

SULLA and SILO

(as they really were)

Volume One in the series
THE OTHER ROME

an accurate historical reconstruction by TITO KITHES ATHANO,
Head of History, Malitora Museum

Copyright: 2013 by Tito Kithes Athano

ISBN: Softcover 978-1-4797-8976-4

Ebook 978-1-3797-8977-1

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without the permission in writing from the copyright owner.

Subject to these rights as asserted, the copyright owner consents to this file being made available for free download only for personal use without redistribution to any other person, service, storage device or agent in any form whatsoever, and without any form of modification for any purpose.

AUTHOR'S INTRODUCTION TO THE SERIES

My name is Tito Kithes Athano. I was a Head of History at Malitora Museum (or as you would say, Professor of History at Malitora University). This is an institute that doesn't exist in a city that doesn't exist in this timeline. I was doing field research when things went awry. My period of expertise is the Transition Age, the period of the Roman Republic from the Italian Citizenship to the establishment of the Federation. The subject I was researching was the development of the interpersonal relationships within the Sertorian Council during the turbulent but relatively poorly-recorded years 679 to 688 AUC, during which time Sertorius held sway from the Nile to the Indus to the plains of the Ukraine. This time and this Council were critical to the eventual Hellenisation of the Republic, just as it was inevitable that the Empire would become Greek when the Imperial Capital was moved to Constantinople in your history. It's strange how there remain so many coincidences between my history and yours, regardless of how far they diverged, and doubtless the educated reader will spot these co-incidences as they arise.

Of course, that will sound like so much fantasy to you, Gentle Reader. If you have read your history you would know perfectly well that Sertorius died in Spain in 681 AUC, and never went to the east. Which brings me to my own story.

I was conducting my research in person, using a device I'll simply call a 'Time Machine', and whose workings I don't even pretend to understand; I leave that to the engineers to worry about. All I knew about it was how to set the spatial and temporal coordinates and the duration timer. On this particular mission I had dropped back to prepare for and attend the Comitia Meetings discussing the Italian Franchise legislation. I had hoped to pose as a chronicler and interview some of the main players about their attitudes towards certain Italian nobles at that stage in the process. Had they ever expected at that time that Italians would be the key players in the Late Republic?

Of course, I couldn't phrase it this way; The Ethics Committee and I had spent months to design precisely what I could divulge, what I could not, and how I was to present myself to each individual person in my plan of research. Instead I would be asking them more neutral questions, such as 'How do you think this will play out over the next couple of generations?' or 'What was your opinion of this person at that particular time?' Although Sertorius himself was a Roman Popularis, his ability to gather the support of the Italianist Faction was the key to his political success. I wanted to know how his readiness to court both Populares and Italianists was viewed by both factions at that time. He was certainly prescient.

During this mission I managed to gather quite a bit of information, and when the timer warned me that I was due for recall to my own time I casually strolled into the Temple of Saturn so my disappearance wouldn't be observed.

The machine usually returns the traveller to the departure location with a temporal safety margin of a millisecond to make sure the traveller doesn't re-materialise into his outgoing body; to a typical observer, it seems that the traveller has never left, even though he might have experienced days, months, sometimes years in his own time consciousness. And there's usually a spatial margin of about one hundred millimetres from the floor, to make sure any errors don't re-materialise him with his feet set into the floor. Such overlapping of solid material can be disastrous; even re-appearing into thin air can cause

medical complications, which is why transport is always done in a very low pressure chamber, with enough pure oxygen to achieve a barely breathable atmosphere at a minimum pressure. This is further enhanced by some sort of engineering trick to cause the immediate return zone to become even more rarefied during the instant of materialisation. Of course, that can't all be done to the target space on the outward trip. The engineers have developed some sort of technique to locally displace as much air as possible at the instant of materialisation, but that's never as good as in the laboratory conditions and the outbound traveller usually feels very sick for some time after his arrival. A side effect of this sudden and extreme reduction of air density, and its collapse back to normal an instant later, is a very loud noise like an explosion, which is why we always try to materialise well away from observers when we leave and in the lab when we return. As a backup the return timer is also fitted with a device that does the same air-thinning trick, but even with this redundancy a few researchers have died; historical research can be a dangerous business.

So I found an unobserved corner in Saturn's Temple, waited for the timer to tick down, and then bent my knees as the zero time approached. This is standard practice, so when you fall on re-materialisation you don't drop onto locked-out knees and break something.

It was certainly more than a one hundred millimetre drop! It seemed like six feet or more, and the wind was knocked out of me. But even more disconcerting was the darkness. Where were the lab lights? And the headache was murderous! And the nausea! And my whole body was tingling, burning and cramping at the same time! It felt like stories I had heard from the first trials, when subjects had travelled without modern atmospheric density precautions. I was so thankful for the redundancy benefit of the return timer, or I surely would have died from gas embolisms. Then I felt something wet on my cheek. With a rush of dread that probably included an adrenalin shock, if only my body was not already too distressed to feel it, I realised that a large black dog was licking my face. Then, out of the deeper gloom, I saw another approach. But I was effectively paralysed from the high-atmospheric-pressure materialisation; I was completely helpless. Then one of the dogs started to bark.

It seemed like an hour to me, full of dread and my body racked with pain from the included gases; but I was later assured it was less than a minute after hearing the huge boom of my return before I was found. I was bathed with light and I heard a door opening behind me and a voice calling, presumably to me. I was in no condition to respond, even if I had understood the language. The door slammed shut, and soon opened again, this time with two male voices. I wasn't capable of even feeble movement, but could control my body enough to give a low moan. There were steps approaching me, but keeping their distance as they circled around to see my face and come within my field of vision. Another light, this one in front of me, snapped on and blinded me. There was a sharp short command, and the dog that had been licking my face left me. At least the dogs are trained, I thought with relief.

I closed my eyes against the glare and asked in slurred tones, 'What has happened?'. In return one of the men said something I couldn't understand; but I could tell he was alarmed and defensive. I squinted one eye open to see that both of them were holding long-bladed knives in each hand.

I still couldn't move and my body was still cramped and in pain, but I was starting to think more clearly. I couldn't recognise the language, although there weren't as many languages in my time as there are in this timeline. And certainly not as many among men who have a European appearance.

But they were not responding to my Oiku speech, which was a derivative of Koine Greek and effectively the world tongue in my time. I tried again, this time in Chinish, although these men were not Chinish in their appearance. But I think that one of them realised what I was trying to do; Oiku and Chinish sound so different that he realised I was looking for a common language. He demanded back at me in a few different sentences, with pauses between. I recognised none of them.

In desperation I tried Latin, which I had been speaking for the last month; but very few understand Latin in my time. It's only used by specialist historians, it having become localised to the West Mediterranean basin before going extinct soon after 900 AUC when Greek was adopted throughout the Republic. Latin is in my world what Ancient Egyptian or Akkadian is in yours.

But to my shock, he recognised it! Then, with an excruciatingly bad accent and stumbling for the right inflections, the stranger lowered the knife he had been pointing at me, and asked 'Are you speaking Latin?'.

I didn't reply immediately; that was when my bowels cramped and I fouled my toga. The associated bout of vomiting probably didn't convey a good impression either. Then I answered 'Yes, but your Latin is not very good.' The stranger laughed, as though my incontinence had been my response to his poor command of the tongue and my reply an explanation. When I was able to move I slowly rolled out of my toga to reveal that I had no weapons, and then struggled to stand naked before them. They started to relax a bit more.

That was how I first met Alan and his son-in-law Brian (not their real names, to protect them). When I told them where I had come from, they obviously thought I was mad; but there I was, with a toga, with my paper notes in Latin in my carry-bag and my visual and sound recordings in my touchboard, yet completely baffled by every European language they tried on me - though some of what I later learned was Brian's Spanish sounded similar to Latin. By now they were convinced that I was no threat to them, and they were kind enough to take me into the house and allow me to clean up. They fitted me with some of Alan's clothes, too; we were similar enough in size for some of his loose casual shorts and Tee-shirts to fit me.

Alan had studied Latin at school, which is why he recognised it; but it was schoolboy Latin, and he was very rusty. He eventually took me into his house and displayed a map of his locality. The landforms were the same! I had materialised back in the place occupied by the research lab in Malitora Museum; except that the Museum wasn't here. I was in a small town whose name I will not mention. I'm glad that in this timeline the area of my return had not been filled with earth, or a wall built through my re-materialisation point. I had suffered no more than a fall to natural ground level instead of onto the lab floor. I'm also glad that the Machine had been installed on the ground floor, and not ten stories higher! I later determined, by comparison of calendars, that I had also returned to the precise point in time as well.

Next Alan started mentioning some Roman names; the first was, to my total surprise, Caius Julius Caesar! The Man of Shame in my history was apparently the most famous Roman of all in this timeline. Alan clicked around on his computer a bit more, mentioning a few more names I couldn't recognise. Then he mentioned Caius Marius. There was a name and a personal history I recognised, at least at first. But when he started talking about the Italian War I was completely lost. Eventually we pinned down that the split in our histories was some time around 662 AUC. That was when it dawned on me; my return timer had somehow caught onto the wrong thread, or whatever those temporal engineers called them. The split had happened the moment my return was triggered.

But that was a few years ago now, and in the meantime I've had to learn English. Alan has been kind enough to feed, clothe and shelter me during that time, and to protect me from the less scrupulous in this rather vicious society (at least in comparison to my own timeline). In between learning English and other aspects of my new world, I've written a history of my old world, starting at the time of our separation. Hopefully it will earn enough to compensate Alan for his expenses in caring for me. At first I wrote in Latin and Oiku, not having the English skills; but I translated these early passages as my understanding of English improved.

Although this is written in the form of a historical novel for the sake of a general audience and does indeed simplify many aspects of Roman life for those who don't have the historian's patience with such things, it's a reasonably accurate retelling of what actually happened in my timeline. While I have used my own reconstructions of the details of many of the conversations, I have done this only where the surviving records in my timeline had left gaps, and I assure my readers that the main thrust is accurate and consistent with what has already been established by proper scholarly research. The characters are true to their real natures and the perceptions by the characters of each other are faithfully reproduced. Remember, I studied this period intensely. As you will read in this first volume, we had developed the Printing Press within Sulla's lifetime, which prompted virtually everyone of any importance to write his memoirs to defend and explain his own actions, and others to write biographies and histories. It also ensured thousands of copies of almost everything were produced. And we did not go through your Dark Ages, in which you lost so many important documents. So compared to your scholars, who have to scratch hard to establish even a basic outline, the scholars in my timeline suffer from an overabundance of raw data and their task is to sort through it all, to separate propaganda from fact.

I had the time, resources and the data to know each significant player in this period as well as I knew my own family; and after the Time Machine became a reliable research tool, I have even spoken with some of the men I write about! So read my offering, and ponder how different your history might have been. More books will be released as I have the opportunity to write them.

Chapter 1 – 663 Ab Urbe Condita (91 B.C.)

“Caius, this is the fullness of time!” Marcus Livius Drusus said to the man walking beside him. He marvelled at the circumstances. Here at his side was the man hailed as the Third Founder of Rome, a Consul for an unimaginable six terms and saviour of Rome against the Cimbri and the Teutones. After all others had not only been defeated but had also lost the last armies standing between Rome and its enemies, Caius Marius had raised new armies from no-where, trained them overnight, defeated the main enemy force in one gigantic battle although outnumbered and then force-marched his men to defeat the second enemy force which had overwhelmed his co-consul Quintus Lutatius Catulus on the other front.

And this man was supporting him, was following him, as though he were the natural leader in this group. He looked to his left, and saw Marcus Aemelius Scaurus, the Leader of the Senate, consular and ex-Censor, at his other side. Behind him followed Marcus Antonius Orator, another Consular and former Censor, and Lucius Cornelius Sulla, a brilliant Urban Praetor who will inevitably be Consul in his turn. ‘Yet they all acknowledge me as their leader in this great enterprise!’

“Indeed it is, Marcus Livius!” Marius affirmed warmly, a grin of complete satisfaction sparking in the torchlight. “This Italian hayseed has never been as thrilled, not even after repulsing the Germans, not in any Triumph. Tomorrow will be a glorious day!”

All around these six men milled a crowd of hundreds of the Lower Classes, cheering Drusus as if a celebrity gladiator but with a respect that bordered on religious devotion. They had started to follow him home as an informal escort after the first few meetings but over the last few meetings the numbers had swelled each night.

Now they reached his house. Drusus turned to the crowd and called for order. The crowd was stilled to a man. Drusus raised his voice, to be heard at the back even by those who couldn't see him. Then he followed the pattern he had established four meetings ago. He invited this motley bodyguard inside his house.

“Friends,” he greeted them, to be met by an immediate cheer. He motioned for quiet again, smiling in appreciation. “Friends, please come inside with me tonight.” Another cheer rose from the mass. “Tomorrow you will vote to welcome my friends, your friends, indeed men who have been Friends and Allies of Rome for generations. You will vote to welcome them into your home, into your Rome, in appreciation of their faithfulness over hundreds of years. So it's only fitting that I should welcome you into my house tonight. Come, eat, drink and celebrate that it falls to you, my friends, to be the ones who will bring justice to our Italian brothers! It will be you who will fulfil the promises Rome made to their fathers!”

The crowd rose in another roar of support. He called for his Master of House to open the door, gestured his Senatorial friends through the door and stood to one side as most of the crowd filed through his doors into the huge atrium and the garden beyond. As they passed through a queue of serving girls and male slaves offered trays of tarts and cups of watered wine to each. When all were inside and

gathered in groups chatting with each other, Drusus went around to every group to personally thank them for their support.

A quick gesture from Drusus to Caius Marius in between groups got the message across and Caius spoke to the other Senators. They broke apart and started to press the flesh themselves.

‘I can’t believe this!’ Scaurus said to himself. ‘All these Fifth Class, some even not in a Class they’re so low, but they’ll be able to tell their children and grandchildren about tonight! It would come close to topping a personal meeting with Romulus and Remus, because Marius is already hailed as the Third Founder of Rome, and there’s no doubt that within his lifetime Drusus will be hailed as the Fourth. And they get humble me and Marcus Antonius Orator, both of us consulars and Censors, thrown in with the bargain!’ Once the greetings had been completed Marcus Antonius Orator took his leave of Drusus to walk home early.

Sulla, dutifully doing his rounds with his utterly convincing charming smile, was not quite so taken by the event. Lucius Cornelius Sulla was a man accustomed to playing a part. As a wastrel youth he had immersed himself in the world of theatre and actors, as a young man he had infiltrated Jugurtha’s stronghold in the Numidian War, as a man coming into full power he had posed as a Celt to gain intelligence for Caius Marius and in his maturity he had insinuated himself into the lives of several prominent Romans who had made the mistake of trusting him - and died as a result. He knew a pretender when he saw one because he was the prince of pretenders.

And there was one group of five men who didn’t seem as relaxed and joyful as they pretended to be. Perhaps they were close friends and one of them had suffered a misfortune lately. But every time he looked over to them in between other groups, the same impression came to mind. They were neither supporters in full celebration nor friends commiserating with a fellow. They looked more like soldiers preparing for a mission.

Sulla thought carefully. Drusus was a man of total integrity, a quality that Sulla thought was greatly over-rated compared to the ability to get the job done by whatever means. Therefore if he were to mention anything to Drusus, it would destroy his political bonhomie this evening. Sulla would have to take control of this himself, subtly.

He wandered across to Cratippus, Drusus’ Master of House. “Cratippus, nod as if I am simply giving you catering instructions. Do you understand?” Cratippus wouldn’t have achieved his current position if he had been a fool. He nodded.

“Good. I want you to arrange that there will always be a few good, strong men near Marcus Livius at all times. They are to be cheery, offering pastries to the masses, but must be ready to defend their master with their lives at the first sign of trouble,” Sulla commanded. “Because I feel in my bones that there’ll be trouble tonight.” Cratippus nodded again.

“You’re a good man, Cratippus,” Sulla concluded. Cratippus, despite himself, was pleased at this praise. Everyone in Rome knew that Sulla didn’t suffer fools.

Drusus stood on the coping of the fish pool in the middle of his atrium, a half-body above the general level, and called for quiet. "Thank you, my friends, for your courtesy to spend this evening with me." A cheer rose from the crowd. Drusus waved it down with that ever-so-winning smile. "But tomorrow will be a big day. We all need our sleep. So if I could ask you to take your leave now..." He gestured towards the door and walked over to take up station beside it.

The crowds drifted towards the door, each man taking Drusus' arm as he left. One group seemed to deliberately hang back, as though they were more interested in being last out than actually taking the arm of Drusus for the second time that night.

Sulla nodded towards Cratippus, and motioned that men should stand by the exit. Cratippus nodded. Soon there were several strong male slaves lined up with trays of pastries for the crowd to take as they left. Rather than leaving for a new tray when theirs were emptied, girls were bringing new trays to them so the men could remain in place.

Sulla kept to the shadows, his eyes on the suspect group of five. There was no doubt now. They were hanging back to ensure they were the last out. Then Sulla saw something very disturbing. It was a glint of steel as one of the group tucked a blade into his sleeve. 'So that's it!' Sulla thought to himself. 'Take the right hand, and stab with the left!' He quietly admired the planning. Sulla slipped into the kitchen to grab a carving knife and hid it in his toga, then quietly joined the line of the Senators who were farewelling the crowd out the door. He deliberately pushed into the place one space ahead of Drusus and started the routine of smiling, thanking, offering his right arm and slapping shoulders with his left.

The first of the last group came to him. He took the offered right arm, then drove his knee into the man's groin. Immediately he stepped in front of Drusus as he dropped his right hand from his victim, grabbed the knife from the fold of his toga, and called to the slaves "Seize them all!"

The group of would-be assassins had all been facing the line of senators. The slaves on the other side of the gauntlet dropped their serving trays and fell on the backs of the would-be assassins. It took only a moment for Caius Marius to add his aging but still powerful frame to the effort and the other senators joined the struggle to force the five to the ground. The clattering of a blade on the tiled floor was unmistakable. Only Drusus, blocked by Sulla's back, stood aloof as the other household slaves rushed to assist.

As the slaves and senators combined their efforts and subdued the men Drusus stood still, stunned by events. Marius, ever a good soldier, saw what his trusted legate had done and allowed him to continue in control.

Sulla ordered the men bound and taken into the private rooms. Each man was hauled off to his own room and strapped to a guest bed. Each was guarded by three household slaves each. "Just three questions, and write down their answers," Sulla instructed these slaves, ticking the questions off his fingers as he spoke. "What are their names, and ask each to name his colleagues as well; who sent them; and would they prefer to live, or be sliced to pieces one bit at a time."

At last Sulla turned to Drusus, who was only now recovering his balance. "My apologies, Marcus Livius, for presuming to order your slaves without your permission. But I have experience in these matters and didn't wish to disturb you in front of your clients."

Drusus nodded his agreement. "Caius Marius always says that you're a good man to have in a tight spot. Now I see why." He slumped onto a seat, emotionally exhausted. Scaurus sat beside him.

"This smells like Caepio's work to me," Scaurus declared.

"We'll know soon enough," Sulla replied. "I'll have a quiet chat with each in turn."

"As if they'll tell us anything!" Scaurus snorted.

Sulla did not respond. He just gave a smile that would terrify a bear and turned towards the bedrooms. The kitchen knife was still in his hand.

Cratippus was leaving one of the guest rooms as Sulla turned, so Sulla walked over to him. Cratippus anticipated the request for a report. "They're all bound, lord Sulla, but will say nothing."

"Follow me, Cratippus, and watch. Then have the same done to all the others." Sulla stepped into the guest room to see a man spreadeagled across a bed, tied wrist and ankle to the bedposts.

"A good start," Sulla said flatly, "but we can do better. Don't just tie him to the corner posts; also tie him to the posts below the side rails. And make it tight!"

The slaves took more bindings and complied. It was obvious that this pulled the man's arms back, slightly hyper-extending the elbows and shoulders. The increased stress showed on the man's face. Sulla stood beside the bed. "Three questions; what is your name, and the names of your fellows; who sent you; and would you prefer to live, or to die slowly and painfully?"

The captive snorted in reply. "When we don't report back, those who sent us will know where we are. They will come, and find you abusing a Roman citizen. A *real* Roman citizen, not one of your Italian turds! If I'm harmed you will be prosecuted!"

Sulla smiled a chilling smile. "I think I'm going to enjoy this evening." Then to the slaves, "Turn the bed up on its end!"

Within moments, the bed was vertical. Because the captives ankles had been tied below the side rails of the bed, the mattress thrust his body forward of his feet, and he hung by his arms.

"This is a bit like crucifixion, isn't it?" Sulla mused. "Let's give him an hour. If he still wants to be the hero, we can move onto the second stage. I call it 'crucifixion with distractions'. It's quite interesting".

Then he addressed the captive directly. "Each of you five who co-operate will live. As soon as you tell us everything we want to know you'll come to no further harm. Marcus Livius won't even have you charged. You'll be completely forgiven. But each of you who doesn't co-operate will wish he had never lived, and that'll also apply to your wives and children. So spend the next hour saying to yourself, 'if any of the other four talk, but I don't, then my family and I will die

horribly, and for nothing. But if I talk, then I will have saved my family. Because at least one of the others will talk anyway.”

Sulla gave him another of those terrifying smiles. “I quite enjoy these interrogations. Feel free to hold out for as long as you can. I’ll be back in an hour.”

The same process was followed in the other four rooms in turn. Then Sulla went to join the other Senators, sitting together by Drusus’ ornamental waterfall so the sound of the water would prevent anyone overhearing their discussion.

Drusus rose as Sulla approached, extending his hands in welcome. “Lucius Cornelius, I owe you my life. Which is a small thing compared to the debt Rome owes you.”

Sulla took the proffered hands and smiled more warmly. “And that’s small compared to the debt Rome owes *you*,” he replied. “What have my political superiors decided?” he asked as he joined the group.

Scaurus spoke for the group as the two men sat. “First, we should act as though nothing unusual has happened. The vote must go smoothly tomorrow. We don’t want Philippus acting the drama queen again and disrupting the vote. If this attempt leaks out he might declare a state of emergency or something similar.”

“You forget, perhaps, that he’s already aware of this attempt,” Sulla responded. “And when he sees Marcus Livius on the podium tomorrow, he’ll know things have gone amiss.”

“Yes, but if he shows his knowledge of that then he’s also showing his complicity.” Scaurus grinned mirthlessly. “And if any of his puppets suggests that something is amiss, then Marcus Livius can quite truthfully say that not a hostile hand was laid on him, not a weapon raised in his direction. It must be just another scare story put out by Philippus.”

Sulla nodded. “So we want the vote to go ahead. I expect we should win, but do we have protection against violence? After tonight’s efforts, I wouldn’t be surprised if they’ve hired a school of gladiators to break up the meeting.”

This time Caius Marius was smiling. “Perhaps I should have mentioned this earlier. Many of my veterans have remained my clients. I’ve arranged for more than five hundred to guard the meeting tomorrow. I’ve also put out the word to some of my less reputable contacts that any gang that tries to disrupt the meeting will be identified and I’ll hunt them down. All agitators can expect to wake up dead sometime within the next few weeks. But you have a point, Lucius, so perhaps I should send out word this evening to the gladiator schools to the same effect.”

Sulla nodded again. “So what happens after the meeting? Every victory is no more than the start of the struggle to hold the ground just won.”

Scaurus took up the lead again. “If we can determine exactly who launched this attack, we’ll prosecute. Marcus Livius has the huge advantage here that he’s always scrupulous to follow the law and to honour his oaths. This has led some to think he’s weak, but it’s a sign of true strength. But it also means he has enormous credibility when he uses the law offensively. Any person he prosecutes will be condemned, if for no other reason than the fact that Drusus is bringing the case.”

Sulla broke in here. “Don’t worry, we’ll know who’s behind this plot before the sun rises tomorrow.” The other five looked to him inquiringly. “I have a special

gift. It has to do with the polite way I ask questions.” He smiled innocently but Marius had known him long enough to see beneath the smile. He had no doubt.

There was action at the front door. The bodyguard detachments for Caius Marius and Scaurus had arrived almost simultaneously to conduct their masters home through the dark and dangerous streets.

“Question our would-be assassins however you like, Lucius Cornelius,” Drusus allowed. “But just try to keep it quiet. The neighbours might not like the noise.”

Sulla spread his hands. “If the neighbours hear and if word gets around, then that might deter any other enemies from making the same mistake.”

The other four stirred uneasily. Sulla certainly was a man you didn’t want as an enemy. Sensing he had made his point, Sulla stood. “I think the first man is expecting me to drop in for a quiet chat. I’ll be back in an hour or so. That is, I assume we’ll be staying here as guests tonight?” He looked to Drusus.

“Yes, of course,” Drusus replied.

“And, please, Marcus Livius, set a strong and well-armed guard tonight. In fact, put our bodyguard detachments on guard duty as arrive. When these ruffians don’t report back to their master he might try something rash. Once the guard is set, all of you grab some sleep. I’ll wake you when I’ve gained some information from our daggermen.” Sulla turned back to the occupied guest rooms.

The first man was obviously distressed by the crucifixion position. The additional thrust on his back from the fullness of the mattress was clearly a more severe stress position than ordinary crucifixion. “Oh, you poor darling!” Sulla exclaimed as he entered. “Did I forget to tell them to lay you flat? Oh, I’m so sorry!” He motioned for the slaves to set the bed level again.

Then he took the kitchen knife from his toga again. Slowly he approached the bed, with the captive spreadeagled on it. He saw the terror rise in the man’s eyes, even as he breathed more easily.

Sulla slipped the point of the knife into the neck opening of the man’s tunic, and cut the fabric across to the left shoulder and down the sleeve. Then the same to the right sleeve. Then, the point of the knife went into the belt at his waist. Then a final cut down the front of the tunic.

Sulla worked with great care and concentration, and slowly. It was eerie to watch, and Sulla knew it would have this effect. He stood back, as if to admire his work; and he licked his lips and sucked on them, slowly deliberately. “I want to enjoy every moment of this, my friend.” He said softly, slowly. “Every moment,” he repeated.

Then he grabbed the side of the tunic under the armpit, and slowly pulled it out. The weight of the captive clamped the back to the mattress, so it tore. Sulla rolled his eyes in delight. He tore the cloth right away, and then did the same on the other side. And then the sleeves. Sulla was breathing heavily now, in quick pants of sexual intensity. He stood back, eyes caressing the body in front of him. The captive was wild-eyed with terror. Exactly the response Sulla was hoping for.

“And now...” Sulla whispered, as if to himself. He stepped forward and gently, slowly, slipped the blade under the man’s loincloth at the front of the right

hip, and started sawing at it. Suddenly the loincloth was soaked with urine. What almost an hour of crucifixion couldn't trigger, the dread of Sulla's slow, sadistic caress had achieved in a few minutes. The man was as good as broken.

"Oh, what a pity!" Sulla cooed. "Now you're all wet! Don't worry, I'll dry you myself." Then, without turning away, "Slave, please get me a towel." One of the slaves passed Sulla the guest's towel, kept in the room as a standard piece of the fit-out. Sulla laid it across the man's belly.

Sulla gently and slowly finished cutting through the cloth, then did the same on the opposite side. He grabbed the front top of the loincloth, and slowly dragged on it to ease it out from under the man's rump. He gazed longingly at the exposed genitalia, licking his lips again. "Ahhh!" he sighed softly. He reached again for his knife.

"No, please! I will tell you everything!" the captive exploded. "You promised no harm if I talk, and I'll talk!"

Sulla pursed his lips together as if in anger, or annoyance; he kept his eyes locked on the man's groin. His grip on the knife tightened and he shook it in frustration. Then he exhaled explosively, turned to the sideboard in the room, and slammed the knife down on its surface. He leant on the front edge on both hands.

"Very well," Sulla threw over his shoulder. "Tell me your name and the names of your fellows. Then the full story of who hired you and what your orders were." Sulla wouldn't turn around to face him. "One of you slaves, write down what he says. When I get back, I want to read his full statement before we let him off that bed. Right now, I'm going to the next room!" Sulla stood erect again but still didn't turn around. "Perhaps at least one of them will have a bit more courage!" he muttered sulkily and went out the door.

The captive in the next room had heard his fellow break. He knew there was no point in remaining silent now, only the certainty that whatever dreadful fate had been threatened in the first room would now be visited upon him, unless he too begged for mercy. "Please!... I will tell... everything," he gasped to the slaves watching him, even as he heard the door opening at Sulla's hand.

"Ah! A man even weaker than his companion!" Sulla grumbled. "See to it that you do indeed tell everything and that it matches what the others say." He stood in front of the bed for a moment, eyes running up and down the captive.

"Oh, perhaps you should lay the bed out flat. He'll find it easier to talk that way." Sulla looked about the room as the bed was brought back to level. "Do you have paper and ink here? Good! I want all names involved in this scheme, and a full account of everything they were ordered to do, and what to do afterwards, who they were to report to, the lot!" He nodded in satisfaction. "I'll be back!" Sulla left that room and entered the next in the line with a petulant cast to his face

"So far, we have two out of two who've agreed to tell all. The cowardly bastards!" Sulla stormed. He glared at the captive. "What about you? Are you as much a woman as those other two, or are you man enough to give me some entertainment?"

"I have... nothing... to tell," he gasped. Sulla's eyes brightened and a smile returned to his face.

"Excellent!" Sulla rejoiced. "Nothing to tell! I'll be back later, when I have time to enjoy you properly." Sulla had made sure that his words from the doorway were loud enough for the fourth captive to hear, if not the fifth as well. As he walked into the fourth room he saw that this had achieved the desired result.

"I'll talk," the man hanging from the bedframe said as he entered.

Sulla stood for a moment, staring at the man. "Right. That's three out of four who'll talk. At least I've got one who'll provide me with some entertainment tonight. Put his bed flat and write his story out for me. Every name, every order, including where to report afterwards." Again this was deliberately loud enough to be heard in the fifth room.

The fifth captive was also ready to tell his story when Sulla walked in. Once again Sulla gave his summary orders and set the interrogation going. Then he strolled back to the third room. As he opened the door with a beatific smile on his face he stopped.

"Ah! I left something I need in the first room." He closed the door behind him and returned to the first man, still naked on the bed.

"How goes my little poppet?" he asked as he entered. He gazed at the body spread before him. "I so much wanted you to be stronger!" he said wistfully. "But at least one of your fellows is prepared to humour me!" He picked up the knife he had left on the sideboard, cast one more longing gaze at the bed and walked out.

The third captive was definitely struggling to breathe. Sulla was surprised at the huge difference the constant pressure of the mattress seemed to have on a man being crucified. He ordered the bed to be laid flat. Sulla, putting on his lover's face, stood beside the bed and smiled so softly on his victim and lovingly stroked his chest.

"I have good news!" Sulla cooed. "The other four have all agreed to talk. That means we can spend all night together. No interruptions, no need to hurry!"

"Please, I have nothing to tell!" The man pleaded, now that he could breathe again. "I don't know these other men. They met me in a drinking-house and offered me one hundred denarii to help them get rid of some fellow who was their enemy. I didn't even know their names until I heard them talking to each other. And I didn't know their target until we were in the atrium."

"Never mind the others, poppet, we have each other now!" Sulla said with such great fondness, and running his fingertips down his captive's chest. "My name is Lucius. What's yours?"

The man on the bed swallowed. "Piso," he replied.

"Well, Piso. Now we're already on first name terms. Let's get to know each other better," Sulla whispered sweetly as he slowly cut Piso's tunic away.

"You promised that I would come to no harm if I told you all I knew," Piso started to weep in despair. "I've told you everything I can! Please believe me!"

"Oh, Piso, you're playing your part so well tonight!" Sulla said admiringly. "You're so brave to hold back so much information, and so clever in pretending that you have nothing more to tell! This is going to be so good!" Sulla shivered as if in an ecstasy already.

"But what have I held back from you, my lord?" Piso begged.

"Please call me Lucius. You can call me 'my lord' when we get to the interesting parts," Sulla rebuked him gently and started to tear away the cut tunic.

"What haven't I told you, Lucius?" Piso asked again, with more desperation as well as more control.

"How would I know, you silly thing?" Sulla said teasingly. "You haven't told me!"

Piso choked back another sob.

"For example," Sulla prompted him, "What role did each of you have in the attack? Were you all going to go for Drusus, or was it intended that only one would and the others cover the escape? Exactly how were you going to do it?"

"Oh, I see what you mean," Piso responded. "The idea was that just as the first of us was about to step out the door and the second in line was about to farewell Drusus, then the first and second would catch Drusus between them. The other three were supposed to provide crowd control, to ensure the first two had the time to make sure Drusus was dead. Then we were to run into the Subura."

"What a clever plan," Sulla praised him. "Where to in the Subura were you intending to run?"

"I don't know. I was just told to follow them."

"What are their names?"

"Gnaeus was in charge. He's the one with red hair. Sextus is the thin one. The young guy was called Marcus."

"One more name to go, sweetie," Sulla said teasingly as he took the hilt of the knife between thumb and forefinger, and dragged the point down past Piso's navel.

"I don't think I heard it!" pleaded Piso. "I told you, I've never seen them before tonight."

"Remember harder," Sulla urged, momentarily reversing the drag of the blade so that the tip pricked Piso's belly. Piso gasped.

"They just called him "Lefty"; I don't think I heard them call him by name."

"See! You can remember more when I coax you!" Sulla cooed. "Now, when and how were you going to get paid?"

"They gave me fifty Denarii. It's in my pouch, along with a couple of other coins I already had. They said I would get the rest afterwards."

"You're remembering so much!" Sulla whispered approvingly. "Now, what other names did they mention? Was there any hint of who had hired them?"

Piso's eyes opened wider in dread. "No other names. In fact, Gnaeus told me we were going after his personal enemy, not that he had been hired by someone else."

Sulla stroked Piso's cheek, like a mother caring for a sick child. "I have to go now and chat with my other guests. Please be patient, because I promise I'll be back." Sulla smiled a farewell, and went to the door. Soon he was in the first room. This was young Marcus. His story largely confirmed Piso's but with some extra detail.

He and his three fellows were petty criminals living mainly by robbery at night and petty theft. They had been approached three days ago by a lone man,

dressed poorly. They were surprised when he put on the table in front of them a pouch, and then tipped it up into his palm to show them a gold mina. He handed this to Gnaeus, and then sat with them.

"That is yours to keep," he said. "Otherwise I expect you'd follow me out, anyway," he said with a smile. "But if you want four more of them for one night's work, I have a proposition."

Gnaeus just nodded once, slowly.

"Go to the Comitia tomorrow. Follow Drusus home with the crowd. Go into his house to eat and drink, as has become his custom lately. Then kill him. If you don't kill him tomorrow you have a second chance the next night. But before the sun rises one day after that he must be dead. I don't care how you do it, just kill him. The details are yours to figure out. Then look for me at the Comitia meeting. I'll be at the back right-hand corner. That's when you get your extra four minas."

Gnaeus nodded again. "We'll think about it. If we agree we'll do it and see you at the Comitia."

"No," said the slave. "You'll do it because you accepted the downpayment. If you don't, Gnaeus, and Marcus, and Sextus, and Sinistratus, you will not live long. Yes, we know who you are. My friends are already back with our Patron telling him where you live and we have the means to track you down. So don't be so foolish as to harm me, or try to avoid this task. You will either do it and be wealthy, or you'll refuse and be dead."

The slave smiled warmly and rose from his seat. Then he walked out of the ale-house. The four put their heads together. Getting into Drusus' house would be easy and they expected that getting close enough to kill him wouldn't be too hard either. He made himself so vulnerable! But getting away from the scene after the killing would be near impossible.

Gnaeus had the solution. Engage a stranger, let him strike the blow and then the rest would come to Drusus' rescue – but too late, of course. But first they needed to check out the site. That evening they attended the Comitia and followed Drusus home. They noted the layout of the atrium and his courtesy in offering his arm as each man left through his door.

Most of the next day was spent discussing a killing strategy that would seem reasonable and plausible enough to convince their newest member that it would work and get them all out alive, but in fact would make sure that only those four were guaranteed safety while the fool was left holding the bloodied blade.

At length they came up with a plan. They would tell the fool that they would be the last to leave, to ensure as little opposition as possible. The first to farewell Drusus would leave slowly, silently taking his blade in hand. The second would take Drusus right hand, simultaneously stabbing him with the left. The last three would act as crowd-control, to ensure Drusus was killed and then covering the getaway. Everything depended upon co-ordination. Whoever was in that second position would be the one who set the timing for all. His thrust of the knife would be the signal for the other four.

