, ~~with~~ her feet whitened with lime -- sign that she was being sold into slavery for the first time. She was new in slavery but she had already proved her tawny charms over and over. And I will prove them again, she promised herself furiously.

The opinion of Deborah's suitors summed up to unqualified praise and all bachelors <sup>fortunate</sup> ~~lucky~~ enough to be invited into the home of Vedius Rusco were Deborah's suitors.

Taking the last crumbs of the honey cake with a quick tongue, Deborah stared up at the wintry sky. She had come to the balcony still hoping for some clue to explain the strange and lovely light over Bethlehem which had broken her sleep a few nights before, and the strange and lovely music which had accompanied the light.

"Just the moon and stars and nightingales!" Bria had said, frowning when Deborah grabbed the honey cake. A girl who

(D)

had won the ~~grown-up~~ privilege of her own study, boudoir and bedroom and who was old enough to be receiving marriage offers ought to be able to wait for breakfast. Munching might be all right in front of a foster mother. But in front of servants and slaves! Well!

"The moon and stars were fire-bright that night," Bria had said. "And you know very well that nightingales swarm around here from Persia every winter. They're singing everywhere. You didn't recognize them because you're used to sleeping like a baby. But lately you toss and turn because you have a proposal on your mind. Even if it is only from the Tribune <sup>Julius</sup> ~~Salvidinius~~ Muso!" Her shrug said that a proposal from the poorest ~~excuse for a~~ lieutenant she had ever seen, and she had seen the best and worst that four legions could offer, was nothing to keep any girl awake.

<sup>Julius</sup> ~~Salvidinius~~ Muso, indeed! Deborah had tried for a crushing look as she turned her back on Bria and the others and especially on Nepte who was muttering something about magic. Nepte muttered about magic whenever the lights over Bethlehem were mentioned because, like all Egyptians, she saw evil in any unexplained portent.

<sup>Julius</sup> "~~Salvidinius~~ Muso, indeed!" Deborah said now, abandoning her search of the sky. As though she would think twice of marrying that old man, past his twenty-seventh birthday! Bria knew very well that a proposal from the pink-faced patrician Tribune did not even begin to tempt her.

It was the persisting hope for some clue to the strange light and -- she ~~stuck~~ <sup>held</sup> to it -- the strange enchanting music,

(D)

that had brought her to the balcony, but it was the approaching young Tribune who now brought her up on tip-toe.

Pg 32

He had turned away from the dusty legionnaires of the infantry detachment. They slogged steadily on toward Jerusalem under their usual seventy-five pound packs at their usual three miles an hour. ~~The solitary horseman grew swiftly recognizable as he~~ headed up the private lane which led to the villa high on its limestone hill, with <sup>his</sup> sooty slave keeping pace, an unstrung bow and a quiver of arrows bouncing on his back.

Deborah had to stand on tip-toe to keep <sup>him</sup> ~~the~~ lieutenant in sight. After a single look she sighed in satisfaction. She had known that he would be young. But who would have dreamed that he would be so handsome? And what beautiful armor! Gleaming helmet and shield, inlaid breastplate, thigh and shin guards!

The <sup>young Tribune</sup> ~~lieutenant~~ wisely wore full armor since any tree or rock might hide a Roman-hating <sup>Judean</sup> ~~Jew~~ who would die happy if he could run a dagger into an alien back, or robbers willing to risk prison for a try at a fat purse. His armor gave off blinding rays as, sighting Deborah considerably after she had sighted him, he jerked his horse to a halt.

Deborah smiled down and <sup>Julius</sup> ~~Salvidinius~~ Muso faded forever from her mind and exultantly she confessed that she <sup>must be falling</sup> ~~was falling~~ in love <sup>at first sight.</sup> ~~at first sight.~~ <sup>It was</sup> ~~High~~ time, too! Wasn't she almost sixteen? <sup>If copied incorrectly will retype - ghdly.</sup>

The young <sup>Tribune</sup> ~~lieutenant~~ made himself tall in the saddle to catch all -- all-- of the sudden vision overhead, and paralleling Deborah's own confession he told himself excitedly that, <sup>it</sup> ~~he~~ was

36  
astounding to come all the way from Egypt to find the girl for whom he had waited - without suspecting it - for almost ~~head over heels in love. And high time! Wasn't he almost~~ twenty-one <sup>years</sup>.

At his side the sooty slave made a confession of his own. As his broad nostrils trapped faint savory odors from the villa kitchen he confessed that he was hungry enough to eat half a horse.

O-O-O  
Tribune  
Deborah and the lieutenant continued to look at each other, both sure that the delight which flooded them, as it had flooded uncounted millions through uncounted centuries, had never before come to any man or woman.

D "I hope this is the home of Vedius Rusco?" the <sup>Tribune</sup> lieutenant called up.

X "Of Vedius Rusco Philippicus!" Deborah corrected proudly. It was not every Roman who could boast <sup>an agomen so celebrated.</sup> a cognomen, and very few ~~could boast one so famous.~~ But then, noting that beneath his helmet his hair, as she had <sup>hoped</sup> expected, was yellow, she smiled again.

D "I have a letter to him," the <sup>Tribune</sup> lieutenant said. "I've brought it from Egypt." He added this information casually, but he hoped she appreciated what it meant to have met and defeated the dangers of those barren, wild miles. "I am . . ."

"Don't tell me!" Deborah leaned toward him, her bare amber arms catching the light, the cool green of her dress seeming to float her an enchanting handsbreadth nearer. "Let me tell you!" And she laid a golden finger on her mouth and gave a sibyllic Um-m-m-m!

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"Um-m-m! You are Marcus Seclator Lucianius. You are the adopted son of Marcus Seclator who fought beside Vedius Rusco Philippicus twenty years and more ago. You are Greek-born and you are a military Tribune as your father used to be."

(D)

Marcus Seclator Lucianius showed little surprise at so much knowledge, but Deborah had <sup>not</sup> really expected much. No doubt he had suspected all along that she would be reading the letters which their fathers exchanged. She went on.

"You have been serving in Egypt, but the legions there are 'sleek, slack and rich.' That is what you once wrote. Half the soldiers have even traded off their helmets and breastplates. You want service with a fighting Legion. So your father turned to old friends, to my father and to General Orfitus Proculus of the fighting Tenth in Jerusalem. And you took your first chance to get out of Egypt as soon as the order for your transfer to the Tenth arrived."

She touched her lips again to indicate that the sibyl had spoken and made her dark blue eyes wide and fathomless. Even Bria had admitted, when she happened upon a practice session before the mirror in the lately won boudoir, that this was a tactic likely to disarm a young man.

"And now," Deborah said, "I'll tell you who I am."

X

"Don't tell me!" Lucianius imitated her sibyllic tone and relaxed in his saddle. "Let me tell you!" He put a finger to his own smiling mouth. "Um-m-m! You are the daughter of a father whose <sup>agnomen</sup> ~~cognomen~~ has become famous from Gaul to Egypt although originally it was given as a joke to a little boy by

Octavian who is now great Caesar Augustus. You are famous too." He lowered his voice in pretended awe. "People say that you use sword, dagger and javelin better than many men because your father taught you, and he is still the best with all three and with spear, sling and bow and arrow, too. And your mother was so great a beauty that people still remember her. And your name is Deborah." He accented the first syllable in a triumphant finish.

Deborah gave him an indignant look. She was still leaning forward, to reveal more fully her soft throat which was like honey poured in sunlight. This, also, was an effect which Bria had grudgingly admitted was likely to make a young man weak at the knees.

"My mother was not just 'so great a beauty.' She was the most beautiful woman in Judea," Deborah said. "And you mispronounced my name. It is the name of one of the ancient judges of my mother's people, who went to war even though she did not have, like me, a father to teach her how to use a sword. It all happened a long time ago but Jews will never forget how to say her name. It is Deborah." She bore down on the second, not the first syllable. But then she forgave him. "And now come into our house. You are just in time for breakfast."

A true daughter of Rome, notwithstanding her mother's blood, she made the promise every Roman preferred to hear. "Your bath will be ready before you are ready for your bath. I know a Roman wants his bath first, even ahead of food."

"A bath before food, even for an adopted Roman," Lucianus said. He swung off his horse to show that he made

39  
nothing of full armor.

Deborah, her blue eyes wide and fathomless again, vanished with a last green flutter.

"There <sup>will</sup> be a side gate somewhere, Micipsia," Lucianius said.

Micipsia did not change the expression of mild surprise which seemed carved into his sooty face. The expression was chiefly due to eyes which protruded and eyebrows which were roundly arched. Both seemed always to be reacting to some unexpected and startling event. In fact, however, Micipsia was rarely caught off guard and rarely startled. He nodded. He and his master understood each other so thoroughly that a nod or a single word usually was <sup>enough</sup> plenty. He nodded in the easy assurance of a slave who has shared enough adventures with a young master to warrant acting more like a comrade when they are alone, and spoke a single word now.

"Eat!" he said in a surprisingly squeaky voice and rubbed his broad, hard belly.

o-o-o

The wall's main gate -- double-doors of oak, reinforced with thick iron straps -- slowly opened. Within lay an open space denying any enemy a hiding place and then the villa entrance, smaller double-doors.

As these swung open Deborah appeared just inside. She had unbent the gold bar and let the spun ebony of her hair foam wide over the shoulders of her green, fluttering dress. Gaily she beckoned Lucianius past the doorkeeper who stood half-

concealed by the panels he had pushed back and half withdrawn into the cell where he not only served but slept. In an identical cell opposite, an enormous watch dog eyed the young stranger with tentative suspicion.

Side by side Deborah and Lucianus walked down a broad corridor to a big open-roofed room, deeply recessed for ornamental vases and furnished with settees for clients who might demand the Road Commissioner's time and attention. Braziers filled with slow-burning charcoal were spaced among the seats. The floor, of polished vermilion tile, was covered by a great rug.

Far down the room, a large but pleasantly soft woman inspected Lucianus, seeking in this young stranger some link with one she had known well long ago. At sight of her, Lucianus ran forward in the excitement which rises so easily when a young man of twenty-one forgets the dignity of his advanced years.

"You must be Bria!" he cried. "My father told me all about you. And Bracae, too! Where is Bracae?"

"Bracae will be here soon," Bria beamed, nodding so vigorously that an iron necklace, shiny from constant wear, clinked. "He and the master are riding home from an inspection trip." She took the hands he held out. "So you are the son the Tribune Marcus Seclator has written about so often."

"Marcus must have talked about us even oftener," Deborah said, coming up. "Lucianus knows everything about us. The two of them must have spent days -- weeks -- ~~picking us to pieces~~ <sup>discussing us</sup>. I'm afraid to hear what will come out of his mouth next."

DO NOT FOLLOW EMBL  
REVERSE BOND

"From the way you walked along with him, I wouldn't say you were very afraid," Bria said.

A girl a year or two older than Deborah, and so tall and strong that she might have been Bria in girlhood except that she was the color of autumn oak leaves, came into the room. Deborah put an arm around her waist and Lucianius decided that this must be a slave even closer to her young mistress than Micipsia was to him.

"The bath is ready," the autumn-leaf girl said.

"Let the bath wait!" Lucianius cried. "Does anyone expect me to leave before protecting myself from slander? As though anything but praise could come out of my mouth! There never was such a household as this. You!" The look which he gave Deborah went far beyond the enthusiasm of the single word. "Your father! And where else could anyone find another Bria and Bracae? The pick of the girls in Cantabria! The best man of Gaul!" He began to laugh. "I'll never forget the story my father tells of how he and Vedius Rusco captured Bria and of how she took a club to Bracae and of how Bracae spanked her."

*story* "Sh-h-h!" Deborah whispered loudly. "We never <sup>tell that</sup> mention that in this house."

"I should hope not!" Bria snapped, holding back a smile.

"Not mention it?" Lucianius cried. "That grand story! Now let me see if I've got it straight."

"Well, you won't catch me waiting while you try," Bria said, but she did not go.

"Um-m-m!" Lucianius eyed Deborah as he made the sibylline sound. "It was long ago when Octavian was trying to bring peace in Spain among the wild Cantabri. And he and your father and my father and a cohort of the Twelfth were ambushed. But they beat off the attack and finally cornered a handful. And then they found that the handful included an amazon."

"Bria! Fighting as well as any man!" Deborah cried.

"Give me shield and sword and I'll still make many a man back up," Bria said calmly.

"I believe you!" Lucianius laughed. "Our fathers had a <sup>time</sup> job taking you prisoner. You were too brave to kill, to say nothing of being too pretty."

"I wasn't the homeliest girl in Spain," Bria said complacently.

"But, finally they did capture her," Lucianius said. "And then Vedius Rusco bought her."

"Because Bracae had begun to ~~make eyes at her~~?" Deborah laughed.

"And that was when she took a club to Bracae and he gave her a spanking heard all through the camp of the Twelfth."

"And that was when my father decided that two who fought with each other so beautifully deserved each other." Deborah said. ?

"So I gave Bracae my club," Bria laughed, no longer even pretending to protest, "and Vedius Rusco Philippicus gave me my freedom to make the marriage binding."

"And after your father had retired from the army to

43  
42  
40

return to Rome, and my father was transferred here to the Tenth Legion," Deborah added, "Bria and Bracae came along. And Bria became my mother's maid until ..." she paused.

"Until I had to take Deborah over," Bria broke in cheerfully. "And what a handful I took! And now I must take over breakfast. Your bath is ready," she reminded Lucianus, striding away.

In spite of that Roman fondness for baths, Lucianus did not follow. He looked at Deborah, and after a moment they sat down, side by side.

"Father will be here for breakfast," she said, just to be talking.

"Imagine meeting him after all my father's stories!" Lucianus exclaimed. "The only Roman alive with undisputed title to four oak leaf crowns for saving four lives on the field of battle."

"Four? Father almost never mentions any, but I never heard of more than two."

"My father," Lucianus explained, "says that two are not in the record because an emperor finds it embarrassing to admit, ~~right out~~, that he ever needed so much help."

"Are you saying that my father ever saved the life of the Emperor Augustus?" Deborah cried.

"I ~~might~~ <sup>might</sup> probably be banished if I said it in the wrong place," Lucianus told her. "But my father says that Vedius Rusco Philippicus saved Caesar Augustus once from a burning trireme when Marc Antony's fleet was destroyed at Actium and

44  
once in Spain. The Emperor has never forgotten."

He paused, losing himself ~~again~~ in Deborah's eyes.

Candace from her corner gave a small remindful cough.

"Oh, yes! That bath!" Lucianus said.

43  
41

13

2000 COLLOIDAL FIBRE  
2000 COLLOIDAL FIBRE  
2000 COLLOIDAL FIBRE  
2000 COLLOIDAL FIBRE

CHAPTER FOUR

Vedius Rusco never thought more clearly about private concerns than when riding through dangerous country. The die-if-you-don't watch which a wise Roman always kept in Judea, flanks, front and rear, was just the spur his mind required.

It spurred him now as the black gelding carried him along the new highway, far south of mighty Joppa Gate in Jerusalem's west wall, toward the hill on which his villa stood. He was a hard-fleshed, vigorous, prematurely white-haired man, in helmet, breastplate and a floating red military cloak. He rode so vigilantly that he could instantly answer, "No! Nothing there!" when half-naked Bracae, slouching like a bear on his roan, a pace behind, called warningly: "Those trees on the left!" Rusco had already satisfied himself ~~from an earlier vantage point~~ about that clump of trees. He saw in good time every rock and fold of ground which might erupt danger. But he was seeing also every facet of his immediate personal problems. These were three.

One was Deborah and her increasing, innocent absorption in love. One was the Gaza end of the new highway which he must start shortly and the new quarrels which it would start with the aging, jealous Herod. One was the urgent repair of his dining room which awaited the carpenter, Joseph.

Concerning?

As to his daughter, he rebuked himself now, as he had so often of late, for dreading pitfalls instead of enjoying her romantic flowering. The pitfalls did not, for the most part, even exist. They were only the ugly nightmares of a too-experienced adult mind. He wondered if all fathers had such nightmares. He wished for <sup>Naomi</sup> ~~Miriam~~, not for the always desired lover, but the understanding mother.

~~But~~ at least, he decided, he had been right in seizing the chance to bring on a rival against <sup>Julius</sup> ~~Salvidinius~~ Muso. ~~The~~ <sup>Muso</sup> Tribune, with his boasts of family wealth and prestige, was a liar by choice as well as habit. All Rome knew that the Muso family only recently had been saved from actual poverty by Augustus who ~~would always have~~ pensions for the families of broken-down senators.

The truth was that young Muso was out to rebuild his family's wealth, <sup>by any means that came to hand,</sup> ~~by hook or crook~~. If he had been willing to rebuild by honest fighting, no one would have thought less of him. Hard-up young aristocrats were fighting for fame and fortune all around the Empire. But Muso, in his year with the Tenth, had dodged a half dozen <sup>dangerous</sup> ~~tough~~ assignments. He might love Deborah -- how could he not when she was so like her mother? -- but he sought the marriage also because it would give him a hold on a ~~fat~~ fortune without any fighting whatever.

Vedius Rusco rejoiced again that Lucianus was coming.

"When he was eight or nine he was quite a boy," he reminded himself hopefully. "Of course that was a long time ago!"

46  
4B

In rough ground to the east there was a flurry of movement. Rusco called, "Bracae!" and swung his shield from under the red cloak and plucked at his sword to make sure it would come easily from its scabbard and lifted his javelin, with its eighteen-inch point, from its stirrup socket.

"Ho-o-o-o!" Bracae kicked his roan alongside the black, keeping room to swing his own great two-handed sword.

Six horsemen, full-bearded and full-armed, came galloping hard out of the rough ground.

"Six to two, ~~is fair enough,~~" Bracae ~~grinned.~~ *said cheerfully.*

"Five to two," Rusco said, deciding to throw at thirty paces. The onrushing six would cover ten paces while his javelin flew twenty and downed one enemy, and he would still have time to draw his sword before the remaining five could close. ~~It never entered his head that the javelin might miss.~~

But the Road Commissioner and his huge bodyguard were too well known to go unrecognized. At forty paces the first of the charging horsemen shouted in dismay and wheeled and the whole band wheeled, their baffled complaints fading as they retreated the way they had come.

"Could that have been Dimas's or Gestas's gang?" Bracae wondered. Dimas and Gestas were bandits whose successes, for months, had increasingly aggravated Herod and out-witted his mercenary troops.