But the real plan was to make sure the fool was in second position. Let him plunge the dagger in, perhaps even a couple of thrusts if he was quick and they

could delay their reaction, pretending to be taken by surprise. Then they would fall upon the fool and break his neck so he couldn't tell anyone the whole story.

That evening they went to another ale-house in Subura, looking for a victim. They found Piso, looking every inch another petty criminal but alone. Most importantly, he was a small man. He would be easy to overpower and kill when they fell upon him.

"Well, Marcus, that is indeed a cunning plan! You were unlucky it didn't work!" Sulla said approvingly. "So just relax, lay back on your bed a bit longer! I'll check that your colleagues tell the same general story." Sulla slipped out of the room again and into the second. This held a large red-headed man.

This was indeed Gnaeus, the nominal leader of the gang of four. His story was close to that told by Marcus, the differences the minor self-justifying tweaks that most people tell in such circumstances. Sulla was satisfied that he had his answers but visited the other two in any case. He was not the man to leave anything to chance.

When he was satisfied he went back through all the rooms, ordering the bonds to be loosened slightly but only enough to allow the men to sleep. He had long-ago learnt that trivial kindnesses to an opponent earn gratitude, trust and respect but large ones encouraged contempt. Then he went to rouse his fellow-senators. He found none of them asleep.

"Well, that's the story and it seems too tight and consistent to be a fabrication," Sulla closed off his narrative of the events as he had re-constructed them. "What we still don't have is the name of the prime mover in all this."

"Do you think that slave will be at the meeting tomorrow, to pay off the balance of the fee?" That was Caius Marius. His military mind was already seeing a way to exploit limited information about the enemy.

Scaurus shrugged. "I don't see why not. Four gold minas is a pittance and it will establish his bona fides if he ever needs another assassination carried out. But as soon as Marcus Livius appears he'll know it failed. He won't stay around. Even if he does, how can we link him to the attempt? He'll just deny it and it'll be the word of four habitual criminals against a noble and his household slave."

"Then let's use the best weapon in any general's arsenal," Caius Marius closed his fist. But his dramatic pause was interrupted.

"Deception!" Sulla finished.

Marius playfully swiped at Sulla's red hair. "Yes, that!"

Scaurus stared at him, completely without a clue.

"Here's how we play it. Marcus Livius stays home tomorrow morning, and his door doesn't open to anyone. We five go to the Comitia, my veterans surround the place as planned, and Gnaeus goes to find his paymaster. He tells him Drusus is dead and everyone escaped in the confusion. There's no way they can be found. I expect that he'll make the payment as Marcus Aemelius says. But even if he doesn't, we'll have people watching from a distance, maybe even planted in the nearby crowd to listen if we can manage it. Either way, his conduct will give us evidence. And then we arrest him! My troops will give us the force to carry it off."

"No, I can't permit that." Drusus objected. "It will cause an uproar and prevent the vote. Getting this Law in place is more important than tracking down a failed assassin."

Marius looked at him for a period. "I take your point," he conceded. "What do you suggest?"

"I like your plan up to the arrest. Why can't we simply identify him? Then I appear late, we conduct the vote and we arrest him afterwards?"

"Because as soon as you show your face or are even rumoured to be on your way to the Comitia, the paymaster will be on a galloping horse headed for Gaul!"

"Even better!" Drusus exclaimed. "That'll also mean everyone with even a faint connection with the plot will be on their way, too! A dozen enemies running for exile is much safer than one in a court and the others plotting in the shadows."

Scaurus came back into the conversation at this point. "Marcus Livius is right. The objective here isn't to defeat our enemies. It's to get the citizenship law enacted. If we do that then our enemies will be defeated in any case. Self-imposed exile is as good as a court-imposed exile."

Sulla nodded. "Marcus Aemelius is right. This is politics, not war. But I still think we should make full use of deception. For example, our enemies will be watching this house waiting for Marcus Livius to leave for the Comitia tomorrow. In fact, they might even have a back-up assassination planned.

"So I suggest that at least one of us should go home soon but with Marcus Livius dressed as a bodyguard. That will get him out of harm's way as well as allowing him to go to the Comitia tomorrow without any spies giving warning. Tomorrow, when Marcus Livius is due to leave for the Comitia, we can send an empty litter from this house, complete with curtains."

"Why the litter, Lucius Cornelius?" Drusus was curious. "Do I want to be seen leaving the house, or not?"

"Twofold, Marcus Livius," Sulla explained. "First, it will flush out any second attempt at assassination, but with you out of harm's way. Second, it will strike them as unusual. When was the last time you used a litter?"

"I don't recall," Drusus agreed. "Probably when I was a boy and injured my foot."

"That's right," Sulla pounced. "So anyone watching will read that as evidence that you're injured. They might even think that you're dead and taking your body in a litter to the Comitia is a dramatic way of announcing your assassination."

Drusus nodded. "I'd hate to be a general opposing you, Lucius Cornelius. You'd have me second-guessing my own bowel movements!" Everyone laughed for the first time since the attack. Suddenly the air was lighter.

"So how do I get to the Comitia, then?" Drusus asked.

"The same way you leave here tonight. As one of my bodyguard," Scaurus answered. "But I might put a wig on you first, and stain the skin of your face. Too many people might recognise you otherwise."

There was a break in the discussion. "So are we agreed on how we go from here?" Sulla was assuming control again. Everyone accepted that. He had the

most tactically-aware mind among them and even Caius Marius would concede that. "Very well, Marcus Aemelius is taking Marcus Livius to his house for safety. The rest of us should stay here so our bodyguards can get a good daylight look at Gnaeus in the morning. I'll explain to Gnaeus his role tomorrow and what happens if his performance isn't up to the required standard.

"The rest of you get off to bed!" Sulla stood, and the others followed.

The next morning dawned bright, still and clear. Caius Marius and Sulla left the house first with their bodyguards to ensure Marius' veterans were properly deployed around the Comitia to keep the peace. As Drusus' fellow Tribunes of the Plebeians arrived, Marius took the courtesy of explaining these security arrangements lest they fear that these men had been set by Caepio or Philippus to disrupt proceedings. Then he sent word back to Drusus' house and to Scaurus' house that all was well.

Sulla and his personal slaves spread around the right rear corner of the Comitia Well to be able to cover the area. Gnaeus was turned loose to meet his paymaster. Caepio's thugs appeared shortly afterwards, some hundred or more of them, and mingled in the growing crowd in groups of three or four. Marius' men broke off equal-numbered detachments to shadow them.

The auguries were done and it was announced that the signs were propitious. The Comitia should go ahead. The most senior Tribune present announced that the meeting would start in half an hour.

Gnaeus was too smart to try to slip away. He had seen enough of Sulla to know he was not a man to be crossed. But having failed to locate his paymaster he made a point of wandering until he 'accidentally' bumped into one of Sulla's lookouts and then made a show of apologising for his clumsiness. "I'm so sorry, sir, I didn't see!" That should be enough to get the message across.

"Then you should look!" was the grudging reply. Gnaeus continued to wander in that back corner.

Many of the Senators arrived, complete with their bodyguard detachments. Scaurus was among them. His retinue passed close to the platform and then halted. Quickly they formed into a circle and in less than a minute dispersed again. Out of their centre strode Drusus, who mounted the steps to the platform. A deafening shout of support greeted him.

But Drusus' friends were not watching the platform. They were watching the crowd. There! In the back left corner! Both Philippus and Caepio made as if to slip out the back, which was not an easy thing to do surreptitiously when you have a dozen armed men around you for personal protection. They soon realised that they were drawing attention to themselves and resumed their seats. Indirect evidence, admittedly, but enough to confirm their suspicions that at least one of them knew about the plot.

The cheering died away slowly. The enthusiasm of the crowd succumbed to their eagerness to hear what Drusus had to say. He waved the noise down, asking for silence.

“My fellow Romans! This is indeed a most auspicious day!” Drusus slowly swept his gaze over the crowd. “Not only do the augurs declare the entrails the best they have ever seen but we also have a perfect day, with the sun joining us with joy. Even the wind is totally absent lest it carry away as much as one word of the sacred business we will enact today.

“Furthermore, a vision was granted to Caius Marius during the night. Yes, I know that some of you might believe that the great days of Caius Marius are behind him now. But let us not forget that during the days when the Cimbri posed the greatest threat to Rome, the gods favoured him and he became the Saviour of Rome! He has truly been hailed as the Third Founder of Rome! The same gods that used him in those darkest hours have used him again through this vision. And in obedience to that vision, he has prevailed upon six hundred of those glorious veterans that turned back the Germans and asked them to do one more duty for the Rome they have already saved once. He has asked them to ensure peace in this meeting. Among us are six hundred of his soldiers sworn to defend Rome against all its enemies, including any who would interfere with the legal processes that lie at the heart of our Republic. Marius' men know who these evil men are, but so long as they don't disrupt the peace they will not be touched. For even they are citizens, entitled to vote. But if they show themselves to be enemies to the due processes, they will be arrested and evicted, under my authority.

“So I warn and entreat any who might have mischief on their minds; please use your legal rights as citizens and cast your ballots however you will. But don't become an enemy of Rome by committing any illegal act.

“And not only Caius Marius was granted such a vision. Marcus Aemelius Scaurus, Head of the Senate, was also granted a vision by these same gods. He was warned that my life was in danger, and took me to his own house during the night. And there, in obedience to his vision, he implored me to come to this meeting disguised as one of his guards, and have my household send an empty litter instead.

“And when I arrived here, what should I find but my empty litter, with three holes in the roof and three cross-bow bolts in the cushion! So those of you who might doubt Caius Marius should take note of the vision to Marcus Aemelius Scaurus, Head of the Senate, and also the physical evidence of my litter! When the gods speak through three different channels to the same effect, there must be truth!

“Thus the vision granted to Caius Marius, Saviour of Rome and the vision granted to Marcus Aemelius Scaurus, Head of the Senate, join with today's Augurs. This is a most propitious day for the business before us. But it's also a most perilous day as well, in which the enemies of Rome can be expected to act with their full fury, with full venom, and totally without honour. For Rome is honour, and they are the opposite. Be vigilant, but be orderly!” Drusus paused before going into the main issue of the day.

“Over the last eight meetings, this question has been debated down to the most intricate detail. We all know precisely the question before us and what it will mean for our future. To pass this law will mean that Rome has acted with honour, fulfilling its promises to our Friends and Allies. To block it will mean that Rome has fallen under the influence of those who don't keep their sacred vows. To pass

this law will mean peace, prosperity and justice. To block it will mean war, destruction, death, and injustice. To pass this law will mean that Rome is truly Rome and that we who enact it are worthy of our heritage!"

Drusus paused to let that last point sink in for a moment. Then in a quieter voice, "Let the vote be taken!"

The crowd erupted in another cheer and then there was mumble and movement in the pit as the citizens moved into the voting races by tribes. Some of Caepio's thugs started a skirmish but this was quickly brought under control by Marius' veterans. The others seemed too disheartened to act. Perhaps this was because of the overwhelming numbers against them but more likely by the talk of visions. Romans were a superstitious lot! Almost every man returned to the Comitia Well after voting. Everyone wanted to be among those who would be first to hear the result.

The smaller tribes finished their voting first and their votes were counted. The numbers for Tribe Velina were the first to be known. This tribe had narrowly voted against the law.

"That tribe has a lot of clients owing duty to Philippus. He probably paid them well to be here today!" Drusus just shrugged. "We don't need every tribe. But don't pass this to the clerk yet. It can wait until all the other tribes have voted."

It took only a couple of minutes more to count the ballots from Tribe Teretina. It was against. Another tribe returned a 'no' vote. These results were also withheld for announcement later.

"These smaller tribes are too easy to stack with bribed members," Drusus observed. The next count was another 'no' vote. Drusus shrugged again. The result was held back again. The next tribe returned a 'yes' vote.

"Thank the gods for that!" muttered Marius. "It cost me enough to get them down here from Picentum!"

The tribunes consulted together to confirm the count. The members of the larger tribes were still in the races, awaiting their turn to cast their ballots. The Tribunes agreed that the sooner the decision could be announced, the less opportunity for trouble-makers to gather enough men to overcome Marius' veterans. They instructed the clerk to announce the results as they handed them to him.

The clerk walked to the front centre of the platform announced "Tribe Fabia votes in favour!" A huge roar rose from the crowd. The next tribe returned a 'no' vote. Five against and only one in favour so far.

Then came a second favourable tribe. Marius smiled again. "I have friends in that tribe, and they have many clients. All they needed was the cash!" The result was taken to the clerk to be announced.

"Tribe Papiria votes in favour!" A second cheer resounded around the Comitia. "We know we have a broad majority, so we have the larger tribes that can't be so easily loaded up with bribed voters," Drusus encouraged his colleagues. "So long as we keep the losses quiet and continue to announce the wins, the larger tribes will keep their nerve."

Tribe Falerna voted against. The score so far was six against with only two in favour. The next tribe also voted in favour. The results were passed to the clerk, to be announced. “Your work again, Caius Marius?” Drusus asked dryly.

“No, mine,” Scaurus interjected.

Drusus was shocked. “I thought you were repulsed by the way bribery was corrupting our elections!”

Scaurus spread his hands. “This isn't an election,” he responded. Drusus shook his head, smiling.

“Tribe Maecia votes in favour!” For the third time, the crowd roared its approval. This biased reporting was clearly having its effect on the voters in the larger tribes, still in their queues. Those in favour cheered each announcement, those against were sullen. Arguments broke out. Any shoving was quickly controlled by the veterans but the war of words continued. Another tribe returned a ‘no’ verdict. The count for tribe Scaptia was completed soon after. Another win!

“Yes!” exclaimed Scaurus again. “I was told that Caepio was bringing in some fifty voters, clients of one of his own clients. So I brought in a hundred!” The result was passed to the clerk.

“Tribe Scaptia votes in favour!” This fourth consecutive announcement was the last straw for many. Although the count was currently seven to four against the law, the crowd had been given the impression that it was actually four to nil in favour. Those who had been growing increasingly sullen, thinking their side had lost, started to abandon the voting races and head for home.

As the first trickle left the lines others started to join them. Each man leaving the lines before casting his ballot was cheered and jeered by those in favour. This increased the momentum towards frustration. By simple observation of the cheering it was obvious where the psychological advantage lay. That was the last of the smaller tribes.

“This is where hearts and minds start to matter, instead of coin and cunning,” Scaurus muttered.

The next vote was narrowly in favour, and the result passed to the clerk. “Tribe Pobilia votes in favour!” A fifth cheer broke out.

Caepio, Philippus and Varius were watching the proceedings from the back of the Comitia, shaded by a canvas canopy set up in a space cut out for them by their combined contingents of fifty bodyguards. It was obvious to them now that the announcements were being made selectively. Only five results had been announced but it was obvious that the count had been completed for at least ten, possibly twelve tribes. But they could do nothing about that. The count was in the hands of the Tribunes of the Plebeians, and none of them were allied to the conservatives. Meanwhile, the Tribunes had invited Marius and Scaurus to join them in observing the count in appreciation of their “visions”.

They knew the final result would be close. Although Drusus had clearly won over a majority of the voters, that didn't matter as much as their distribution among the tribes. The popular majority could be outweighed, thanks to their bribery and supporters in the smaller tribes. But the surprise loss of four of the smaller tribes was disturbing. They had calculated that they had all twelve in their

pocket, and that these, being announced first, would totally demoralise the voters in favour still waiting in their lines to vote. That psychological table had now been turned on them. Now they still needed at least half of the larger tribes to stay with them and they knew that was not going to happen. Their supporters in these larger tribes were already abandoning the vote in despair and the day would be lost if they allowed it to drift any further.

“Solon, send out word to any one you can think of,” Caepio ordered angrily. “We want some bully-boys here, and we need them soon. Try the ale-houses in Subura, try the Training School at the Circus, try everywhere you can! We'll pay twenty-five denarii a man for this day's work!”

“Tribe Arnensis votes in favour!” the clerk announced. Another cheer broke from the crowd. ‘How many was that?’ Philippus pondered. ‘Six? And there's still four tribes not yet finished voting!’ He knew he had little chance of taking the ten biggest tribes but had calculated that he had enough clients in six of the medium-sized tribes to win their vote, and that meant throwing enough bribe money to sure of the twelve smallest tribes. The result would be 18 tribes, enough to defeat the law, and any extra were a bonus. But losing five of the smallest has put this almost out of reach.

“How has this happened?” Philippus demanded of his fellows. “How did we lose those five small tribes?”

Varius snorted. “Damn Scaurus and his acclaimed 'integrity'! That bastard isn't above bribery after all! And what about all those Picentines? Only a couple of dozen live in the entire city, so how do we manage to have over a hundred in the Comitia? I smell Marius all over them!”

“They always bang on about prosecuting for bribery but they have no scruples against doing it themselves!” Philippus said in exasperation. “Damn hypocrites!”

Meanwhile Scaurus and Drusus were not daring to celebrate too soon. Marius was more relaxed. “I don't want to tempt the gods, my friends, but I wish merely to confirm that the Augurs told us this would be a good day!” Marius gazed over the Comitia, like a general assessing the horizon. What's just over that ridge?

“I think it's time to see what the enemy are doing. They won't just be sitting still and watching!” He stepped down into the Well and strolled around the boundaries, surrounded by his retinue. His veterans were still the alert, experienced soldiers that they had always been and keeping watch over the approaches in case an armed gang was on its way to disrupt the vote. They had seen no sign of it yet.

“Make sure you keep your eyes open, men. The longer this goes on the chances of an attack will grow, not fade. I'll send some of the Well-walkers up to you. That area seems placid at the moment.”

“Tribe Sabatina votes in favour!” bellowed the clerk on the platform. Another cheer rose from the crowd, still watching and waiting. They wanted to tell their children that they were there on That Day that renewed Rome.

“Tribe Claudia votes in favour!” The eighth cheer from the crowd, and still no tribe had been announced to have voted against. By now it was clear to many in the smaller tribes that the result of their tribes' vote must surely be known by now

but the announcement had been held back. There was the beginning of a sullen anger building among some malcontents.

Marius saw a half-dozen of his Well-walkers moving quickly to one such hotspot. Five men were grabbed out of a melee and frog-marched to the exits. This didn't worry Marius too much. A mere fist-fight means they were just a bunch of displeased voters. The real threat of disruption would come from a larger body of professional trouble-makers using weapons. All these groups had been spotted early on in the voting and quietly reminded by Marius' section leaders that they had been recognised. Disruption would mean death, either 'accidentally' during the riot or later when Caius Marius would send squads out for them in the dead of night.

These clusters of known mischief-makers in the crowd were clearly visible to a trained eye and Marius was pleased to see that each was being very obviously followed by a squad of his veterans at least twice as numerous. These professional thugs were not so stupid as to take on those odds. They would keep quiet.

Marius gave a loud whistle, a technique he had perfected to be heard over all but the heaviest battles. His men in the Well heard it and looked around for him. He gestured for one in three men in each squad to report for orders, hand signals known to his junior officers from many battles. Immediately the squad leaders spoke to their men, indicating which individuals were to respond.

As they arrived in their handfuls Marius directed them to report to the Section Leaders on the entrances to the Comitia. If any century-sized bodies of men were being assembled to assault the voting, then they would need to be intercepted and stopped outside the grounds or all would be lost.

"Tribe Voturia votes in favour!" Another cheer. Marius realised that he had been too busy deploying his men and had lost count of the announcements. He started to make his way back towards the platform but was immediately met by Sulla and his dozen close guard.

"I saw you making the re-deployments, Caius. Would allow your former legate to take command of the main entrance?" Sulla smiled as he put the question. Marius clapped him on the left shoulder.

"Yes, that would be excellent, Lucius Cornelius! But I've lost count. How goes the voting?"

Sulla, aware that those surrounding might not be aware of the selective nature of the announcements (however much they might suspect it), leant close to whisper in Marius' ear.

"Eleven in favour, twelve against. Drusus has permitted three of the 'no' tribes to be announced, because some of the crowd were getting restive and the credibility of none of the tribes voting against the Law was growing thin."

Marius nodded his understanding. "Scaurus and Drusus are the politicians among us, so they know these things best. Our job is keeping the peace. Have a boring day at the entrance, please."

Sulla smiled again, saluted and turned toward the main entrance, his retinue following.

"Tribe Pupinia votes against!" A small cheer went up, immediately drowned out by booing.

“Tribe Pollia votes in favour!” Another cheer.

“Tribe Galeria votes in favour!” The cheers were not as hearty as they were at the start. It was becoming routine.

“Tribe Lemonia votes in favour!”

“Tribe Menenia votes against!”

The results were coming through more quickly now as the clerks finished the smaller tribes and were re-deployed to speed the count on the fewer remaining tribes.

“Tribe Voltinia votes in favour!”

“Where the hell is our hired muscle?” Caepio demanded of Solon.

“Lord Caepio, I have sent to every known haunt and every gladiator school. But it takes time to prepare, organise and get here,” Solon replied fearfully. “Is it possible to order the men already in the Well to rise up now and buy us some more time?”

“It's possible to order them but with Marius' men holding a gladius in the back of each of them I doubt they'll obey!” Varius huffed his annoyance. “At least they're drawing off more than their own number of Marius' men just by keeping them down there. That should make it easier for the reinforcements to break through.”

A young slave burst into the circle of armed guards surrounding the three. “My lord,” he gasped through his breathing. “I've run from the Circus Training School. They won't send their gladiators. Caius Marius has threatened them if they disrupt the vote.”

Caepio and Philippus looked to each other. “The bastards!” Caepio exclaimed. “Bribing the voters, threatening citizens in the Well of the Comitia and now threatening legitimate businessmen! Everything they preach against, they've done themselves!”

“They fooled us completely, the pricks!” Philippus agreed in disgust. “Drusus played the part of the rabbit in the wolf-pack, not using his veto when we overturned his laws, observing the omens, playing everything straight down the line. Now he suddenly shows his teeth and claws! All the time he was setting us up for the sucker-punch!”

Another slave came running into the circle. “My lord! I've been to our contacts in the Subura, and...” Caepio raised his hand to cut him off in mid-sentence.

“And they have some excuse for not being able to get here?” Caepio finished the sentence for him.

“No, my lord. They'll come but first they need to gather their men together and prepare their weapons. They promise to be here in two hours,” the slave announced.

“Bullshit!” Philippus answered. “They're stalling. Two hours will be too late and they must know that!”

Varius raised an eyebrow. “Do you think Drusus has something to do with that?”

Caepio threw his hands up. "Who knows? But whatever, it's obvious that the day has been lost. Our only hope now is to make sure the Senate squashes him flat." Caepio stood to relieve his tension. "We have evidence of bribery, and Marius' men committing intimidation in the Well of the Comitia. That should be enough to overturn this vote."

"I think it might be harder than that, Quintus Servilius," Varius dissented. "He didn't intimidate the voters, only the known thugs that we sent in."

"Who's to say they're thugs?" Caepio challenged him. "Which of them ever drew a weapon? Which of them ever attempted to do anything except vote, which was their right as citizens? And even if they get over that problem, which they won't, who is to say who hired them?"

Varius simply laughed. "You're dreaming, Quintus Servilius! Specially so now that your slaves have been running all over the city, trying to recruit gladiators and criminals to disrupt the vote!"

He's right, Quintus Servilius," Philippus agreed. "We're not going to win by arguing the facts of the case in court, but by getting the numbers in the Senate. Start thinking politics, not law!"

Caepio didn't like being lectured. "Enough of this farce! I've seen enough, and I'm going home now!" He ordered Solon to start packing up the camp.

"Yes, I've seen enough too," Philippus agreed. "Let's meet at my house this afternoon and make plans."

The armed retinue formed up as the slaves packed the chairs and refreshments. The three of them started for the entrance, the armed men clearing their path through the crowd.

Sulla had an extra man in his personal contingent at the main entrance. Gnaeus had been shaved and included in his entourage, with explicit instructions to scan the faces of the people leaving the Comitia. He was to pay special attention to those in the company of Senators. The size of their armed bodyguards as well as their personal prestige demanded that the Senators use the main entrance. Sulla was hopeful that Gnaeus' paymaster was highly-placed in his master's house and therefore would accompany him today.

"That's him!" Gnaeus exclaimed softly. "See those three senators? The slave behind the one on the left! He's the one!"

"You are sure of that?" Sulla asked for confirmation.

"Absolutely! When you need to be able to find a man in a crowd to get paid for a job, you make sure you can recognise him!"

"Now the question is, which Senator does he serve?" Sulla mused. "He's walking behind Caepio, but that might just be an accident."

That question was soon solved. Caepio turned to speak to this slave who immediately took three quick steps to walk beside his master.

"Good work, Gnaeus. You've earned your four gold minas, without a drop of blood and no crime! Now, I need to make sure he doesn't recognise you! Go back to Caius Marius and tell him that we've found the paymaster. Then do whatever he tells you."

Sulla casually walked to the second-in-command of his personal retinue. "Marcus, take off your helmet and armour. You see that slave walking beside Caepio? I want you to follow him, then report back to me where he goes and with whom. Make sure you're not noticed yourself. You should be able to stay well back in the crowd without losing him, given the size of the retinue."

Marcus dropped his helmet, gladius, chestplate, padded undershirt and greaves at the feet of another guard and casually walked into the crowd dressed in his tunic, kilt and sandals.

Then Sulla heard a huge roar from the Comitia behind him. The eighteenth 'yes' vote had just been announced, he guessed. But let's not get ahead of ourselves, he cautioned himself.

But the flow of people out of the entrance soon became a flood. Everyone had seen and heard what they were waiting for and now it was time to celebrate. Eventually one of Marius' men reported to him. "Lord Marius asks you to wait for him here and then invites you and your men to join him in his house, my lord."

Soon Marius, Drusus and Scaurus arrived at the entrance in a combined retinue, surrounded by the six hundred veterans and beyond them the cheering citizens. Sulla joined them, their personal escorts merging.

The short walk to Marius' house seemed like another Triumph to Marius, except there was no-one at his side reminding him he was mortal. Drusus had never tasted anything like it.

Soon enough they were in Marius' enormous house, with the veterans and bodyguards feasting in the vast walled garden. Drusus beamed with joy. Success at last!

"Our next problem," Caius Marius opened the conversation, "is to hold these gains against the counter-attack." He put his goblet of Chian wine on the table between them.

"How can they counter-attack?" asked Drusus. "They've already used the 'omens trick' to overthrow my other laws and everyone who swallowed that feels pretty stupid for falling for it. They have no credibility left!"

Scaurus looked at him as a father would look at a dullard son. "Marcus Livius, you are too pure to even imagine what scum comes to the surface of a mind like that of Philippus. Expect something so amazing that many will believe it purely because it's too incredible to be invented."

"Strike first," Sulla said. "We must take the initiative rather than reacting. Make them fight on our chosen ground, not theirs."

"Very wise, Lucius Cornelius," Marius agreed. "They threw away the rule-book when they paid assassins to kill Marcus Livius so why should we be obliged to play fair? This is war, not law."

The four lapsed into silence for a while, each lost in his own thoughts.

"Well, we have a case against Caepio for attempted murder," Drusus offered.

"No we don't!" Scaurus responded harshly. "The word of four career criminals against Caepio? And don't forget that Philippus will support him all the way."

"Oh, yes we do have a case," Sulla countered. "We'll also have the testimony of the slave that engaged the criminals. Didn't Gnaeus report back to you that he had seen the paymaster?"

Marius nodded, "But how do we get him to testify? He's Caepio's slave. One word out of place and Caepio is within his rights to kill him."

Sulla responded with that broad, feral grin. "That won't be a problem! Did any of you hear any screams last night? Did any of you see any wounds on our would-be assassins? I can get people to talk, don't worry about that!"

The other three saw that grin and knew he spoke the truth.

Marcus returned that evening from shadowing his man. He confirmed that the slave in question appeared to be part of Caepio's household. Sulla set his people to watch Caepio's house, a rotating shift of different people in different places to avoid suspicion. Whenever this slave ventured out of the house, they followed him. They discovered that he was well trusted and valued by Caepio. He was usually provided with five escorts to carry out a good deal of routine business such as paying household accounts and as a courier of messages to family and other senators. One constant part of his routine was a trip to the house of Philippus each morning. And they had heard one shopkeeper call him 'Solon'.

On the fourth day after the Comitia meeting Drusus was waiting on the route from Caepio's house to that of Philippus. He had ten of his men in shops at each end of a narrow clivus. As Solon entered the clivus Drusus' men came out of the shop and strolled up the street. Behind him A young boy also came out of the shop and ran up the hill to the other end and entered another shop.

Drusus and another ten men came out of that second shop and started walking down the hill to meet them. He stopped some ten paces short, his men with swords drawn. "Solon, I am using my powers and authority as Tribune of the Plebeians to arrest you. If you or any of your men resist, you will be killed."

Solon looked around him. There was no way to make a break for it. Even if he succeeded he would make himself an outlaw. He decided to stand his ground.

"I am the Master of House for Senator Caepio, your brother-in-law. I know you don't regard my master highly but nor will the Consul regard you highly if you insist on this. Remember that Philippus bears the fasces."

"The Consul has his powers, and I have mine." Drusus replied. "Do you submit to arrest or do we need to apply armed force?"

"What am I accused of?" Solon stalled.

"You will be told that when you're under arrest," Drusus replied.

"What of these men standing by me? Are they subject to your spite as well?"

"No. Your men may go their way, provided they don't resist my authority."

Solon turned to his retinue. "You two, go to the Consul's house and tell him what has happened." Then to the remaining three "You go back home and tell lord Caepio." The men set off at a run.

Then Solon turned back to Drusus. "I don't resist. Where do you want me to go?"

One of Drusus' men tied a rope around Solon's waist and the other end around his own.

"Follow the men in front of you," Drusus ordered. Two men set off at a walk to lead the way. Three more walked to either side of him and another three behind, the man with the rope in the centre. Drusus followed and the remaining men in his retinue followed after him.

The destination was Drusus' house. Scaurus, Sulla and Caius Marius were waiting there.

"Yes, that's the man Gnaeus pointed out to me at the Comitia," Sulla said when he saw Solon.

Solon was untied and left in the dining space with the four Senators. Cratippus went outside and returned shortly with four more men. These were Drusus' clients who had been asked to spend the day with him and were being paid well for their time.

"Friends, please move about the room as you will, enjoy the food laid out on the table. I would like it if you were in different positions each time a man is led in so there can be no suspicion that they're being prompted by location or similar," Drusus instructed his guests. "I'll bring in four men, one at a time. I'll ask each if he recognises anyone in the room." He nodded to Cratippus outside the door. Cratippus disappeared for a minute then came back leading Gnaeus. Solon started, then sidled into a corner slightly darker than the rest of the room.

"Gnaeus, do you recognise anyone in this room?" Drusus asked.

Gnaeus looked at each in turn. "Yes. I recognise lord Sulla; lord Marius; yourself; lord Scaurus; Cratippus, your Master of House; and that man there I recognise as the one who engaged me to assassinate you. I don't know his name." He pointed directly at Solon. He then peered at the other clients in the room. I don't think I've seen any of the other lords before," he said at length.

"Thank you, Gnaeus. You may go into the next room now." Drusus asked his clients to move around and then gestured to Cratippus. "Our next guest, please."

Marcus walked into the room tentatively.

"Marcus, do you recognise anyone in this room?" Drusus asked.

"I recognise you, lord, and lord Sulla, and lord Marius. I apologise to the other lord. I know his face, but I do not know the name." Marcus stood still.

"Have you ever seen any of the other men?" Drusus continued.

"I don't think I have seen either of these two lords before," he answered, gesturing towards two of the clients. Or those two lords, either," he added, raising an arm to the other two. "I've seen that man before," pointing at Solon who had been trying to be inconspicuous by standing behind the large frame of Caius Marius, "but I don't know his name." Again Marcus stood, uncertain of what he should or should not say with so many by-standers.

"When did you see that man before? Please describe the incident as fully as possible," Drusus pressed.

Marcus swallowed. He didn't want to confess to conspiracy to murder.

"Please answer truthfully, and all will be well," Sulla prompted him.

"We met in a drinking-house. I was with some friends. He offered us five gold minas to kill you, lord Drusus." Marcus swallowed again. "But we didn't attempt to kill you, my lord," he rushed out in a panic. "None of us carried a weapon that night. We did you no harm!"

"Don't worry, Marcus. I've sworn that no harm will come to you so long as you speak only the truth," Drusus soothed him. "Please pass into the next room."

Cratippus ushered in the next man, Sinistratus. He glanced around the room, starting slightly when he saw Solon.

"Tell me if you have seen anyone in this room before," Drusus commanded.

"Yes; I have seen you before, lord Drusus, and lord Sulla and lord Marius. I've seen lord Scaurus before and I have seen that man," pointing at Solon, "but I don't know his name." He looked more intently at the remaining four. "I don't think I have seen the other four lords before."

"Tell me what you know about this man," Drusus prompted as he indicated Solon.

"I know that he gave us a gold mina, and offered four more if we killed you, lord Drusus."

"Thank you, Sinistratus. Please go into the next room, please."

Sextus was invited in next. He corroborated the stories of the other three, and was then lead out.

Drusus turned to Solon. "I think you know now what you are accused of."

"This is a lie!" Solon exclaimed, quivering. "It's an attempt to get at my Master!"

"You're both wrong and right, Solon," Sulla said breezily. "It's not a lie but it is an attempt to get at your master." Sulla swung off his couch and stood to face Solon. "So let's make it quick and easy for all of us. Testify against your master and you will be given your freedom, a new name, and enough money to get out of Rome and live comfortably in one of the provinces." He turned to gesture towards Drusus.

"Marcus Livius will swear to that and you know he's a man who keeps his promises. But if you want to make it hard for us we will make it hard for you. We might even give you back to Caepio. We could tell him that you've confessed to organising this attempted assassination under his orders and that you'll testify to that in court. How long do you think it will take Caepio to set up a cross for you?"

Solon looked from one senator to the next. His eyes came to rest on Drusus. "Do you swear to what lord Sulla just offered?"

"I swear it," Drusus acknowledged, "provided you tell us everything. But if you lie to us or hold back on anything relevant, all promises are off."

Solon lowered his eyes. "I personally don't wish you any harm, lord. I was only doing what my Master instructed."

"I'm sure that would have been a comfort to me had the plot succeeded," Drusus answered drily.

"Tell us the story from the beginning," Sulla urged. "Cratippus will be writing it down, so there's no need to hurry."

Solon took a deep sigh. "Lord Philippus was having a private meal with lord Caepio the evening of the second meeting. They had noticed that there was more support for the citizenship law than at the first meeting, and wondered if opinion was turning around.

"Lord Caepio shrugged it off. He was of the opinion that it would run out of wind and even if it didn't a few well-placed bribes would be enough. They met again on the night of the fourth meeting. Lord Philippus was becoming more alarmed. Lord Caepio agreed that some action should be taken. They agreed to discuss with their allies the need to make sure they got as many as possible of their clients to vote against the laws and to bribe as many of the smaller tribes that they might need to ensure defeat. Lord Philippus thought this was too risky; although Drusus makes a great show about legalities, they were not confident that his supporters would not be out there bribing as well. They wanted a back-up plan.

"They attended the fifth meeting themselves to get a better sense of the mood. They were shocked by the support. After the meeting they met in lord Varius' house, and all three of them agreed that this might not be controllable. They would bribe and stack the Comitia as much as they could but this was no longer a certain thing. So Philippus suggested that Drusus should have a terrible accident.

"Lord Caepio went ecstatic about this idea. He hates Drusus at a personal level, never mind the politics, and he was stunned that he hadn't thought of this idea himself. Here was a chance to not only defeat the citizenship law once and for all, but also rid himself of a personal enemy. Lord Varius also thought that defeating Drusus one law at a time would become tedious and it would be better to get rid of him forever.

"They ordered me to arrange Drusus' death before the vote could be taken. The bribery scheme would continue as a backup but the primary aim was to kill Drusus. I went to a drinking house in Subura and a few well-placed coins soon led me to someone who might be able to do the job. That was Gnaeus and his crew. A few more coins were enough to get some background information. It was enough to make them think I could track them down if they didn't perform.

"I gave them one gold mina, instructions, and a promise of four more minas on completion. I also threatened them that if they didn't do the job I would arrange for their deaths.