Rusco shook his head. "Dimas and Gestas ~~are tough.~~ *would* ~~They'd~~ have kept coming."

"You don't think Herod turned these six loose?"

try to finish  
what he  
ordered  
to do

"No!" Rusco said confidently. "When Herod goes after me, he'll send more than six and they won't dare fail to finish the job." He eased his javelin back into its socket.

o-o-o

He had seen Herod's diseased sexagenarian enmity growing. The tyrant, of course, rejected all men who did not put his selfish interests above every other consideration, even above honor, integrity and trust. Immediately, however, Rusco was in deep disfavor because of an unavoidable conflict.

Ⓚ  
Ⓚ  
Ⓚ

Herod was still seeking to insure his Judean throne, as he had insured it for years, by holding Augustus's favor. He was still furiously building, in honor of the Emperor, temples, amphitheaters, palaces, gardens, even cities and harbors. And when these were delayed by Rusco's requisitions for highway materials and men, his rage soared.

check spelling

But barring accidents, Rusco reflected now, he knew how to keep from joining the victims of sword, dagger, rope, and wayside cross, whose bleached bones outlined Herod's bloody career.

W

"I think I can count on Orfitus Proculinus," he told himself. The General of the Tenth, although too ambitious to be entirely trustworthy, was an old comrade.

"And probably I can count on Quirinius, although Damascus is a long way off." Publius Sulpicius Quirinius, an even older comrade, ruled Syria for Rome and was Herod's superior. He had just imposed a head tax on the Jews and Herod had been forced to help collect it.

Ⓚ  
Ⓚ

It wouldn't surprise me if Herod invented

I wouldn't put it past Herod to cook up some charge

49  
48  
45  
against me when I ask for men and supplies for the Gaza job,

*thought*  
Rusco ~~said to himself~~. And then I wonder if I could get word to Quirinius before Herod arranged one of his favorite little accidents.

*from long practice*  
The tyrant ~~He knew~~ ~~so well~~ how to arrange an accident when he wanted to put someone out of the way.

But Herod would have a time explaining an accident involving Rusco to the Emperor. The knowledge of that might keep him from trying. Rusco had the favor of Caesar Augustus. He had won it at Philippi and had never lost it.

o-o-o

Throughout that fratricidal slaughter amid marshes, mountains and bitter October wind and rain, Vedius Rusco had been a six year-old, tagging behind his father. His father had been a trumpeter in one of the nineteen legions which headstrong Marc Antony and the young, sick, worried Octavian, not yet become Caesar Augustus, had scraped together for the decisive battle with Brutus and Cassius. Vedius had stowed away for the stormy voyage from Brundisium, and across the Adriatic Sea had trudged all the long miles eastward into Macedonia. And, because he had not whimpered, his proud father had coaxed an armorer to make up a *miniature* pint-sized shield and spear. *for him*

The young Vedius, strutting heroically with his new *possessions* weapons, had caught Octavian's eye. To murdered Caesar's frail nephew, *with* doubly frail because of a stomach always made queasy by crisis, such bold posturing had seemed an answer to his anxious sacrifice in Hercules' circular temple before quitting Rome.

"You shall be my luck!" Octavian cried.

*Pg 46*

"I'll be your bodyguard!" Vadius said. A bodyguard was a post of dignity to a half-orphan already wise in the duties of the legion. He thrust through an imaginary enemy blocking Octavian's path and rasped, "Hah-h!" like a recruit practicing at a sod target.

At the left knee, STRIKE! "Hah-h!" At the throat, STRIKE! "Hah-h!"

"Bodyguard, then," Octavian laughed. And when Cassius and Brutus, honorable men, were dead ~~and done for~~, the elated young emperor-to-be bestowed upon his small gamecock an accolade which in the end became a distinction few soldiers in the Empire could equal.

"You are no longer Vadius Rusco," he cried in rare jollity. "You are Vadius Rusco Philippicus for your heroic part in a great battle. And when you are older you shall enlist in the legions and maybe even rise to centurion rank."

Vadius Rusco had enlisted at fourteen, although the minimum age for recruits was sixteen. Long before, he had observed that the majority of legionnaires, including his father, were usually <sup>troubled</sup> ~~in hot water~~ and penniless. They were brave enough, charging headlong at the rousing note of shining trumpets, but they were forever being fined, whipped, demoted, banished, even executed. Except for occasional loot they seldom had more than pennies to eke out their ration of bread, porridge, vegetable stew and the watered vinegar with an egg beaten into it, the posca, which was frequently substituted for wine. And when they were discharged they half-starved on small pensions made smaller by dishonest paymasters.

①

②

247

50  
47A

Young Vedius had determined not to be of this majority. He would be one of the few who became not merely centurions but primi pili and tribunes and sometimes generals and governors of provinces and retired with honor and wealth.

Modelling himself on <sup>stories he had been told of</sup> the two friendly rivals, Pullo and Vorenus, praised by great Julius Caesar, he had in every way outdistanced his own chief rival, Helius Naepor, ~~who had succeeded him as Primus Pilus of the Tenth.~~ <sup>Indeed</sup> when he retired it was said that even Scaeva, that third paragon whom Julius Caesar had jumped seven grades to make Primus Pilus of the Twelfth, had not equalled Vedius Rusco Philippicus.

In Gaul, Thrace, Britain, Syria, Judea, Egypt, Africa, Pannonia, in Spain where silver mines poured their wealth into Rome after the Cantabrians were quieted down, he <sup>heaped</sup> piled up honors <sup>and at last became a legend.</sup> Far behind <sup>had</sup> now lagged Helius Naepor -- <sup>who was now Primus Pilus of</sup> ~~lording it over~~ the Tenth in the Fortress of Antonia, usually full of wine and always full of envy.

At twenty-two, Vedius Rusco had been transferred to Judea. There he had found his <sup>Naomi</sup> ~~Miriam~~ and enjoyed three such years as he had believed came only to the gods. Losing her he had marched again, but in the end he came back and now his life had only two centers, Deborah and the roads he built for Augustus. He liked road-building <sup>and an extra attraction was that it kept him in</sup> <sup>Naomi's</sup> ~~Miriam's~~ land which he loved, although he never hoped to understand its people.

Jews were baffling, stubborn, unquenchable. Beset and often overrun, with a totality which would have crushed most peoples, they had never in their hearts submitted to any conqueror.

And now they would not submit to Rome, <sup>but</sup> plotting endlessly against Herod and so forcing <sup>ed</sup> the Emperor Augustus to <sup>endorse</sup> ~~go along with~~ the tyrant's plots against them.

The plotting was so widespread in Judea that any man might be a spy for Rome, for Herod, or for the Jews. And there were additional spies for other states. For hot Numidia whose Juba lately had been allowed by Rome to take over Mauretania. For cold Dacia whose peasants were not allowed to wear hats but who would not hear of Roman rule as a substitute for that of the nobles who froze their ears. For Thrace whose tattooed tribes were instantly in revolt against any Roman restraint upon their often highly immoral conduct. For Armenia whose people challenged all invaders with bold eyes which gleamed above the hooked noses inherited from warlike Hittite ancestors. Spies from all these countries and more hung around Jerusalem, ready to warn their uneasy kings of any movement by Roman legions which might presage a Roman invasion and even more ready to help a Judean uprising on the chance that it might spoil an invasion plan. But in far greater numbers lurked the informers of Rome, herself, and the spies of the Temple priesthood, and of Herod. ~~His agents reported~~

o-o-o

Thinking of spies and ways of confounding spies, Rusco found his mind turning to Joseph and the problem of the dining room. He was glad that Deborah was at <sup>home</sup> the villa in case Joseph came early. The Galilean carpenter had first worked on the villa there at that time for when it was building. He had been ~~kept away from the site for~~

weeks <sup>stayed on,</sup>  
 some ~~was~~ because, after the villa was completed, he had been  
 asked to stay on, adding those last touches which called for a  
 master carpenter's hand. He had been a stranger to the house-  
 hold but soon had won the friendship of all. <sup>Rusco tied himself</sup> Deborah would give  
 him the key to the cautiously locked room. He might be at work  
 there, already, on the needed repairs.

<sup>detected</sup>  
 That die-if-you-don't watch picked-up movement and  
 Rusco again called, "Bracae!" but this time only in the pleasure  
 and excitement which marching Roman troops always aroused in him.

Over the brow of the hill ahead came the infantry de-  
 tachment up out of Egypt. Its legionnaires were cursing. Good  
 curses were a counter-irritant against ~~the chafing of~~ hobnailed  
 boots which <sup>Sometimes chafed</sup> slipped in spite of straps laced tight to the knee,  
 and the torture of seventy-five pound packs (basket, cloak, ax,  
 saw, spade, chain, leather thong, grain ration, cooking pot,  
 weapons, unsold loot and two stakes for the night camp's pali-  
 sade!) Rusco and Bracae edged their horses off the highway and  
 as the detachment drew near the cursing changed to a whisper,  
 the whisper to a murmur, the murmur to a shout.

"Vedius! It's Vedius Rusco Philippicus." ~~Sleek, soft~~  
<sup>in the detachment</sup>  
 veterans found a better counter-irritant in hailing familiarly the  
<sup>champion</sup> living legend known wherever legions marched. They hailed and  
 rehearsed the boasts they would make when, <sup>that</sup> ~~come~~ evening, they  
 drank their eggy posca or dined on the twelve-sided patterns cut  
 into barrack pavements. How they <sup>would</sup> humble recruits who <sup>never had fought</sup> would  
<sup>will and would not have recognized</sup> never be able to first-name Vedius Rusco Philippicus! They could  
 not wait for evening. They boasted as they marched. And the re-

(1)

(2)

B

(A)

Sleek, soft  
in the detachment

(A)

pg 50

cruits felt the prick of ambition along with contempt for old-  
sters whose every word was an admission that their glory was all  
behind them.

Rusco saluted his shouting comrades of other years  
and when the detachment had passed, Bracae looked at him with  
bright eyes.

"It's still in your blood, isn't it?" Bracae said.  
"Well, it's in mine, too." He slapped his bare chest. He always  
rode naked to the waist in this mild Judea. "I followed the  
eagles so long, I feel lost when they're not shining ahead."

Rusco ~~nodded~~ and turned for a last look. No matter  
what the Emperor might put him to doing, he was still, he knew,  
and always would be, a soldier. ~~But~~ then he realized that this  
must be the detachment with which Lucianus had journeyed and he  
beckoned Bracae and spurred his black.

They reached the by-road and turned into it at a gallop  
and came to the wall of the villa and Bracae gave a great roar.  
"We are come! Open up in there!" And the gates were hurried  
apart and then the villa's doors swung wide and the doorkeeper  
bowed and the dog slid out a long, panting tongue in welcome  
and Deborah came running.

(X)  
(D)  
(V)

## CHAPTER FIVE - 1250's

"Lucianus has come!" Deborah made the announcement in a burst of excitement.

"Lucianus?" If she's calling him Lucianus already, the boy hasn't changed. He'll put Muso's little light clean out.

"Lucianus?" Rusco repeated in pretended reproof. "Lucianus? Just like that? Not the Tribune Marcus Seclator Lucianus? I hope you aren't too familiar. I hope he won't have to put you in your place."

"He's nice," Deborah said, and lifted her amber cheek to be kissed.

Vedius Rusco had never felt completely natural except with one woman, and the reticence which his early life had fostered restrained him now even when kissing his daughter's soft cheek. Deborah did not seem to notice any more than her mother would have. Swinging his hand delightedly, she drew him down the wide corridor to the open-roofed atrium in which Bria had welcomed Lucianus. There, as always, Rusco paused before the murals of <sup>Naomi</sup> ~~Miriam~~ playing a lute, of <sup>Naomi</sup> ~~Miriam~~ weaving, of <sup>Naomi</sup> ~~Miriam~~ asleep on a couch.

"He <sup>is</sup> ~~s~~ bathing," Deborah went on. "Candace had ~~got~~ everything ready for you, so he didn't have to wait. He has the

widest, blackest slave you ever saw, who can eat more bread and bacon than anyone except Bracae. He's with Lucianus now, massaging him, I suppose."

"And I'll be with them in no time," Rusco said. "But has Joseph come?"

"Just a little while ago," Deborah said. "I took him straight to the dining room."

"You've kept that locked?"

"I never even unlock it to go in myself, but the whole villa is curious. The slaves are all talking about what we are hiding behind that locked door."

Rusco hurried on into a colonnaded garden. The dining room was to the right <sup>of the garden</sup> with the kitchen behind.

The slaves, Rusco reflected, were too near for comfort and he wondered, as he unlocked the dining room door, which ones had started the talk. He locked the door carefully behind him and saw Joseph squinting indignantly at splintered panelling and a slipped ceiling beam, the cause of the trouble.

"You've got here, Joseph!" Rusco cried. "I'm glad and ten times glad and you know why. But oughtn't you to be somewhere else?"

"Mary's cousin <sup>has</sup> taken charge. She's even found us a house."

"Is everything all right? The mother?"

"Both are wonderful," Joseph said. "And it's a boy."

Boy or girl, Rusco thought he knew exactly how Joseph felt. Hadn't he felt the same, <sup>fifteen</sup> sixteen years before? He nodded

in understanding.

Joseph squinted once more at the guilty beam.

"I'll never again trust a Lebanese roofer <sup>(11)</sup> ~~to work on~~  
a chicken coop," he said.

"Bracae will help reset the beam, and after that's done the mending of the panels won't be too hard," Rusco said.

o-o-o

In the home of Vedius Rusco the Roman routine of meals was followed. Of course anyone, even the slaves, might nibble at something on rising. Remindful of many days on short rations, Vedius Rusco was generous. But the first formal meal was served at eleven in the morning.

By the garden sundial it was ten as Rusco left Joseph and headed for his bath.

The Roman routine of baths also was followed. The family bathed, sometimes several times a day, across the garden from the dining room in a tiled and frescoed room containing the pool. Adjoining were a steam room, a cold room, and a ~~massage~~ <sup>massage</sup> room with marble tables. Bracae and Bria used all these, too, and Candace when Deborah bathed alone. For the rest of the household there was a great bath behind the kitchen with unlimited hot water.

Deborah, although a Roman daughter, held back when her father walked toward his bath. She was also her mother's daughter and no more than Susanna before the elders would she have uncovered her body before men, although she had heard that in Rome virtuous women did this as a matter of course.

She consulted with Bria about breakfast and only when her father and Lucianus emerged, oiled and massaged and casually clothed in belted tunics and soft sandals, did she call for Candace, meanwhile noting with delight that Lucianus was talking as though to his own father while her father listened in a companionable silence which he never had offered to <sup>Julius</sup> Salvidinius Muso.

Bria hastened in from the kitchen. She was disturbed.

"Candace's arm has just been scalded," she said. "A basin of hot water tipped over."

"Oh!" Deborah cried, ~~in quick sorrow. in loving concern~~ <sup>in quick sorrow. in loving concern</sup> ~~(She loved Candace with no thought of the limits set for mistress and slave.)~~

"Not badly," Bria said. "And we've covered it with sweet oil. But she'll do no massaging today."

"My poor <sup>Candace!</sup> ~~dear!~~" Deborah mourned.

"Nepte is the best I have left," Bria said slowly.

"Nepte will do," Deborah said just as slowly. She would not reveal her dislike of Nepte. She knew how her disapproval would affect the Egyptian's position in the household.

Bria frowned.

"If this meal wasn't going to be practically a feast instead of just a breakfast, I'd take over myself. Wouldn't that be like old times? But we'll have to use Nepte today. I don't like her, though. I wish we could get rid of her. Of course, I know that in this household slaves are <sup>not</sup> never sold."

"She served the same mistress from childhood," Deborah reminded, but in a doubtful tone. "It was only when her mistress died that she was put up for sale."

Reputed

(D)

"I remember the story," Bria said. An orphan, succoured in Egypt by a rich widow of Idumea, Nepte was reported to have been more daughter than servant in the household but no provision had been made for her and after the widow's death, penniless in a strange land, she had sold herself to a good master.

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(D)

If Bria could have talked with a certain troop of Roman auxiliaries which had come, from Cyrenaica through Egypt to Palestine, she might have heard a different story. But the troop had stayed in Jerusalem only briefly.

o-o-o

Nepte flexed her too wise fingers as she hurried toward the pool, a sinuous girl, the color of yellow cream and with black hair sculptured to her defiantly held head. The hands which shepherded her young mistress through the pool and to the steam room were light as thistledown and when they began to massage her on the warm marble table they set up such a lulling rhythm that Deborah felt on the drowsy edge of sleep, only it was not the sleep she had always known.

Nepte had waited confidently to serve the rounded young body and now that opportunity had come, thanks to a sly arm on a basin of hot water, she was exultant.

If this daughter of the house accepts any service but mine hereafter it will be because she is too cold for pleasure.

She looked around the inviting room with its warm tiled floor so easy on her feet and its landscaped walls so pleasant to the eye. She drew in the sweet air.

This is where I belong, not in that stinking kitchen.

In the kitchen Bria stopped abruptly in the midst of preparations for breakfast. Could Nepte, she asked herself, have tipped the basin on purpose? On the heels of that suspicion other suspicions piled up and the whole lot were so disturbing that she could not get to the baths fast enough.

"I shouldn't ever have let that Egyptian near Deborah," she thought as she hurried.

Nepte's hands lifted when Bria came in. Languid, more than half-tranced, Deborah was frowning, as in protest against a frightening dream. And while Bria looked down, the frown became a shadow of distress upon the soft flushed cheeks.

With a speed which no woman of her weight could have been expected to reach, Bria snatched Nepte and whirled her away.

"You dare?" she whispered. "You dare!" She drove the snarling Egyptian into the corridor. "You - you -"

Gadding half around the world after Bracae, Bria had picked up words suiting the occasion. She had picked them up in Spain, Thrace, Rome, Palestine and where not. She had not realized how they had accumulated, but now they flowed out in a variety as vivid as it was sulphurous.

"You jomer!" she cried. "You pot! You bed-bait! You draggletail! You horny! You ploom! You fizzfab! You ponk! You Cyprian! You ..."

She swung against Nepte's delicate, cat's ears. Right hand, left hand, right, left! Nepte's face flamed but she still snarled.

? or - only one "back"?

Page

"Get back, <sup>?</sup>back to the kitchen!" Bria swung again and when Nepte's hands lifted to her flaming face Bria laid a heavy palm across narrow buttocks. And when Nepte tried to protect her rear, the palm swung high once more. ~~Bria drove the~~ snarling, defiant offender through long corridors and hurled her among dirty pots, then hurried back to Deborah.