"I attended the next meeting and saw that Gnaeus the big red-head was there, so I concluded that they were going to perform. They were there the last night as well, so I was confident that they would get the job done. But they didn't." Solon had been staring at the floor through all this monologue. Now he lifted his gaze to Drusus.

"Do you want any more details?"

Drusus stared back at him for a moment. "You're telling us that Varius, Philippus and Caepio all agreed to this plan, and commanded you to carry it through?"

"Yes, my lord."

"Who provided the blood-money?"

"Lord Philippus offered, but lord Caepio was eager to pay it himself. Even if it was only five gold minas, he wanted the satisfaction."

Drusus paced the floor for a moment. "Thank you, Solon. You'll understand that you must stay in this house for the moment. Caepio and Philippus both know you're being held and no doubt they'll tell Varius immediately. They'll want to silence you at the first opportunity so we mustn't give them that opportunity."

"Thank you, my lord. I rely on your protection as promised."

Drusus then spoke to his clients. "Thank you for your time today, my friends. Please make a written record of everything you saw and heard today. I might need to call upon you as witnesses in court to testify that these four men all identified Solon as the man who paid them to attempt an assassination. And that they all did this even though you were in the same room, so it was possible for any of them to pick any of you if this were not a genuine recognition."

"I might also need to call upon you as witnesses to Solon's confession and his account of his dealings with Varius, Philippus and Caepio. But for the moment I don't require any more of your time." He pressed into each of their hands a gold mina in appreciation as they left the room. "Please, not a word of this to anyone. It could imperil your lives," he warned them.

"Cratippus, please take Solon to a guest room. Also, arrange for our other guests to be accommodated more comfortably," Drusus instructed. "No, please bring them back here," he corrected himself.

Cratippus left with Solon.

"There's no way Solon is going to try to escape," Sulla summed up. "He knows he's safer here than in Caepio's house."

"Yes," Marius agreed. "He can't be sure one way or the other if Caepio would kill him but he knows we want to keep him alive as a witness."

Drusus stopped pacing. "Those other four criminals won't be going anywhere, either. Now they know that we have Solon, they also know that they can be found if they cross us."

The four criminals walked into the room.

"Thank you for your help today, men," Drusus started. "As you know, we now have Solon. He has confessed to engaging you and will testify to that in court." Drusus saw their expressions, and quickly raised a hand. "Not in your prosecution! Don't worry! In the prosecution of the man who ordered him to arrange my death. That's the head I want and you will all be pardoned and well-rewarded as you help me to achieve that."

"What I've promised Solon for his co-operation, I also promise you. You will be provided with enough money to go to the provinces and buy a farm or a small business, whatever you need to set up a comfortable life. But to earn this you must remain co-operative."

"Cratippus will provide you with proper accommodation now and I thank you again." Drusus extended a hand towards the door. The men filed out behind the Master of House.

"Well!" exclaimed Scaurus. "You performed as promised, Lucius Cornelius! You gained a confession and a testimony against the conspirators. Well

done!" He shifted on his couch slightly. "So how are we going to play this hand? Legally, or politically?"

"Neither," replied Sulla. "There are much quicker and more certain ways that either of those."

Eyebrows around the room rose, inviting him to expand.

Sulla moved from his reclining position to sit square. "An enemy isn't defeated so long as he still has the will to fight. You can defeat these bastards in the Senate but they'll come back at you. They'll try to destroy the citizenship law just as they destroyed your other laws. You can drag them into court but I don't see why we should give them that much time to do their mischief. And even when you get them to court, the case against Rufus proved that juries can be bought and good witnesses can be undermined and contradicted by liars. And even if you win I doubt they'll be sentenced to anything harsher than exile. There'll be constant lobbying to have that sentence overturned. They'll be back soon enough."

"No! These petty moves won't break their will to fight. You need to present each of them with proof that would completely destroy their dignitas and then offer to keep quiet if only they're prepared to get out of town with their dignitas intact."

"If you prosecute them in court or if you make these grubby dealings public knowledge you'll force them to defend themselves. You'll have thrown away the one genuine weapon you have, the threat that things could get worse! Much better to just let them know that you have evidence and testimony that could destroy them but offer to bury this evidence if they're prepared to retire with full honours and move to Asia."

"Blackmail!" Scaurus said, shocked.

"Yes!" replied Sulla, smiling gently and nodding. "So much cheaper and quicker, and heaps more effective!"

"That's my legate!" Marius added, smiling broadly. "Always the tactical genius!"

"But it's blackmail!" Scaurus repeated.

Sulla knitted his brow in concern. "Why do you say it as if it's a bad thing?"

"Because it's morally reprehensible!" Scaurus exploded.

"No, it's not!" Sulla countered. "Marcus Livius has very good reason to prosecute these bastards for offences against him, not against any other aggrieved party who would remain harmed and deprived of justice. But he's a generous-hearted man who will forgive these offences if the offenders show true remorse," Sulla argued. "True remorse is to be shown by retiring from politics and going to Asia."

"Well, if you put it like that...." Scaurus conceded, then burst into laughter. "I had you there! Admit it now!"

All four collapsed into laughter. After a few minutes of tension-relief Drusus called for order again.

"Very well. Let's get into the details of how to go about it," he started. "Lucius Cornelius, this is the child of your genius. What do you suggest?"

Sulla steadied himself. "First point; never let the enemy know your true strength. Show him enough for him to fear the worst. Second; remember that if

you converse with anyone he's able to ask questions. It's difficult to control exactly how much information you divulge in such circumstances. Third; anything you put into writing can be shown to others so you must be careful how you phrase what you say so it will seem innocent to all except those with guilty consciences." Sulla stood and started pacing.

"I suggest that you write to Caepio alone, a letter couched in regret that you and your brother-in-law have become so severely estranged. And now that Solon has explained to you some of the events of recent weeks, your familial duty compels you to be concerned for your brother-in-law, both in terms of his health as well as his reputation.

"Therefore, you urge him to retire from public life and indeed away from all temptation to be drawn back into it. You suggest he should move to Achaia or Asia and live out his days in peace, elegance, honour and calm. Otherwise you fear that something terrible might happen to him if he stays in Rome." Sulla looked around the group. "How would something like that go down?"

Scaurus simply smiled and applauded. The other joined in the applause.

"The reference to Solon and 'events of recent weeks' will be a stab through the heart!" Drusus enthused. "He'll know exactly what it means, but no-one outside the three of them would. A stranger would think it meant Solon was so concerned for his master's health that he sought your advice as a family member, however estranged. It's brilliant!"

"Let's not rush, this!" Marius warned. "Let's wait a few days and reflect upon it. Consider in greater detail exactly what should be said. Lucius Cornelius might well be able to polish his first draft, given some time," he smiled.

"It will also give Caepio reason to believe that Solon has indeed told us everything. If we rush off too quickly he might think that it's too soon for us to have broken his man and we're just fishing."

Drusus nodded. "Yes. Two or three days should be about right. In the meantime, what do we do with Solon and our other guests? Keeping them here would be too obvious and I wouldn't be surprised if they try to break in from sheer desperation."

"Let them!" Marius waved the problem away. "In fact, make a point of improving your security! I'll provide you with more armed men! Get in a builder to strengthen your door, and let all your neighbours know about it. Convince them that Solon is being held here, but the task of breaking him out might be too difficult, short of gathering an army. That will add to the credibility of the letter and convince him to take the retirement option." Marius sat.

Drusus shook his head. "So long as that idiot Caepio thinks he can locate Solon then he's likely to try it. This is personal for him, and now that he's awake to the assassination option wiping out my whole family is only a short step further."

Sulla broke into the conversation. "Caepio doesn't have much wit, so he's probably more likely to take direct action. Something like organising a gang of thugs to knock your door down, never mind the legalities. But he might not even need to do that. If I were Philippus, even now I'd be using my authority as Consul.

I'd be banging on the door of the Urban Praetor, demanding that this house be searched for a stolen slave."

Drusus stiffened. "By all the gods, Lucius Cornelius, you're right! We have to get him out of here right now!"

Marius jumped to his feet. "Get Solon and the other five into the courtyard, right now!" He rushed into the courtyard and called for his retinue.

"Ok, men, strip off your gear!" Marius' men looked at each other strangely, but started unstrapping their scabbards and chestplates. "Put your gear in a pile in front of you!"

The six guests were brought into the courtyard.

"Find a man similar to your own build and put on his equipment. We're taking you to a safer place," Marius ordered Solon and the criminals. The six found their matches and started fumbling with the equipment.

"Help them into the gear, men! They're amateurs, so help them!"

Soon the six of them were properly dressed.

"It won't take long before they try to search my house, and Sulla's and Scaurus' as well. But I know where I can put Solon for a couple of days," Marius told Drusus. "I'll be back this evening." He turned to Sulla. "Lucius Cornelius, please come with me. The more men we have the less likely anyone will notice individuals." Then to Scaurus "Marcus Aemelius, where we're going you would look out of place. So please go home and then send groups of slaves to as many family, friends and sympathisers as you can in case we're being watched."

Marius took an appraising look at the five. "Get some scissors!" he called to one of the house slaves. Then more conversationally, "Sorry, Gnaeus, but that red hair will have to be trimmed. No soldier of mine ever has hair that long and the colour will attract too much notice."

While this was happening Scaurus took his leave and headed for his home.

Eventually Marius and Sulla were ready to move out. The front doors opened for them and they stepped into the street, surrounded by their combined guard. The six strangers were in the inner ring. They turned towards Marius' house.

"Are you thinking of Aurelia, Caius?" Sulla muttered.

"Exactly! Solon will be safe there forever. We can tell the children that he's a visiting scholar waiting for a colleague to arrive. The other five are unknown to the Terrible Three, so they can safely be integrated into my guards."

"Speaking of the other five, Caius, what of their households? Are any married? Do they have children? This is five days now since they were captured, so there'd be some questions being asked in their neighbourhood."

Marius thought for a few moments. "Yes, but given their professions a few days missing is probably nothing unusual. Perhaps we should fetch their families into my house. We promised to set them up in the provinces, so they'll have to move out of their current digs soon."

They arrived at Marius' house, each with his own thoughts, and entered. Marius dismissed the guard except for the five criminals. Solon was sent to the guest quarters, a personal slave assigned to him.

"Men, I want to keep you safe but close on hand until the present situation is resolved," he told them. "My preference is to blend you in with my guards as though you're new recruits.

"In the meantime, do you have women outside? Any children? We need to make provision for them until we can get you to Massalia, or Africa, or wherever you want to settle."

Four of them looked to Gnaeus for leadership. Was this a trap to get hostages or was it a sign that these senators were actually going to honour their promises?

"I have a family," Gnaeus replied.

Marcus, the youngest, spoke next. "I live with my parents."

Sextus and Sinstratus just shook their heads.

Piso, the stranger among them, said "I have a woman."

Marius nodded. "I propose to send you three," indicating Piso, Gnaeus and Marcus "with four of my men. I propose you call in on your homes in turn."

"Gnaeus, you may invite your wife and children to join us here and then you'll be able to make your plans for your new, prosperous future. Or if you prefer, we can ignore them for the moment. That's your decision.

"Piso, the same for your woman.

"Marcus, you can say your farewells to your parents and assure them that you'll prosper. No parent should ever have a child simply disappear. It's too cruel.

"Or if you prefer, you can simply walk away from your former lives. Think about it overnight, and let me know what you decide in the morning." Marius nodded to dismiss them and indicated a slave standing by to take them to their quarters.

It was now late afternoon. Sulla and a retinue of five, including Solon still in armour, set out into the streets towards Subura and Aurelia's insula. It was dusking when they arrived.

"Lucius!" Aurelia exclaimed on seeing him. "What a wonderful surprise! Come in! And bring your men in, too! It will be cold soon!" She shepherded the six men into her main room. The five men dutifully stood crowded into the far corner to allow their betters as much room as possible.

"To what do I owe this pleasure?" Aurelia sparkled.

"I need a favour, Aurelia. I'm forever imposing upon your kindness," Sulla answered. "And where is young Caius?" Sulla asked, looking around for the boy.

"Oh, he's staying at the home of a friend tonight," Aurelia answered, "They're forever in each others' homes. But what can I do for you?"

"Two things if you could, please," Sulla started. "First, let me introduce to you Sosthenes, a scholar from Athens." He indicated Solon, who bowed slightly in response. "I need a place where this man can stay safely. A colleague will be meeting him here in Rome soon, but you know how hard it is to plan travel overseas. Everything depends on the wind, the weather and the locals." Sulla beamed a smile.

"But he has some enemies and doesn't want anyone to know his whereabouts. That's why he comes disguised as one of my retinue. So I also need you to prevail upon one of your boarders to dress in his armour and take his place

on the walk back to my house. Just in case I've been followed, you see. Anyone watching will think I've just paid one more visit to my old friend."

Aurelia looked at him carefully. "And what will become of my borrowed boarder?"

"I'll treat him as my guest for the night and in the morning he'll leave my house as though he is one of my clients. I will, of course, compensate him for his time."

Aurelia took Solon's measure with her eyes. "I'll ask someone about the same size." She disappeared out the door and up the stairwell. She returned a few minutes later, with a candidate. "Jason is prepared to go for a walk with you," she chirped.

"Excellent! Thank you, Aurelia, and thank you Jason. Let's get the gear onto you. It's already dark enough that the difference won't be noticed."

Meanwhile, back in Marius' house, the five criminals were talking. Piso had learnt how he had been set up as a sole assassin, to be killed by them in turn. Naturally, he resented his imagined "fellows".

Gnaeus said that he believed Drusus would honour his promise. "This guy spent more on entertaining us riff-raff on the night before the vote than any of us will earn in our lifetimes! The cost of keeping his promise to us is bugger-all to him, so why wouldn't do it?"

"Besides," agreed Sextus, "he knows the killing was nothing personal. He doesn't hate us. In fact, he seems to think catching us was the best thing that could have happened. We directed him to the guy behind the plot."

"I know I trust him a damn sight more than I trust any of you!" Piso grumbled.

"Oh, get over it, Piso!" Gnaeus responded impatiently. "It was nothing personal and we got no reason to hurt you now. But you don't have to do the same as we do. You make your own decision."

"Well, I'll take him at his word, and I'll go alone," Piso announced. "That way if it works out all right I'll be able to get a better bed-warmer than the old one. And if it doesn't work out, then at least I didn't get her into trouble as well."

"Marcus? What about you?" Gnaeus asked.

Young Marcus had no doubts. "I want to go to Africa and buy a farm. It doesn't snow in Africa."

"But what will you tell your parents?"

"If I'm allowed to tell them the truth, then I will. I'll say that lord Drusus gave me some money and I'll use it to buy a farm in Africa, and I'll write to them every year to tell them how I am prospering."

"Why would a senator give money to the likes of you? They'll think more likely that you stole it, and have to get out of Rome before you're caught!" Sextus snorted. The others laughed.

"I expect they might," Marcus conceded. "But that changes nothing. And if lord Drusus allows me to mention his generosity, then it's only proper that I should. Whether anyone believes me or not, I owe it to him." His earnestness silenced the chat for a short time.

"Well, it's obvious what I should do," Sextus took his turn. "I'll take the money and go. I can always come back if I want and still have some spare change. But I like the idea of Africa."

"Me too," added Sinistratus. Lefty was never much of a talker.

There was an expected guest at Drusus' house the next morning. It was the Urban Praetor with his retinue. Drusus immediately invited him and his men into the courtyard.

"What can I do for you, Quintus Pompeius?" Drusus asked with concern. Quintus Pompeius Rufus had supported his earlier law concerning the Ager Publicus, but they had parted ways over the citizenship law. But they had remained on good terms personally.

"I'm embarrassed to raise this matter with you, Marcus Livius, but a complaint has been made. I must act upon it." Rufus took a deep breath. "Quintus Servilius Caepio alleges that you have stolen one of his slaves."

Drusus looked shocked for a moment, and then burst into laughter. "Oh! I think I know what's happened here!" He steadied himself.

"A couple of days ago I was told that there was evidence that Solon had conspired to commit a crime. You know Solon? He's Caepio's Master of House. So I arrested him and asked him a few questions. Then I brought in his accuser. After some more questions and discussion, I released him."

"Then where is he, Marcus Livius? Caepio says he has seen no sign, heard no word."

Drusus spread his hands. "How would I know? I swear to you, Quintus Pompeius, I have no idea of his whereabouts. I know only that he walked out my front door free and unhindered, to go wherever he would. I haven't seen him since, and I have no idea where he is now." All of which was true, Drusus thought to himself. Marius didn't tell me where he had planned to hide their informer.

"Perhaps Quintus Servilius is keeping him out of sight. Lots of people saw the arrest, and perhaps my brother-in-law is capitalising by making a false charge to cause me political embarrassment. I wouldn't be surprised. Lately some of his antics have given me cause to think he's starting to become unhinged in the mind. Although he seems to hate me with such great passion, he's still my brother-in-law and I have a familial duty towards him. Perhaps I might write to him and suggest he take a break."

Rufus was obviously unwilling to ask for permission to search; that would be a great insult to a man of such high reputation. So Drusus made it easier for him.

"I sympathise with your predicament, Quintus Pompeius. Please, search my house! Look in every wine-barrel in the cellar and shine a light into the roof spaces. I want you to be able to tell Caepio that you searched my home so thoroughly that not even a lizard could have eluded you. I'll have my kitchen prepare a mid-day meal for all your men, so you can take as much time as you want."

Rufus looked relieved that he had not been forced to ask. "Thank you Marcus Livius; I'm sorry to have to put you through this indignity."

Drusus clapped him on the left shoulder. "Never apologise for doing your duty diligently, Quintus Pompeius," Drusus chuckled. "Your men have freedom to go anywhere, do anything. I'll leave you to your task, without me looking over your shoulder. If you need me, I will be visiting Marcus Aemelius Scaurus."

Drusus rose and gave orders to Cratippus to allow full access and to feed the searchers. Then he called his retinue together and set off.

Scaurus chuckled as Drusus narrated the episode with Rufus. "No doubt about it; Lucius Cornelius is a genius!" Scaurus said. "Not only did he see the search coming, but this perfectly sets up the circumstances for your letter to Caepio! Anyone he shows it to now would be absolutely certain that you're genuinely forgiving and concerned for him, despite his blind rage against you."

"Yes, Lucius Cornelius read the situation perfectly," Drusus agreed. "I think we should talk with him and Caius Marius this evening. But we must make sure that no-one tells me where Solon is. I must be able to swear ignorance with a clear conscience."

"Yes, I'll send invitations now. Felix!" Scaurus called to his Master of House. "Please send to lord Marius and lord Sulla immediately. The message is 'Lord Scaurus begs your attendance for this evening meal. Please arrive before sunset.'" Felix nodded and left the room.

"The Senate convenes in three days' time to consider the citizenship law," Scaurus shifted the subject. "Everyone knows now that it has huge popular support so to refuse to endorse it would seem high-handed. But we mustn't sit still and let them plot in comfort. That letter to Caepio must go out tomorrow, in my opinion, unless Sulla can explain why it mustn't. Have you had any indications from anyone about any shift in mood?" Scaurus leaned forward as he awaited a reply.

"Yes. I've had my clerks writing letters to every senator. As I emphasised in the Comitia, this is a matter of Rome honouring its promises to Friends and Allies, as much as the pragmatic business of avoiding a civil war. I've had assurances from more than fifty of the waverers, and the only negative responses have been from those already in Caepio's pocket. When it gets about that Caepio is falsely accusing me of stealing slaves, I think everyone except the rusted-on will shun him. I'm expecting overwhelming support."

"That is a very dangerous state of mind to have, Marcus Livius," Scaurus warned. "You're never safe when surrounded by mad dogs. They do the most unimaginable things in their desperation."

"Like hiring assassins," Drusus added. "Yes, you're right. We must be prepared to battle this all the way."

"I've not been spreading my opinion around," Scaurus commented. "I think your letters are doing good, and any from me would just duplicate the effort. I intend to speak solidly in favour at the start of the meeting, emphasising how the Italians have honoured all their obligations to Rome despite some acts which they might have considered provocative. They have remained faithful and so should we. It links with your argument, but adds another dimension."

"I suggest that Caius Marius should speak last. As a soldier, he should say how much he respects the fighting ability of the Italians, and dreads to think what would happen if that strength was ever alienated."

"That sounds good. We can discuss that tonight at dinner," Drusus agreed.

There was a knock at the door. Felix peeped through the slat and challenged the visitor. It was Rufus seeking entry. Scaurus heard the response without Felix needing to report to him.

"Yes, by all means, Felix. Let him in," Scaurus called.

Rufus walked into the atrium and saw Drusus reclining in conversation with Scaurus. Both men stood as he approached.

"My apologies for disturbing you, lords. But after this morning's absurd farce I felt I should call on Marcus Livius and apologise before reporting back to Caepio." Rufus shook his head at how ridiculous this duty had been. "Of course, there was no trace of Solon, and your courtesy was much appreciated. But more to the point, Caepio's accusation has forced me into a most humiliating position. It will take me a long time to forgive him for doing this to me. Be assured of my support for you in every proposal you put forward, Marcus Livius. You're a most magnanimous man, and I'll never go far wrong if I put my trust in you. If there's anything I can do to help you, please let me know."

"Thank you, Quintus Pompeius; I've already told you that I bear you no ill-will from today, but rather applaud your diligence," Drusus responded, and offered his arm. Rufus grasped it firmly. "There is one thing that I would appreciate, if you would be so kind. Speak to your friends and ask them to join you in supporting the citizenship law. You're a highly respected man and rightly so; your public support would be an enormous aid to my efforts."

"I will certainly do that, my friend," Rufus assured him with intensity. Turning to Scaurus, "Thank you too, Marcus Aemelius, for allowing me to interrupt you." Rufus left.

The council of war that evening went very well, Drusus thought to himself. But he had to admit, his self-image had changed greatly over the last week. On the walk home after that last contio session, he had dared to think that in this group of the best and greatest, he was the leader. But Caius Marius and Marcus Aemelius had saved the vote in the Comitia by planning ahead, while he had foolishly and naively done no more than hope for a fair vote. And Lucius Cornelius... well, he was amazing. How had he seen the assassination attempt coming? How had he cracked those men so quickly, to get to the heart of the plot? And it was he who had woven their plans ever since. Here was a man who would tower over Rome's history as none before him, at least none since Romulus. Drusus was convinced that Marius' legate would surpass Marius himself in good time. He could only pray to all the gods that Marius would pass on the laurel gracefully. For Marius to oppose the inevitable would demean them both.

In comparison, Drusus realised with an unaccustomed humility, he himself would feature as no more than a courageous idealist who was fortunate enough to have the support of these much greater men at one critical point in history.

The outline that Scaurus and he had marked out in the morning was adopted in principle. Sulla, in another stroke of his own genius, suggested that he also speak in the Senate meeting as an ex-Urban Praetor. He would emphasise how many Italians there were in the city, something that the Senatorial classes tended not to notice because they never went to those parts of the city where real work was done. Indeed, the economy of Rome below the Third Class depended on Italian labour to such an extent that the city would be crippled by an exodus of Italians. So Scaurus would press the high-minded approach of honouring ancient promises, Marius would emphasise the military realities, and Sulla would underline the economic consequences of alienating the Italians. What gap was left?

Whatever gap might be left, getting Caepio out of the way would go a long way to plugging it. And it seemed that would be possible.

Marius had been amused by the ‘stolen slave’ story as told by Drusus over the meal, but Sulla had listened more intently. When Drusus had finished his tale, Sulla had asked for pen, ink and paper, to write a draft letter to Caepio. For the next hour he had this distant look on his face, but still participated in the general conversation appropriately. What sort of man is this? Drusus asked himself. It’s as though he’s running two parallel minds, one fully immersed in a plot, while another fully engaged in the conversation.

After about an hour, Sulla started to write. He had a very interesting style of writing. While everyone wrote one letter after another, running the words together, Sulla put a dot at the end of each word to make it easier for the reader to scan and understand. His draft was impressive, not one cross-out or blot on the entire sheet! He must have composed the entire letter mentally and remembered it word-perfect to write it down.

He presented it to Drusus and the others to consider.

*Marcus Livius, your brother-in-law,
to Quintus Servilius,*

*First, I must apologise to you for the arrest of Solon, your Master of House. This arrest was based on an accusation supported by *prima facie* evidence, so I had no choice but to act on it however much it grieved me to do so.*

Once the facts were known, I permitted Solon to leave my house. My last sight of him was walking out my front door, free to go wherever he chose. I swear by all the gods that I have no idea where he is now.

But before he left, he did share with me certain matters that caused me deep concern, arising from instructions you had given him in the week leading up to the final Comitia vote.

Since that time when I last saw Solon, I have been made aware of other accusations you have made against me.

My dear brother-in-law; I am not offended by your actions as much as concerned for your well-being. Thanks to Solon’s confidential discussions with me before he left my house, I am fully aware of all that has occupied your thoughts over the last month or so.

It is clear to me that you are in serious need of a break from the pressures you have placed upon yourself. Although we are usually on opposite sides of the political debate, these are not personal and should never strain our familial bonds.

I strongly urge you to retire from public life, lest it result in loss of your dignitas if certain of your intemperate decisions become public knowledge. Indeed, I urge you to not only retire, but to also place yourself beyond the reach of any temptation to re-enter the fray. I think that your retirement into one of the provinces would ensure that you see out a long and fruitful life, full of joy, elegance, honour and esteem. Perhaps Achaia or Asia would best suit you. The alternative, I fear, is that you will find yourself stripped of all the dignitas you have so diligently earned, and this could perhaps even cause your premature death.

But perhaps you will think that this letter is politically inspired, and not based on a genuine concern for your immediate well-being and your eternal dignitas. I can only suggest that you discuss this with your trusted friends. Perhaps Philippus and Varius might be good sounding-boards, since I know from Solon that they will understand the background to what I am saying.

I hope that you will be wise.

“Lucius Cornelius, that is brilliant!” Drusus exclaimed. “I could not have phrased it better if I had been given a week!”

Scaurus agreed that it would seem totally innocent to an outsider, but crushing to the plotters. Marius was happy to go along with the wordsmiths.

“Excellent!” Drusus concluded. “I’ll write it out in my own hand, and send it in the morning.”

The Senators were gathering before the Senate meeting was formally called to order. Meanwhile, pledges of support had been streaming in, many of them thanks to Rufus. Drusus was talking with some minor senators, trying to confirm a few extra votes, when Philippus approached him.

“If I might take a few minutes of your time please, Marcus Livius,” he asked politely.

“Certainly, Consul. What can I do for you?” Drusus responded equally politely, but using the formality of his title rather than his name.

Philippus guided Drusus to a conveniently private corner.

“I visited Quintus Servilius yesterday. He seemed troubled, and showed me a letter you had written to him.” Philippus paused, inviting a response.

“Oh,” Drusus responded eventually. “Did you comfort him?”

“In so far as I could. But he couldn’t understand what you meant when you alluded to certain things in his private life. Perhaps some false rumour has come to your ears?”

“I doubt the reports I have heard are false,” Drusus replied.

“Well, what rumours?” Philippus persisted.

“I shouldn’t repeat them to you, just in case they *are* false,” Drusus smiled. “Perhaps I should discuss these reports with Quintus Servilius in private, before I give them any wider airing.”

Philippus realised he would get no further, and time was short. He smiled graciously, and moved away. He walked over to Varius and Caepio, who had been pretending to be talking but watching Philippus out of the corner of their eyes. After a short exchange Caepio walked towards him.

“What was that letter all about, Marcus?” Caepio demanded bluntly.

“You know what it was all about, Quintus,” Drusus responded just as bluntly.

“Then spell it out for me,” Caepio challenged.

Drusus caught the eye of Scaurus, who had been supposedly talking with Marius, but watching Drusus carefully. He beckoned Scaurus to come closer.

When Scaurus was beside him, he said “The Head of the Senate is a witness to what I say, lest you report a fabrication of your own invention.

“I have irrefutable proof that you were behind an attempt to assassinate me. I have access to the testimony of the assassins themselves, to the testimony of Solon who engaged them on your behalf, and of many others who will testify that they saw Solon engaging the assassins.

“However, I would rather not sully the famous name of Caepio by making these grubby actions public. Not only for your sake, but for the sake of your ancestors and also for the sake of my own dear wife. So I offer you the opportunity of a self-imposed exile, instead of humiliation and death. So keep your dignitas, brother-in-law, keep your fortune, and keep your life. This same offer extends to Varius and Philippus, your co-conspirators, provided you all go now.”

Caepio heard these words, a rage growing in him with every sentence. “You bastard!” he said, loudly enough for those around him to turn their heads. “So you *do* know where Solon is!”

“No I do not; but *he* knows where *I* am. But that's beside the issue; go, tell your friends about my offer. The Senate meeting will begin in less than half an hour. That's how much time you have to decide.” Drusus turned on his heel and walked away. He had delivered his message and he wouldn't give Caepio the chance to lead the conversation anywhere else. Scaurus walked with him back to where Marius was waiting and watching. Sulla joined them as they walked.

“I've been talking with Rufus and some of his friends, as an ex-Urban Praetor to the current office-holder,” Sulla explained. “He has been proclaiming your dignitas to all who will listen, and even some who won't.”

“And I've just given the ultimatum to Caepio,” Drusus said. “We have yet to see how he responds.”

“He went straight to Philippus and Varius once your back was turned,” Marius informed them. “They look worried.”

“Good. Now to do the rounds and rally the numbers.” The group scattered, each to show a confident face to his own particular supporters and to stroke their egos. Politics will always be such, Drusus mused.

It didn't seem long before Sextus Julius Caesar called the Senate to order, he having the fasces that month.

“The Augurs have assured me the omens are propitious. Let the business of the Senate commence!”

Scaurus stood.

"Marcus Aemelius, you have the floor," Caesar invited the Head of the Senate to speak.

"There is only one piece of business that absolutely must be dealt with today, Conscription Fathers," he asserted with that rich, mellow voice. "The citizenship law recently passed by the Comitia demands our immediate attention. And, I must say, our immediate approval."

"Rome has promised citizenship to our loyal Italian Friends and Allies for generations. Even the men of the Head Count recognise that Rome has a solemn duty to honour its promises. That is why they voted in favour of this Law." Scaurus turned, casting his gaze over the full circuit of the assembled Senate.

"Yes, even the Head Count keep their promises! Which of you has less honour to his name than the merest of the Plebeians? For if you vote against this measure, that's what you will be saying, not only to us, not only to the lowest classes in this city, but to all of Italy and the whole world beyond! You will be saying, 'Other men might keep their sacred oaths, but not I!' By voting against this Law, you will be renouncing any claim to honour, integrity, dignitas or trust!"

"It's that simple! Do you have any honour, or are you lower than the lowest of the low?" Scaurus sat down.

The brevity of his speech shocked everyone. Scaurus, the man who delighted in detail, saw the question in such simple terms.

Sextus Julius looked to Philippus, his consular colleague, to see if he wished to speak next. Philippus rose to speak.

"Lucius Marcius has the floor," Caesar declared.

"Sextus Julius, my consular colleague," he nodded to the Chair, then turning to the benches, "and Conscription Fathers. The vote of the Comitia was a travesty, a complete corruption of everything that makes Rome the greatest nation on earth. I am totally appalled that we are even considering this law here today! Rather, we should be trying the Tribunes of the Plebeians for treason!"

He turned to glare at Drusus. "Rather than foul my ears by listening to any more of this filth, I announce to you all that I'm going into a self-imposed exile, as of today. I cannot tolerate being part of a Senate that so much as even considers this! It is a total betrayal of all that Rome stands for! I refuse to be a member of such a dishonourable coven!"

"I vow that I will not return to Rome until there is a Rome fit to return to; not until Rome returns to herself!" He turned on his heel and strode quickly to the doors which had been left open today so the crowds in the porch could hear the debate. So fierce was his face that the crowds parted before him. He didn't have to break stride.

The Senate was stunned. Then a wave of muttering broke out among the benches. Sextus Julius called for order, and managed to re-establish it eventually. "Is there another speaker for the law?" he called formally.

Marius stood.

"Caius Marius has the floor."

Marius strode to the centre of the floor. "I would not have believed that Lucius Marcius had such a keen military mind! He has the wit to fall back from the battle when he sees he has no chance of prevailing!"

"Because I intend to tell you about a real battle that lies ahead of us, if we are not wise. Or rather, a series of battles.

"I've fought a few battles in my time. I have commanded Roman legions, and also Italian legions. I must tell you that on any given day, the average Italian legion can be expected to perform as well as the average Roman legion. And why not? They are equipped the same, they are trained the same, they follow the same tactical doctrines, and are led by officers of the same background, training and culture. In fact, they would probably fight even better if some of the less competent Roman officers were replaced by their own Italian leaders. They have suffered too many Arausios in their time!" Then Marius seemed to startle slightly. "Oh, my apologies, Quintus Servilius; was that disaster not caused by your own father? I recall having to take over and clean up that mess, but with one hundred and fifty thousand fewer men than Rome had commanded the day before that slaughter!" There were murmurs on the benches. Marius paused a moment before going on.

"But I digress. There is one exception to this rough parity of Roman and Italian soldiers. Any legion, be it Roman or Italian, will always fight better if the men are convinced that they're fighting for a worthy cause, for something they believe in. They are much less likely to stand firm if they think they are being asked to die for something which is shameful. And which side in this coming war will have that moral advantage? The Italians, who would rightly feel cheated of that which they have been promised for generations? Or our Roman troops, who will be fighting contrary to their own vote in the Comitia? You don't need anyone smarter than a five-year old to answer that question for you!"

"If the Italian tribes unite, they can field twice as many men as Rome and they will be fighting for their rights, while our Roman troops will feel they are fighting for a shameful cause. But not only that. These Italians will be fully-equipped, believe me! And do you know the source of all this equipment? Let me tell you.

"There are some new towns, complete with the best-quality foundries, stretching from Campania, through Umbria, Etruria, even through Massalia, Utica and Gades. All these towns have been deliberately set up outside Rome, in the territories of the Italian tribes, in Gaul, in the Spains, in Africa, to help them hide from the casual glance of those senators who only step outside the pomerium to go to their country villas!

"These new foundry towns have been set up only within the last five or ten years, but they've been very busy. They've had a constant stream of orders for gladii, for shields, for armour, for all manner of weapons. These orders have all been placed by Italian tribes.

"I actually asked one Italian noble why the Italians were placing such large orders. He appeared quite surprised that I had discovered his secret, but then he recovered. 'Why, to be ready whenever Rome calls on its Friends and Allies for help!' he explained, rather embarrassed. I didn't believe him.

“And who, you might ask, has set up these foundries which are so industriously churning out weapons for the Italian tribes? Why, none other than our own esteemed colleague,” and here Marius paused between each word, “Quintus, Servilius, Caepio!”

The Senate erupted. It took Sextus Julius Caesar a full three minutes to restore quiet.

“Yes, Conscrip fathers,” Marius continued at length. “Here is a man who is profiteering by selling weapons to the Italians, while at the same time provoking these same Italians to raise his finely-crafted weapons against us! Has he no shame? Has he not even any wit?”

Uproar broke out again, to be brought under control only after a great effort.

“But facing Italians who hold the manpower advantage, the equipment advantage and the moral advantage is only half of the story. We will also be facing enemies within! Although these will not be enemies of Rome, only enemies of a decision that would destroy Rome. These apparent enemies will in fact be the true Romans, and we would be *their* enemies! We will be faced with the population of this city itself, which has clearly voted for peace, not war; for honour, not arrogance! It will not only be a civil war against Italians; it will also be a civil war against Romans!

“Conscript Fathers, the Greeks have a very interesting word. Yes, this hayseed with no Greek, as I am sometimes described, knows at least one word of Greek! That word is one that I would never want to see applied to Rome. That word is *hubris*. It describes a man so arrogant and self-confident that he believes he is above all the moral and ethical considerations that compass mere mortals. He believes he free to breach with impunity all constraints of honour, of morality, of piety. This hubris is an offence against the gods, and will surely bring about his own destruction. My fellow-Romans; let us not be guilty of hubris.”

Marius resumed his seat.

“Is there a speaker against the law?” Caesar asked again.

Caepio was visibly shaken as he stood.

“Quintus Servilius, you have the floor.”

Caepio gaped a few times before finding his voice. “Conscript Fathers, I must admit to being shocked at this unfounded and unwarranted attack! It is obvious how much Italian blood runs through the veins of Caius Marius, for him to make so sordid an allegation.”