"That one will never handle you like a bag of barley again," she cried. Under her motherly hands the repellent dream was broken, the flushed cheeks cooled.

"I must have gone to sleep," Deborah stammered in bewilderment. She moved with a clouded distaste. "I want to go back into the pool, Bria. I want to wash all over again. Was I asleep, Bria? What happened?"

"There, there!" Bria murmured and carried her to the pool and then back to the rubbing marble and smoothed oil over the amber shoulders. "There, there!" she cooed and touched Deborah deftly with perfume-sticks.

And when this was done she dropped a white linen tunic over the head of the only daughter she had ever had and put silvered sandals on her feet, and a lemon-colored dress on her body and snugged a gold belt around her waist and hung gold rings in her ears and set a woven, silver cap on her foaming hair, brushed and hanging loose, all as she had done when each of them was ten years younger. And Deborah, remembering nothing now of the dream, stood up, fresh and gay.

"Bria!" she said. "I love having you even more than having Candace." She looked away. "Bria! Don't ever send

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Nepte again!"

Bria's rage came back. She gave a final tug to the lemon-colored folds, gave Deborah a last motherly spank and hurried to find Bracae. We don't sell slaves but if Nepte hasn't lived her last days in this house, my name isn't Bria.

O-O-O

Bracae, that mighty man, had reseated the beam with scarcely a ripple of leg and shoulder muscles and now the solitary repairing of the panels was a job much to Joseph's liking. Any work of skill was to Joseph's liking and this precise replacing of cracked woods, this exact regrooving of runners, this sweet fitting of invisible edges so that none could tell which marked the concealed door, all called for his best skill. He would, he reflected, have a fine story of craftsmanship for Mary when he got home.

And then, as had been happening often of late, he grew warm and proud thinking of home-comings when he and the son Mary was nursing would together be telling Mary fine stories of craftsmanship accomplished together. He looked ahead to such home-comings and next, in wonderment, back to the night of the birth, accomplished amid such portents. He thought of how Mary's calm had calmed his own dismay when they found there was no room for them at the inn. He thought of how naturally she had accepted a stall, among cattle, <sup>27</sup> ~~in the cave under the inn~~, and then he had to laugh.

"Never," he laughed softly, "did I see a more amazed, resentful, unbelieving woman than that midwife who came late and

found nothing to do and the baby up in that limestone manger all bathed, oiled, salted, dusted with myrtle powder and swaddled and even with an amulet, a little ivory fish, under his chin." She had looked down at Mary asleep in the golden straw and had just thrown up her hands.

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Well, he also had been amazed, and admiring, too. He had not, however, been unbelieving. Long ago he had decided that with Mary nothing was unbelievable.

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So many strange, unfathomable things had happened ... that light filling the stable ... the shepherds and the vision they had seen ... and months earlier, he himself...

Joseph laid down his tools.

He heard again, as though it were yesterday, the great voice out of nowhere, which had brought him out of sleep.

---And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins.

(D)

~~The closing words of the prophecy~~ always frightened Joseph. He shall save his people from their sins. What a mission for the little mite tugging at Mary's breast!

Jesus -- Joshua! An earlier Joshua had tumbled Jericho, had made the sun to stand still on Gibeon and the moon in <sup>i</sup>Ajalon, and had conquered all of canaan's milk and honey land.

(D)

"...the hills and all the south country and all the land of Goshen and the valley and the plain and the mountain of Israel and the valley of the same. Even from Mount Halak that goeth up to Seir, ... even unto Baal-gad in the valley of Lebanon ... the whole land, according to all that the Lord said unto Moses, ... for an inheritance unto Israel according to the divisions of their tribes ..."

But to the new Joshua, to this child, was now given a greater labor. He shall save his people from their sins.

It was frightening that in the hands of an ordinary man like himself must rest the bringing up of this boy. Joseph had not asked for such responsibility and doubted that he was equal to it.

"I'm certainly not!" he said, picking up his hammer. That gave him reassurance. At least, he thought, he was equal to the tools of his trade. He was a good carpenter although maybe not quite <sup>so</sup> good as Mary always claimed. ¶ He resumed his careful tapping.

But the sound could not drown out other worries which came crowding. Enemies would hover over this chosen one like panthers and vultures around a lost sheep. Rulers, fearful of their power. Others in high places jealous of their positions. Evil men ~~with axes to grind~~, like those who had stared so long at Mary on the way down from Nazareth. He remembered the centurion Panthera. Only the ~~timely~~ arrival of Vedius Rusco at Sebaste had kept that one from troubling Mary.

Joseph could not keep such worries entirely from his mind. "Everything is in the Lord's hands," Mary always said. But he did not have Mary's faith.

He was glad when the door of the dining room opened and Vedius Rusco came in again.

o-o-o

"They're still eating," Rusco said, smiling at the picture he brought with him of Deborah, radiant in her lemon-

colored dress, and Lucianus, trying to pull his gaze away from her. The boy was handsome; he had Greek grace and strength.

"My daughter," he explained to Joseph, "and the son of an old friend. He <sup>is</sup> come up from Egypt to join the Tenth. I'll never be missed and I wondered how you were coming on in here."

"I'll be at this a couple of weeks." Joseph pressed a carved ornament in the center panel and a concealed slide opened part way revealing a murky limestone cave. "When a thing like this sticks, it needs <sup>careful</sup> ~~a lot of~~ work. The whole wall needs <sup>it</sup> ~~a lot~~."

He made the demonstration gravely but his eyes had a small twinkle. This business of a hidden exit into a hillside tunnel with its implications of spies and plots and swift escapes was a side of Vedius Rusco that <sup>surprised him</sup> ~~did not seem in character~~.

Rusco ~~caught the twinkle~~ and smiled sheepishly. "You have to be a soldier, I guess, to understand. In camp I always wanted an extra way of retreat. And when I found that just by breaking through a few caves, Bracae and I could run a tunnel <sup>all the way</sup> ~~clean~~ to the hill's far side, I couldn't resist."

He ~~didn't~~ <sup>not</sup> mind explaining to a man he liked as much as he liked Joseph. Joseph would have been surprised if he had been told how much he was liked by the famous Road Commissioner. From the first, Vedius Rusco had found the tall, darkly tanned carpenter, so far removed in station from himself, a good companion. He enjoyed Joseph's quiet humor, his astonishing knowledge and his proper pride. Rusco <sup>at first</sup> ~~had been at first~~ <sup>startled,</sup> ~~surprised,~~ then amused and finally whole-heartedly approving, of a self-respect which not many people asserted when facing a Roman of authority. He had been

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doubly approving when he found that the attitude did not affect Joseph's friendliness.

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It was fine to be a conquering Roman. In every age one nation stands above all others. In the age of Vedius Rusco the nation was Rome. If you were a Roman you belonged to the most powerful people in the world. The temptation was almost irresistible to act as though they were also the most generous, virtuous, intelligent and brave. The trouble was that this assumption aroused Rome's conquered subjects to a natural resentment. Romans everywhere bumped up against that barrier. They did, that is, except when they came across one like Joseph who, surprisingly, raised only his own friendly counter-assumption of equality.

The enterprises of these two men were far apart, but more and more they ~~got on like~~ <sup>enjoyed companionable</sup> ~~been companions, enjoying friendly~~ talks and even arguments -- about gods, for example. Rusco put his trust in Roman gods, of course; chiefly in Jupiter and the rest of the major twelve. The carpenter believed, as all <sup>now's</sup> ~~Miriam's~~ people did, that there was only one God. Rusco liked to draw Joseph out on this subject, and he saw a chance now. He sat down and motioned for the carpenter to join him.

"Take a rest. Candace will be bringing your breakfast. And if you can reset the door in two weeks I'll be more than satisfied. I'll sacrifice to Mercury tomorrow, or maybe to Ceres, to help you along."

Some said Ceres was hardly a goddess for a soldier. But in Vedius Rusco's heart she had always stood next to Jupiter. He smiled, remembering a thing he had lately read. Virgil, dead now

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almost twenty years and chiefly famous for his poem about Aeneas, had written it. It was one of the verses about farm life which Rusco liked even better than the Aeneas <sup>work</sup> ~~thing~~. He waved his hand gaily.

"Bow down to Ceres in whose honor see  
You mix a bowl of cream and honeyed wine ..."

"I suppose," <sup>he</sup> Rusco broke off, "you think I am foolish to sacrifice to more than one god. You believe that one god does everything; don't you?"

Joseph smiled. He could see what Vedius Rusco was leading into.

"Yes," he said. "I do."

"Just one, for everything!" Rusco said, shaking his head. "Don't you know the whole world is against you? It's <sup>far</sup> a lot more sensible to believe in special gods for every special need. In Babylon they used even to have Beelzebub to protect against flies. I hate flies."

He was smiling and Joseph laughed.

"The Cyreneans also claim a fly god. They call him Achor."

"Bracae," Rusco said, "and Bria both are sworn servants of Woden and wear Woden's iron necklace, even abed. But they sacrifice to dozens of pesky, malicious lesser gods. And how about our legions? Besides all the old gods, they sacrifice now to a new one, Mithras, out of Persia. A god of light they say, always at war with Ahriman, his ~~A while back nobody ever~~ <sup>his</sup> god of darkness. A while back nobody ever heard of Mithras. Now thousands of priests sing of him and his

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" Rusco still speaking.