“And also to be consul six times!” one backbench senator riposted.

There were mutterings around the benches as Caesar called for order.

“Yes, and to save us from the Germans!” another voice called out.

Caesar stood. “I will have silence!” he bellowed.

The muttering died down. Caepio looked around the Senate chamber. He didn't like the look on the faces he examined. He threw his hands up in exasperation. “This is not the Senate that I have served all my life. I will join our noble consul, grieving for the Rome that is no more, and await its recovery.” Caepio turned and walked to the Senate door. He was soon swallowed by the crowd.

“Is there a speaker in favour?” Caesar asked.

Sulla stood.

“Lucius Cornelius, you have the floor.”

Sulla walked out to the centre of the floor unpretentiously. “I'm not known for my integrity and dedication to doing the honourable thing, as Marcus Aemelius is,” he nodded to Scaurus. “Nor have I had the supreme command of Rome's armies, as Caius Marius has.” He nodded to Marius. “I'm guided by their wise advice on these matters.

“But I think I was a diligent Urban Praetor in my time. I made a point of seeing how this city actually works, from the docks of Ostia to the taverns along the main roads, to the workers who maintain our water supply and sewer systems, to the carters who deliver food to the shopkeepers and the men who maintain the roads for them.

“I was struck by how much this city relies upon the work of Italians living among us. Conscript Fathers, you wouldn't believe how dependent this city is upon those who don't have the right to vote, not even with the Head Count! If the Italian tribes ever decided the harm us, they could do so simply by putting on their sandals. They need only return to their tribal lands! Were that to happen, then the whole working of this city would descend into chaos. Don't you remember the dislocations a few years ago, when Italians were ordered out of the city? Well, at that time only one in ten of them actually went! Think what would happen if all of them left! And we would not only be plunged into disorder, but we would also be sending the Italians thousands more disgruntled recruits. After a week of that, the Italians need only wait for us to beg them to return!” There were a few chuckles from the ranks.

“Oh, and by the way, while I'm talking about the economics of the city, I believe that the fine levied on the first Quintus Servilius Caepio has not yet been paid. Perhaps the current Quintus Servilius Caepio, driven by both piety for his father and his love of Rome, might like to make at least a part-payment. You know, out of the fortune he is currently making by selling weapons to the Italians. Or perhaps he might even throw in a few sesterces from the Gold of Tolosa, part of which was doubtless used to set up these foundries.” That brought some shuffling and murmurs from the benches! But Sulla affected to not notice.

“Perhaps if we send a runner after him, he might think that would be one way of showing the true measure of his love for this city! But perhaps I dream.”

Sulla sat down.

“Is there a speaker against the law?” Sextus Julius Caesar asked. Varius stood.

“I am sorry, Quintus Varius; you are a pedarius, and not permitted to speak,” Caesar advised. “Is there a speaker against the law?”

Varius remained on his feet. No-one else stood. Caesar flicked a glance to Drusus. Drusus spoke without rising, “It would not be fitting to have this question decided without an attempt to mount at least one argument for the other side.”

Caesar cast around the chamber. “Is there any objection to hearing Quintus Varius?” No one spoke.

“Quintus Varius has the floor.”

"I think it totally despicable," Varius started, "that Quintus Servilius should be so insulted when he is not here to defend himself!"

"Ask him to come back, and I will repeat it!" Sulla offered. "He chose to run from the battle."

"Lucius Cornelius, you will sit in silence!" thundered Caesar. It was bad enough dealing with interjections from the back benches, without the front benches stirring them up!

Varius glared at Sulla. "Thank you, Lucius Cornelius; your boorishness has proved my point. You are an example of what Rome will become if the rest of Drusus' minions are as base as you. You are a scandal on your noble name!" Varius looked around the benches. "Conscript Fathers, take note of what you might yet become, if you follow this trash! As for me, I can only applaud the wisdom of Quintus Servilius and Lucius Marcius. I will stay away from this house until it is cleansed of this scum!" Varius also turned on his heel and stormed out through the doors.

"Is there a speaker for the law," Caesar intoned again.

Rufus stood.

"Quintus Pompeius has the floor."

"I have noticed a pattern in today's proceedings," Pompeius started. "First, Marcus Aemelius speaks of the need for Rome to be seen honouring its promises. Philippus failed to even address the question; instead, he spoke of trying the Tribunes of the Plebs for treason. The Tribunes of the Plebs! Supported by a vote in the Comitia! This is only treason if you assume that to oppose Philippus is treason! No wonder he resorted to running like a beaten cur! Because that is precisely what he proved himself to be! And if any of my fellow senators would take Varius' position that I should not insult a man in his absence, then invite him back to defend himself! A general who flees the battle can be called a coward, precisely *because* he is not there to defend himself!"

"Caius Marius, without doubt the best military leader in living memory, has told us that the Italians would not only defeat us, but by all standards of justice would deserve to, for our broken promises. And he reveals why; because Quintus Servilius Caepio has been arming them! Caepio did not even deny this charge. He spent just enough time on the floor to throw a handful of dust into our eyes and then bolted for the door.

"Then we heard Lucius Cornelius reminding us that we depend on Italians much more than they depend on us. This is a statement of fact that none can deny, and which I confirm to be true in more ways than Lucius Cornelius took the time to list. Again, Varius didn't even attempt to argue a case. He simply spreads insults around and then joins the other whipped bitches slinking away into the crowd." Rufus looked around the benches.

"In summary, I've heard three absolutely unshakeable reasons why we must pass this law and not even one feeble attempt to explain why we shouldn't. Only distractions from the issue. If there are any senators here today that can explain why this law should be defeated, then please speak to us. But if you have no more

to offer than these other three, then please save us the waste of time!" Rufus strode strongly to his seat.

"Is there a speaker against the law?" Caesar asked again. No-one rose. Caesar repeated the call.

Titus Didius stood reluctantly.

"You have the floor, Titus Didius." Caesar acknowledged.

Didius was not the most polished of speakers. He paused, hoping this would add gravitas to his words. "I am appalled that we are even thinking about this law! Rome must lead, and not be a mere partner with our allies! And nor should the Comitia vote sway us; the Senate must lead, not the rabble!

"A vote in favour of this law is an abdication! An abdication as Senators in whose hands the fate of Rome has been entrusted and an abdication as Romans, chosen by the gods to civilise the world!" He sat abruptly, thinking that the finishing parallelism was pretty good for one forced to speak without warning. He didn't want to risk anyone forgetting that polish.

"Is there another speaker for the Law?"

Again, no one rose.

"Then I will hear all those in favour of the law." A solid round of 'Aye's rose.

"Those against?" There were many scattered voices against, but clearly a minority.

"I think the Ayes have it. Does anyone request a division?"

There was no call for a division.

"Then I declare the law has been passed. With the leave of the Senate, I wish to insert an important item into the agenda at this point," Caesar continued. Eyebrows rose around the chamber.

"The final words of Lucius Marcius Philippus as he left were 'I refuse to be a member of this Senate'. I take this to be a resignation from the Senate. And because one must be a senator to hold the office of Consul, this automatically disqualifies him from remaining my consular colleague. It behoves this chamber to elect a Suffect Consul to replace him. This would best be done now, in case I'm not available for such an election at a later date. Does this Senate concur with my interpretation of the situation?"

A chorus of 'Aye's met this question.

"Then may I have a formal motion?"

Gnaeus Domitius Ahenobarbus stood.

"Gnaeus Domitius, you have the floor."

"I move that this Senate accepts the resignation of Lucius Marcius Philippus from the office of Consul, and initiate an election for a Suffect Consul." Ahenobarbus sat.

"Is there an objection to that motion?" Caesar asked. There was no response.

"There being no objection, I declare it carried," Caesar declared. "Do I have any nominations for the position of Suffect Consul?"

Drusus stood.

"I nominate Lucius Cornelius Sulla. He has fulfilled all the requirements of the position, has the sharpest mind I have ever met, and has trained for this position under the great Caius Marius. There could be none better."

"Do you accept nomination, Lucius Cornelius?" Caesar asked.

Sulla stood slowly, to give himself time to think. He had not prepared for this! It was too early and too many things could go wrong. Any little problem could be seized upon by his enemies and the backlash could destroy his career. Then he saw an opportunity to turn this poisoned chalice to his advantage. He would pay off his one-time mentor!

"It would be an honour to serve as your fellow-consul, Sextus Julius, but I must decline. In these times of change, the People will need to be assured that the situation is in trusted hands. They need as Consuls two men who have proven themselves beyond doubt. You are one such man, Sextus Julius, and you will need a colleague worthy of you." He turned to face Caius Marius.

"Therefore I nominate Caius Marius to be appointed Suffect Consul."

Caesar looked to Marius. "Do you accept nomination, Caius Marius?"

Marius stood slowly. "I will serve, if the Senate so decides."

"Further nominations, please?" Caesar looked around the chamber.

Ahenobarbus stood. "I nominate Lucius Licinius Crassus Orator. He has already served as Consul and Censor, and will have the total respect of the people."

"Lucius Licinius, do you accept nomination?"

Crassus rose to his feet. "I am honoured and flattered, but I feel I cannot accept. It is not yet ten years since I was consul, and the Mos Majorum requires a ten-year interval." He turned to acknowledge Caius Marius with a gentle smile. "I am aware that there are precedents for terms closer together than the Mos Majorum generally allows, but that option should only be exercised in times of crisis. I do not believe that this is such a time." Crassus sat.

Ahenobarbus stood again. "If I may, Sextus Julius, I implore Lucius Licinius to allow himself to be persuaded. Any time of significant change has the risk of becoming a crisis unless managed by men such as yourself and Lucius Licinius."

Crassus simply shook his head without standing.

"Is there another nomination?" Caesar asked. There was no immediate reply. Titus Didius leapt to his feet. "I nominate Quintus Lutatius Catulus! If the enfranchisement of the Italians is to be thrust upon us, then let us not leave the execution of it in the hands of an Italian-lover! It must be done with proper restraint." There were murmurs of approval around the chamber.

Catulus rose to accept the nomination. There was no way he would publicly back away from a confrontation with Marius. Not after Marius had claimed all the credit for their shared victory against the Germans! (In fact, everyone except Catulus saw it differently. In their opinion Catulus' forces had been broken and would have been annihilated, except that Marius had won his own battle and then forced-marched to Catulus' aid. There he rallied the broken Catulan forces and snatched a heroic victory from the jaws of disaster. That this 'mis-interpretation of the situation' was universal made Catulus even more bitter.)

Caesar again called for nominations, but all was quiet.

“There being only two nominations, I put the question. Shall the Suffect consul be Caius Marius or Quintus Lutatius Catulus? Those in favour of Caius Marius?” There was a strong call of support.

“Those in favour of Quintus Lutatius Catulus?” The reply was distinctly louder.

“I think Quintus Lutatius has it. Is there a call for a division?”

Sulla stood immediately. “I call for a division.”

“The Senate will now divide,” Caesar called. “Those in favour of Caius Marius to my left, those in favour of Quintus Lutatius Catulus to my right!”

There was the sound of scraping chairs, and a loud murmur as faction leaders urged their supporters and attempted to persuade others. Eventually the senators formed in two groups, one on each side of the chamber.

“Those in favour of Caius Marius stand to my left!” Caesar ordered, “those in favour of Quintus Lutatius Catulus to my right!” No-one moved from his position. The count appeared close.

“Senators will form pairs, and proceed to the far end of the chamber,” Caesar instructed. One by one senators from each side walked to the centre of the chamber, and then to the far end. When all of Marius' supporters had been accounted for, there were still almost twenty standing to Caesar's right.

“I declare Quintus Lutatius Catulus elected Suffect Consul for the remainder of this current term.” Applause rose from the right of the chair and from many at the far end of the hall; polite, but not enthusiastic. Catulus acknowledged the applause with a couple of small bows, and then started walking back with the other senators to resume his seat.

“No, Quintus Lutatius; don't sit there! This is your seat now,” Caesar gently chided him, indicating the consular chair beside his own. Catulus rose, and took his place beside Caesar.

Drusus was overjoyed that the law had been passed so comfortably, but as they walked out of the Senate chamber he could see that Marius was not happy.

“Caius, why do you seem so downcast? This is a great day!”

Marius said nothing, but glowered at him.

“Come, let's gather Scaurus and Sulla, and celebrate our victory!” Drusus continued.

“Drusus,” Marius replied, the formal form of address instead of the familiar ‘Marcus Livius’ hitting Drusus like a physical slap, “I have given you total support through this entire campaign. And now you betray me!”

“Caius, if I have offended you, please tell me how,” Drusus protested. “I will apologise and make good my fault!”

Marius looked around. “This place is too crowded. Let's walk some distance.”

The two men collected their retinues, and started towards Marius' house. Marius spoke after travelling about a hundred paces.

"You nominated Sulla as consul!" Marius spat. Again the bare cognomen was used. Drusus was concerned.

"Yes; and in doing so gave you full credit for his achievements."

"That's not the point!" Marius broke out angrily. "It has been prophesied that I would be consul seven times. I have already served six terms. The remaining months of this term as a Suffect would have fulfilled the prophecy, but you put my follower ahead of me!" Marius shook his head angrily.

"Many have already formed the opinion that I'm a spent force. My last term was ten years ago. Ten years! Even the Mos Majorum would allow me another term by now! But by preferring my legate over me, you have implicitly said my time has passed." Marius rounded on him, stopping in his tracks. "Don't you see what you've done? You, whom everyone might have thought one of my closest supporters, have told the world that the generation following me must now take over! You have declared that I belong to the past!"

Drusus looked horrified. "By all the gods, Caius, I had no idea! Why didn't you tell me?"

"More to the point, why didn't you ask me, before opening your mouth to nominate my pupil instead of his master!" Marius retorted harshly.

Drusus looked so abject that Marius felt his rage drain away even as he stood there.

"I'm so sorry, Caius; I'll do all I can in the remaining months of this term to secure your election next year. The prophecy must be fulfilled!"

Marius put his hand to Drusus' shoulder. "Yes, that's how I should be looking at it, Marcus Livius; as a challenge, not a defeat. I regret my harsh words to you." The two men started walking again.

"We should ask Scaurus when we can next meet," Drusus commented. "I expect Catulus and Caesar will need to meet soon and often to sort out the Consulship. I'd like Caesar to be accorded the responsibility for putting the citizenship law into effect. Surely he has the wit to see that Catulus will deliberately sabotage the process."

"I expect Caesar would prefer that, too," Marius agreed. "Caesar is no supporter of the law himself, but at least he has some sense of civic duty. He'll act honestly. He won't want his consulship tainted by any improper actions from that shameful ingrate." Marius stopped again. "Perhaps we should go back to the Senate, see if Marcus and Lucius are still there, and have a quick word."

"Yes," Drusus agreed. He would agree with anything Marius said right now, to atone for his blunder. He turned, and the retinue turned with him.

They had almost reached the steps to the Senate when Scaurus emerged. He hailed them and approached.

Scaurus was in very good cheer. "Shall we four dine together tonight?

"That would be excellent," Marius agreed. "My house?"

The other two accepted this invitation.

"Good. Is Lucius Cornelius still inside?" Marius asked. The answer was a nodding head.

"Then I'll have one of my men remain to convey the invitation. I'll ask him to join us as early as he can manage," Marius decided. "And Marcus Aemelius; could you please use your position as Head of Senate to have a word with Caesar; urge him to take the registration of the Italian Tribes as his own responsibility. If it's given to Catulus, the Italians might see that as an attempt to circumvent the law. Heaven knows that there'll be enough honest mistakes and stuff-ups anyway, so he needs to ensure they're smoothed out, not turned into a Greek tragedy."

"Good thinking, Caius," Scaurus agreed. "I'll send a note to Caesar's house now, asking for a meeting tomorrow morning before he sees Catulus."

The three men walked together towards Marius' house. Sulla joined them on the way.

"That's the big issue out of the way, Marcus Livius. What else needs to be done before your term expires?" Sulla asked.

"I'd like the division of the public lands to be re-established," Drusus replied. "Everyone knows that the voiding of that law was done in panic. With the Evil Triumvirate out of the way now there should be no problems."

"Yes," agreed Marius. "But I'd like to give priority to soldiers, and after them the Head Count, rather than the upper classes. We need to keep control of the Plebeians above all."

The three men walked on in silence until they reached Marius' house. They entered and relaxed around his central pool. Marius ordered finger-foods to be brought, and some watered wine.

"That was an amazing performance today," Sulla mused. "I thought the triumvirate would either fight dirty or run away. The dramatic exit in protest was one ploy I didn't expect."

"I think they realised their case was lost in any case. This allows them the option of returning in glory if anything goes pear-shaped." Marius replied. "But the way Caesar pounced on the chance to get rid of his co-consul took me by surprise. Philippus must have been just as much a pain in the butt for Caesar as he has been for us."

"No-one raised an objection, either; I think everyone has had his fill of Philippus," Sulla chuckled at his own pun. "But it was a shame we were so taken by surprise by it. It would have been good to have agreed on our candidate for the job." Sulla threw a quick glance to Drusus.

"My apologies. I perceived a need for haste before another nomination was put forward. I knew you were talking about seeking the Consulship in a year or two, Lucius Cornelius, so I thought best to see if you were prepared to bring your timetable forward," Drusus stumbled out.

"Crassus would have won, had he accepted the nomination. Why did he decline?" Sulla pondered. "Perhaps he doesn't want to gain the position by default, but prefers the honour of an election. Or perhaps he thinks it's a poisoned chalice. Too much could go wrong with the Italian Question. Or perhaps he doesn't want any challenge to the legality of the appointment."

"I think it's the Italian issue that made him refuse," Marius commented. "Remember, it was during his consulship that the Italians were ordered out of

Rome, so how would they respond to seeing him Consul again now that they have citizenship? I think he wants to be out of the public gaze until everything about Italian citizenship settles down.”

“Yes, that would be a big issue to him,” Drusus agreed.

“We certainly needed someone with a ‘can-do’ attitude, and the energy to push it through,” Sulla mused. “We also need someone both the Italians and the Head Count would trust, rather than one side seeing the Consul as being partial to the other side.”

“I couldn’t think of anyone who fits that description better than our own Caius Marius, and that’s why I put his name forward. He has prestige, even if some say he’s over the hill. He would prove them wrong once he had the job!” Turning to Marius and smiling, “The Old Warhorse still has the heart for battle, don’t you, my friend?”

Marius smiled wanly. “Marcus Livius and I have already discussed that. But that was not to be! But there’ll not be enough time in the remainder of this year to finish the job, even if the Consuls wanted it done quickly. Perhaps I should nominate for Consul next year to keep the momentum. I’m still popular among the Plebs, even if the Boni don’t like to admit it. If you can line up the Italian tribes, Marcus Livius, and I mobilise my veterans, we should have no problems.”

“But that’s next year,” Scaurus broke in after a respectful pause. “If we want to get it started this year, and under Caesar rather than Catulus, we need to think fast about how we might be able to bring Caesar on board.”

Sulla saw his chance. “This might sound a bit extreme at first, but hear me out. If the aim is to smooth over any problems without the Italians screaming foul, then it has to be done by some-one the Italians trust. I suggest that Caius Marius offer himself as Caesar’s delegate for this task.”

“That should keep Caesar happy. He doesn’t want a civil war to break out on his consulship and he knows he can trust Caius, who is his own brother-in-law.”

“From our side, it will also give Caius great exposure for a run at his seventh consulship next year, to finish the job properly.” Sulla spread his hands. “I’ll work under Caius; we’ve been a good team for years now, and I’m sure we can get the job done smoothly.”

Marius smiled to hear this. “Thank you, Lucius Cornelius; I don’t have many active years left, but one more Consulate would let me die a happy man.”

“I agree,” Scaurus concurred.

Then that’s settled,” Drusus clapped his hands together.

“Janus,” Marius called, “Get some paper and a quill; Marcus Aemelius has a letter to write!”

As expected, Caesar was only too happy to shut Catulus out of the Italian Question. He had seen enough of Philippus’ antics and he had no desire to throw the burning torch of Catulus into the oil-soaked tinder of the Italian Question. Three days later Sulla had completed the itinerary for Marius’ sweep through the south of Italy, sending out riders to the various tribal notables asking for them to prepare

accommodation for his clerical staff and to post notices of registration places and dates.

"If you're to be consul next year, Caius, then you'll need to demonstrate that you're not past it yet, but still in your prime. Rome will need that re-assurance of your fitness if we're to ensure your election."

"Of course, you're right, Lucius Cornelius, as usual," Marius agreed. "And in fact, now that you've mentioned it, I think I'm looking forward to it as a first step towards my final Consulate. When do we set out?"

Sulla smiled broadly. "The morning after tomorrow, if you can manage it. Remember how Marius' Mules could march faster than any other army on earth?"

Marius smiled back at him. "So this is how you will get even with me, is it?" Marius slapped him on the shoulder. "You just watch this old man come alive again!"

Sulla had deliberately decided to work southwards from Rome, moving as lightly and quickly as possible. He wanted to cover the entire southern end of the Peninsula before the winter closed in. Then, in the Spring of next year, he would work northwards - oops; Marius would work northwards - from Rome as the snows of winter retreated.

This should mean that the voting census for all of the Italians might not be ready in time for the next elections, but would certainly be prepared in time for the year after that. But if at all possible, his aim was to have at least one Italian tribe listed. It might only be a token, but even one Italian citizen voting at the next election would be a precedent that the incoming officials would have trouble turning around. So haste was everything.

It also meant that he would be in close proximity to Marius every day. He was getting sick of being in the shadow of the Great Man, however much it suited him politically to play along with it. He would be able to assess the Old Man's strength, perhaps use the urgency of the task to push him to the point of breaking. And if the opportunity arose for something Terribly Accidental to happen to Marius, then so much the better.

The first tribe, by special request of Drusus, was the Marsi. "Quintus Poppeadius! A joy to see you, and best wishes from Marcus Livius as well!" Sulla embraced the Marsic chief.

"It is good to see you too, Lucius Cornelius! I must confess that I didn't expect this to happen, and thought that we would be forced to war instead." Silo responded. "All of Italy thanks you and your colleagues for such an improbable victory!" Then he turned to Marius.

"And the great Caius Marius! You saved not only Rome from the Germans; you also saved every Italian tribe that would have been sacked on the German's southward march, plus the rest of us as well had they managed to besiege Rome! We would have all been plundered! Italy owes you as much as does Rome herself!"

"Thank you, Quintus Poppeadius; but it was the Italian legions that the tribes provided to me that won the day, when Rome had few men left able to fight. Rome owes a great deal to Italy, too!"

Sulla wanted to get down to business as quickly as possible. "Did you receive the letter I sent you? Concerning the registration of names?"

"Yes, Lucius Cornelius. All has been arranged as you described. I've sent out word that every Italian seeking citizenship must report to one of ten main centres to be enrolled." Silo handed Sulla a paper. "Here's a list of the centres, and the dates on which you're expected at each. I've added my estimate of how many men I expect to present themselves at each. I'd be honoured to accompany you around the circuit."

Sulla glanced down at the parchment. As he had requested, it was a tight schedule, with little time to spare. "Thank you, Quintus Poppaeus; this looks excellent. And your knowledge of the land will certainly allow us to travel more quickly. We'd be delighted if you could come with us."

For the next week the days were full and the travelling hard. After one particularly hard ride Marius took his leave from the evening meal early, pleading a headache. Sulla offered him a flask of strong wine. "Drink well, Caius; it will deaden the pain and help you sleep. A man of your experience knows when to stop short, to avoid the hangover in the morning."

Marius smiled feebly, and took the flask to his room.

Marius woke the next morning feeling decidedly heavy. 'I didn't drink that much!' he protested to himself. He went to roll onto his left side, to swing his legs out of his camp cot. He felt as though his left arm and leg were tangled in the sheets; he couldn't move them. Eventually he clawed with his right arm to throw the sheets off, and reached over the edge of the bed with his right foot. But his left leg was unresponsive. He tried to push himself vertical with his left elbow, but again his arm was lifeless.

'I must have slept crooked, to cut off the blood,' he mused, and fell back onto his back, awaiting the tingling as his limbs came alive again. But there was no tingling; just a dead feeling to his left arm and leg.

He started to grow concerned. He called for his personal slave to assist him.

"Janus! Come here, please!" His voice sounded thick and clumsy in his own ears. Janus appeared at his bedside. He looked Marius in the face, and Marius saw the look of shock.

"What's the problem, Janus?" Marius asked, again realising as he spoke that his speech was clumsy and slurred. The left side of his face also felt dead. 'Oh, no! Another stroke!' Marius thought to himself. 'It couldn't be!'

"Your face has dropped, my lord. It seems to sag off your bones," Janus said hesitantly.

"Yes, I've slept badly," Marius said, again feeling that heaviness on his left side. "Please help me up, and the numbness will pass."

Janus lifted Marius' legs over the edge of the cot, and pulled him to a sitting position. Then he re-positioned in front of his master.

"Your hands, my lord," he asked, readying himself to pull Marius to his feet. Marius reached out with his right hand, but his left hand fluttered only slightly, never rising from his lap.

"This doesn't look good, my lord," Janus said fearfully. "Perhaps you should stay as you are for the moment, until the life comes back to your side."

"No, Janus; I'll recover more quickly if I'm sitting in a proper chair. Please assist me."

Janus reached down to take the left wrist, and was re-assured to feel it still warm. 'But if it had been starved of blood overnight, should it not be cool to touch?' he mused. Then he pulled Marius upright. Immediately Marius started to topple to the left. There was no strength in his left leg. Janus jumped forward to embrace his master, to support his body. He man-handled him to the camp chair, and lowered him into it.

"My lord; your hand is warm! Can you feel my grip?"

"Yes, I can Janus. It seems this isn't just the result of a bad sleeping position," Marius said dryly, strting to accept what he knew to be the awful truth.

"You must return to Rome, lord; lest this is only the start of something more serious," Janus voiced his concern.

"You mean something more serious than being a cripple?" Marius returned.

"Being dead is much more serious, my lord," Janus answered, taking a liberty that only a long-serving and trusted slave dare attempt. "I've seen you suffer similar problems, and you learnt to regain use of the injured parts. But only if properly treated. You must return to Rome."

"What will I tell Lucius Cornelius? What will I tell everyone?" Marius pleaded. "This is the end of my career, Janus."

"No it's not, my lord," Janus insisted. "You will recover, if only you have the right treatment. Tell lord Sulla that you are troubled by an old wound to your left leg and wear your toga to support your left arm."

"You're right, Janus. I should compose myself," Marius agreed. "Please, summon a carriage, and we'll return to Rome. In the meantime, I must put on my toga to take formal leave of Quintus Poppaedius."

Marius was dressed and placed in his formal chair, and word was sent to Sulla and Silo.

"Quintus Poppaedius, please excuse me not rising to you. My left leg is suffering a recurrence of an old injury," he greeted Silo. His words were slow and measured, as he struggled to speak clearly. "I'm sorry, but I must take my leave of you now, and return to Rome."

Silo was concerned. It could be seen in every line in his face. "It saddens me to see you inconvenienced, Caius Marius. But it's been a joy and an honour to have you as my guest. May you recover soon, and continue to be a blessing to Rome and all of Italy." Silo took the right hand Marius offered, and was relieved to feel its strength. He backed out of the room.

Sulla managed to squeeze out a few tears. "Caius, you can't fool me! Please get the best of attention, and become well again! You're needed!" He took Marius' right arm and then left.

Sulla's heart was singing within his chest, even as he put on a show of grieving. It was obvious that the Great Man had suffered another paralysing stroke and that couldn't be hidden during an election campaign. And he would most likely

suffer more in the near future. These things had a way of compounding on each other. Marius was a spent force! What could be better for Lucius Cornelius Sulla than to have his former master, the great Caius Marius, publicly hand over the mantle of First Man in Rome! This was an even better outcome than the 'Terrible Accident' option!

Sulla threw himself into the enrolment of the Italians for the rest of the year, sending a message back to Rome asking to be permitted to stand as Consul in absentia if Caius had not recovered sufficiently. He would rely on Drusus and the others to sense the political winds in the city, emphasising his diligence in performing his duties even at the cost of harming his own election chances.

The message back from Drusus disappointed him. Marius seemed to be recovering. His speech was becoming clearer. He was also regaining some measure of control over his left hand. He had also taken to growing a beard, to reduce the visible effect on his face. The other bad news was that the newly-enrolled Italian tribes would not be able to vote this year. Catulus had demanded that they be excluded until their rolls are accepted and endorsed by the Censors and there were no Censors in office at the time.

When the last of the southern tribes had been enrolled with only fifteen days remaining before the elections, Sulla returned to Rome.

The reunion was in Marius' house, which had become their headquarters now because Marius was reluctant to be seen in public until he had fully recovered. But he certainly wasn't daunted by his stroke; he had engaged the very best of Greek experts, and was following a torturous regimen to rehabilitate his limbs and his speech. Although the aging body was starting to fail, the determination to conquer was as powerful as ever.

"I'm sorry, Lucius Cornelius," Scaurus was saying, "but with the Italian tribes now coming into the picture, the Senate almost to a man is becoming extremely conservative; probably out of fear that Marcus Livius might exploit his clientele. They dread a man with too much power. We're even contemplating not putting anyone up for Consul this year, lest we seem to be overly ambitious. Perhaps we should let the unease die down. Eventually the Senate will realise over the next couple of years that we're safe."

"The new situation will become the new normal soon enough, and the fear will recede. Perhaps next year will be better, but at the moment we believe that we shouldn't be seen to be grasping for power. Too much ambition could be the downfall of everything we have worked for."

"Don't delay for too long, though," Sulla countered. "Caius yearns for his seventh consulship, and time is not on his side." He smiled towards his former General sympathetically.

"Just continue your hard work over the coming year, Caius, and recover fully. Have a stab at the consulate next year, when all the Italian tribes will be voting. They love you for granting citizenship to the Italian legions that fought the Germans, even without Drusus' patronage, and there are still many in the Plebs who hold you in awe for your achievements. It's only the Senatorial class who think of you as 'that Italian hayseed'!"

Marius smiled back. It was amazing, Sulla thought to himself, how well that beard hid so much of his facial immobility. Or was it actually recovering?

"Thank you Lucius Cornelius; that was my plan, too," Marius replied.

Janus entered the room apologetically, leading a Greek physician.

"Excuse me, friends. It's time for my exercises." Marius stood without help but required a man under each arm to walk out of the room. The other three watched him go.

"He's a man of amazing fortitude," Sulla commented. "He always has been."

"Yes," Scaurus agreed. "If ever a man deserved a seventh consulship, Marius is that man."

After a short pause, Drusus spoke. "So all the southern tribes are enrolled, Lucius Cornelius? That's good!"

"Yes, but not good enough!" Sulla made a distasteful face. "As you informed me, Catulus claims that they can't vote until the Censors have accepted the rolls. I've sent messages back to the Italian leaders by fast horse advising them of this, so they won't arrive at Rome only to be disappointed."

"Don't be impatient, Lucius Cornelius," Scaurus comforted him. "Caesar has promised that Censors will be elected this year, even if he has to stand for election himself."

Sulla nodded his acceptance. "So we can be confident that all of Italy will be voting in the next election after this. Well, I'm sure Caius will be back to good health by then, so it's not too displeasing. But what of the other positions for this coming year? Will you stand again for Tribune of the Plebeians, Marcus Livius?"

"I think I should," Drusus replied. "Until all the Italian tribes are enrolled and their right to vote is established, I haven't finished my work. Just one vote by an Italian tribe in the Comitia in this coming year would have been enough to make the process irreversible, but it seems that won't happen."

"So you suggest we don't put up a candidate for Consul this year?" Sulla went back to the previous topic. "You've been in Rome while I've been out of town, so I accept your assessment. But shouldn't we at least support a candidate whom we know will complete the Italian enrolment?"

"That's a matter for the Censors, as our meticulous Suffect Consul has pointed out," Scaurus explained. "But apart from that, we also want to revive the Ager Publicus laws that were voided. To do that we must ensure Marcus Livius is re-elected."

"So the reasoning is as follows," Drusus started to explain. "A Consular candidate who is completely independent of us but is willing to campaign on the Ager Publicus laws will have our support, and we campaign on the same platform. This common thrust by two separate parties will re-inforce each other, and will help both of us. In consideration, our preferred candidate will support the election of Censors to complete the work you've already started."

Drusus spread his hands. "I know it's presumptuous of us to make your plans for you," he apologised, "So obviously we haven't discussed this with anyone outside our circle. But we do commend it to your approval."

Sulla thought to himself for a moment. 'Yes! Very presumptuous! But I must put on the face of a dedicated team player here.' So no indignation showed on his face. "I'd also like to involve Caius in the bargain as well. Perhaps if Caius Marius could offer his support this year, in return for reciprocal support in the next...?" Then Sulla corrected himself. "But no; Caius doesn't want to be seen at the moment lest his affliction harm his public image. He will not have recovered sufficiently to be able to do anything before the election."

"Yes, unfortunately that's not possible," Drusus agreed.

"So whom do you have in mind?" Sulla pressed on. "Although you might not have approached anyone without my agreement – for which courtesy I thank you – you must have a preference."

"Lucius Julius Caesar seems as good as any. Marcus Aemelius is on good terms with him, and he accepts Italian Enfranchisement as being inevitable, even if not desirable. Not one of our supporters, but not a blind opponent either," Drusus answered.

"I know him too" Sulla said. "Quiet sort of a fellow. He might be overwhelmed by his co-consul, so we might need to keep pushing him."

"True. But more to the point, I remember that he voted against my Corn laws, so he isn't seen as one of our stable." Drusus went on. "And Rufus tells me that he spoke to Lucius Julius just before the Senate meeting that passed the original Ager Publicus law, and seemed to favour it before the Farce of the Omens; but he's never spoken in favour, so he hasn't been identified with us on that point either."

"So did he support the Ager Publicus law or not?" Sulla asked. "If he changes his story now, people might think he has been bought."

"First, he voted for it, then he voted to void it when Philippus presented the dodgy omens. So he was just one of the majority in both cases. So again he has credibility without being seen as one of our clique."

Sulla shrugged. "Sounds good to me!"

Drusus smiled. "Then with your permission, we'll approach him this evening." He turned to Scaurus "Would you be so kind as to write the invitation yourself, Head of the Senate?"

Scaurus nodded, and Drusus called to Cratippus, asking for paper, ink and quill. When Cratippus arrived Scaurus took the equipment but then passed it over to Sulla.

"You've shown a gift for words, Lucius Cornelius; please draft something elegant but brief."

Sulla took the quill and paper and started writing immediately.

*Marcus Aemelius Scaurus, Princeps Senatus,
to Lucius Julius,*

Greetings and best wishes.

I have recently given much thought to the important events of the last year, and I can see how easily the recent initiatives could be mis-directed, either by rabble-rousers seeking to exploit unrealistic dreams or by hyper-conservatives seeking to create fear and panic. Both extremes would be disastrous.

Now more than ever Rome needs the leadership of a man who will follow the Mos Majorum but understand that its operation needs to be adapted to new circumstances.

I believe you are such a man. I am convinced that you would be an excellent Consul for these times, a diligent and prudent hand on the tiller of the Ship of State. I would very much appreciate spending an hour with you to discuss certain matters if you could spare me that time.

Please let me know if this is possible, and the time and place that would most suit you.

I wish you well in your campaign.

“How can you just trot out such a letter, without so much as a single scratch-out?” Scaurus asked as he signed it.

“I spent much of my youth with actors and suchlike. You learn a turn of phrase in those surroundings,” Sulla waved the compliment away. ‘How can these excellent orators not recognise a pile of clichés when they see one?’ he wondered to himself.

The letter was dried, folded and handed to Scaurus. He sealed it with his signet ring and passed it to Cratippus. “Please send that to the house of Lucius Julius Caesar immediately,” Drusus commanded. Cratippus nodded and left.

Marius re-entered the room at that time, his tunic stained with sweat. Janus and the Greek physician lowered him onto his chair.

“Tell me, Caius, if it doesn’t embarrass you; what exercises are you required to do?” Sulla asked.

“Not embarrassing, Lucius Cornelius, only tiring. This drill sergeant here,” he gestured towards the physician, “makes me walk up and down a room, with Janus under my left arm and a rail for my right arm to hold. I’m slowly regaining control and strength in my left leg. Then he makes me pick things up and place them, using my left hand. Again, I’m slowly improving.”