'thousand eyes, thousand ears, all knowing, all powerful.'

"That is not the Lord, no matter how many sacrifice to him," Joseph said. His tone now was serious.

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"I know, I know!" Rusco said. "'There is none holy as God, there is no rock like Him.' That's out of your own book and your people have said it for thousands of years."

"The Lord was the Lord ten times ten thousand years ago."

"But your priests are just as full of trickery as the priests of gods you say are nothing," Rusco observed slyly.

"All this stuff in your Temple!"

"This 'waste of rivers of oil, and thousands of rams'?" Joseph quoted. "I know. One of our prophets <sup>Micah</sup> spoke against it long ago. He said that all the Lord asked of us was to do justly, and to love mercy and to walk humbly with our God."

"I used to watch your priests when I was quartered in the Fortress of Antonia," Rusco said. "If I walked from my orderly room, just a little way along the colonnade roof, I could see a good deal that went on."

Fortress and Temple stood close together on top of Jerusalem's Mount Zion. The thick, towering Fortress overhung the precipice which fell away to the north. The shining, lofty Temple with its spacious courts and broad terraces stood <sup>adjacent</sup> south and east on a site leveled out of the rock itself. So little distance separated the two structures that smoke from sacrificial fires often stung the eyes of Roman sentries. The colonnade roof on which Vedius Rusco had walked, joined fort and Temple.

Joseph had never thought of that walk from the Fortress

being used to look down into the Temple out of curiosity. It was meant to be a quick avenue into the great Court of the Gentiles in time of trouble. When a hundred thousand were packed in the Court on feast days, trouble could flare up in seconds. A single complaint against a cheating money-changer could start it.

"Down below," Rusco said, "people can't tell whether the sacrifice being readied for the altar is unblemished or just any bony old brute slipped in while greedy priests sell the perfect beast over and over. But I could see."

Priests did sometimes make shameless substitutions, Joseph conceded.

"And there's this cheating over the priests' share of sacrifices," Rusco went on. "Priests fill their bellies every night with meat supposed to be too sacred for mortal touch."

Priests did <sup>a great deal</sup> plenty that they shouldn't do, Joseph agreed. To Elizabeth's husband, a Temple priest, he had said so bluntly.

"I know," he told Rusco, "that much is not right." But I think I know why we don't protest enough to bring on a reformation.

"Why?"

"It's this way. When we Jews have climbed from the Court of the Gentiles through the Woman's Court to where only men may stand, and look across the Court of Israel past the Altar of Sacrifice to the Holy Place, we are truly afire with reverence. We feel ourselves almost in the very dwelling place of the Lord and nothing else matters."

Joseph paused.

"The dwelling place, of course," he went on, "is the

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Holy of Holies, and when we feel the power and the nearness of that, the tricks and lies of a few priests seem unimportant."

"Your Holy of Holies had one of our generals puzzled," Rusco said. "He had heard of it, and when he conquered Jerusalem before you and I were born he broke through the curtain, hoping for gold and jewels. There was nothing at all, just an empty room as high as it was wide and as deep as it was high. No gold, jewels, or anything."

Joseph nodded.

"Is there always nothing in it?"

"Nothing but the Lord," Joseph said.

"What?"

"The Holy of Holies is the Lord's dwelling place."

"Now I know why Pompey was so <sup>Juggled</sup> set down," Rusco said.

"Pompey?"

"He was the one who broke in. <sup>(10)</sup> ~~He was a general almost as great as Julius Caesar.~~"

Joseph waited.

"The story's <sup>has</sup> come to be a joke among the legions," Rusco said. "When a soldier looks for loot but finds nothing, we say he's done a Pompey."

Joseph did not smile. And Rusco realized penitently that the tale might have been better left untold.

"I suppose," he said quickly, "now that your baby is come and your tax paid, you'll be starting back to Nazareth as soon as you finish here."

"No," Joseph answered. "The Law tells Mary to make

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her purification rite in the Temple on the forty-first day after the boy's birth. If we leave earlier she will have to put it off. Some," Joseph smiled, "put it off until they happen to be in Jerusalem for a feast day. But the Law says after forty days and that is how Mary wants it. And," he added, "so do I."

"And so would I," Vedius Rusco agreed. "I <sup>would</sup> want every-  
thing done in order for my son, too. And <sup>all the proper prayers.</sup> ~~prayers help, maybe.~~ He

~~"They help Mary every day," Joseph said.~~

~~Rusco~~ grew thoughtful. "But in battle," he said, "my safety hangs less on prayers than on me. I have to know how to get a shield in front of the other fellow's sword and how to get past somebody else's shield with my own sword or dagger or javelin. It helps, too, to know how to use a sling, or a bow and arrow. The most powerful praying man won't last long in a ~~fight~~ if he hasn't practiced using weapons."

"A long long time ago," Joseph said soberly, "my people were warned not to raise hand against one another who are all made in the Lord's image. 'Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed,' we were told."

"'Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed.'" Rusco repeated it. ~~Then he smiled with a trace of excitement.~~ "If you make your living by the sword, the sword will cost your life in the end, is that it?" he asked. "Then I know what I must expect."

Joseph did not like to hear him say that. He was about to answer when a knock sounded and Rusco admitted tall, brown Candace, her shoulders and knees gleaming above and below

a knee-length tunic. She placed a loaded tray in front of Joseph.

Rusco waved toward it with satisfaction.

"It was a gala breakfast today because of young Lucianius. Baked eggs in cream sauce, sausages, these yellow things called carrots, and fresh rolls and honey and wine."

Joseph accepted the invitation of Rusco's hand.

"How do you like carrots?"

Joseph tasted. The taste was strange. But the more he savored it, the better he liked it. He nodded.

"Bracae grew <sup>them</sup> ~~em~~ from seed sent along with the sausages," Rusco said. "All Gaul eats the things. Do you think many other people might?"

"Why not?" Joseph said. "They're good."

Candace stood waiting and her eyes, on her master, were luminous and tender. Vedius Rusco did not even look her way.

"Thank you, Candace," he said, and turned back to Joseph before the Numidian had left the room.

"I'm <sup>am</sup> glad," he said, "that you won't be starting back to Nazareth after the door is repaired. There <sup>is much</sup> ~~'s lots~~ for a carpenter to do around the villa. Easily enough work for forty days."

He was too reticent to say more but his friendly look <sup>led</sup> gave Joseph ~~the idea~~ that Rusco would be glad to have him around. Well, he enjoyed Vedius Rusco, too.

"We'll have more chances to talk," the Road Commissioner said, rising.

"But now I've promised Deborah and Lucianius some sword practice."

CHAPTER SIX

Deep cooking hearths filled the kitchen's whole north wall. Eight all told, with cranes to swing big pots and little pots over the flames, and roasting spits to hold, at need, a whole plump pig or sheep. Each hearth had a short flue to draw off smoke, for there was always smoke, and behind each flue a painted snake writhed on the sooty plaster. Even now, with anger against Nepte still at flood, those snakes recalled to Bria her satisfying victory over two-score silly superstitious servants.

"Thank Woden," she had said to Bracae when the battle was won, "that you and I aren't such dupes of any god."

In the Villa Rusco, servants and slaves were conceded privileges and seldom hesitated about claiming them. Vedius Rusco was too conscious of his own humble beginning to force all his ~~own~~ preferences upon those whose position in the household was humble, and Bria and Bracae were too good-natured. Barring Nepte, all the slaves had been at the villa so long that they felt they had an interest in it which it was their right to defend, ~~now and then~~. And for pious reasons born of various ancestries, Bria's crew had wished to defend it with snakes.

They had urged live snakes unlimited in and around the new villa's kitchens. The Greeks had pointed out that, in Athene's

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temples, resident snakes got a honey cake once a month. The Jews had recalled Moses's fiery serpent upon which any Wilderness wanderer needed only to look to be cured of any live snake's bite. The Romans had reminded that domestic snakes were favored by tutelary gods without whose guardianship great evil might befall any household. The Egyptians linked the slimy things with fertility and, by an extension of characteristic lickerish reasoning, with the even more desirable gift of potency. All had warned that trouble was sure for any kitchen failing to welcome snakes, and feed them, too.

Bria, however, as to religion was stoutly exclusive. Naturally she missed no chance to conciliate Woden and allied gods but conciliation of any alien god was a waste, and honey cakes for a tame snake, were, she declared, downright silly.

"In this Palestine there are at least thirty kinds of snakes," she had protested, "if you count from Dan <sup>all the way</sup> clear down. Which will you pick? Or do I pass out honey cakes to one and all?" Bria loved an argument.

One Greek had suggested that for all except Athene's snakes any left-overs would do, and besides they often caught mice.

"Maybe you want all snakes set up in housekeeping, two by two," Bria snapped, "the way it was with that Noah?"

Despite such crushing rejoinders the crew still wanted snakes and a stalemate was near when the key to victory flashed into Bria's mind. Painted snakes! As many painted snakes as Romans, Greeks, Jews and Egyptians wanted.

"And any color," she had added generously. After all,

(D)

Vedius Rusco had ordered frescoes <sup>Painted</sup> ~~slapped~~ on all four walls of the new kitchen in the latest fashion and painting ~~in a few extra~~ snakes would <sup>not</sup> be ~~hardly too much trouble~~ <sup>pampering</sup> for the world's best kitchen crew ~~too far~~.