“If there were a rail on either side, Caius, would your left arm be strong enough without the need for Janus?”

Marius looked to the physician to answer.

“That’s the next step in the process, lord Sulla. I’m hopeful that lord Marius will be at that point within a month or two.”

“Then please, physician, could you allow me to speak with you for a few minutes?”

“I would be honoured, lord Sulla.”

Sulla rose from the couch. “Excuse me, friends,” he said to his friends, “I have an idea that might help Caius in his recovery.” He led the physician out of the room.

Scaurus watched them wander out into the garden. There, beside the ornamental pool, Sulla started talking with animation, gesturing with his hands.

“Caius, you’re indeed fortunate to have so devoted a friend as Lucius Cornelius,” Scaurus said. “Or perhaps you’ve been such an inspiring leader that

you've earned that devotion. Either way, I'm impressed by the care he takes for you."

"Yes, and I'm very aware of it too," Marius replied. "Once I get this seventh consulship settled, I'll pour the rest of my life into ensuring that he prospers."

There was little point in the three discussing anything while Sulla was talking to the physician. It would only have to be repeated, so they nibbled at the tray of refreshments Janus had brought in.

Sulla returned soon enough, looking pleased. "Thank you, friends. Now what's the next item on the agenda?"

"We've already laid out our plans; we see it as a year of consolidation, letting the Senate know that we're not trying to take over the Republic," Drusus answered. "I'll involve myself with nothing new, but only finish what's already been approved. And you have already agreed to lay low, concerning yourself with completing the enrolment. Anything that comes up through the year can be treated as it arises but I would prefer to simply consolidate and establish what's already on the books." He looked to his fellows. "Is that enough for the moment?"

Marius and Sulla nodded, but Scaurus responded "When I talk to Caesar, I'll offer his campaign the support of all four of us, but only after nominations are in and to the extent of informal approval and recommendations to our friends and clients. We don't want him to be stained by an obvious association with us. In return for which, he is to support the rapid enrolment of the Italians and the passing of Ager Publicus law. Do I have that right?"

The others agreed.

"Then I think I have the picture now," Scaurus summed up. He stood. "Then if I may take my leave of you now, Caius; and you too, friends...."

"Just a moment, please, Marcus Aemelius," Marius interrupted him. "I'd like to make sure we're all agreed on one detail. I would prefer that the Ager Publicus be allocated only to retired soldiers of the Fifth Class and below, and who have served at least ten years; it's not to be distributed to all. That way there will be a strong incentive for Head Count to enlist in the legions. That will clean up much of the petty crime in the city."

"It will also mean that the old Republican virtues will be encouraged. This way of presenting the scheme will appeal to the conservatives very strongly, and reassure them we're not the Gracchi brothers all over again."

"And it will also reduce opposition from those who have secretly encroached onto the public lands. The demand for land will be gradual, and their encroachments will not need to be reclaimed by the State immediately, so they will still have the use of their ill-gotten lands for some time to come. Are we agreed on that?" Marius looked around the group.

"That's a wise course, Caius," Sulla agreed.

Drusus didn't look convinced but he accepted it. "I can settle for that much," he conceded.

"Excellent!" Scaurus agreed as he stood. "I now have a negotiating position I can take to Caesar. Until we meet again, friends!"

Chapter 2 – 664 Ab Urbe Condita (90 B.C.)

“Look what I have as a New Year's gift for my old friend!” Sulla proclaimed as he walked through Marius' portal. Behind him followed a slave with a strange metal frame.

The frame was placed in the middle of the triclinium floor.

“Can anyone guess what it does?” Sulla asked.

Marius, Scaurus, Crassus and Drusus looked at each other in bewilderment.

“Let me give you a clue!” Sulla continued. He stood in the centre of the U-shaped curve of the frame, with a hand on each of the waist-height horizontal bars on either side. Then he lifted the frame and dropped it to the floor again a foot or more further forward, then took a pace forward with his right foot, and then brought his left foot beside it.

Marius was the first to understand, and roared with laughter.

“Lucius Cornelius! What can't you turn your mind to? How the gods have favoured me, to have a friend like you!”

By now the other two had seen the purpose of this strange contraption, and were also laughing their approval.

“Come, help me stand, Marcus Livius!” Marius commanded. “Lucius Cornelius, bring it over here! I want to ride my new mount immediately!”

Marius' left arm was still weak, but it was strong enough to creep the frame forward. And when locked out at the elbow, it was sufficiently well-controlled to take whatever weight the left leg couldn't carry as he stepped up into the front of the frame again. And then Marius heaved the frame forward another foot.

“It works! By Fortuna's left eyebrow, it works!” Marius exclaimed with glee. His three friends cheered their delight.

Marius doggedly worked his way across the triclinium. When he reached the far wall, he twisted the frame around slightly, and then turned his feet on the spot. After a dozen such moves, he was ready to make his way back, grinning even as he concentrated on the movements and his tunic started to become moist with perspiration from the effort.

At last he made it back to his couch. He turned the frame again, and when properly aligned he fell back into his place. His friends cheered and applauded.

“It's very hard work, Lucius Cornelius; but I can feel it's so much better for me than Jason's shoulder. It gives me more independent control! I'm sure I'll recover much more quickly, thanks to your marvellous gift!”

“The prophecy must be fulfilled, Caius; but the gods don't make anything happen unless we fight for it!” Sulla responded. He was well-pleased with his work; this was clearly more physically demanding than leaning on a slave. If it doesn't provoke another stroke, then perhaps a fall from exhaustion might be enough.

“But enough fun for one day,” Marius said as he mopped his brow. “I must say how pleased I am that Lucius Julius honoured his promise to provide Censors. We now know that we can deal honestly with him.”

“Yes,” Sulla agreed. “Lupus threw a severe case of temper tantrums; you know how much our dear Publius Rutilius Lupus hates anything you suggest, so Lucius Julius’ insistence to elect Censors against the will of his colleague shows character. All-in-all I think the election of Sextus Julius and Publius Licinius is as good as we could have hoped for.”

“And I really can’t understand why the Boni didn’t push harder for Catulus.” Crassus commented. “Perhaps they were afraid of attracting too much attention to him, lest they generate a backlash. They just hoped they could get enough conservative voters in the Rural tribes to overcome Popularis apathy.

“But it’s good that Sextus Julius has agreed to appoint Caius to start enrolling the remaining tribes as soon as the weather allows travel. I expect you to be on the road in perhaps a month, perhaps a bit longer. He agreed to accept the enrolments as soon as you return with them; but he wants it to be done as a single act, and not tribe-by-tribe. He doesn’t want the northern tribes complaining that the southern tribes are being favoured by early acceptance.”

Then Crassus turned his attention to Drusus. “However, there’s one point that he raised in our discussion, Marcus Livius, that I need to refer to you,” Crassus continued.

Drusus frowned. “What’s the problem?”

“Many senators have spoken to him about how these new citizens are going to be distributed among the Tribes. The Boni in the Senate don’t want them spread evenly, because that would mean the Italians would take control of the smaller rural tribes. That would completely alter the nature of these tribes, and would be an offence against tradition.”

“So what does he suggest?” Drusus asked darkly. He thought the battle had been fought and won last year.

“Many have suggested that we create a new tribe called “Italia”, and put all the Italian enrolments into that one tribe.” Crassus answered.

“Oh, that’s absurd!” exclaimed Drusus. “The Italians will see that as a way of castrating them politically! One tribe, with more members than all the other thirty-four combined!” Drusus gestured his frustration. “They won’t even bother to argue against that; they’ll go straight to war for such an insult!”

Sulla felt his own heart sink at this news. The Italian vote will be essential for his campaign to become Consul; he needed them to see him as Marius’ successor. But what would that mean if they’re only one tribe out of thirty five?

“Wait a minute!” Sulla exclaimed as the solution hit him. “Let us propose a compromise. Leave the existing tribes as they are, for the sake of tradition; but recognise that the Italians also have their traditions. I suggest that each Italian tribe be recognised as a new tribe in its own right!”

“How many tribes would that be?” Crassus asked.

“Fifteen,” Drusus answered.

“So they would still be less than a third of the total number,” Scaurus commented. “That would probably be less of an influence than putting them evenly into the existing tribes; they would have been a majority in most of them! But is it enough to keep the lid on the Boni?”

"More to the point, would it be enough to stop a civil war?" Sulla asked.

Drusus stood abruptly. "I think it's a brilliant idea, Lucius Cornelius! The Italians would probably prefer to keep their own identity, anyway; and it leaves the traditional Roman tribes intact. I don't see how anybody can argue against it, short of rescinding the citizenship law completely."

"They might not be able to argue against it, Marcus Livius," Sulla responded, "but that doesn't mean that the Catulus and his cronies won't fight it tooth and nail."

"Let them fight it; but let them fight it on our terms." Drusus said. "If they don't agree to the change, then the existing law remains in effect and the Italians get spread them across the tribes. Which are they likely to prefer?"

"That's easy," Sulla snorted. "They prefer the single tribe "Italia"!"

"Then that settles it," Drusus summarised. "I'll veto the single-tribe option, and Catulus can veto the multiple-Italian-tribe option; neither of us gets the change he wants, so the existing law stays in effect." Drusus sat again. "I think most will see that your plan as the lesser of two evils."

"Hey! Just a minute," Crassus called for their attention. "Have a closer look at the law, even as it stands now. As one of the Censors who has to do the enrolment, I have a perspective that you as the legislator, Marcus Livius, might not have seen. The provision is that each new Italian citizen will be enrolled *in the tribe most appropriate to him, as determined by the Censors*. The debates in the Comitia have always assumed to mean one of the existing tribes; but it doesn't have to mean that. Perhaps the most appropriate tribe for a Samnite is Samnium, rather than a Roman tribe. Who needs to change the existing law at all?"

Drusus pondered this for a moment. "There'll be arguments about that," he concluded.

Scaurus flopped his hands in a gesture of finality. "It's the job of the Censors, not the Senate, to make up the rolls. What Sextus Julius and Publius Licinius agree to, within the wording of the law, is final. And the wording of the law doesn't require the Italians to be enrolled in existing Roman tribes."

"I'll talk to Sextus Julius," Crassus said. "I'll suggest to him that this is the best way out of this dispute; certainly, the single-tribe idea will mean a war that will destroy us all, and he doesn't want that hung around his neck as his greatest contribution to the history of Rome."

The five of them brooded for a while, each with his own thoughts.

"Yes, Lucius Cornelius has come up with the best way forward." Crassus broke out. "A single Italian tribe would be a nonsense at one extreme. If Catulus doesn't like it, then we could well argue that the most appropriate of the existing Roman tribes would be the rural ones. That would give the Italians control of thirty out of thirty four, and the others would be urban tribes that never support the Boni anyway, so leaving the rural tribes as they are would be in his own interests."

"So if he wants to argue the case in the Senate, I'll tell him that this Sullan Solution is actually the best way to limit Italian influence, rather than promote it. I'm confident that he'll see it that way, too. Or at least, his supporters will."

Crassus was accurate in his judgement of his colleague. In fact, Caesar was downright enthusiastic about it as a way of protecting the smaller rural tribes from Italian domination, a prospect that had been filling him with foreboding.

“A brilliant suggestion, Publius Licinius! How fortunate that Catulus prevented the southern tribes from being enrolled last year; otherwise we would be trapped in a precedent!”

“It is a pity Philippus isn't still with us; he could proclaim it as an omen!” Crassus joked.

Caesar suddenly went sour. “Not even revenge would be enough reason to have him back! Seeing him walk out of the Senate was a special gift from the gods, and one I don't want taken from me!”

“But anyway,” Caesar continued, resuming his more jovial disposition, “Let's not commit finally to that position just yet. It's by far the best solution I've heard yet, but when the registration is complete will be the right time to make that decision.”

“Indeed, Sextus Julius.” Crassus agreed. “But while we await that information there are some more routine matters to deal with. Ahenobarbus and Lucius Licinius were too busy arguing with each other to actually get any work done before Lucius Licinius died, which means that we're the first real Censors since Flaccus and Antonius Orator seven years ago. There's been considerable change since then. We also need to make up some Senate vacancies.”

“Excellent! Let the first step be to remove Philippus, Varius and Caepio, in recognition of their resignations.” Caesar said, only half-joking. “I know they hated the citizenship law with a passion; but I still can't understand why they went into exile for it.” Caesar shrugged. “But they did, and they thumbed their noses at the Senate in the process. I would have moved for their ejection had they come back; no-one who treats the position of Senator with such contempt deserves to hold it.”

“I agree with you there, Sextus Julius. Rome, as well as the Senate, is well rid of them. But there have been many deaths in the ranks as well over the last seven years, so we'll have quite a task in selecting replacements. The sooner we start on updating the rolls, the better.”

Sulla was on the road again by late February, keeping mainly to the coastal areas while waiting for the Spring thaw to creep up into the higher ground. On the last day of Quinctilis the task was finished. Sulla had sent records back to Rome progressively as the registrations for each tribe were completed, and personally accompanied the last batch home. He arrived at his house to find a note from Marius.

*from the Old Warhorse,
to Lucius Cornelius,*

Greetings and best wishes!

I understand that you would be exhausted on your return, so I don't want to trouble you.

However, I would be grateful if you could, in your own time, send a letter to me advising what date and time you would be pleased to set for your "Welcome Home!" celebration, and whom you would have me invite.

My left side is much strengthened since you last saw me, and I am sure it is mainly due to your marvellous invention. I have so much to thank you for! Be assured of my gratitude, and my support in all you might set your hand to.

Sulla put the note down on the table, a bemused smile playing on his face. Marius is so totally unaware of his own selfishness! He is so absorbed in his own plans that he simply assumes that everyone else is glad to fit in with them! His gratitude is genuine, but totally conditional upon compliance with the will of the Great Man in every respect, and would evaporate in an instant at the first whiff of an agenda independent of his own; he would see that as nothing less than a betrayal.

Oh, well. I'll have to play along with him a bit longer, Sulla mused. With luck, Marius will drive himself to another, final stroke; and he, Sulla the Under-appreciated, will inherit all of Marius' influence. Stay patient! Sulla ordered the hypocaust to be fired up, and a toga to be laid out for him.

Two hours later he was at Marius' front door. Jason peered through the slit, and then threw the door open without reference to his master.

"Please, lord Sulla, come inside! I'll inform lord Marius immediately."

Sulla walked into the huge central courtyard, and sat on the raised edge of the pool. It was only a matter of moments before he heard the clanking of Marius approaching on his walking frame.

"Caius, you certainly are looking good!" he exclaimed as he stood, smiling broadly. "And you're moving at a good pace now, with proper paces instead of just bringing your good foot up to your weak one. You're getting stronger."

"Yes, but I think I'm cheating just a little bit," Marius thanked him with a wry grin. "I throw the frame forward while I am on my right foot, and take most of my weight on my hands when on my left foot. But it is progress!"

By the time this exchange had been completed. Marius had reached the pool edge, and sat heavily onto it. Sulla sat again.

"Didn't you get my note, Lucius Cornelius?" Marius asked.

"Yes I did, Caius; but I wanted to see you again, and not just write another letter. Talking with you refreshes me more than sitting at home for a day or two."

"I would be honoured if I could save you the time to visit all your other friends in turn," Marius said. "Please, provide me with your guest list and a date, and allow me to host a proper feast for you."

"Thank you, Caius. I'm honoured. I'll get a list to you in the next few days. Now tell me; how goes it back here in Rome?"

"Sextus Julius Caesar and Publius Licinius have done a good job with the latest census, and have also done a complete audit of the city's finances.

“Caesar was overjoyed when they found evidence of misappropriation by Philippus! They found claims for construction work to improve the Via Latina, all paid out, and not a shovel lifted in its general direction! There were payments authorised by Philippus to replace bridges, and not a hammer lifted to the task!” Marius chuckled deliciously. “So now, with that evidence of corruption by Philippus, and Caepio's fame with the Gold of Tolosa, everyone thinks they know why the Triumvirate sent themselves into exile. All three are suspected of being partners in these crimes, and that they were so frantic about the citizenship law because they knew it would mean that Censors would need to be elected to carry it through. So long as there were no Censors, they could continue undetected.”

“Excellent!” Sulla enthused. “That means that we're in the clear; no-one will look deeper, and discover our blackmail.” Sulla suddenly remembered something. “By the way, whatever happened to our assassins? And to Solon?”

“Oh, the assassins? I gave them each ten thousand denarii and free passage to Africa. They all wanted to go there. I don't know what has happened to them since, and I expect they don't want me to find out.

“Solon got used to the name 'Sosthenes', so he grew a beard. I'm paying him a thousand denarii a year while he studies in Alexandria.” Marius shrugged lopsidedly. “It's little enough to keep in touch with a man whose knowledge of our opponents could be valuable. And after a few years I might bring him back, so his education can be used. If I require him to become my slave, he dare not refuse!”

“Ten thousand denarii is more than those petty criminals deserved,” sniffed Sulla, “but their co-operation was worth every denarius, I suppose.”

“Anyway,” Marius changed tack, “Your last letter seemed rather positive. All's well with the registration?”

“Yes; and you'd be surprised how wealthy some of those Italians are!” Sulla took a deep sigh. “There are many who hold more than enough land to qualify as senators! If that had been known last year, there would have been no way we could have got the citizenship law through the Senate.”

“Don't worry about that, Lucius Cornelius,” Marius chuckled. “Much as Publius Licinius and Sextus Julius are men of honour, I am sure they will find something to disqualify them. That is, if any Italian was silly enough to even try!”

Sulla nodded. “Yes, I think we might need to suggest to Marcus Livius that he tell his Italian clients to stand back for a generation, and let this current crop die out. In thirty years' time, when the sky hasn't fallen and Italian citizenship is accepted as normal, their sons might be slipped in. But not yet.”

“Now that you're here, would you care to stay for dinner?” Marius asked. “I can send invitations to others too, if you want.”

“No thank you, Caius. I think I need an early night tonight.” Sulla stood. “It's been good to see you again, but I think it might be time for me to leave.”

Marius stood too, taking his weight on his strong right leg, but with sufficient control and strength in his left to keep balance without any other support. He offered his right arm to Sulla, smiling. “Until next time!”

Sulla took the arm, and smiled back. “Soon!” Then he released and turned for the front door.

The completed registrations were turned over to Crassus and Sextus Caesar on the Ides of Sextilis, confirmed by augurs as a particularly propitious day. Sulla had made a special point of inviting Lucius Julius Caesar and Drusus to accompany him to the formal presentation. Naturally, the co-Consul LUPUS was conveniently forgotten.

Sextus Caesar was clearly unhappy, but business-like. Crassus was also sombre, and asked Drusus to have lunch with them after the presentation, an invitation which Drusus naturally accepted.

Two hours later Drusus and Crassus were sitting together in the shaded part of Crassus' courtyard when Sextus Caesar also arrived. The two stood to greet Caesar.

"Sextus Julius, my personal thanks for your work this year," Drusus welcomed him.

Caesar took the arm offered by Drusus with a short nod of acknowledgement. "Thank you; but I think we need to talk."

Crassus clapped for food and wine to be brought, and the three men sat.

"There have been some rumblings among the Boni," Caesar cut straight to the issue. "Many are angry about Italian citizenship under any circumstances. More are angry that this contagion was not contained within one tribe called "Italia". Only a few can accept the enrolment of each Italian nation as a Tribe in its own right."

Drusus spread his hands. "Would they be happier if the new citizens were spread across the rural tribes? That was the assumption during the debates about this Law, and surely they accept the preservation of the traditional Roman Tribes as an improvement."

Caesar scowled. "They don't take that as their reference point for comparisons; they take the situation of no Italian citizenship at all as their point of comparison."

"That question has already been decided." Drusus replied.

Caesar looked briefly to his co-Censor, then back to Drusus. "Publius Licinius and I have discussed this at some length, and I see no better solution than individual Italian Tribes. But the Boni are beyond reason; the only thing that will make them happy is to abandon the whole idea." Caesar put his hand up to forestall Drusus' protest. "Which we cannot do. It would not only be illegal, it would also trigger a civil war."

Caesar shifted uneasily on his chair. "There's also the related issue of Senate membership. The Senate is forty seven members short of its full number, due to resignations, disqualifications and deaths since the last census. There are many Italian nobles whose property value qualifies them for Senate membership, to fill at least some of these vacancies. Given the mood of the Boni about the Italian citizenship is so ugly I fear that any Italians being admitted to the Senate, the Boni's own playground, would be the last straw."

"So I was hoping you would take some of the sting out of this situation, Marcus Livius," Caesar was clearly unhappy, having to ask a Tribune of the Plebeians for a favour he would not be able to repay. "Could I have your

undertaking that your wealthier Italian clients will not object if they are excluded from the Senate?"

Drusus leant back in his seat as Caesar concluded his request. He made a show of considering this for some time.

"Excuse my delay, Sextus Julius; I'm thinking of each of the Italians who might be affected, and how I might best placate them," Drusus explained his delay.

"My apologies, Marcus Livius, but I should have given you this list of names Publius Licinius and I have made up of those Italians who would otherwise qualify." Caesar passed over a list of thirty-three names.

"Thank you, Sextus Julius," Drusus accepted the page and scanned it.

Crassus was impressed by this piece of sober theatre; Caesar was not to know that Drusus, Marius, Sulla and Scaurus had already discussed this in advance.

"I would think that over a dozen of these men would not want to be Senators in any case; they would prefer life as usual, except with the added protection that citizenship offers," Drusus opined.

"Most of the others would be willing to obey me if I asked them to decline, out of gratitude, provided it was understood that this would not be a permanent exclusion." Drusus went on.

"Ah! Mutilus might be harder to placate!" Drusus exclaimed. "He's a proud man and a very capable one as well. And he's very much driven by an insistence that an Italian is the equal of any Roman; he'd acquiesce if I insist on it, because he's a man who honours his oath; but if I die and he's thereby released from his oath, this repressed rage could be dangerous."

"And Silo! He's a reasonable man, and would understand and agree with your proposal, purely as a temporary tactic to reduce tension. But he's not the problem. The problem is that the whole of Italy sees him as their greatest man; and if he doesn't take a seat in the Senate, then the whole process will fall into disrepute." Drusus looked up from the paper.

"What can I say to them that will overcome these issues?"

Caesar dropped his hands in near-despair. "You know them better than I! What would they want?"

Drusus leaned back again, apparently deep in thought.

"Sextus Julius, I believe it's essential that at least one Italian be admitted to the Senate, to demonstrate that the principle has been accepted; and that the first Italian should be Silo. Preferably a second with him because we Romans always share power, and no one man should be given the sole right to speak for the Italians. That second would be Mutilus," Drusus nodded. "If that can be done, I'm sure the others will be satisfied to stand aside."

Caesar was stony-faced. "I don't think the Boni will accept that."

"The Boni had no trouble accepting Varius, a half-breed Celt if ever there was one!"

"They accepted Varius because he did what they told him to do," Caesar said quietly. "You seem to forget that these Boni are men who believe in the selective application of their high principles."

Now Drusus lifted and dropped his hands in apparent exasperation. "Spoilt children! Well, I've made my suggestion; tell me what can you put on the table, and we might both see something that neither can see alone."

Crassus cleared his throat quietly. The two men looked towards him.

"I think there's a way which could provide your two Italian Senators, but in a way that not even the Boni could challenge, and which would also get Sextus Julius and me off the hook." Crassus offered.

"Then tell us!" Drusus urged him on.

"Let's report back to the Boni that the omens argued against us appointing Italian Senators this year; but who knows what will be the case next time?" Crassus started. "But let's invite Silo and Mutilus to stand for the office of Praetor, which means automatic membership of the Senate."

"They wouldn't be eligible," Caesar objected. "They haven't served as Military Tribunes."

"Service as a Military Tribune is only one way of qualifying, Sextus Julius," Crassus corrected him gently. "The more time-consuming way is to serve on the staff of a Roman general for ten or more years. They have both qualified in this way."

Caesar sat in silence for a moment. "You are right, Publius Licinius!" Then he looked to Drusus. "Would this work, Marcus Livius?"

Drusus paused. "I'm not happy that you won't appoint them on the basis of property qualifications; but if you declare that this decision was based only on the auguries but not on a point of law, then I can accept that; if other conditions are agreed."

"What other conditions?"

"It's essential that the Italians have confidence that Rome respects them. Election of Silo and Mutilus as Praetors could be seen as a sop, rather than genuine respect for their equality. This will only be sufficient if it's accompanied by at least one Consul in whom the Italians have complete confidence."

Caesar frowned darkly at hearing this. "So now the steel fist is taken from the velvet glove, Marcus Livius? Your price is the Consulship!"

"Not at all, Sextus Julius!" Drusus laughed. "I haven't been a Praetor, so I don't qualify!"

"Then who?" Caesar demanded.

"Since the purpose is to assure the Italians that their voices are being heard, then perhaps we should ask them?" Drusus suggested. "But I'll promise you this, Sextus Julius; I'll insist that they mustn't seek any Consul who doesn't qualify under the strictest possible reading of the Mos Majorum. The Italians must demonstrate that they'll honour the traditional legal structures that are the basis of everything that has made Rome what it is." Drusus gestured palms-up.

"Whomever they chose, it must be someone who is a totally impeccable Roman. Marius qualifies; it's been ten years since his last Consulship so the Mos Majorum allows it. And Sulla has been Urban Praetor, so he qualifies. Or they might prefer someone else entirely, perhaps even Scaurus!" Drusus suggested.

"So let us make up a list of all consulars who qualify for re-election, then all Praetors who haven't been consul yet. Then I'll send this list to the tribal nobles and ask them whom they prefer. I can think of no other way to persuade those Italians who qualify for the Senate that they can trust Rome to respect them, without imposing themselves as senators."

Caesar stared into the distance. "So long it's by a completely legal election, the Boni would have no basis for complaint."

"But here is the point, Sextus Julius; it must not only be legal; it must succeed!" Drusus looked into Caesar's face intently. "It isn't enough for us to agree to it here and now; if we don't achieve that outcome, we can expect Italy to react badly. Unless you're prepared to stare down the Boni and appoint Italian Senators, we'll need to rally our allies and supporters to ensure that our men are elected by the People!"

Caesar nodded slowly. "Yes, that's understood. Either Publius Licinius and I appoint them as rightful Senators, or we work to ensure their election by the People. Anything less will not satisfy Italian expectations, and will mean war."

Drusus and Crassus reported back to Scaurus, Sulla and Marius over the evening meal in Marius' home.

"An excellent outcome, Marcus Livius! You played the part perfectly!" Crassus acclaimed.

"Indeed!" Marius enthused. "Now we need to get a message to Silo and Mutilus to nominate themselves as Praetors, prepare for elections, and ensure the other Italian tribes support them. So long as the northern tribes support Mutilus and the southerners support Silo, they can't fail to be elected. The only vulnerable point is the Consulship."

"I wouldn't worry too much about that, Caius," Sulla re-assured him. "The fifteen Italian tribes, your own Picentines, and Caesar's rock-solid support base in another four rural tribes gives us twenty tribes out of forty-nine already. Another five will not be hard to pick up. We already have the four urban tribes who they still love you, Caius."

"You seem sure that the Italians will prefer me to you, Lucius Cornelius," Marius responded generously. "They haven't seen me for a long time, but you've been to every one of them in the last year, working visibly for their citizenship. You might be surprised."

"Thank you, Caius; but your fame lives on." Sulla bowed his head modestly. Actually I won't be surprised, Caius, Sulla thought to himself. I'll win their nomination beyond any doubt; but I'll certainly act surprised when it happens.

"Formality or not," Sulla went on, "we need to get that question settled for certain before we make any further plans. Marcus Livius, please write to the leaders of the tribes tomorrow, and invite them to Rome so this can be discussed and decided. While they're down here, they can present themselves in the Forum; please ask them to appear totally Roman in dress, in manners, in conversation, in every way. They must behave themselves as paradigms of Roman nobility. The People must see that they're brimming with nobility, dignity and moderation, so no silly lies can be spread."

"Good idea, Lucius Cornelius; you're always ahead of the game," Drusus agreed. "It's Sextilis now, so we still have five months before the elections; but I'd like to have a definite plan before the end of October."

Everyone grunted or nodded agreement.

"So I'll invite them to lodge with me, starting the first day of October, and we can take a few days to plan and to let the Forum get used to Italian nobility," Drusus continued after the show of agreement. "Meanwhile I'll ask our supporters to host a few Italians as well, so this won't be seen as only our work; support for Italians must be seen to have wide support."

Marius had become accustomed to the lingering effects of his stroke. Indeed, as he felt himself improving week-by-week, he had discounted it from his self-image almost entirely. Only his awareness of enemies outside his door, ready to seize on any minor difficulty, prevented him from walking the streets openly. But among his friends he was entirely unselfconscious.

He hadn't reckoned on the effect his remaining symptoms would have on old friends who had not grown accustomed to his difficulties, but remembered him from his prime years; the Old Warhorse, strong as a Samnite bull. What they saw when they arrived in Rome on the first day of October was a husk of a man, unable to leave the sanctuary of his own home. Only Silo, who had seen him the morning after the stroke, took comfort in the degree of his recovery.

Marius unwittingly amplified his incapacity by being as active as possible, happily clanking around in his walking frame which only drew attention to his need for it. Had he sat quietly he would have appeared more dignified and in control, but the sound of the frame echoed through the house to even those who couldn't see his unsteadiness.

"Caius, my friend," Mutilus ventured to ask one day, "Will you be well enough by the time of the election? That frame is ingenious, but it detracts from your dignified bearing."

"I certainly expect to be able to stand and walk slowly without it by then, Caius Papius, which is all I'll need to do by then. I'll use my litter instead of walking, and save my strength for the platform."

Mutilus was inwardly dismayed by this answer. Marius was admitting he didn't even have the strength to walk to the forum unaided. How then could he have the strength to defend Italian interests?

"In fact," Marius went on, "this frame is an excellent aid to my recovery; instead of exercising at set times of the day, this frame prompts me to exercise throughout the day. I'm recovering much more quickly than I would have otherwise."

Mutilus looked at the frame closely. "Where did you get it, Caius?"

"It was made for me by Lucius Cornelius," Marius enthused. "That man is a genius! Once I have my seventh consulship under my belt, he will be a worthy successor."

The close contact between Marius and the Italians was having precisely the effect Sulla had hoped for when he had proposed this conference. The Italians were

seeing Marius as a broken man who endorsed Sulla as his heir in days to come. And the Italians were thinking that perhaps those days had already come. The only qualms they were having were those of personal loyalty. But Sulla knew how to deal with them.

"I have total confidence in Caius," he was telling one group of minor tribesmen around a table on the morning of the first day. "He's gaining strength step-by-step; he has many more years left in him."

"Many more years" was the key to his strategy. He hoped fervently that at least one of these Italians would pick up on it, and say out loud the excuse that Sulla dare not suggest.

It didn't take long. Sulla had no way of knowing for certain who first voiced it, nor when; but on the afternoon of the third day as he chatted with Scaurus, he overheard one noble at a table behind him say it to another,

"Caius has many more years ahead of him. So why should he risk his health and dignitas now, while still visibly crippled? Let Lucius Cornelius be consul this coming year, and let Caius have the next year when he's fully recovered."

Sulla didn't look around nor even alter his facial expression as he continued listening to Scaurus. But inwardly he leapt for joy. His intended message had hit the mark! To all who saw him and heard him, he was still completely supportive of Marius. To all who saw and heard Marius, Marius was completely supportive of Sulla. Sulla's hands were clean! Yet he had won.

The other parts of the plan were on track as well. Most of the Senatorial class rarely mixed with Italian nobility; the closest they usually came were Italian troops in the legions, and these were as fair an indication of Italian nobles as the Head Count were representative of Senators. The contrast created by these educated and urbane nobles compared to their expectations based on peasant troops had impressed them.

Rufus, the former Urban Praetor, was an excellent support in this regard; he urged all of his own supporters to host an Italian noble during the month of October. Together with similar support from the friends of the four prime planners plus those of Caesar, many came to realise that these Italian leaders were not the rustic rabble that had formerly been their mental image of 'Italian'. Several were better-read and better-educated than some of their own colleagues in the Senate.

Throughout October the whole Italian contingent had taken lunch each day at Marius' house, with only a few absentees on any given day. At first there had been no doubt that Marius would be unanimously supported. But within a few days Sulla's personal brilliance became more recognised, as well as his apparent dedication to Marius and Marius' great trust in Sulla.

Once discussions had opened up the possibility that Sulla could act as a care-taker until Marius was fully recovered, the end result was a foregone conclusion. By the end of the month the weight of opinion had irresistibly swung behind Sulla, with Marius to follow in the next year. But no-one had told Marius about this, and the Old Warhorse was so caught up with the prospect of his longed-for seventh consulship that he hadn't noticed the increasing embarrassment of his Italian friends when he spoke with them.

Caius Vidacilius finally approached Marius on the day before the final lunch-time meeting. He took him aside, into one of the many rooms opening onto the central courtyard.

"Caius, my old friend," Vidacilius opened sombrely, "I'm sad that I must prepare you for some bad news."

"What is it my friend? Are you in difficulty?" Marius responded, still full of naivety.

"No, Caius, you are the one who is facing a disappointment," Vidacilius continued. "The general sense of the group is that you are not well enough to face election this coming year. Almost everyone would prefer you to take one more year to recover fully before you fulfil the prophecy."

Marius was stunned. His jaw worked as he struggled to comprehend what he had been told. After a few moments he found his voice. "But I'll ensure your gains are consolidated. Whom else in Rome can you trust more than me?"

Vidacilius was clearly uncomfortable; but he didn't want his old friend to be taken by surprise at the meeting the next day. Better to get it all out in the open, so Marius could prepare himself to act with proper decorum when the blow came. "Well, Caius; whom in Rome would *you* trust, among all those qualified to stand for consul?"

"Well, Lucius Cornelius, of course," Marius blurted out, "but he's pledged to support my candidacy...." his voice trailed off. His brow darkened. "Please, Caius; don't tell me that Lucius Cornelius has betrayed me!"

"Not at all! Not at all!" Vidacilius hastened to soothe Marius. "Lucius Cornelius knows nothing of this! In fact, he constantly expresses his confidence in you, and you yourself have told us how much he's done to hasten your recovery."

Vidacilius took a deep breath. "With a handful of exceptions, everyone supports Lucius Cornelius, but fears that he'll refuse our support if it's at your expense. They fear that they will be forced to support you before you are fully fit. And if you're not acceptable to the Roman tribes because of your infirmity, we will have lost our chance at a sympathetic consul. Even if you're elected the burden could prove too great for you to bear so soon and it could kill you. Then the Senate will appoint a suffect consul like Catulus, and we will have lost not only a sympathetic consul, but our dear friend as well!"

Vidacilius looked down guiltily and cursing himself that his loyalty to both Marius and the Italian Cause had brought him to this. "I beg of you, Caius; step aside this year in favour of Lucius Cornelius and wait until the next election. Then there will be no doubts about your health. In doing this, you will prove yourself to be what we already know you are; the greatest friend Italy ever had, as well as the Greatest Man in Rome."

Marius felt numbed. "You say this is the general opinion?"

"Yes, Caius; but please, ask around. Satisfy yourself before you decide, for I don't want it on my conscience nor on your memory that it was my urging alone that moved you."

Marius nodded slowly. "I mean no insult to you, Caius, but among my many friends only you had the courage to speak to me on this matter. But I must satisfy

myself, as you say, and I must also see if the others will be as candid with me as you have been.” Marius gestured for Vidacilius to precede him out of the room, and then clanked to the doorway himself. He caught Janus’ eye, and gestured him over.

“Janus; please find Quintus Poppaedius and ask him to come to this room to talk with me.” Marius then re-entered the room and sat, thinking and waiting. It took only a short time for Silo to appear framed in the doorway.

“Caius, did you ask for me?”

“Yes, Quintus Poppaedius. Please sit down and talk with me.”

Silo entered the room with a frown, and sat. “What shall we talk about, Caius?”

“Tell me, old friend; will you support me if I stand for consul? And will the others?”

“I’ll support you, Caius, and so will many others. But there are many more who would prefer you to wait another year before you do so, to allow yourself time for a full recovery.”

“These many who would prefer me to wait; whom would they prefer as their candidate?”

“I think the majority; no, I’m sure the majority would prefer Lucius Cornelius, if he could be persuaded.”

“Has anyone tried to persuade Lucius Cornelius?”