(D)

There was no question that it was the world's best kitchen crew and except in silly matters like live snakes ~~she~~ <sup>Bria</sup> showed her appreciation by never skimping them on even the generous allowances of Vedius Rusco.

All the bread, oil, olives, pickled fish and salt they could eat. Plenty of wine, even fresh meat now and then. And every two years the best pair of wooden shoes and in alternate years a tunic, and not a cheap tunic, either. And a warm, shaggy hooded cloak. And living quarters ~~far~~ beyond the coffin-sized cells of other villas she knew about. And for couples a cell with a thick double mat. Because, of course, each couple used ~~only~~ <sup>← ?</sup> one mat. If they hadn't desired that pleasure they wouldn't have coupled up.

(D)

Her crew earned, Bria never denied except to their faces, all the good things they were given, even painted snakes. They kept the kitchen spotless, barring the ~~dratted~~ smoke, and any time, any time at all, that the master or young mistress called for food, food was ready ~~in no time~~. A wonderful crew! But it would be even more wonderful when that Nepte was gone!

Bria turned a punitive glare on Nepte, crouching like a wild yellow cat over dirty pans. The whole crew had been looking at Nepte since her humiliating return from Deborah's bath and their whispers had been of nothing else. There was little

pity in their looks and whispers. In her few weeks among them the Egyptian had offended them all by her arrogance and her overtures to Vedius Rusco, as plain as she dared make them and openly rivalling Candace's.

Candace did, indeed, adore her master, and ~~a lot of~~ <sup>500000</sup> good it did her, Bria thought regretfully. Candace deserved, herself, to be adored. But her shy, barely unveiled affection only aroused Rusco to approval of her as a companion for Deborah, if he noticed it at all.

Nepte was different. Trained in a school where even free men and women sought to submit themselves to a superior, Nepte had hoped that her yellow <sup>charms</sup> beauty might become so necessary to her master that she would be freed of drudgery. That hope had now been ruined and she was open in her fury.

Bria, even while planning punishment, granted grudgingly that the Egyptian was not afraid. This concession did not, however, beget mercy. Nepte deserved no mercy. She had thrown away her luck. A mistress who never stuck needles into her! Who never had her beaten just for fun! Yet she had done ... what she had done!

"You ... fool!" Bria muttered and ~~ran over~~ <sup>silently repeated</sup> the wonderful epithets she had thought of earlier. ~~"You've lived your last day in this villa, if I know anything!"~~

Ever since she had ordered the Egyptian back to the pans and pots Bria had been looking for a chance to talk to Bracae about getting rid of the girl. First, however, there had been breakfast to serve. Now Bracae and his new friend, Micipsia,

were eating bread and bacon again as though they had not stowed away mountains of it earlier. Bria refused to let such stuffing hold her back longer.

"You ... fool!" she muttered toward Nepte again and hurried out to the courtyard where her man and the broad, sooty black, whenever their mouths were emptied, were swapping boasts mixed with explosive oaths that by god ... by this god and that ... every last word was true.

Bracae swore by Woden. Like Bria he wasted no time conciliating strange gods, but along with constant sacrifices to his chief deity he made many fearful appeasements of Woden's godlings. A man was a fool who didn't. Rash doubters born elsewhere might deny it, but every man born in Gaul knew that every forest, tree, hill, valley, stream, pool and rock was the home of at least one spirit, usually spiteful or at any rate so touchy that it could be stirred to retaliation merely by the wrong flicker of a passing man's eye. So whoever neglected any of them was sure to find himself in <sup>trouble</sup> a mess. And what a <sup>trouble</sup> mess if the tree, hill, valley, stream, pool or rock on which the careless flicker fell happened to house, as <sup>many</sup> plenty of them did, a whole clan of spirits!

Bracae scorned Roman gods as he scorned Roman apparel, and in spite of his devotion to Vedius Rusco, he stood fast by the long pants of his own country. These had earned him, first in derision and then in admiration, the nickname, "Bracae," that is to say "Pants." Thick-soled sandals on his enormous feet had straps criss-crossed to hold the famous pants tight around his ankles. From the waist up he was bare. Even his head was bald-

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bare, although he rubbed it nightly with powdered donkey's teeth and honey, a hair-restorer guaranteed by Woden's usually reliable druids.

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Bracae lived under a double embarrassment. He was childless as well as hairless. Even though he and Bria wore Woden's necklace, they were childless. Technically, the necklace was meant to be worn only within those magic circles ruled by Woden's grim druids, but Bracae and Bria, always hoping, kept on the evidence of their fealty even in bed.

Well, why should not Woden help make Bria pregnant? Making ~~whole~~ men and women was no trick for him. Hadn't he made the first man and woman from trees? And was Bria worse material out of which to make fine boys and girls than ash and elm?

"And it isn't," Bracae told Bria often, "as though we weren't doing our share. We ought to have ten sons, at least." And whenever he said that Bria's gaze grew dreamy. Ten sons!

~~Imagine!~~

Looking at Bracae now, as he and Micipsia lied to each other, Bria wished from the bottom of her warm heart that she had been able to give this satisfying man ten sons. Well, five sons and five daughters. By Woden!

o-o-o

"By Anuku!" Micipsia ended a great lie with a loud appeal to his own pet deity, a goddess of small power even in her own country and not known at all in Palestine but favored by Micipsia because her statue presented her in a magnificent feathered crown.

"What better goddess," Micipsia contended, "for a man who fights with bow and feathered arrow?"

Bria tried to interrupt, anxious about the business of Nepte, but Bracae had to tell Micipsia how, once, he had fought out of a tight place by mowing down -- he couldn't remember how many -- with his two-handed sword. "Like grain, by Woden!" he said and dropped a belittling glance at Micipsia's bow. But then his pleased expression turned to <sup>apprehension</sup> ~~alarm~~ because the bow came from a tree and the tree would certainly have its spiteful and probably eavesdropping spirit.

"By Anuku, the bow is the one weapon!" Micipsia said, giving Bracae's sword a look. "It can finish before a sword can even start." And while Bracae continued to worry lest he had offended the bow's tenant spirit, Micipsia told how, once, he and his bow had won, lone-handed, a fight against -- <sup>It is hard</sup> ~~I'd hate~~ to say how many, Bracae. A man who has to deal death slowly with a sword, maybe wouldn't believe. It was at least fifty."

"Once I finished off over fifty without even a sword," Bracae said, boldly refusing to worry longer over only one spiteful spirit. "I just <sup>pulled</sup> ~~heaved~~ a beam loose one time and brought down a whole house and a whole mob under the house."

"You two, and your swords and bows and beams!" Bria broke in impatiently. "When I was a girl no one took me for a beam or sword or bow, but you two together would have had a time felling me like grain, or with an arrow either."

Bracae offered Micipsia more bread and bacon. "She's always cutting a man short, and that's the truth, by Woden!"

he said.

"So were all my girls, by Anuku!" Micipsia said. "I got tired of them and just left. Why don't you leave her?"

"Leave me?" Bria murmured complacently. "Go feather a few arrows, black man! I have a private thing to say to this one."

When Bracae failed to slap the woman down for her impertinence Micipsia registered amazement. But he was himself docile as he walked to a seat on a pile of firewood. And he confessed to himself that he might not have been able to leave easily and maybe not at all, if any of his girls had been such a ripe armful as Bria.

When Bria had told about Nepte, down to the last of the vivid string of epithets, Bracae turned toward the kitchen.

"Egyptian!" His bellow must have been heard in every corner, but he had to repeat it twice before Nepte stalked through the doorway, a half dozen frightened, curious faces filling it after her.

"I'll give her this!" Bracae said. "She isn't going to take it lying down." afraid

"She's everything I said," Bria declared. "But foul as she is, she has courage."

Bracae took Nepte by the throat and shook her until the helmet of her hair whipped around like a mop.

"I ought to break you in two," he said.

Her eyes cursed him and her fingers clawed.

"We never have sold our people," Bracae said, flinging

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her away. "But we'll sell you. I'll speak to your master and in ten minutes you'll be on your way to the Joppa Market <sup>the</sup> ~~auctioneer.~~"

Nepte brushed herself off and her eyes continued to curse him but they cursed only his back as he hurried toward the garden.

He returned in less than the time he had promised and nodded in grim triumph to Bria. Nepte looked defiantly away. By now a stream of servants had poured through the kitchen doorway; the whole staff was crowding out to watch the unheard of punishment. Scoldings? They couldn't <sup>not</sup> count their scoldings. Whippings? Some had even been whipped. But when had any slave been sold out of the household of Vedius Rusco Philippicus?

While cooks, scullions, gardeners and maids stared and mumbled, two men of the household staff marched Nepte through the courtyard gate for the long walk to Jerusalem's west wall, and there stood the vast Joppa market where slaves, along with all other disposable merchandise, were sold twice daily. As the gate closed, Nepte's gaze slid back, over a yellow shoulder, a promise that they had not heard the last of her.

"I should have had her lashed!" Bracae said. "That's all her kind ever worries about. She'll come off better at the auction than <sup>any</sup> ~~most~~ honest women."

Shouts and the sound of tramping feet rose in the field outside the villa walls. Micipsia hopped off his firewood seat and ran to a peephole. One bold cook, hoping for a last report on Nepte, ran to another.

"Legionnaires!" Micipsia called to Bracae in his high,

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squeaky voice. "A whole cohort!"