“Not yet; or at least, not that I know of. But there’s no doubt that he assumes you will be the candidate of our choice, and would scoff at any suggestion that anyone should be considered ahead of you. He’s the most loyal and enthusiastic supporter you have.”

And what do the other Italians think of that?”

“Frankly Caius, they’re unhappy that he’s so committed to you. Otherwise they would line up behind him as a stand-in until you are recovered; even if it meant passing over you to do so. But they fear that Lucius Cornelius will not even consider such a thing; that he will step aside instead, to ensure you attain your seventh office. And they fear that in the process, they will have insulted you for no reason.” Silo stood abruptly. “They are torn, Caius, between loyalty towards you personally, and loyalty towards what you and your colleagues have done for Italy. But that makes no difference; whatever they might want, only one outcome is possible. Lucius Cornelius will not accept their nomination anyway, and no-one will leave happy.”

“Quintus Poppaedius; tell me why you didn’t speak to me about this, but I had to call for you.”

Silo gestured his despair. “And what would I have said, Caius? That your friends are turning their backs on you? But they’re not; they’re moved by compassion for you as much as anything else. They see Lucius Cornelius as a trustworthy stop-gap measure until you are healthy. Or might I have said ‘Caius, don’t contest this year’s election!’? But I know how much this means to you, and I’m resolved to raise my hand in your favour, no matter when or against whom. So why should I urge you otherwise? If I had come to you, Caius, what could I have

said? I can do nothing but support you, persuade others as well as I can, and be confident that even if I don't persuade them, nor will they be able to persuade Lucius Cornelius to confront you."

"You're formally the client of Marcus Livius, aren't you? How has he instructed you?"

"He has given no instruction, Caius. As far as I can tell, he has not even thought about any possible outcome other than support for you; so why does he need to instruct?"

"If Marcus Livius were to instruct all his Italian clients to vote for me rather than Lucius Cornelius, would they obey?"

"Of course they would, Caius; except that Lucius Cornelius wouldn't stand against you anyway if it came to the vote, regardless of whatever Marcus Livius might instruct. Lucius Cornelius is your supporter, not your opponent! Don't you see that this isn't a contest between you and Lucius Cornelius? It's a tragedy that we're all trapped in! Tomorrow afternoon, when the business is done, you will be hailed unanimously as the candidate favoured by all Italians; nothing can stop that! But at the same time, most will leave here unhappy with that result, for fear that they might have sentenced you to an early death, and Italian citizenship with you."

Marius sat silent for a short time. "Then what should be done, old friend?"

Silo took a deep breath. "Please understand, Caius; I'm only answering your question, not telling you what to do. But if you want to know what I think would be best for Italy, best for Rome, and best for yourself, it would be to declare yourself unavailable for one more year. In twelve months' time it will be a different story. You will be fully recovered and all our misgivings will be past; you will be unstoppable.

"But the choice is yours, Caius, and no-one could begrudge you your right, and I'll support you whatever you decide."

Marius stared at Silo for a brief time. Then he stood and offered his arm. "Thank you, Quintus Poppaedius. You have spoken like a true friend."

Silo stood and took the arm. But what could he say now? He held the grip for a moment, and then left the room. Marius sat again as soon as Silo had cleared the doorway.

Marius absolutely hated this situation. Certainly, the prized seventh consulship was there for the taking but it would be no glorious fulfilment. Instead, it would be bitter, won only by an act of pity by a subordinate. Caius Marius was not a man to feast on scraps tossed to him by another! He would rather starve!

Very well! Let Sulla have the prize that rightfully belonged to the Third Founder of Rome! Let Sulla be the one forced to accept the charity of another! The Great Marius would be the donor, not the petitioner, in this transaction. Then, next year when he would be recovered beyond any dispute, he would take his desserts at their sweetest!

He rose to his feet and crossed to the door again. Janus was inconspicuously watching for him, and came to the gesture.

"Janus, give me time to stand on the block at the end of the courtyard, then call our guests to attention. I have something I wish to say to them." Marius then

started to make his way to the stone plinth, this time with more dignity and composure than he customarily showed. He wanted to portray his gravitas, not the degree of his recovery.

As he took the small step up to the stone, which combined with his own stature was enough to be more than head-height above every other man in the garden, Janus struck a small gong. The mutter of chatter died away.

“My lords, if you could please turn your attention to lord Marius...” Janus gestured towards the end of the garden, where Marius stood with a grave dignity.

The crowd turned and waited.

“My friends,” Marius started. “And I mean that with all my heart! My friends, I would not be a true friend to you were I to impose my own wishes upon you. You all know of the prophecy of my seventh consulship and also how driven I am to achieve it!” Applause started, but Marius cut it off with an almost brutal chop of the hand.

“It's not your applause nor your encouragement I seek, but your patience! I ask you to permit me one more year to recover fully before I fulfil that prophecy. For although I know within myself that I am capable of the office, yet I refuse to be thought of by anyone in Rome as a man anything short of full strength and dignity. I refuse to be remembered by future generations as the Crippled Consul!

“So I ask your leave to take one more year to allow me to recover fully; and that until then, you put your support behind my true friend and trusted colleague, Lucius Cornelius Sulla!” He threw his arm outstretched towards Sulla, his distinctive red mane easily identifiable in the crowd. A cheer of wonder started from the crowd, and died as they saw Marius was not yet finished.

“This man has worked tirelessly for me. He has worked tirelessly for you. He will be not merely a good consul, but a great consul. A consul for Italy as much as for Rome. His administrative skills, you well know; his organisational brilliance, you know; his diligence in ensuring our plans are not thwarted, you well know.

“Hail, Sulla!”

Riotous applause and cheering broke out. There was not an Italian in the garden who didn't feel genuinely relieved; the best possible outcome!

Drusus and Scaurus were also relieved, much as they were also surprised.

And there in the middle, his red head nodding in acknowledgement to one well-wisher after another, was the only man who wasn't happy. Sulla was absolutely fuming, and the colour rushing to his smiling cheeks was not embarrassment but rage. The Bastard! I had him nailed to the ground, and he knew it! Yet he makes it sound as though the consulship was his to grant, and not mine by right! Why does he insist on humiliating me?

Yet every eye saw nothing but the most heartfelt sincerity in his responses as he thanked one well-wisher after another. Then he broke through the crush to approach Marius, his right arm extended and his smile broad and warm.

“I'll get the seat warm for you, Caius; just wait till next year!” He assured the Great Man. Then he stood on the stone plinth next to Marius, and waved for quiet.

"You have all known Caius Marius as "The Great Man". Sulla proclaimed. "But today you have seen that he is indeed greater than anyone could have imagined!" A roar went up from the crowd.

"As soldiers, we have all been prepared to give our lives for Rome; but here is a man who is prepared to put even his most precious dreams aside, for the Common Good!" Another roar erupted. Sulla turned to Marius. "Get well soon, Old Warhorse! Rome will need you in a year's time!" He then stepped backwards off the plinth, applauding Marius who stood there alone.

Marius continued to exercise through gritted teeth. He was determined that he must present as fully fit long before the next elections. If possible, he would be fit to walk the streets unaided by Spring, so everyone would know well beforehand that Caius Marius was back in full strength. He also decided to shed some of the paunch he had developed; he must present himself to the people without fault. And finally, he started to dye the streaks of grey out of his hair and beard. He would do everything possible to look exactly as he did twelve years ago, during his sixth consulship, and dedicated every hour of the day to that end.

By the end of November he was walking without the frame; or at least, shuffling along the portico of his house, within reach of the wall in case of over-balancing. This forced his left leg to carry his full weight, if only for a brief moment. It was exhausting work. Even as winter crept down from the north, he was often in a lather of sweat.

"My lord, please be gentler with yourself," Janus urged him. "This is a harsher regimen you are setting yourself than a forced march under full pack! Let your efforts increase in line with your strength, and not run too far ahead!"

"The harder I work, the faster I will improve, Janus." Marius responded, forcing himself to even greater effort to prove his point.

"As you will, my lord; but I fear for you."

"You would do better to fear for yourself!" Marius snapped back at him. "You're my slave, not my mother teaching a toddler how to walk!" Marius leant against the wall, cradling his head in his right hand.

"Now you've made me angry, and caused a head-ache! Begone, and do not lecture me again!"

Janus wisely retreated, bowing in apology as he stepped backwards.

Chapter 3 – 665 Ab Urbe Condita (89 B.C.)

Caesar was as good as his word, as usual. Sulla was elected senior consul, with Lucius Porcius Cato as his colleague. Silo was elected as the first Praetor, and Mutilus was elected in second place; but in a display of political wisdom they invited the third-placed man, Quintus Caecilius Metellus Pius, a Roman of impeccable conservative credentials to the Boni, to be Praetor Urbanus. Silo took the position of Praetor Peregrinus, and Mutilus asked for Sicily to be allocated to him.

Drusus didn't stand for Tribune again, but retired from public life hoping that his absence would remove a focus for Boni attacks. They were forever alleging that he intended to use his huge Italian clientele to seize dominance.

Crassus and Sextus Caesar continued as Censors, their term being a five-year lustrum.

The Boni, who had been sending out shrill warnings that ‘Drusus and his Italians will take over everything we hold sacred!’ were now being mocked for their panic. Two Praetors out of a college of six were the only Italians to even stand for election to any offices, and became the only two entitled to sit in the Senate; and even these rights would rarely be exercised, since each had chosen an imperium outside the city and would therefore not be able to attend regularly. It was obvious that the Italians had no interest in taking over the Republic. They wanted only the protection of citizenship as they went about their business, and token recognition.

The five friends gathered in Marius' house a month after the inauguration.

“How goes the consulship, Lucius Cornelius?” Drusus asked in humour.

I intend to make it impeccable, Marcus Livius,” Sulla replied. “I'm deliberately including Cato in every decision I make, asking for his opinion, encouraging him in every way to think of us as true equals, rather than as Senior and Junior. In things that matter little, I defer to his opinion; and in this way I oblige him to defer to me, simply as a matter of courtesy, in those things that really matter.” Sulla gestured palms-up. “He's not a fool; but his weakness is in the formal courtesies, and by these I manipulate him even while he thinks I'm deferring to him.”

“You've always been a good manipulator, Lucius Cornelius,” Marius agreed, but with little humour. The other three looked at him uncertainly. Was that a joke? Or was there a bitter edge to his comment?

“Oh, I'm sorry, Lucius Cornelius,” Marius apologised for his bad humour. “I've had a couple of headaches lately, and they seem to make me a bit grouchy. But don't worry; by summer I'll be fitter than I have been for years and the fine weather will lift my spirits. Anyway, how are you getting on with our new Urban Praetor? Didn't he serve under you in the war against Jugurtha?” Marius shifted the subject.

“Yes, and he was very good, too. We got on well together.” Sulla agreed. “But he seems a bit more distant, more formal towards me now.”

“That'd be because he is one of the Boni at heart.” Scaurus waved a hand. “He thinks Italians eat Roman babies, and therefore he doesn't trust anyone who supports their citizenship.”

“Yes, that was my conclusion too,” Sulla nodded. “I'll just keep up the charm offensive, and do everything by the letter of the Mos Majorum. He'll soon enough know what to expect from me.” Then, changing the subject again, “Publius Licinius, how goes your work with Caesar?”

“Turning up something interesting all the time,” Crassus smiled. “You wouldn't believe how Philippus sucked on the Treasury's teat! And not just for himself, either!” Crassus chuckled. “Caesar, his co-consul, relied on the Populares, but by inclination he was a conservative; he supported the citizenship law reluctantly, because the only alternative was a war. But he's coming to resent the knuckle-heads in the Boni more and more as he sees the corruption they have engaged in! Preaching about the nobility and virtue of the old Roman Way, while all the time stealing its gold! He probably suspected Philippus was corrupt. No wonder he was glad to see the back of him.”

“Have you got any examples for us?” Sulla leant forward, like a dog waiting for a treat.

“All in good time, Lucius Cornelius,” Crassus soothed him. “Some stories are much better told in December, just before the elections. But some will come out month-by-month, just to keep the bastards on the back foot, and to let the worst of them know that if they open their mouths too wide we will have something to jam down their throats.”

Sulla rocked in his chair and clapped his hands. “Oh, what a goldmine! Isn't it wonderful that you were elected for a full five-year lustrum!” He laughed lightly. “We have those bastards absolutely paralysed!”

Marius attended his first Senate meeting for eighteen months in early March. He deliberately waited until the augurs had declared the omens were auspicious and the meeting had been called to order, and walked slowly and majestically towards his seat in the front row.

Sulla, who had the fasces that month, stood and applauded. Scaurus, as Head of the Senate, and Caesar and Crassus as the current Censors, did likewise. Cato hesitated for a moment, and then followed suit. Soon everyone, even those who hated Marius, were on their feet to show respect for the Old Warhorse.

Marius did not acknowledge the applause, but simply walked with dignity to his accustomed place, and sat. The other senators also sat, except for Sulla. He remained standing until all others had taken their seats.

“Caius Marius; welcome back! It is good that Rome will once again have the benefit of your services.” Then Sulla sat abruptly and called for the first item of business.

Cratippus responded to the knock on the front door. He looked through the peephole and saw Felix, Master of House for Scaurus. The man had been weeping. Cratippus swung the heavy door open to admit Felix and a small retinue.

“Is there a problem, Felix?”

"There's a big problem, Cratippus; lord Scaurus is dead." Cratippus felt like he had been slapped. He hugged Felix without realising what he was doing.

"I'll call lord Drusus," He responded eventually, and turned towards Drusus' office. A knock on the opened door, a few muttered words, and then the sound of a chair scraping back.

Drusus appeared in the doorway, mouth agape. He hurried over to Felix. "How and when?"

"He didn't wake this morning, lord, and his flesh was cold. It would seem he died shortly after going to sleep the previous evening."

Drusus took a deep breath. "Who else knows?"

"I've been to lord Sulla's house first, because he is consul. After you, I will go to tell lord Marius and then lord Cato. No-one else outside the household knows yet."

"What did lord Sulla say?" Drusus asked.

"He wasn't in at the time, so I left a sealed note with Jason."

"Please wait a moment. I'll go to Marius' house with you." Drusus turned to go to his room. "Cratippus, please assemble my retinue."

A few moments later Drusus re-appeared togate and his retinue were ready. The front door swung open.

Janus seemed reluctant to admit Drusus and Felix. Apologetically he asked if he could take a message for Marius.

"Please, Jason; this is important, and we need to see lord Marius if at all possible. He will not thank you if he is not informed immediately."

The door swung open, and Janus ushered Drusus to a shaded table and clapped his hands for refreshments to be served. He bowed politely to Drusus before turning towards the sleeping quarters. A plate of grapes and sliced cucumber arrived almost immediately. Drusus took a grape and bit down on it. It was luscious and sweet.

Marius' voice could be heard, raised slightly in anger. Then Marius appeared in a gown, as if he had only now been awakened. He plodded heavily and slowly to the table, glaring at Drusus with red eyes.

"Yet another of these screaming headaches, Marcus Livius," he explained. "Sometimes they drive me to distraction."

He dropped into the second chair at the table, picked out a grape, popped it into his mouth and chewed on it. Immediately his face puckered and he spat the grape out. "Janus, you incompetent little prick! Why are you putting out sour grapes?"

Marius shifted on his seat as if uncomfortable. "My apologies, Marcus Livius; I'm embarrassed that you were presented with such poor food!"

Janus arrived with another bowl of grapes, and took the first plate away. Marius back-handed him as he went.

"Well, what's so important, old friend?" Marius asked wearily.

Drusus gestured to catch Felix' attention, and beckoned him over.

"Lord Marius, it's my sad duty to tell you that lord Scaurus died last night." Felix announced flatly.

Marius stared at Felix for a moment, disbelieving. "Scaurus is dead?"

"Yes, lord."

Marius banged the table with his right fist, setting the bowl shaking. "Blast!"
Marius bristled. "Why couldn't the Old Fox hang on for just one more year?"

Drusus was shocked at the callousness of this response. He didn't know how to respond. Embarrassed, he stood. "I'm sorry to have caught you at such a bad time, Caius. Please let me and Lucius Cornelius know when this headache has passed. We will need to make plans."

"Thank you for coming, Marcus Livius," Marius said, but not convincingly. "I think I need to rest right now." Marius struggled to his feet, and turned back to the sleeping quarters, and shuffled away. Drusus watched him turn the corner.

"Janus; I would not ordinarily pry into such matter, but you know that I have your master's interests at heart," Drusus started apologetically. "Those grapes were excellent. Do these headaches trouble him often? And do they usually have so strange an effect on him?"

Janus looked down, unwilling to meet Drusus' gaze. "This is the fourth such headache he has had since the start of the year. While they last, he often complains about bad smells or tastes, and often handles his slaves more roughly than is his custom. After a day or two the headache passes, but he doesn't seem to fully recover his good humour." Janus shuffled uneasily. "It's like another stroke; but instead of crippling his body, it seems to damage his senses and his emotions instead. Each time, it leaves him worse in some way."

Janus swallowed, and his eyes brimmed. "You know how good master he has been to me, and I love him. When he strikes me, something he never used to do, the blow doesn't hurt me as much as the fact that he threw it; it's like watching him die slowly."

"Thank you, Janus. You'll not suffer for telling me this, I promise you."

The Lucani, one of the smaller Italian tribes and remote from Rome, sent Marcus Lamponius to meet with Drusus. He arrived at the end of a hot day late in Sextilis.

"Welcome, Marcus!" Drusus beamed a smile at him as he entered the forecourt at Cratippus' summons. "What can I do for my old friend? A bath to start with, perhaps?"

"That would be excellent, Marcus Livius," the Italian agreed, taking Drusus' arm. "May I impose upon you as a guest tonight?"

"No, you may not impose upon me, Marcus; but if you would care to honour me by staying as long as you are pleased to, I'd be most pleased."

The two men smiled at each other.

"This way to my bath, Marcus," Drusus gestured the way. "Cratippus, please provide for some refreshments when we have bathed. See to his horse and retinue, and find accommodation for all." The two nobles dawdled towards the bath as Cratippus busied the household staff into action. Drusus asked polite questions about Lamponius' family and their mutual friends on the way.

Lamponius sighed with delight as he stepped into the frigidarium pool. "I tell you, Marcus Livius; this is a delight!" He continued down the steps to the floor of the pool, and then submerged himself for a moment, rising to sweep his hair back from his face. Small talk continued for a few minutes, and then Lamponius, feeling refreshed, thanked his host.

"That was marvellous, Marcus Livius, and I have no need to move to the tepidarium. Let's relax in your garden, if we may." Lamponius' body slave was waiting by the pool with a fresh, crisp linen towel and a clean loincloth and tunic. Drusus indicated to his own man to match his fresh attire to that of his guest. The two men dressed and took seats at a small table set in the shade of the portico, fresh fruit and watered wine laid out for them.

"Marcus Livius, I have a favour to ask of you, please." Lamponius opened as he picked out a few grapes.

"Of course, my friend; how can I be of some service?"

"You might have noticed that we Lucani tend not to be represented at the Assemblies," Lamponius answered. "This is not necessarily a bad thing; most of the matters voted on don't affect us, and our absence gives the lie to the Boni cries that Italians are trying to take over the Republic. But there will be times when one more tribe's vote could be important. Worse still, it leaves open the opportunity for one of our enemies to bribe a few stray Lucanians to turn up and vote against the tribe's interests.

"So our nobles have decided to rent an entire insula here in Rome, and send a dozen trusted men to delegate for our tribe. They'll be good tradesmen who can work when there's no public business to transact, but they will also be able to walk away from their shops when an Assembly is happening. We Lucani nobles will subsidise this arrangement."

"That sounds a very good idea, Marcus," Drusus agreed. "How can I be of assistance in it?"

"We ask for your help in two ways," Lamponius responded. "First, we ask that you assist us in locating a suitable building in a respectable part of the city; one that will convey to all that we Italians are respectable people, and not to be lumped in with your urban Head Count. If a suitable insula can't be rented, then we'll buy one. Of course we'll pay all expenses, but we look to your better knowledge of the city and personal contacts to obtain possession.

"Secondly, we ask that you treat with these men as though they are your direct clients, and render them any occasional assistance they might need." Lamponius sat back in his chair. "This will include any instructions as to how they should vote on any particular measure."

"Of course I'll do as you ask, Marcus." Drusus replied. "In fact, to ensure your men are not evicted by a landlord hostile to them for political reasons, I'll buy a house for them myself, if you wish."

"If you think that wise, Marcus Livius," Lamponius responded, "But we Lucani think that might make too close a connection between you and our men. But your point about possible eviction is a good one; perhaps we should buy outright, rather than rent."

“As you decide, Marcus.” Drusus agreed. “Shall we start tomorrow?”

Drusus and Lamponius were agreed that they should be fussy. Settling for anything less than their stated aims would not be an option. It took eight days before they found a large complex of shops with living quarters over, situated a short walk from the Forum. The inhabitants of the surrounding area were comfortable small merchants and artisans, typically of the Third and Fourth Classes. Thus the Lucani would present themselves as respectable and prosperous, but without presuming to count themselves equal to Equestrian Class.

The property was bought but evicting the present occupants would have created resentment that the Lucani didn't want. Each tenant was approached individually, and offered a cash incentive to move out voluntarily within three months. Seven of them took the money and were given formal notice. Then a second round of offers, considerably more generous, was made to the remaining tenants, with a warning that this offer was only available to the first five to accept; but if there were not five acceptances, the offer would be withdrawn and five would be chosen by lot to be evicted. As it happened, Lamponius paid out all six acceptors who were waiting for him when he called around the next day. Formal notice of eviction was given, complete with the incentive payment up front. Let no-one say that Italians are not fair in all their dealings!

The other Italian tribes heard of this arrangement, and copied it with variations. The Marsi called their own tribal council together, and openly elected which dozen men would be allocated to this housing. This was accompanied by a Tribal law that forbade any other person from voting contrary to those delegates, under pain of confiscation and exile. The same law also bound these representatives that if the Tribal Council meet and decided any issue, they must vote in accordance with the Council decision; but in the absence of a Tribal Council decision, they may decide the issue among themselves, but must all vote as a block. They were also required to report back to each Tribal Council meeting, explaining how they voted on each question, and why.

But other matters were creating more interest. Tensions had been building for over a year between Nicomedes of Bithynia, a Roman client-state, and Mithridates of Pontus. The last Senate had sent a delegation under Aquilius and Maltinus to adjudicate between them.

Sulla scanned the message a second time, to make sure it said exactly what he had read the first time. It did. He put the note down and called for his lictors.

“You,” he pointed to one of his house slaves at random, “Go to lord Flaccus and tell him I want the Senate convened tomorrow.” Lucius Valerius Flaccus had become Head of the Senate upon the death of Scaurus. Then he called to his Head of House. “I'm going to visit lord Cato. We have important decisions to make. Send a runner now to give him warning.”

Cato realised that this was a formal matter of state that brought Sulla to his house; the formal toga and lictors rather than his own personal retinue were evidence enough. “Welcome, Lucius Cornelius; what matter brings you here today?”

“Urgent business, Lucius Porcius, or I wouldn't have have presumed upon your availability.” Sulla replied. “I've just received this message from Ephesus.” He handed the paper to Cato, but rather than make his colleague decipher it for himself he summarised it. “Mithridates invaded Cappadocia in late Quintilis; that was a month ago. Only the gods know how much further he's pressed in the meantime, or will before we can act. It might be that even as we speak he's strutting the streets of Ephesus, with all Asia under his heel.”

Cato gaped for a moment. “But what about Aquilius? He was supposed to take control!”

“It seems his idea of 'taking control' is to threaten and bluster and insult until he provokes a reaction!” Sulla spat. “We must respond immediately, before the East is completely lost. I propose to collect all the legions I can find and set sail for Rhodes; from there I'll be able to get better information and plan a campaign.”

“I agree, Lucius Cornelius. It's better that you lead this force than I; you're a much better Military Man.” Cato agreed. “I'd be better deployed here in Rome, to organise re-inforcements and handle the politics. You have my full support and agreement in whatever you decide.”

“I've already called for a Senate meeting tomorrow, Lucius Porcius. I'd be most grateful if you could repeat that support from the floor, lest any mischief-makers try to pretend that we're not agreed on this point.” Sulla smiled grimly. “Perhaps I'm being silly, but I don't want to give any chance to a new Philippus in our ranks.”

“Don't worry, Lucius Cornelius; I'll expel anyone who behaves like that in my Senate!”

“Thank you, my colleague and friend. Now I'll send riders to all the barracks and training grounds; I want everyone assembled and on their way as soon as possible; the sailing season has only a few of months left in it.”

It was Cato's month with the fasces. The augurs confirmed to him that it was an auspicious day to conduct their business, and he called the Senate to order. Having been called at short notice, and with no information concerning the purpose, the meeting was sparsely attended.

“Conscript Fathers, we have received news from Asia. Lucius Cornelius will read the message for you.”

Sulla stood, and walked solemnly to the focus of the floor. He unfolded the note, and started reading in the clear, strong and measured tones he first learnt as a boy in the theatre.

*Manlius Maltinus, your legate to Bithynia,
To Lucius Cornelius Sulla, and Lucius Porcius Cato,
Consuls of Rome,
And to the Senate and People of Rome*

Greetings!

The situation here has taken a serious turn for the worse, and in my opinion is now irredeemable.

Our mission here was to bring some semblance of peace between Bithynia and Pontus, both kingdoms having “Friend and Ally” status. These two kingdoms have been uneasy with each other lately, with Nicomedes behaving quite provocatively.

He claimed that he is acting pre-emptively, because of the significant build-up in the Pontic army and the active wooing of allies by Mithridates. These are, he said, surely preparations for something much grander than simple defence of his own realm.

Mithridates, on the other hand, claimed innocence of any wrongdoing, and in fact declared his forbearance under such intense provocation. He asserted that his increased armed forces and network of friendships is aimed at convincing Nicomedes to desist, without the need to actually raise a sword to force him to this point. Key to this, he said, was a favourable judgement from Aquilius that Nicomedes should return the looted treasure from his unprovoked attacks, and pay compensation.

Aquilius returned a verdict that Mithridates found disappointing. Although saying that he wished no more harm be done to Pontus, Aquilius stopped short of forbidding it. What he did forbid was that any harm be done to Bithynia. You will understand that Mithridates saw this not only as a failure to keep the peace which Rome promised to him; it was a carefully-measured insult as well. Mithridates responded with actions, not more protests. He moved into Cappadocia like lightning, and as I write this letter he is still marching westwards.

It is possible that Aquilius will write to you separately; in which case I expect he will have a slightly different perspective as he tells the story. But this is my honest account of the matter as I have seen events unfold.

Whatever Aquilius writes, if anything at all, it is imperative that Roman authority be re-established; and preferably this will include the recall and trial of Aquilius. Rome can ill afford such an arsonist operating in its name.

Farewell!

The Senate was hushed. Sulla allowed a dramatic pause, to allow the import of this message to sink in.

“Conscript Fathers, your consuls have discussed this matter and are fully agreed,” Sulla continued after the pause. “We consider it absolutely essential that we muster whatever force we can, and send it to Rhodes before the winter makes transport too hazardous. We also agree that the longer we wait, the more ground will be lost, and the greater the risk of defections by our remaining friends and allies.

“I, Lucius Cornelius Sulla, seek your approval and support in leading this expeditionary force, and full authority to conduct the war against Mithridates.”

Catulus stood.

“Quintus Lutatius; you have the floor.” Cato invited him to speak.

“I must say, Conscript Fathers, that this is rather threadbare evidence on which to set out to war! A single page from the second-in-command of a legation, who goes behind his commander's back and calls for his trial!” Catulus shook his head slowly. “No, this is not grounds for war; it is grounds for the recall and trial of an insubordinate legate!” Catulus sat.

Flaccus stood.

“Lucius Valerius, please speak.” Cato recognised him.

“I have some clients who carry out trade in Asia.” Flaccus started sombrely. He was known to be a gripping public speaker when roused, but he seemed almost a shadow of himself as he spoke. “I received a letter from one of them today. I had barely the time to read it before coming to this meeting.” He paused, and shifted his weight as if uncomfortable.

“He tells me that I should sell anything I own in Asia immediately; word is that Mithridates is coming!” Flaccus sat, and Sulla realised that sometimes a bare sentence is more effective than the most balanced oratory. Flaccus had achieved his impact precisely by not being oratorical.

“That would seem to be an independent confirmation, Quintus Lutatius.” Cato summarised. “Are there any other speakers?”

Caius Marius stood. To Sulla's eyes, he had recovered remarkably well. He no longer used the walking frame; in fact he hadn't used it since Sulla's election, as if to make the point that the Italians had been wrong to hold over his election for one more year. He had attended every Senate meeting since that Spring, as if to demonstrate his fitness.

“You have the floor, Caius Marius.”

“Conscript Fathers,” Marius spoke out, “I offer myself to command the war against Mithridates.”

A murmur went through the Senate Chamber.

“I have met this man, and he fears me,” Marius continued after the murmuring had subsided. “I can also claim without too much risk of contradiction that my reputation as a military leader is greater than that of any other Roman still living; in the eyes of the whole world, no less than in the eyes of the men who will be trusting their lives to my leadership. In short, if I lead this war, my men will follow me, regardless of the odds, because they have faith in me. And in the same way, the enemies' men, even though they might enjoy superiority in numbers, will melt away before they even meet me in battle. Because they will approach the battle in dread of my reputation.” Marius sat.

“Caius Marius; no-one in this chamber would question your reputation.” Cato responded. “However, the Law and the Mos Majorum demand that the Consuls must be the commanders of Rome's armies. What you suggest is completely illegal.”

Marius stood again.

“You wish to continue, Caius?” Cato asked.

“Then I suggest that we don't act with undue haste.” Marius replied. “What use is it, that we put perhaps two legions onto Rhodes, if the whole coastline is hostile? That way, we risk their loss to an invasion force, while winter cuts them

off from any reinforcement. Such a loss would only embolden Mithridates, throw our allies into despair, and convince the waverers to turn against us.”

Sulla stood.

“Yes, Lucius Cornelius?” Cato asked.

“There is some wisdom in what Caius Marius says,” Sulla conceded. “But I have had a day to think this through, a luxury which Caius Marius has not been granted.

“I won’t sail with less than three legions. And with three legions, I will be able to hold Rhodes for six months or more, unquestionably.” He smiled generously. “After all, I learnt my soldiering from the best; none other than Caius Marius himself!” Then he resumed a more settled countenance. “But I’ll certainly have more than three legions; I’m confident that at least twelve can be raised, equipped and transported, by relying on veterans in our own Head Count and other veterans in the Italian Tribes.

“The very fact of my legions being there will serve three purposes. First, it will distract Mithridates from any further ventures, for fear that I can fall on his lines of communication from the sea. Second, it will re-assure our friends and allies to stand firm with us. They will know they have not been abandoned, just as it will discourage the waverers from turning against us. And third, it will give us immediate intelligence on the spot, instead of waiting for the information to make its way to us here in Rome.”

Metellus stood.

“Quintus Caecilius, please speak” Cato acknowledged the Urban Praetor.

“When Lucius Cornelius was elected Consul, I didn’t count myself among his supporters. Because of his advocacy of the Italian citizenship I doubted that he would honour the Mos Majorum. However, I must confess that my judgement has been proven wrong. He has been scrupulous to follow the Mos Majorum in all things. It is only right that either he or Lucius Porcius lead the army. That is the Roman way!

“So if our current consuls are agreed to send an expeditionary force, then so let it be done! If, on the other hand, they agree to wait until the winter passes, then that also is their prerogative; in which case the consuls for the next year should lead! But right now, they are the commanders. They should decide and the rest of us should support them, as true Romans always will.”

Cato looked around as Metellus sat. There seemed to be no more who wished to speak. “If there are no more speakers, I will put the question; That Lucius Cornelius Sulla be given full authority to conduct the war against Mithridates.

“All those in favour?” Cato asked. A strong chorus of approval rose.

“Against?” not even Marius spoke against.

“I think it’s carried. Is there a call for a division? There being no call for a division, I declare it carried.”

The Senate meeting broke up. Immediately the decision was announced Sulla rose from his consular chair and stepped down onto the main floor, making his way to Marius.

“Caius; your help would be invaluable.” Sulla said loudly enough for all surrounding him to hear. “Please join my staff and come to Rhodes with me.”

Marius felt an explosion of indignation as he heard this. Caius Marius, the greatest Military Man in Rome, to serve as a mere staff member to one of his own pupils! But he swallowed his anger for the moment.

“Thank you, Lucius Cornelius. But if I do that, I won't be here for the next election. I must wait until the new year, gain my seventh consulship, and then I'll lead the main army. I'll go via Rhodes and absorb your advance force into my own.”

Now Sulla felt a flush of indignation. “That might not be a wise move, Caius. It's not good military practice to change commanders mid-way through a campaign.”

Marius smiled frostily in return. “We'll just have to wait and see what Fortuna puts in front of us, I suppose.”

Marius went home and started writing letters. Within ten days he had in hand letters from all the Italian tribes, promising that they would not provide any legions for the war against Mithridates unless Caius Marius had command of them. The only reservation was that they would comply with any request that Drusus, their Patron, might make.

Marius took these letters with him to visit Drusus.

“Greetings, Caius! I see you're not using your litter any longer! You must be fully recovered by now!” Drusus welcomed him into his garden, now filling with autumn colours of October.

“Thank you Marcus Livius; and yes, I'm now fit for full public duty.”

“That's good!” Drusus continued. “So you'll be standing for Consul this year, as planned.”

“Without a doubt,” Marius confirmed. “Which brings me to the purpose of this visit.” He laid the letters out on the table before Drusus.

“I must be consul next year, and lead the war against Mithridates. These are letters from all the tribes of Italy; they'll provide legions, but only if I command. Their only reservation is that, as your clients, they will obey you if you command otherwise.”

Drusus shuffled through the letters, but didn't read any. “Well, why would I command otherwise?”

“It might be that Sulla will ask you to,” Marius answered. Drusus was struck by the use of the impersonal “Sulla” rather than the more familiar “Lucius Cornelius”, but did not comment. “If he does, Marcus Livius, then I ask that you command nothing. This is a matter between me and him, and there's no need for you to become involved.”

Drusus stared at Marius for a short time. “This saddens me enormously, Caius. For more than twenty years you two have been an excellent team, and only a year ago you nominated him yourself to take the consulship. What has gone amiss since then? I urge you two to be reconciled, for both your sakes!”

“The consulship has gone to his head. He has betrayed me!” Marius spat out angrily.

“How has he betrayed you, Caius? By mobilising rapidly against Rome's enemies? By leading the army, as the Mos Majorum requires of him? Had he *not* done these things, then perhaps he might be rightly charged with negligence! Or has he betrayed you by asking you to be his partner in this effort?” Drusus shook his head as if in bafflement. “When I heard him say that in the Senate, my immediate thought was that he was being generous to you. Because whenever he suffers a setback Rome will blame Sulla; but whenever there is a victory, Rome will praise Marius. What better could he do to ensure your election next year, and your glory in the eyes of all future generations? Listen to me, Caius! Sulla has betrayed neither Rome nor you; but rather he's being faithful to both! It's your own impatience which is betraying you!”

“So you turn against me as well, Drusus!” Marius pounded the table in rage as he used the insultingly impersonal form of address. “Don't ever speak to me again unless it's to apologise!” He turned away, calling for his retinue as he stormed towards the door.

Drusus stood still in shock as Marius took his rude leave at the front door. Eventually he sat as if in a daze, and called for Cratippus.

“Send a note to the house of lord Sulla,” he commanded. “Ask lord Sulla to let me know when he might be able to meet with me privately.”

Marius hadn't gone back to his house after leaving Drusus. He headed directly for the house of Publius Sulpicius Rufus, a Tribune of the Plebeians.

Sulpicius was surprised to see the Great Man come calling, and hastily ordered refreshments as he led Marius into his courtyard.

“Caius, I am honoured that you call on me!” Sulpicius gushed. “What can I do for you?”

“You know that Sulla has been given the command in the war against Mithridates?”

“Of course. All Rome knows that.” Sulpicius replied.

“Sulla was an excellent second-in-command to me, I will grant him that. But he has never been overall commander. And Mithridates has over a hundred thousand men. Twenty legions! And he is fighting on territory he knows, from established positions. Sulla will be cut to ribbons!”

“If that's your assessment, I'll have to agree with it. You're the Military Man, and you would know.” Sulpicius deferred.