"A troop of the Tenth," Bracae said, "out for its monthly field drill." Under the strict discipline of General ~~Orfitus~~ Proculus, each cohort marched ten miles every ten days, and at least once a month, spent a half day afield in ~~tough~~ combat practice.

"They're letting your two men and Nepte go past," Micipsia called. "No! The Pilus Prior is speaking to them."

"And Nepte is certainly making sure he remembers her," the cook cried.

Everyone ran to look.

Distantly down the slope which fell away from the villa wall, the Egyptian stood close to an officer of pilus prior rank. Nothing about her pliant pose suggested a disgraced slave.

~~But make no mistake, Bria thought, half in admiration, half in disapproval at so public an exhibition,~~ she is making him see that she's all woman. *Bria thought, half in admiration*

"Trust the slut to get herself remembered!" she said to Bracae. "She'll manage even to tell him where he can find her."

The watchers saw Nepte's two escorts draw her away.

"But she's still looking back at the Pilus Prior," Bria said.

"If he knows she is for sale, he might buy her, at that," Bracae said. "On a Pilus Prior's pay, he can afford to." He broke off. "By Woden!" he bellowed as the men and their leader came closer. "Look who that Pilus Prior is!"

"Bracae!" Micipsia said. "How about opening the gate?"

I want to go out and watch."

Bracae had already started to open the gate. He hurried out in advance of everyone. He wanted a better look at the Pilus Prior.

"I don't believe it," he was muttering.

o-o-o

*Page*  
In the garden, when the shouts and tramping feet were heard, sword practice was in full swing. Deborah and Lucianus were opposing each other with sword, dagger and shield, while Candace watched Vedius Rusco who patiently corrected mistakes of which Lucianus, with a Venus in armor before him, had made more than his share.

Both girls were in armor. Candace, unable to practice because of the scalded arm, had been so disappointed that Deborah had insisted on her at least putting on the proper dress. They were full of young pride over their military accoutrements.

Vedius Rusco had lately given Deborah all of the rich gear usually worn by tribunes, from hob-nailed marching boots to crested helmet, with added engraved gold <sup>for</sup> ~~to give it~~ beauty. Candace had similar equipment but hers was dressed up with ~~dazzling~~ silver. The arms of both girls were bare, except for low-hanging shoulder flaps, and so were their legs beneath tunic skirts which were reinforced with leather straps, and as they stopped short to listen to the sounds from the field both did justice to their handsome attire.

Exercise had made Deborah's knees rosy and had spread over her arms a soft sheen of moisture. It had given her upper

lip a faint, dewy moustache, had flushed her amber cheeks and had made sunny pools of her eyes. She was a girl to take a man's mind clean off his work and Vedius Rusco had not blamed Lucianius for not putting his heart into his. The heart, <sup>was</sup> so obviously, ~~was~~ elsewhere.

The prolonged nearness to Vedius Rusco had done for Candace as much as exercise and Lucianius had done for Deborah. ~~The autumn-leaf girl,~~ <sup>she,</sup> too, was glowing. Tall, strong, rounded, her silvered breastplate rising and falling with her quickened breath, she seemed to be absorbing with quiet joy every moment of this desired proximity. Vedius Rusco's attention was given fully to his duties as drill master.

The commotion outside broke in on all this.

"What can it be?" Deborah cried. "Come ~~and~~ Candace! <sup>Let's go</sup>  
~~Let's go see.~~ <sup>and</sup> look!"

Forgetting even to drop their shields, the two girls ran and the men looked at each other, both aware of how colorless the garden had suddenly ~~grown.~~ <sup>become.</sup>

"They'll be disappointed," Rusco predicted. "You know that sound and so do I. It's only troops doing field manoeuvres. Little Orfitus Proculinus runs a fit legion even if he does look too fat and easy-going."

"If these are men of the Tenth," Lucianius said, "how is it that their leader lets them <sup>make so much disturbance</sup> ~~raise such a hullabaloo~~ so near your villa?"

"It isn't good manners," Rusco agreed. "But it will probably turn out to be just an accident." He could think of only

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three in the Legion who might wish to annoy him. And his old rival, Helius Naepor, was too shrewd a hand and <sup>Julius</sup> ~~Salvidinius~~ Muso was on leave in Caesarea -- besides, he was too enamoured of Deborah -- and the centurion Panthera whom Rusco had reprimanded in Sebaste did not command a cohort and never would.

*Page* The girls had raced through the villa. Rusco and Lucianius overtook them at the wall gate, waiting impatiently while the keeper unbarred it under the gaze of the ever-watchful dog. Outside the walls the four joined Bracae, Bria and Micipsia.

"It's the Eighth Cohort," Bracae said. He turned to Rusco in amazed disgust. "And <sup>imagines is</sup> ~~guess~~ who's commanding? Believe it or not, it's Panthera. How could Helius Naepor pick him for a Pilus Prior?"

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Rusco was shocked. He had been Primus Pilus when Panthera joined the Tenth, a recruit from Sicily. A Sicilian had long been just as much a Roman citizen as any man from the original mainland provinces, and Rusco had known <sup>many</sup> ~~plenty~~ of Sicilians who were Romans as good as any. But for centuries the island had been a crossroads where all the traffic up and down the Mediterranean mingled. The best, but also the worst, adventurers from Phoenicia, Babylon, Greece, Egypt and Carthage, indeed from the whole world, had dropped their seed. Panthera showed all the faults of such <sup>catch as</sup> ~~catch as catch can~~ crossbreeding.

A mongrel, Rusco had decided early, and had seen the record bear him out. From the beginning Panthera had played favorites when he was on top and ~~had~~ begged favors when he was

underneath. When rations were short, when prizes were divided, he always came off with something extra. He always had an excuse, even a downright lie, for a duty undone. His mind was always on women, any woman. And where other men might have been embarrassed, he grew only boastful when his bottomless craving caused his real name to be forgotten and replaced by the name of the animal considered the most concupiscent in nature.

Vedius Rusco's memory turned back to the recent night in Sebaste, half way between Nazareth and Jerusalem, when Panthera had affronted the young wife of Joseph. Vedius could still recall her face. Indeed, he wondered whether he ever would forget it.

Panthera had come to halt a riot. Riots grew up like weeds between Sebaste's Samaritans and Judean ~~Jews~~. <sup>OF Galilean Jews.</sup> That was why ~~Rome always kept soldiers in Sebaste.~~ <sup>one</sup> This riot had started in a quarrel between a Samaritan shopkeeper and a Sadducee. And having parted the two chief quarrelers, exacting his bit of graft, Panthera had put his legionnaires to dispersing the crowd that had gathered and so had come on Joseph's party, who were on their way to Bethlehem.

Not even a centurion had any right from Rome to stop an innocent traveller and his wife, but Panthera had seen Mary. His winks, hints and innuendos had drawn a crowd of guffawing soldiers around her and Joseph when Vedius Rusco and Bracae had ridden up. Rusco had been staying overnight in Sebaste and the riot had aroused him. <sup>23</sup> And even though he was out of the Imperial army, his rank gave him authority over a centurion. He had ridden between Panthera and his victims.

"These people can't be mixed up in the riot, Centurion," he had said, and another thing he still remembered was the relief that came into Joseph's face, and how his strong hand had relaxed its grip on the staff he was holding.

"No, but ---" Panthera had fumbled.

"Suppose then that we let them go along."

"If the Commissioner will let me explain ---."

"Go <sup>on</sup> ahead!" Rusco was softly reasonable. "Do explain."

"Well, the Commissioner knows of the funny story going around. About a ---." He glanced at Mary, so plainly near her time.

"Oh, that?" Vedius Rusco was still softly reasonable, because his anger was growing.

"Well, it's just like I told you. Herod ---." Panthera rubbed suddenly sweating hands against his cloak. "If there's anything to --- he'd like to know. I guess ---."

"To know what?"

"Now, look, Commissioner! The kind of thing people say is going to happen might mean trouble for Herod a few years from now. So, if Herod knew ~~soon enough where to look~~ ---."

"Look to people like this?" Rusco did not think it necessary to explain that he knew Joseph from the latter's work in <sup>his</sup> the villa. It was enough that here were only harmless travellers.

"Well!" Panthera exploded. "It could be this woman's, just as well as not. It could be any woman's."

It was then, at the absurdity of pinning such a story on Joseph's wife and at the greater absurdity of trying to take

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down the names of all women due to bear children in the next few days, or weeks, and so compile a list which Herod might check, that Vedius Rusco had sent Panthera back to his quarters.

Page Panthera was, Rusco decided looking toward the hill on which the cohort sprawled, not only a mongrel and a piece of filth, but a fool to boot. He was good enough in combat -- a brutal fighter -- too, but he got little respect from his men. As the leader of a century, a hundred soldiers, he might do, but he was not half good enough to lead a cohort. Then why the promotion?

But because Rusco <sup>e</sup>know Helius Naepor, he thought he knew the answer to this question. The Primus Pilus was up to ~~some~~ <sup>questionable transaction and</sup> ~~one of the grafting deals he was forever plotting. He needed at a~~ least one cohort leader whom he could send down any path.

What path, Rusco wondered, eying the Eighth in its brief moment of rest? What path did Naepor plan for Panthera?

Seeing that he had attracted the attention of the master of the villa, Panthera saluted Rusco and swaggered forward.

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