“This must not be allowed to happen!” Marius emphasised. “The Italians have promised legions on the condition that I command them, but they don't want to put their lives at the mercy of an untried general like Sulla.

“With them I can re-take not only Asia, but the whole east! I could even subdue Pontus!” Marius enthused. “So you tell me, Publius, whether the Equites and merchants and publicani tax-farmers and investors want the East to be lost, or re-gained. Under Sulla they will be ruined! But if I'm given control they'll come out of this war with far more wealth than when they went in.”

“There's no doubt, Caius, that everyone in Rome would be more comfortable with your hand in control.” Sulpicius agreed. “Only the old women in the Senate say differently.”

Marius leant forward on his chair. "It's time the Senate realised that they cannot ignore the People! I think everyone would be better served if the People demanded that I be given command. And if the Senate doesn't yield on this point, then perhaps they need to be convinced in a somewhat more dramatic fashion."

Sulpicius nodded, as though thinking to himself. "Indeed you're right, Caius; as usual. But I'm not sure that I personally can do anything about it. You see, I'm heavily in debt. So much in debt that I would be destroyed if knowledge of this came out. And if I try to act against the wishes of the Boni, then it surely would come out."

"In debt to whom, Publius?"

"Quintus Lutatius Catulus."

"Damn! You had to pick him, didn't you!" Marius exclaimed. "Oh, well; how much?"

"Sixteen thousand *sestertium milia*, Caius."

Caius nodded. "For the sake of Rome, I'm prepared to send that cash to you tomorrow. Will you get an Assembly to demand my appointment, and then do whatever needs to be done to convince the Senate to agree?" Marius paused for a moment, for emphasis. "Even if it takes a bit of rough handling?"

"I can assure you that you'll be in command within the week," Sulpicius promised.

Cratippus returned from Sulla's house looking very solemn.

"Lord Sulla has already left for Tarentum, to join the legions bound for Rhodes," he reported to Drusus. "He left three days ago, in haste, after a letter from the training grounds in Campania reached him. Jason is under orders to tell no-one, but he relented when I agreed that you would honour confidentiality."

"Blast!" Drusus vented his disappointment. "Very well; please get paper and a quill. I need to get a message to him. And ask for four fast riders to prepare their horses."

It was more than three hours before the message was on its way to Tarentum. At first Drusus had written plainly, but then risk of interception occurred to him and he feared what would happen if so sensitive a letter fell into the hands of highwaymen. They would know immediately that the Boni would pay handsomely for it. Yet he was by nature a straightforward man. He had none of the skills in allusive or parabolic expression that such a task demanded. But eventually he and Cratippus managed a form of words that satisfied him.

Sulpicius called his Assembly for two days later. It was poorly attended, there being no notice given of the subject to be discussed; but by evening all Rome was abuzz with the news. Sulpicius was calling for the People to veto the appointment of Sulla, and demand his replacement by Marius!

The senators were bemused by this. The *Mos Majorum* was clear. The armies of Rome were always under the control of the two Consuls and both Consuls had agreed to Sulla taking full authority. Not even the Senate could over-rule that. For any military appointments other than consular, the Senate had always had authority without reference to the Popular Assembly. Thus the Sulpician proposal

was unconstitutional on two levels; there was no way it could be enforced, regardless of the Assembly vote.

But to the Senate's dismay, the second day of Contio was packed solid. The Equites, with huge investments in Asia and fearing great loss of income, wanted the best Military Man available on the job. The classes below them, still remembering how the Great Man had saved Rome against the Germans, were no less vocal. On the evening of the second day, all of the Italian delegates gathered in Drusus' house.

"How would you have us vote in this matter, Marcus Livius?" The question had been put by Gnaeus Pollo of the Marsi, who had been recognised as an informal head of the Italian faction. "We're aware that Sulpicius' proposal is contrary to tradition, and that any disregard for tradition could harm you in the Senate. But we're also aware of the confidence everyone outside the Senate has in Caius Marius, both Roman and Italian. We don't want to make enemies in this matter."

Drusus sighed deeply. "I can't ask you to support Caius. I can't act contrary to the law. And it would be futile, in any case; the Senate would never agree. You would do nothing except convince the Boni that Italians are a threat to everything they hold dear.

"But nor can I ask you to support Lucius Cornelius in this matter. Sulpicius has this vote won already, no matter which way your men vote. I can't ask you to risk your lives in that pit against the thousands of Romans who have been whipped into a frenzy, all for a pointless gesture.

"I suggest you stay at home tomorrow, or even go back to your tribal lands to explain the situation to your nobles." Drusus sighed again. "This is a very sad day for all of us! It's best that neither side can make you their scapegoat."

"But Marcus Livius," pleaded Pollo, "Could we perhaps talk to Caius about this? Could we prevail upon him to wait less than three months until he's rightfully Consul, and take legal command?"

"That would be my preference, too, Gnaeus. I've urged him in that direction. He responded by refusing me entry to his house any more. The difficulty is that by the time he will be able to sail in the new year, the circumstances might be much worse; or alternatively, if Sulla has won some victories with his advance force, Caius' consular colleague could veto any change in command."

"If Sulla continues to win, then the war will be won; but if he is defeated, then Caius can step in." Gnaeus reasoned. "Either way, the war will be won."

"That's not how Caius sees the issue, unfortunately."

"Then let us Italians all go to Caius tonight, and reason with him along the same lines," Gnaeus persisted. "Surely if his own chosen successor, plus Marcus Livius Drusus, plus representatives of all his Italian allies can agree, then he may be persuaded."

"I'd recommend against that, Gnaeus. Caius has not been his usual self lately; if anyone disagrees with him, he explodes in a rage and cuts off all contact. As I told you, he won't even open his front door to me now. I don't want you to suffer the same fate. Better to wait until his mood has recovered."

Gnaeus paused and waited for a moment. "Is that an instruction, Marcus Livius?" he asked at length.

Drusus threw his hands up. "My friends, you know how reluctant I am to give you any instruction! You're citizens, and not slaves! Not even former slaves!" Drusus rose from his seat and started to pace the garden in which the 150 Italian delegates were gathered. "I give you no instructions on this matter; but I strongly recommend you don't approach Caius Marius and that you be absent yourselves from the vote tomorrow.

"I understand that you also have standing orders from your tribes, so I leave you to discuss these matters among yourselves. I offer you my hospitality for that purpose, and will have my kitchens prepare enough food for the evening meal so you don't need to break for dinner." Drusus looked around the gathering sadly. "Whatever you decide in good faith, may the gods favour you!"

Meanwhile, in Tarentum, Sulla was scanning the letter from Drusus a third time.

*Marcus Livius Drusus, your friend.
To Lucius Cornelius Sulla,*

Greetings!

I must apologise for disturbing you over a matter that might seem at first sight to be so trivial; but I'm sure you will understand how important it is to me.

My favourite old horse – yes the one whom you also love! - has been acting strangely lately. He has become very fearful, seeing danger in every corner, and in his panic has been harming everyone who approaches him. It has reached the stage that he will not even let me draw near; he rears at me and kicks at me. I have no doubt that he would be even less amenable to you, when next you attempt to greet him.

Regrettably it's no longer safe for him to be taken out in public, yet he seems to be driven to break out. If this happens there is no telling how much damage he might do.

But I still think that he can be constrained well enough to limit the damage, so long as all concerned are alert to the risks. However, the children are very insistent that he be allowed one more ride. I can only hope (as I expect) that the adults will not permit it.

May all go well with you!

Sulla smiled in grim satisfaction. At last the Old Warhorse is on the way out! But typically of Marius, he'll fight to the last! Well, let him! So long as I'm not on the scene, and don't finish with his blood on my hands! Let others do the butchering and incur the odium. He sat to compose a reply.

Lucius Cornelius,

to Marcus Livius Drusus, my friend,

My greetings and heartfelt sympathy.

Don't apologise for writing to me about your beloved horse, whom I also love! Rather I thank you that you have shared with me something so deeply personal.

I'm at a loss when it comes to providing any advice on how this sorry situation can be overcome. I can only observe that your horse has suffered injuries in the recent past; it might be that he somehow senses his mortality, and is struggling against it in his own mind. The behaviours you mentioned might be symptomatic of that deeper malaise.

I dread to say this, but it might be that he's approaching his last days. I beg you to make them as comfortable and fulfilling for him as possible. But if he continues to deteriorate, to the point of harming himself or others, then I must urge you to one last act of love towards this noble horse. Allow him an honourable end, and don't allow him to be remembered as a rogue. He has been of too great a service in the past for either of us to allow his memory to be degraded.

In the meantime, is it possible to surround him with friends, to perhaps ease his fears? Perhaps this is what he needs most in these troubled times, and might yet bring him to a full recovery. But above all, be faithful to him in the deepest sense, as he has been to you in his own way.

Sulla read through his reply one more time. Yes, a casual reader wouldn't see anything in it that could be read as referring to anything except an aging horse. But Drusus will understand only too well. The mention of 'an honourable end' will perhaps be a bit shocking, but Drusus needs to be reminded of what's at stake here; one megalomaniac's desires must not be permitted to destroy the Republic. I don't object to being the one who has to say it – provided someone else actually does it! He then wrote another letter to his co-consul, dried the ink, folded it, and stamped it with his personal seal.

"Clodius!" he called to one of his staff. "I want three men to ride to Rome, deliver this to Lucius Porcius Cato my colleague, and await his report on the political situation at home. I want you to explicitly ask if he has any news, suggestions or instructions for me, because I would appreciate the benefit of his insights. While you await a response, please deliver this personal note to Marcus Livius Drusus. No reply is required, unless Marcus Livius specifically asks you to carry one back to me." The two letters were handed over.

"I expect you back within five days."

Clodius saluted as he took the letters. "Request permission to ride in light equipment, Sir!"

"Permission granted."

The Assembly vote was unanimous, partly from the passion of the plebs, partly from the fact that the Senators saw no point in paying bribes for a result that

meant nothing and partly out of fear of opposing it. Sulpicius then led a mob to march on the Senate. Sulpicius didn't enter the Senate chamber through the usual pedestrian door, as customary. Instead he had the main public doors thrown open, and marched into the chamber as if in triumph.

"Publius Sulpicius!" Cato scolded him. "The Urban Praetor has the floor! Please take your seat more respectfully."

Sulpicius continued to strut towards the centre of the floor. "Quintus Caecilius, you may sit now. We have much more urgent business to transact!"

Metellus was stunned. He gaped wordlessly, but Sulpicius turned away from him almost immediately.

"Conscript Fathers, the People have unanimously decided that Lucius Cornelius Sulla must be removed from the command of the Army, and that Caius Marius be appointed instead. Therefore I, as a Tribune of the People, veto Sulla's command, and I also veto the appointment of any person other than Caius Marius in his place."

A roar rose from the crowd outside the open Senate doors.

"Publius Sulpicius, your authority as a Tribune of the Plebs arises from the Mos Majorum. Therefore it does not extend so far as to veto the Mos Majorum itself, from which it receives its legitimacy; otherwise it would overturn itself." Cato responded from the Consular chair. "Therefore your veto is not recognised."

"Then perhaps you will recognise this!" Sulpicius replied, and clapped his hands twice. A mass of men swept into the chamber through the open doors. The pedarii senators in the back rows hastily scrambled out the back of the chamber; but those senior senators in the front rows had no time to escape.

The crowd grabbed them, hauling them out through the doors and into the open. Some were thrown to the ground and some were kicked and struck as they ran the gauntlet of bully-boys, but Sulpicius had his men under strict orders to kill no-one, to break no bones, and to not harm anyone on the ground. He wanted to terrify, not incapacitate. Then the senators still within reach were picked up and hauled back into the chamber. Cato, bleeding from the mouth and grazed fore-arms, was thrust back into his consular chair.

"I repeat my veto," Sulpicius bellowed arrogantly. "I veto the appointment of Lucius Cornelius Sulla to the command of the Army; and I veto the appointment of any replacement other than Caius Marius!" He stared at Cato, who simply stared back at him. At last realising that he would not get any co-operation, he went on.

"There being no objection to the veto, the veto is recognised!" he announced his own result.

"I move that Caius Marius be appointed as commander of the army, effective immediately, and his imperium is to continue until the war against Mithridates is concluded." He glared at Cato, who remained silent. After a pause, Sulpicius again took over from the consul as chair of the meeting.

"Are there any speakers against the motion?" He asked. An intimidating growl rose from the mob. "There being no speakers against the motion, I put the question," Sulpicius went on, becoming accustomed to this parody of procedure.

"All those in favour?" he asked. "Aye" he replied to his own question. "All those against?" There was silence. "I think the Ayes have it. Is there a call for a division?" Silence. "There being no call for a division, I declare the motion carried." Sulpicius turned to the open doors. "Caius Marius has command of the army until the war is ended!" A great roar rose from the crowd.

"Where is Caius Marius?" Sulpicius asked.

"He sent a message that he wouldn't be able to attend today," Cato answered. "Perhaps he didn't want to be seen pissing on Rome; he prefers to do it secretly."

Sulpicius took five hurried paces towards Cato and back-handed him across the mouth. Cato was knocked backwards out of the backless consular chair, humiliatingly tumbling to the floor with his legs above him. "That is no way to speak about the Saviour of Rome!" Sulpicius roared at him.

Drusus stood abruptly and walked hurriedly to assist Cato to his feet. Standing beside Cato, he faced Sulpicius, his face a mixture of anger and disgust. Then he turned to the open doors and bellowed.

"I am the friend of Caius Marius, not his hireling like Sulpicius! You all know me from when I was your Tribune, how I achieved everything I set out to do for you! And I did it legally, so it could not be later undone!" He stalked towards the open doors. "This worm here" gesturing towards Sulpicius behind him, "is everything I am not! You might be satisfied with your work here today, but how long do you think it will endure? Have you learnt nothing from Saturninus?" By now he was under the arch of the doorway, and the crowd was falling back before him as if he were a prowling lion.

"Remember! If our politics descends into who can do the most violence," Drusus continued from the top of the Senate steps, "Then you are setting Rome onto a path of shame, and not glory! Remember that Romans killing Romans will only strengthen our enemies!" Drusus paused, and swept his eyes through the crowd, silent before him. "Now all of you go home, and think very carefully about what kind of Rome you want your children to inherit. And then dedicate yourselves to building it, and not tearing it down!" He turned and walked back into the Senate chamber, to stand again beside Cato. "Bravely done, Lucius Porcius! You are worthy of your ancestry!"

Sulpicius, who had stood still through the last few minutes rather than appear to be chasing Drusus, simply sneered at the two men. Then, looking around the chamber, shouted, "The Senate's business is now complete. You shall now disperse." He then turned and strode imperiously out the doors. The remaining senators started to gather on floor to share with each other their shock and displeasure.

"Marcus Livius," Cato asked, "He said *unanimously*. Are the Italians against us as well? You promised us that you would ensure the Italians would observe the Mos Majorum."

"No, Lucius Porcius; the Italians did *not* support this attack. I couldn't permit them to vote in favour of Sulpicius because his proposal was illegal and I have promised you that I won't knowingly allow my clients to do anything illegal; but to vote against him would have meant their deaths. I suggested they stay away."

“So where do the Italians stand?” Cato asked, as the other senators gathered around to hear the reply.

“The Italians love Marius; but they disagree with how he is acting. They value their citizenship and are scrupulous to act legally; more scrupulous than most Romans, from the look of it!” Drusus gestured towards the still-open doors.

“So what can we do?” asked one of the remaining pedarii, usually not permitted to speak but this was not a formal Senate meeting any more. “Can we rely on the Italians?”

“What would you have them do, Conscription Fathers?” Drusus asked drily.

“Can we rely on them to stand against Marius and Sulpicius? Will they support the legal consuls?”

Drusus re-phrased the question. “Do you mean, can we rely on them to capture the streets of Rome from the Roman mobs?” He looked around. “Hands up everyone who wants the Marsi and Samnites to occupy Rome and keep the peace, because Romans can’t do it for themselves?” Sheepishly the senators realised how absurd this would be.

“Let me make one thing clear;” Drusus went on, “This is not one of the Boni scare-stories about how giving the Italians citizenship will make the sky fall. These are Romans spitting in the face of the Mos Majorum! The Italians have been model citizens, compared to the Tribune of the Plebs. No, this problem is all about *Romans* behaving illegally, not Italians.” He looked around. “So what does anyone suggest?”

One of the pedarii suggested “Perhaps we should send a message to Sulla; tell him to come back to Rome and restore peace.”

Even some of the Boni shuddered at this idea. Cato was the man who gave voice to their fears.

“That’s just as much a breach of the Mos Majorum as what Sulpicius just did! It’s the role of the Praetors to keep the peace, not the army. A Roman general marching his troops into Rome? It’s never been done! It would mean civil war!”

“Why not just tell Sulla to go to Rhodes, anyway?” Another asked. “In three months’ time we’ll have new consuls, and the problem will go away.”

“Ah! But who will those new consuls be, if Rome is in the hands of Sulpicius and his thugs while the elections are held?” yet another interjected.

“Marius will certainly be one of them, from the sound of today.”

“In which case, the plebs will be happy and we can all get back to business as usual.”

“Marcus Livius; is there any way we can have Sulla and Marius sort this out at the top level?” Cato asked. “If we can get them to compromise, the situation will be resolved.”

“The last three times I have called on Caius Marius, he has refused me entry to his house.” Drusus admitted. “I have no doubt he’ll also refuse to talk with Lucius Cornelius. But perhaps if I can talk to Lucius Cornelius and work out a proposal for some-one else to take to Caius...?”

“Marcus Livius, I agree! I think that would be an excellent way forward!” Cato enthused.

“Rubbish!” came a shrill voice. It was Catulus again. “Don’t you see what’s happening? These Italian-lovers have created this crisis between them! They’re creating a state of emergency, so that one or other of them can be made Dictator! Then we’ll know what comes of giving away citizenship to that scum!”

Some murmurs in the background indicated that this conspiracy theory might have some credibility among the Boni.

“On second thoughts, Marcus Livius,” Cato continued. “As co-consul with Lucius Cornelius, I think it’s only proper that I be the one to negotiate between Caius Marius and my colleague.” There were murmurs of approval all round. “But I would be grateful for your assistance, if you would. At all times under my authority,” he added quickly.

“Indeed, Lucius Porcius; that would be even better than my suggestion.” Drusus quickly agreed.

Cato raised his voice, as if in summary. “Well, conscript Fathers? Does that sound a good way forward?” There was general agreement.

“Are there any speakers against the motion?” he asked. There were chuckles everywhere. Who said Lucius Porcius Cato had no sense of humour?

Cato returned home to find the letter from Sulla had just arrived. Amazed at this co-incidence, he quickly checked the seal, and then opened it.

*Lucius Cornelius,
to my dear colleague, Lucius Porcius,*

Greetings!

I trust you are well, and all your family and dear ones in good health and spirits.

I report to you that I have three worthwhile legions with me here in Tarentum. These are equipped and trained well enough to set sail, with another twelve being formed and trained; I’m hopeful that they will be ready before the weather turns foul. Unless I hear word from you otherwise, I intend to sail for Rhodes eight days after the date of this letter.

I have heard from my contacts in Rome that Caius Marius has been behaving strangely lately. These contacts say that he has broken contact with many formerly trusted companions. You hardly need to be reminded that he no longer considers me a friend, a wound that I feel keenly after so many years of faithful service. But my hurt is as nothing compared to my fears.

These fears are that Caius might no longer be of sound mind. As a man with some experience of battle and the harm that is inflicted on men, I know that some injuries to the head can cause paralysis of some part of the body or some other loss of senses, and we both know that Caius has had strokes that mimic this effect. I also know that some head injuries seem to cause no physical damage, but can completely change a man’s personality, destroy his memories, or result in cognitive impairment.

I am starting to wonder if the same unseen damage that caused Caius his physical difficulties might also be affecting his mental faculties. No doubt a good physician would be of some help in this regard.

Be that as it may, I suggest that you make a point of calling in on Caius at some time on some pretext, and assess for yourself if he has changed as reported to me. I would not put it beyond the bounds of possibility that he might press more vigorously than might be proper his desire to lead the war.

But enough of that. Having reported the situation here, and my tentative plans, I seek your endorsement as my colleague for those plans. If circumstances in Rome or elsewhere have changed, I would welcome your considered suggestions on what other course might be better. I beg your response in time to meet my tentative deadline.

May you prosper!

Cato looked up to the date of the letter. Only the day before yesterday! He must have a good courier! And the prescience of the man! There was no way news of Sulpicius' Assembly could have reached him in time for him to have been aware of it before he wrote this letter. Catulus' accusation of conspiracy crossed his mind, and seemed to lodge stubbornly there. Prescience? Co-incidence? Or conspiracy?

Whatever, he must pay a visit to Marius now, after the events in the Senate. He sent a runner to Marius' house, advising that he would be calling by in an hour to discuss the command of the army. Marius would probably be expecting that anyway. Cato then had his grazes bathed and the blood on his face washed. His lips and right cheek were swollen; but let Marius see what his puppet had done!

Cato preceded his lictors into the vast garden of Marius' house as the door swung open. Marius was standing by the fountain, smiling broadly. He started walking forward slowly as Cato entered, his hands spread palms-up in greeting. What a staged greeting! Cato thought to himself, but smiled in return.

"Welcome to my house, Lucius Porcius," Marius smiled even more broadly. "What brings you here?" Marius offered Cato one of two consular seats set up by the pool.

"Certain events today are the immediate trigger, Caius," Cato replied as he took one of the seats, "but I think I'm over-due to talk to you about the conduct of the war. I would appreciate your insights."

Marius tried to look bewildered as he sat, but the smile never disappeared. "What events, Lucius Porcius?"

Here was a man trying to imply non-involvement; but everyone in Rome must know by now, involved or not. The sheer transparency was appalling.

"The Plebeian Assembly passed a proposal drafted by Sulpicius, and then Sulpicius presented it to the Senate." Cato summarised. "The Senate didn't accept its legality, and there was an invasion of the Senate by some thugs who roughed-up some senators and attempted to intimidate us into accepting it."

"Oh, that's terrible!" Marius interjected, still smiling. "Was it accepted eventually?"

"No, it wasn't. There wasn't a quorum present when Sulpicius called for voices."

Suddenly Marius turned dark. "But it must be accepted!" he exploded.

"That is why I'm here now," Cato responded. Marius visibly settled.

"Would it be possible for you and Lucius Cornelius to come to some agreement?" Cato suggested. He was now in no doubt that Marius knew everything about this attempted coup, but was also several oars short of a trireme. He must tread carefully. "You two have worked well together in the past, so why can't you resume that same arrangement?"

"Don't talk to me about Sulla!" Marius spat. "He has betrayed me, as did Drusus when he defended that scoundrel! And not even Scaurus returns my messages now!" Cato was put off balance by that last remark. Didn't Marius realise that Scaurus was dead?

"But if we can persuade Sulla to make peace with you?"

"I'm not a man to bear a grudge," Marius offered magnanimously. "If he will only apologise and resume his proper place, I'll forgive him. I'm sure he would have a part to play in my campaign."

Cato had never been more relieved. "That's excellent, Caius! I'll talk to him myself; I'm sure he can be persuaded, in fact I expect he's already regretting his offence, and will be only too eager to be reconciled to you." Cato rose, hoping to escape the company of this madman as quickly as possible. Marius also rose to his feet, the maniacal grin on his face. He offered his arm, and Cato took it firmly. "I'll be back soon, Caius!"

Cato called to his lictors, and left through the open door. He went immediately to the house of Drusus.

"Marcus Livius," Cato opened as he accepted a seat under the freshly-lit lamps in Drusus' triclinium, "Marius is mad. There is no other word for it."

Drusus was not surprised, but he was disappointed. "It's gone that far, has it? When we last spoke he was easily angered, but I had hoped he could recover."

"The strange thing is that Lucius Cornelius already knew this. Listen to a letter that arrived at my house this morning." As common courtesy demanded, Cato read the letter for Drusus. "How could he have known that?"

Perhaps I can shed some light on that for you, Lucius Porcius." Drusus rose, walked into his study, and came back with two letters.

"This is a letter I sent to Lucius Cornelius some days ago." He glanced at the top. "The date is seven days ago, actually. It was written this way in case it fell into the wrong hands." Drusus read the letter to Sulla.

When he had finished, he took the second sheet. "It's obvious that Lucius Cornelius knew exactly what I meant. Here is his reply, which arrived this afternoon." Drusus read the rescript.

Cato stared into the distance for a moment. "That must have been so difficult for Lucius Cornelius to write! To actually say that we should consider the assassination of a man he obviously loves so much!"

"Lucius Cornelius is a true Roman. He loves his friends, but he loves Rome more," Drusus replied.

Another pause. "But that's not a politically-possible option, Marcus Livius," Cato said at length. "If Marius were to die now, all of Rome would rise. Not one senator would survive."

Drusus nodded. "That's true. We have no choice but to allow him to be acclaimed consul next year – it won't even be an election! Not a single tribe could be made to vote for anyone else! And then he'll head off to the war. I think we have no choice. We must persuade Lucius Cornelius to sail to Rhodes as soon as possible, to put some space between the two of them. And then next year, Lucius Cornelius can return to Rome."

"That will be a great humiliation for Lucius Cornelius," Cato said. "To command an army, and then be told to sit still until another takes over... What a crushing insult!"

"Yes; a crushing vote of no-confidence, and completely unfair. Because I see in him a commander who would be the equal of Marius," Drusus asserted. "Perhaps even better, because he has a much greater imagination than the Old Warhorse."

"Some soldiers are called upon to give up their lives for Rome, but very few are called upon to give up their *dignitas*." Cato agreed. "This will be the test of his inner nobility."

Cato stood suddenly. "This melancholia is not getting the job done! Tomorrow we set out for Tarentum! In the meantime, perhaps I should send Lucius Cornelius a note, asking him to remain in port until we arrive."

"Shouldn't we rather tell him to go?" Drusus argued. "That will serve the same military purpose as he planned all along; the only difference will be the change of command next year."

"Will Marius accept that? We don't want more blood in Rome."

"Hm. Perhaps not. Marius will want to sail at their head, this year." Drusus conceded. "You're right. No doubt about it, Marius will want command now, and election in absentia in December. He was permitted to do that before, so he has a precedent. So yes, write to Lucius Cornelius, asking him to continue training his troops, ready for a handover of as many as possible to Marius."

"And will Lucius Cornelius accept that? After all, he is the consul!"

"I think he'll be outraged; but he'll accept it, for the sake of Rome," Drusus opined. "If he doesn't accept it, then what can he do about it? Sail for Rhodes, anyway? Even if he does that, we still have peace in Rome, and taking over next year becomes Marius' problem."

"Well, you know him better than I," Cato agreed. "But my preference is to get Marius out of Italy as soon as possible. So long as he's fighting Rome's enemies, he won't be doing any damage to Rome."

"Then we're agreed? You'll write to Lucius Cornelius telling him to remain in Tarentum until Marius arrives to take command?" Drusus summarised.

"Yes; and we follow the letter ourselves, to explain in person what the situation is like in Rome. He deserves at least that much courtesy." Cato looked

across to Drusus. "Would you care to write a personal letter to him, as a friend, to go with mine?"

Drusus called for paper and quills, and the two men set to writing their sad letters. When they were finished the letters were dried, sealed, and sent by fast rider, even though it was approaching midnight as they left the front door.

"I'll be here at the third hour tomorrow, and we'll go together," Cato suggested as he left. "We shouldn't delay."

"Agreed, Lucius Porcius, I'll see you then."

Five days later they were surprised to meet Sulla on the via Appia, marching at the head of his legions towards Rome.

"Lucius Cornelius!" Cato greeted him. "It's good to meet you so soon; but why aren't you still in Tarentum?"

"With all due respect to you, my fellow-consul; I felt that we needed to talk together as soon as possible. And also that the Urban Praetor might need some assistance in restoring good order in the city." Sulla gestured vaguely behind him towards the legions as he spoke that last sentence. "So I thought it would be better if we met on the way." Cato looked down the road. He couldn't see very far because of the rolling country but the line reached as far as he could see.

"Might I suggest that you order the men to make camp? I think we should talk privately, and not in front of the men."

Sulla gave the order to make camp. "If I recall correctly, there's a small town with a good inn just a mile or two further on. Shall we go back there for the night?"

"Yes, there is, Lucius Cornelius; but I would be more comfortable in a private house than in a public inn. Perhaps we could prevail upon the mayor to host Rome's two consuls for the night?"

Sulla nodded his agreement. "Then let's ask." He rode forward to join Drusus and Cato, and the three of them set off down the road, surrounded by Cato's lictors and retinue.

The mayor's villa was pleasant and spacious even if the finishes to the walls were plain, the decorations rustic and the rare piece of art-work little better than amateur standard. The three men sat in the large courtyard, behind the rather plain fountain so that the sound of the water gave their conversation a measure of privacy.

"I must thank you both for coming to meet with me, rather than hiding behind correspondence." Sulla opened. "I'd like to hear from your own lips what you might have been hesitant to put onto paper."

"I met with Marius immediately after I received your letter, Lucius Cornelius. It was obvious from the first words that his mind is unbalanced. Not only is he convinced that he's the best man for the job; he's convinced he's the only man for the job, and that this entitles him to a status little short of Dictator. He sees himself as the Saviour of Rome all over again, and nothing will stand between him and that role."

Sulla nodded that he understood. "And Sulpicius?"

"Do you remember Saturninus? Well, the only difference is that this time Marius isn't defending the Senate, but complicit in opposing it."

Sulla nodded again. "In other words, Rome is effectively in the hands of the Mob, led by Sulpicius as Marius' puppet."

"That would be a fair summary," Cato agreed.

"Then the Mos Majorum has been completely overturned! There's only one thing a true Roman can do," Sulla asserted. "I must take my troops to Rome and restore the proper order."

Cato was horrified at this suggestion. "No, Lucius Cornelius! No Roman has ever marched on Rome! It would be an affront to the gods! It would be seen as an attempt to rule by force, as if you were to make yourself a King!"

"Rome is already being ruled by force, and at the behest of a man who's not only mad, but more importantly unelected!" Sulla spat back. "But I won't cross the pomerium with my troops; I'll hand them into the control of the Urban Praetor, whose duty it is to maintain the rule of law within the city." Sulla clenched a fist. "I'll come not to set myself up as a king, but to depose one! I'll come to restore the Mos Majorum, not to overturn it! I will not allow the Rome I love to become the arse-wipe of any man, not even Caius!"

"I'd agree with you, Lucius Cornelius," Drusus broke in. "But much Roman blood will be shed if that were to happen! Even though you come to restore peace, Sulpicius will ensure that every man in Rome believes otherwise! Please, listen to our plan, and consider it coldly. You'll see it's better for Rome, however much we might find it distasteful."

Sulla looked at Drusus doubtfully, then to Cato. At length he replied "I'll certainly listen to the advice of my co-consul and my old friend."

Cato took over the conversation. "Marius wants to lead the war against Mithridates, and he wants to start as soon as possible. Even as we speak, he's gathering legions from among the Italians and the Head Count who are hungry for loot. And he'll seek election as Consul to give it a veneer of legality. This is his only interest, and once he gets that he won't give a thought about internal matters; he'll let domestic things simply roll on, just as he did in his other consulships.

"Our aim is to get Marius as far away from Rome as possible as quickly as possible. This would best be done by giving him the command he wants, and urging him to set sail immediately, before Achaia is over-run as well as Asia. He must sail before winter, and he can do that with the legions already war-ready. The others can follow as occasion permits. So give him what he wants and we get control of the city back, and a good commander leading our armies as well. - Not that you would be any less able, but this is a sacrifice that Rome requires of you, Lucius Cornelius."

"That sounds a good plan," Sulla conceded, "Except for two problems.

"First, it accepts that the Mos Majorum can be thrown aside whenever true Romans lack the courage to defend it! I'm scandalised that you would even suggest such a thing, Lucius Porcius! I can only conclude that the situation in Rome must be very bad indeed, for you to be so daunted! How can the Boni, who pride themselves on their tenacious defence of Roman Tradition, even contemplate it?"

"The Boni are cowards, Lucius Cornelius, as well you know," Cato replied scathingly. "And yes, I say that as one who has supported them more often than

not. They only ever stand on their ‘principles’ when they have the power to crush those who oppose them. When it comes to the time of testing, every one of them will support the Mos Majorum until their first drop of blood.”

“Don’t I know that!” Sulla said dismissively. “But the second point is a touch more practical. If we give him what he wants, how can you be so sure he’ll loosen his grip once it’s around your throat? When he defeated the Cimbri and came home he found that he was isolated in the Senate and treated like a leper. Everyone was afraid that he would use that to seize even more power. He won’t allow himself to be shunned like that again! Before he leaves to fight Mithridates, he’ll make sure that there is not a Senator alive who would even think of opposing him when he returns. He’ll stack the whole chamber with his own creatures; and they won’t include either of us, Marcus Livius! I tell you now,” Sulla emphasised, “If you give him the army, you will not be buying your freedom; you will be selling it!”

The three men sat, looking at each other, for a long time. Eventually Cato broke the impasse.

“What you say, Lucius Cornelius, makes sense. You might well be right. But if you’re right in saying that Marius would act that ruthlessly, then to act on your advice would guarantee bloodshed on a vast scale. Whereas to act on our plan would avoid that bloodshed, at the risk of permitting a dictator into the nest. But I take comfort that this dictator will die eventually; and perhaps very soon, if your theory about him having internal head wounds is correct.”

Cato drew a deep breath. “I would ordinarily say that you two have known him a long time, and would be the best judges of his likely decisions; but the man I saw was nothing like the Caius Marius of even last year; I can honestly say that no-one knows him any more, so my opinion is as valuable as yours. Lucius Cornelius, you’re consul, and I have freely conceded to you the command of the army. The decision is yours. But I implore you to hand over the command to Marius, and to kiss his hand. In doing so, you will at least retain your status in the popular mind as heir to Marius; and in that way you will have the leverage at home while Marius is away.”

“If I kneel to kiss Marius’ hand, he’ll make sure it’s the last time anyone sees me do anything; he won’t risk me disobeying him a second time,” Sulla said flatly. “But my own life isn’t important; what’s important is protecting Rome from a madman. I can do nothing else.”

“I’m sorry to hear that, Lucius Cornelius. I fear I’ll never see you again.” Drusus stood and offered his arm. Sulla stood and took it. Cato also stood to offer his arm to Sulla, and was accepted.

“Marcus Livius, see to it that you protect yourself,” Sulla urged him. “Lucius Porcius, for Rome’s sake, act prudently: flee to Massalia if you must!” The three men went to their guest rooms.

When Drusus and Cato woke next morning, Sulla had already left. They thanked their host for the night, and turned back towards Rome. After two hours on the road they were met by Silo coming the other way.

“Quintus Poppeius! What a joy to meet you!” Drusus greeted his friend.

"It's a joy to meet you, too, Marcus Livius, after so many troubling meetings," Silo replied.

Drusus saw the haunted look in Silo's eyes. "Perhaps you've been meeting with Caius?"

Silo flicked a glance across to Cato. The meaning was clear; may I talk openly in front of one of the Boni?

"Please speak openly, old friend. This is too important for partisan politics," Drusus urged him. "Lucius Porcius is well aware of what's happened with Caius."

Silo dropped his eyes for a moment. "Yes, I mean meetings with Caius. He's not the man I knew even a year ago. He has gathered the legions we Italians offered for the war, but now he wants to send them against Lucius Cornelius. Against Lucius Cornelius, who has supported him for over twenty years, and loves him like a father!" Silo shook his head in wonder.

"And how will you and the other Italians respond to this?" Drusus asked.

"That is why I'm chasing after you," Silo explained. If we disobey, then we're not really committing desertion or insubordination, because Caius doesn't have a legal Imperium. But you can understand that we have pledged him our armed service. So we agreed to seek your advice, as our Patron. We need your wisdom to help us through this problem."

Drusus looked around to the combined retinues. "Come, let us cross the stream, and talk privately. Lucius Porcius, please come with us."

The three men rode their horses across the stream running beside the road and a short distance further, into a bare paddock.

"There's no doubt that Caius is quite mad," Drusus said bluntly. Silo cringed slightly at the word.

"But first, to deal with your problems. To attack a consul of Rome is high treason. So you mustn't harm Lucius Cornelius for that reason alone. Quite apart from the fact that he's still your friend, and a faithful servant of the Mos Majorum," Drusus went on. "Second, you must do all within your power to protect Rome. In these circumstances, I suggest the best thing you can do is keep your distance. If you attempt to restore order, you'll be portrayed as an Italian attack rather than a rescue. You'll have to let Romans redeem Rome themselves.

"And third, you should do all you can to protect Caius from himself. Tell him straight that you Italians are offering yourselves to fight against Mithridates, and no-one else. Don't let him use you to harass any of his personal enemies, perceived or real. And finally," Drusus took a deep breath and looked to Cato for support, "If you have to, you might need to kill him." Cato nodded in agreement. "But don't be hasty in that. Who knows that Caius might yet come to his senses?"

Drusus continued. "So your first priority is to persuade him to sail for the East immediately. Then he'll be permitted to stand for his seventh term in absentia; and we'll guarantee his election and full command of the war. None of his enemies will be permitted to thwart that. But if he attempts to use his authority to harm personal enemies, then every Italian must refuse his orders and desert him, whether he holds Imperium or not."

Silo nodded sombrely. "He regards both you and Lucius Cornelius as enemies, you know. I told you he wants to march against Lucius Cornelius and crucify him. I'm not confident that I can persuade him to sail for the east so long as he thinks there are enemies at his rear."

"In which case, and if all else fails, you might have to kill him," Drusus concluded.

Silo nodded again. "I understand. And it breaks my heart, but I agree." Silo pulled his horse around to face the stream again, and started back to the main body of men waiting for them. The other two followed. Then Silo stopped suddenly.

"What does Lucius Cornelius intend to do? Will he hand over his legions?" Silo asked.

"He refuses to hand over his legions to a self-appointed dictator," Drusus answered. "And in my heart, I can't blame him for that."

"So what will he do with them? Sail for Rhodes himself?"

"Don't tell Caius this, but I can't lie to you," Drusus answered. "He says that he intends to march them to Rome, and then hand them over to Metellus to restore proper authority."

"In other words, crush Sulpicius," Silo grunted. "But that will provoke Marius terribly; and even if we Italians stay out of it, the Head Count legions Caius has raised will make it a bloodbath."

Silo shifted uneasily in his saddle. "Marcus Livius, let me make a suggestion. I'll do all within my power to persuade Caius to sail immediately, but from Ostia. I'll tell him that Sulla's legions have faded away, deserted him, so they pose no threat. And the war against Mithridates can't wait until after winter. Your part of the bargain will be to persuade Lucius Cornelius to park his legions out of sight until Marius is safely out of the way. In fact, we Marsi have plenty of places we can hide them for you, just a few days' march from Rome for when the time is ripe. Only then should he approach Rome."

Drusus looked across to Cato. "Lucius Porcius; you're the consul. What do you say?"

Cato thought for a moment. "I say that the three of us should turn back and talk to Lucius Cornelius again. I think we now have a workable plan."

The three men rode back across the stream and rejoined their retinues. They turned towards Tarentum. Less than two hours later they met Sulla, still marching northwards.

"Lucius Cornelius, my friend!" Silo shouted his greeting from a distance.

Sulla kicked his horse to a trot and drew nearer, "Quintus Poppaeius! Greetings!" Sulla saluted him from a distance of perhaps thirty paces. "Do you come from Caius Marius?"

"I come as your friend, and a friend of Rome," Silo answered. "You well know that Marcus Livius doesn't lie, and he will guarantee my good intentions towards you." Drusus nodded his agreement.

"Then how can we work together, for the good of Rome?" Sulla asked.

Silo dismounted, and stripped off his armour down to tunic, kilt and sandals. His sword was still strapped to his saddle. "I can understand your wariness, Lucius Cornelius. Allow me to approach you defenceless and on foot."

Sulla smiled broadly, and swung himself out of his saddle. Handing the reins of his horse to the legate on his left, he removed his helmet and strode towards Silo.

"There was no need for that, old friend!" Sulla said as he offered his arm to Silo. Silo took it, and smiled warmly.

"We three have devised a plan, Lucius Cornelius, which will restore order to Rome under its rightful officials and with a minimum of bloodshed. We hope you'll co-operate in it."

"So far it sounds good," Sulla replied guardedly. "Let's discuss the details in a less public place. He looked up to Drusus and Cato, still mounted. "The four of us, alone?" he asked. Then he looked back to Silo. "Get your gear back on, man! You'll get a chill!" Then he walked back to his horse, resumed his mount, and walked it forward to join the other three. Soon Silo was properly dressed and mounted, and the four of them walked some hundred paces downwind for privacy.

Silo outlined the plan to Sulla. "So you see, Lucius Cornelius, that it doesn't overturn the Mos Majorum. "You remain Consul, and in command of your legions until you freely decide to turn over their command to another properly-elected and authorised officer of the Republic. Although Marius might think himself the Commander of the Army in the East, his command is actually by Cato's permission and under Cato's supreme authority."

Sulla considered the plot carefully. "And you'll pledge yourselves to support his candidacy for Consul next year, in absentia; well, there are precedents for that! And if he then becomes Consul again, then he will have imperium by right, so that is not a breach either. But what if he decides to come back to Italy, and use that army to establish his supremacy? He didn't do that when Saturninus raised a mob; but he was sane then." Sulla looked across to Silo.

"I think two things will prevent that," Silo said. "The first is that he wants this seventh consulship more than life itself. Once he has that, then who controls Rome will be of little importance to him; he prefers warfare to politics, anyway. And the second thing is that if Marius tries to return to Rome before the Mithridatic War is finished," Silo took a deep breath, "I will kill him myself."

Sulla stared at his Italian friend long and hard. "I know I've suggested that the need for that might arise" he said at length. "But will you be able to do it if the time comes? He's your friend."

"And so are you my friend too, Lucius Cornelius, and you, Marcus Livius." Silo replied. "And so is the Rome that gave to me citizenship and a seat in the front row of the Senate, and in that act it gave seats on the front row of the Senate to all of Italy. How could I regard those obligations as less binding than my friendship to a man who is no longer himself, but has been replaced by a demon?"

Cato spoke next. "You didn't list me as one of your friends, Quintus Poppaeius; and rightly so, for I've never supported you as these others have. But if you make that pledge, then I'll bind myself to you as tightly as these men have."

Silo walked his horse around to stand beside Cato. "I so pledge," he responded, "and I'm pleased to call you my friend." He extended his right arm, which Cato accepted.

The four men walked back to the road. When they returned Sulla gave the order for his force to divide into its individual cohorts and fall out to alternating sides of the road. He and Silo then rode down the road, Silo allocating one of his retinue to each cohort. He only had enough to provide guides to a third of the cohorts, so they rode along the road again, calling for any Lucani, Hirpini or Marsi to join them on the road. Over twenty Marsi reported, a couple of Hirpini, and a few Lucani. These men were taken aside and given their orders, and then divided among the remaining cohorts.

"Now I'm completely vulnerable, Quintus Poppaedius." Sulla said. "For the sake of Rome, don't disappoint me!" He offered his arm again, smiling.

Silo took the proffered arm, smiled back, and said "Lucius Porcius will send word when you should move. I expect that I'll be at sea with Caius by then." Silo drew a deep sigh. "I suspect that I'll be fighting Mithridates for several years, so we might never see each other again. If that's so, then I consider myself favoured by the gods to have been called your friend."

Sulla smiled back. "I suspect that history will rank you ahead of me, once the dust settles. But enough of that! I must now race to Brundisium and perform my latest theatrical work, 'Panic in Public'. I like to put on a convincing show! Farewell!"

He turned to Cato next to say his farewells, and then Drusus. Then he turned southwards and set off at a slow trot, his personal staff of eight serving as his remaining retinue.

"I have to say this, Quintus Poppaedius," Cato said as they watched Sulla disappear over a crest in the road, "I didn't expect him to agree so readily. He has, in effect, surrendered his entire force to a man on the staff of his enemy."

"I wasn't surprised, Lucius Porcius," Silo replied. "He trusts all three of us as honourable men, and knows that we're fully aware of the danger Caius now presents to Rome. He knows that if we betray him, we also betray Rome."

"Now, let's return to Rome, and report that Sulla's legions have deserted him."

Sulla and his personal staff reached Brundisium the next day. They went immediately to the docks, found a small ship, and hired it for their exclusive use as a transport to Dyrrachium. They set sail as soon as supplies had been taken on board.

Drusus, Cato and Silo were back in Rome three days after parting with Sulla. They called upon Marius immediately, even before going to their own houses to bathe. Janus admitted the three men to the triclinium and their combined retinue to the walled garden and then went to inform Marius. A few minutes later Marius walked into the triclinium.

"Ah! Quintus Poppeus!" Marius beamed. Then he noticed Drusus behind him. "What are you doing here Drusus? Why did Janus allow you entry?" Marius' face showed of thunder. "Janus! Come here!" he bellowed.

"I come to apologise, Caius," Drusus rushed out hastily. "You were absolutely right. Sulla has betrayed you, and I was too foolish to realise it at the time."

Marius was quietened. "What brought you so late to this realisation?"

"Lucius Porcius went to meet him, to urge him to surrender his legions into your command. He refused. He was so stubborn that it was exasperating!"

Marius eyes switched to Silo. "Didn't I tell you this would happen, Quintus Poppeus? I told you that Sulla must be declared an enemy of the People and crushed! Form up ten of your Italian legions now, and march on him!"

"There'll be no need to do that, Caius," Silo assured him calmly. "As soon as his men got wind of what was happening, they scattered like flies. Sulla then fled to Brundisium and hired a ship to Dyrrachium. He's broken."

"Ah!" Marius sighed in delight. "Then we're clear to sail to Asia, now that Sulla is no longer a factor. And not a moment too soon; the year grinds on, and winter will hit us soon!"

"Yes, Caius," Silo responded. "I'll hasten the boarding of the City legions first, because they're closest to Ostia. The Italian legions will be shipped as soon as they arrive and suitable transport can be found." Silo saluted and left the room, heading for the front door.

Marius turned his attention back to Drusus. "Now for you, Marcus Livius; of course you're forgiven! But please don't disappoint me again!" Then to Cato, "Lucius Porcius; I must thank you for your mission, attempting to bring Sulla to his senses. I didn't expect you to succeed, knowing how spiteful Sulla can be at times, so I don't blame you for any failure." Marius was feeling very magnanimous today, buoyed by the collapse of Sullan resistance. "But now you need a new colleague as Suffect Consul, don't you? A Military Man, who can prosecute the war against Mithridates immediately. One who qualifies under the Mos Majorum." Marius smiled broadly. "Whom would you recommend?"

"Oh, there's no doubt that you would be the man, Caius! But the elections are due soon, and if you were appointed Suffect Consul now, that would disqualify you from being elected for the next term." Cato replied.

"No it wouldn't!" Marius thundered. "I served consecutive terms before in an emergency. Wouldn't you say Mithridates is an even greater emergency than the Cimbri?"

"Absolutely, Caius; but there might be some who would disagree with that."

"I promise you, Lucius Porcius; no-one will object." Marius smiled again, but this time without humour.

"Then there's no problem," Cato agreed pleasantly, showing open palms. "We must see to it at the next Senate meeting. I'll call for one the day after tomorrow, so it won't delay your sailing."

"Good. Is there anything else?" Marius asked. Drusus and Cato glanced at each other, but remained silent. "Then you may go now," Marius dismissed them. Drusus and Cato left without a word.

"Had a sane man addressed me like that, and then dismissed me like a slave, I would have been unable to prevent myself from striking him." Cato muttered as the two men walked down the street away from Marius' front door.

"We must continue to humour him," Drusus agreed. "With any luck he'll be at sea in a few days' time. Then we should give him another six or eight days to ensure he hasn't been forced to land at Messina or closer. We just need to be patient."

While Drusus and Cato walked from Marius' house Marius sent a runner to the insula owned and managed by Aurelia, wife of Caius Julius Caesar currently serving as Quaestor in Asia. He asked for Young Caius, the thirteen-year-old son, to be sent around.

Marius looked at the boy darkly as he entered the triclinium. This was his nephew; the prophecy which foretold seven consulships for Caius Marius had also declared that this wouldn't mean that he would be the greatest Roman ever. That title was reserved by the prophecy for this boy. That mustn't be allowed to happen.

"Caius, I'm told that you're a clever boy," Marius said in a voice that tried to turn a grimace into a smile.

"I don't know who might have told you that, Uncle Caius," Caesar replied evenly.

A flush of rage filled Marius. "It's none of your business who told me!" he shouted. But then he gained control of himself. "But I see, yes, you're more than just a little smart-arse. You have a composure well ahead of your years. Now, how can that gift and your undoubted abilities in other areas be put to the best service of Rome?" Marius put on a pretence of pondering this question.

Caesar was not taken in. It was obvious that Marius already had an answer in mind, but Caesar's pride prevented him from playing a guessing game with his uncle.

"Well, boy? Don't you have any ideas?" Marius asked angrily.

"Yes, but you've already decided which idea you like. Why don't you tell me, instead of wasting my time?"

Marius took a step forward and swiped Caesar with the back of his hand. It was all he could do to fight down the red mist. More out of frustration than for any other reason, he bellowed, "Wasting *your* precious time, boy! You're talking to the First Man in Rome! A minute of my time is worth a lifetime of yours!"

Marius turned to Janus. "Lock him in an empty cellar until tomorrow sunset. The next High Priest of Jupiter must have time to contemplate how best to pray!"

Caesar was shocked. The High Priest of Jupiter? He would never be permitted to ride a horse or touch a weapon! A life more trapped, more wasted, than any Vestal! But even so, he knew he would be able to find a way out. He was Caius Julius Caesar, and he was destined for great things!

Unknown to anyone except the conspirators, Sulla landed on the Adriatic coast the next day, and was spirited inland into the Marsi lands. The captain and crew of the ship were rewarded well, in anticipation that they would obey strict orders to report that Sulla had debarked at Dyrrhachium; but they were also warned that to say anything else would constitute treason, Sulla still being consul.

The thirty cohorts of Sulla's scattered forces were slowly but carefully being led to join him. The Italians who guided and provisioned them had been told by their own nobles about Marius' condition, and that Sulla was their true friend. He must be kept secret if possible, protected by all means if necessary.

Drusus and Cato had spent the day calling on their senatorial colleagues, urging them to support moves to declare Sulla's consulship ended and appointing Marius suffect consul in his place. It was, they urged, of no real consequence; Sulla had less than two months of his term to run and was effectively out of play anyway but to resist the will of Marius would be suicidal. Metellus, the Urban Praetor, was one of the more difficult to convince.

"Marcus Livius! How could you, of all people, possibly suggest so gross a violation of the Mos Majorum?" Metellus shrieked at him. "You have made your reputation by being scrupulously legal in all things, and now you want to depose a properly-elected consul and replace him with a madman?"

"Believe me, Quintus Caecilius; If it were a trivial thing, such as saving my entire family from annihilation, I would not even consider it," Drusus pleaded. "But this is the only way Rome can be saved. You have that on my word of honour!"

"The honour of a man who has forsaken all honour!" Metellus snorted contemptuously.

"You know me better than that, Quintus Caecilius." Drusus said levelly.

Metellus looked at Drusus carefully. Drusus' sincerity was apparent. "You're up to something, aren't you, Marcus Livius? Whether for good or evil, I'm no longer sure. But for the sake of the man who stared down Sulpicius when he set his thugs on the senators last meeting, I'll go along with you. I can only hope you're the same man now as you were then."

"And will you similarly urge your Boni associates to do the same?" Drusus asked.

"No, I will not," Metellus said flatly. "It's one thing to allow myself to be manipulated, if that's what you're doing; but I won't invite others to expose themselves to the same risk. You must talk to them yourself!"

Drusus had a visitor that afternoon. It was Titus Lafrenius, sent by Marius. Cratippus guided him into the triclinium, and then called for Drusus.

"Greetings, Titus!" Drusus welcomed him with a wide smile, offering his right arm. "I've not seen you since the night of the agreement to nominate Sulla, more than a year ago!"

"That is why I'm here, Marcus Livius. It has come to Caius' attention that you've been visiting many of the Boni senators, and spending an inordinate amount of time in private with them." Lafrenius heaved a worried sigh. "Caius suspects you of plotting with them. What answer do you give for your actions?"

"Cast your mind back a few years, Titus," Drusus responded. "'Didn't I spend endless hours talking to all sorts of people in an attempt to ensure the passage of my legislation? If there's one characteristic in all my political dealings, it's that I defeat my enemies *before* the vote is taken, not *when* it is taken! I dearly want Caius to be appointed suffect consul and start taking action against Mithridates as soon as possible, and I am spending every hour I have to talk around those most likely to be focal points of opposition. Why, only this morning I gained the acquiescence of Quintus Caecilius Metellus, one of the leading Boni! If he doesn't oppose the proposal the chances of its success are greatly increased."

"Caius isn't worried about opposition," Lafrenius commented drily. "They can be silenced, and the vote taken again."

"In which case Caius will be creating enemies when he could be gaining friends," Drusus retorted. "If you want to take the Senators with you, it is better to have them help you push the cart, rather than their dead bodies making the cart heavier."

Lafrenius smirked at the metaphor. "So I'll tell Caius that you're building a consensus in his favour?"

"Yes; and when he sees how so many of the Boni support him rather than sullenly abstaining, he'll know I speak the truth."

Lafrenius sat on one of the couches. "Why do you care so much about building this consensus, Marcus Livius?"

"Why? Because it's good for Rome that Caius sail before the winter! We can't afford to waste any more time."

Lafrenius glanced at Cratippus, hovering at the far end of the room. He was obviously being very careful about what might be overheard. "And will you support him for election in absentia as well? If he's made suffect consul tomorrow, then election next year would be his eighth consulship; the prophecy was only for seven."

"So long as Caius is willing and able to lead the war against Mithridates, I will support him as consul," Drusus assured him. "If that means that Caius exceeds the prophecy, then why should I worry about that?"

"I'm sorry, Marcus Livius; I believe you but I have my instructions. Please accompany me to the house of Quintus Poppeus so you can explain your actions to him."

Drusus inclined his head to show submission. "Of course I will, Titus. I fully understand your position. May I dress more appropriately first?"

Ten minutes later Drusus had changed his tunic for a toga and was walking out his front door. After another ten minutes he was at Silo's house. They were conducted into the open garden, where Silo greeted them and lead them to the fountain in the centre of his courtyard.

"Thank you for coming, Marcus Livius," Silo opened as he sat on the low wall around the fountain. "I expect to be sailing with Caius within the next few days, and I needed a pretext to bring you here in the company of Titus. I've received word that Lucius Cornelius is now safely in Marsi territory and in hiding. His scattered cohorts are nearing their appointed places. In three more days they'll be

within a two-day forced march of Rome, but it would be good to give them a few days' rest before asking them to move again. But the earliest they will be needed is some ten days hence so that's not a problem.

"When I'm at sea, Titus here will be your contact with the Marsi and Lucius Cornelius. But please don't make contact more than is necessary; you mustn't give rise to any suspicion." Silo paused. "Do you have any questions or comments?"

"Yes, I do have a question, Quintus Poppaeus." Drusus ventured. "Caius Papius is still in Sicily, to the best of my knowledge. Is he aware of the situation, and how will he react?"

"Caius Papius is indeed still in Sicily, as you say," Silo replied. "Events have moved too quickly to keep him fully informed, but I've been sending him messages every second or third day; so by the time Caius gets to Sicily, Caius Papius will know everything we intend."

"I've had only one reply from him so far, and that was to my very first letter, sent just before I left to meet you and Lucius Cornelius on the Via Appia. He pledged himself to support my judgement of the situation and urged me to show his rescript to Marius Egnatius and Pontius Telesinus, two of the leading Samnite nobles. They've both agreed to support me as well."

"And the other Italians?" Drusus pressed.

"The Lucani and Hirpini are with us; we had to ask for their help so they would keep quiet about the scattered cohorts passing through their territory. The others believe that Lucius Cornelius is on the run. But when he re-appears, I'm confident that they will at least accept what we do, even if not come out in support." Silo shrugged. "Remember; they're your clients, and they have a high regard for Lucius Cornelius as well. A plan that allows Caius to lead the war and Lucius Cornelius to take control of Rome would seem to them to be the best outcome possible."

Drusus nodded, half to himself, as he thought through the possibilities. "Caius has insisted that this is an emergency worse than the Cimbri, and that justifies him in taking consecutive consulships," Drusus started. "In which case, there could be no objection to consecutive consulships by Lucius Cornelius as well. And I think I might stand for Urban Praetor, to ensure the city is run according to law instead of by gangs." He looked up to Silo. "Do you think I would have support?"

Silo grinned widely. "Absolutely! On both counts! The Italians will be behind you and Lucius Cornelius one hundred percent. The Romans can be persuaded to regard Lucius Cornelius as still Marius' right-hand-man, and this latest kerfuffle as no more than a means to get Marius immediate command as they have demanded themselves. So long as we all continue to praise Marius, that is, and he won't be around to say otherwise. And as for you, the People still stand in awe of your integrity. You'll be elected to whatever office you stand for. That speech at the top of the Senate steps crippled Sulpicius and your courage in staring that thug down convinced many that you're twice the man that he will ever be. Once Caius' legions move out and Sulpicius no longer has their protection, the People will welcome Lucius Cornelius with open arms and you with him."

"So we have a plan for next year," Drusus summarised. "Just make sure that Caius doesn't hear about it!"

The Senate meeting the next morning was a subdued affair. Cato, as the only consul present, took the fasces. After the augurs had pronounced the day propitious, he called the meeting to attention. It was sparsely attended, not even a quorum present. But that didn't concern Cato, who was aware that there were no legal grounds for what was going to happen anyway. Nor did it concern anyone else present but rather gave the opportunity to have the day's work overturned later. And lastly, it didn't concern Marius, so long as he was recognised as consul with full authority to wage war.

"Conscript Fathers; we have a situation in which the whereabouts of one of the consuls cannot be determined and in which he is patently unable to fulfil his office," Cato opened. "Therefore it is appropriate that his office be declared vacant, and a suffect consul appointed in his place. Do I have a motion to that effect?"

Catulus stood before Drusus had the chance to put his own feet on the floor. This surprised everyone; Catulus' hatred for Marius was legendary. But they were not surprised for long.

"Quintus Lutatius, you have the floor."

"I forbid that such a proposition be even put!" Catulus fumed. "This is nothing more than a ploy to get Marius his seventh consulship! It is unprecedented to depose a consul merely because his whereabouts are unknown! How often before in our history has a consul waged war overseas, and the best knowledge the Senate had as to his location might be months behind the facts? Yet here we are, only half-a-month from the consul last being sighted, in good health and within Italy! The whole proposal is absurd!" Catulus sat.

Drusus stood, and was recognised.

"I think that it's obvious that Lucius Cornelius cannot fulfil the duties of his office. It matters not the slightest where he is, what health he is in, or anything else except his ability to act as consul." Drusus looked around the chamber. "You all know that I've had a long and close friendship with him, so I don't put this question out of personal spite. I act only on the basis of the reality confronting us and what would be in Rome's best interests in the face of that reality," Drusus sat.

"Are there any speakers against the proposal?" Cato asked.

Catulus stood.

"You have already spoken against the proposal, Quintus Lutatius; is there any other speaker against the proposal?" Cato asked again.

Catulus stood his ground, and no-one rose.

"Very well, Quintus Lutatius; you have the floor," Cato conceded.

"Behold, in whose hand is the dagger that would slaughter the Mos Majorum!" Catulus thundered. "None other than Marcus Livius Drusus, the self-proclaimed guardian of scrupulous legality! The mask slips at last and we start to see the man beneath! There's no wonder that he has played the hypocrite in this regard! He is already on record as being the first to nominate a replacement when Lucius Marcius Philippus was wrongfully deposed, a major breach of the Mos

Majorum which he professes to uphold; and that man whom he nominated was none other than Lucius Cornelius Sulla, whom he now betrays and stabs in the back! Surely this man has no honour, no loyalty to anyone or anything! Except, perhaps, to his own agenda!” Catulus looked around him slowly. I solemnly warn you all; if you follow this man you will end up just like him! Avoid such a disgrace by acting now! Reject this illegal and cowardly proposal!” Catulus sat.

“Is there a speaker in favour of the proposal?” Cato asked.

Rufus stood.

“Quintus Pompeius, you have the floor.”

“Conscript Fathers, I cannot help but notice some parallel with a debate we had a couple of years ago, in the same meeting that accepted the resignation of Lucius Marcius Philippus.” Rufus pivoted where he stood. “First we had a speech from Marcus Livius Drusus, consisting of clear and obvious facts, and woven into a rational and compelling case. This was answered by a bellyfull of bile which was supported by no facts at all; only a stream of hatred.

“That is not good enough, Conscript Fathers! Let us deal with facts and the unavoidable consequences of those facts.

“To list only one of the untruths in the address you have just heard from Quintus Lutatius, the former consul Lucius Marcius Philippus was not deposed; he resigned from the Senate, and thereby surrendered his office as consul. Marcus Livius Drusus had no part in that; he didn't move that the resignation be accepted, and if I remember correctly he didn't even speak on the question.

“When it came to nominations for the successor, Marcus Livius did indeed nominate Lucius Cornelius, who declined the nomination. However there was one man there who did more than nominate a candidate; he actually accepted nomination! He even went on to fill the consular vacancy! If he were so convinced that Philippus had been ‘wrongfully deposed’, as he said only a few minutes ago, then why was Quintus Lutatius Catulus so eager to be his replacement?” Laughter broke out among the benches, and Catulus visibly shrank.

“I support this proposal because it is straight, simple common sense.” Rufus sat.

“Is there a speaker against?” Cato asked. No-one stood.

“Then I put the question.” Cato continued. “That the consul Lucius Cornelius Sulla has been found to be incapable of executing the office of consul, and is thereby set aside from that office.”

“Those in favour?” A weak chorus of “Ayes” was heard.

“Those against?” Only Catulus thundered a loud “No!”

“I think the Ayes have it,” Cato reported. “Is there a call for a division?”

“I call for a division!” Catulus shouted “So all can see who are the traitors in our midst!”

“There is a call for a division,” Cato reported. “Those in favour will gather to my right, those against to my left.”

A mere twenty people stood and moved to Cato's right. Only Catulus stood and moved to the left. The others, a considerable majority of those attending, remained in their seats.

“Senators will pair off and move to the end of the floor.”

Marius deliberately strode to make the pair with Catulus. He glared at his long-time enemy with a river of pure hatred.

It took only this one pair to leave the “ayes” in control of the floor.

“The Ayes have it! This Senate declares that Lucius Cornelius Sulla is no longer a Consul of the Roman Republic!” Cato concluded. “Please resume your seats.”

The senators on the floor shuffled back to their chairs amid a soft murmur.

“There being a vacant consular office, I ask if there is a nomination to that vacancy.”

Gnaeus Pompeius stood, very quickly. Again Silo was too slow.

“Gnaeus Pompeius, you have the floor.” Cato invited.

“I nominate Quintus Lutatius Catulus as suffect consul!” he proclaimed. There were chuckles all round. “Doesn’t Plato teach us in his Republic – not our Roman Republic, by any measure, but a good title for a book in any case – doesn’t Plato teach us that the best ruler is the man who would rather not rule?” The laughter returned. Pompeius waited for it to fade again.

“In the case of Quintus Lutatius, we have a man well experienced in not wanting to rule! He did nothing when he was the colleague of Caius Marius some twelve or so years ago – or at least, nothing except make his colleague look like Mars come down to earth, anyway. And can anyone remember anything that he did when he was consul only a few years ago?” More guffaws broke out.

“And in case Lucius Porcius is inclined to consider him ineligible because it has not yet been ten years since Quintus Lutatius last acted as consul, I must voice my objection to such a ruling.” Pompeius paused for effect. “Although he might well have held the office of consul, he certainly did not act as one!” More laughter rippled over the chamber as Pompeius sat.

“I am sorry, Gnaeus Pompeius, but you have correctly anticipated my ruling,” Cato responded. “And in regard to your objection, I must say that Quintus Lutatius did indeed act as consul. I clearly recall that he used his veto – once.” The laughter rose again. Catulus stood and stormed out of the chamber.

When the laughter had died down to be replaced by the murmur of conversation, Cato asked again “Do I have a nomination for suffect Consul?”

Silo stood.

Quintus Popphaedius, please speak.”

“I nominate Caius Marius. He has served as consul before, but his last consulship was more than ten years ago, and he is therefore eligible for another term in the office.” Silo sat.

Caius Marius, do you accept this nomination?”

Marius rose to speak. “I will serve, if the Senate so decides.”

Do I have any further nominations?” Cato looked around. No-one stood.

“Caius Marius is the only nominee,” Cato announced. “All those in favour of Caius Marius being appointed suffect consul?” A weak chorus rose.

“Those against?” There was silence.

“I think the ayes have it. Is there a call for a division?” There was silence.

“Then I declare Caius Marius suffect consul for the remainder of this term,” Cato announced. “My congratulations, Caius, and please come and take your seat beside me.”

Marius walked to the raised dais on which the curile chairs were placed, and sat.

Drusus stood again.

“Marcus Livius, you have a matter of urgency?”

“Yes, Lucius Porcius. Every day that passes is a day during which Mithridates further plunders our Friends and Allies in the east and a day in which the currently unaligned powers in the area are open to the suggestion that Rome cannot stand against him. They are thus being persuaded to join with him. I think it's essential that we despatch as large a force as possible as soon as possible to stabilise the situation before it becomes irrecoverable.

“We now have an excellent Military Man available to us, to my mind the best Rome has ever had. He is now consul and therefore entitled to have full Imperium in the conduct of the war, subject only to his colleague's veto. I urge the two consuls to agree together that Caius Marius should devote his energies entirely to the war and be given full authority by his colleague to act as he deems fit without any fear of a veto; and that Caius Marius depart to carry the war to Mithridates as soon as possible.

“Because this war will not be over within two months, I also suggest that this crisis be declared a State of Emergency similar to that when we were threatened by the Germans; and that so long as this State of Emergency endures, nominations in absentia are to be accepted and the usual restrictions on minimum duration between offices shall be waived.” Drusus sat.

“The first two parts of your suggestion are entirely within the prerogative of the consuls, Marcus Livius. As for me, I openly and irrevocably lay aside my power of veto over any decision taken by Caius Marius when he is outside Italy. I also concede to him the command of all forces outside Italy. When and where he takes those forces is therefore his own decision.” Cato looked to Marius. “Caius, would you care to outline your intentions?”

“I intend to sail in two days' time for the east, now that I have the authority to do so. Exactly how I deploy my forces will depend on information I hope to gather once there. The only thing that might delay me is the need to be personally present to nominate for the office of Consul next year, but if the suggestion of Marcus Livius is adopted that will remove the final barrier.”

Drusus stood again, and received the call. “I move that a State of Emergency be declared,” he said. “This State of Emergency shall last for three years from today's date, unless the War is concluded earlier. For the duration of this State of Emergency, candidates for office may nominate in absentia, and there shall be no restriction on duration between offices.” Drusus sat.

“Is there a speaker against the proposition?” Cato scanned the chamber. No-one moved.

“There being no speaker, I ask if Marcus Livius would have the question put immediately.” Drusus nodded his response.

"I put the question; those in favour?" Another weak chorus rose.

"Those against?" Silence.

"I think the ayes have it. Is there a call for a division?" Silence.

"Then I declare the State of Emergency, with the conditions as outlined by Marcus Livius Drusus. Is there any further business to transact?" Cato asked.

Marius stood.

"Yes, Caius?" Cato asked.

"At present Jupiter has no High Priest." Marius looked around the chamber. "It would be a great impiety for us to allow this circumstance to continue, the more so as we set out on a war against so powerful a foe. We must show our piety towards Jupiter by establishing his High Priest in office immediately." Again the eyes swept the chamber.

"I nominate Caius Julius Caesar the Younger for this office." Marius sat.

"The first question is "Shall we appoint someone to the High Priesthood of Jupiter?" Cato announced. Are there any voices against?"

Silence.

"There being no contrary voices, I believe the question is carried. Is there a call for division?"

Silence.

"There being no call for division, I declare that question is agreed. I have the nomination of Caius Julius Caesar the Younger to the High Priesthood of Jupiter. Are there any further nominations?"

Silence.

There being only one nomination, I put the question. Shall Caius Julius Caesar the Younger become the High Priest of Jupiter?"

A few 'ayes' rose.

"Those against?"

Silence.

"There being no voice against, I believe the ayes have it. Is there a call for a division?"

"There being no call for a division, I declare that Caius Julius Caesar the Younger shall be High Priest of Jupiter."

Is there any further business?"

Silence.

"Then I declare the meeting finished. Thank you for your diligence, Consscript Fathers."

Marius rose from his seat, and walked over to where Drusus was speaking with Silo.

"That was well done, Marcus Livius," he said, his face beaming. "Only that idiot Catulus dared to stand against you, and I'll soon enough see to him."

"Thank you Caius," Drusus answered. "But might I suggest that you leave Catulus alone? So long as the only voice against you is his, he will show that only a fool would oppose you. Every time he opens his mouth, his puerile utterances against you strengthen you more than a dozen speeches in your favour. And besides, you don't want to be seen as one who would make himself a king! The

People follow you precisely because you serve Rome, rather than making Rome serve you.”

Marius looked at him as if confused for a moment. Then his face cleared. “Yes, I suppose that makes sense. I’ll leave him, at least for the moment. Keep up the good work, Marcus Livius.” Marius turned and wandered away.

It was three days before Marius finally left Ostia, with eight legions raised from the Head Count with him. Silo was under instructions to continue marshalling as many legions as possible and send them on; orders had long ago been sent by fast riders and ships to every port in Italy, Africa, Sicily, the Spains and Massalia for transport ships. As soon as they could be assembled into convoys large enough to ensure a successful landing if opposed, he was to load them and send them. Finally, he was to accompany the first convoy dispatched in December, and order any remaining legions to be marched to Brundisium for the shorter crossing to Dyrrhachium as the weather might allow opportunity from time to time over winter.

A letter arrived on the last day of November, addressed to Cato as consul.

*Caius Papius Mutilus, Praetor responsible for Sicily,
to Lucius Porcius Cato, Consul of the Roman Republic,*

Greetings!

I report to you that Caius Marius, your consular colleague, departed Syracuse this morning with all ships and eight legions in good order. I have supplied him with sufficient stores and fresh water to reach Rhodes without the need for a second landfall, provided the winds remain true.

In accordance with instructions from Caius Marius I am collecting further stores to ensure any following forces may be sped on their way with minimal delay. The costs of these preparations, like the cost of the supplies already handed over to Caius Marius, will be charged to the Treasury as a war cost, and an audited listing of quantities and prices will be laid before you when I return at the end of my term of office in this place.

If I may now change from making a Report to expressing an opinion; I must say how pleased I am that the recent turmoils have been resolved so well. I fully support your actions, and also the terms of the State of Emergency. In particular, I support the measures to ensure Caius Marius may remain in the East until Mithridates is overcome, without the need to return to Rome. Be assured of my continuing support for your plans, which are clearly the only way Rome can be assured of continuing peace and prosperity.

May you prosper!

Cato immediately sent a runner to ask Silo to attend his office as soon as convenient. The Italian arrived within the hour.

"I have a letter from Caius Papius," Cato said as refreshments were delivered to the table in the triclinium. Cato read it for his guest.

"Excellent!" Silo enthused. "How wise of Caius Papius to inform us that Caius is now safely out of the way, and in such an innocent way! As well as his agreement with our plans."

"Yes," Cato agreed. "Perhaps now is the time to send a message to Lucius Cornelius?"

"Indeed! The sooner Sulpicius and his street-gangs are crushed, the better," Silo agreed. "They're getting bolder and less restrained every day."

"Yes, that's true," Cato agreed. "Quintus Caecilius told me only yesterday that he's not even bothering to bring them to trial now; if he charges any of them with a crime, the thug simply turns up with a hundred of his friends to intimidate witnesses and jurors alike. Not even Sulpicius can control them now; he's as intimidated as anyone else."

"Excellent!" Silo agreed. "Let's allow ample time for the message to get to Lucius Cornelius, then to prepare his men, and then to march here. I'd reckon on seven days, just to allow for any delays with the weather."

"Agreed," Cato confirmed. "But we must tell no-one until they're outside the gates; not even Quintus Caecilius. We don't want Sulpicius to notice any preparations or even improved spirits that might give him warning."

"In that regard, I don't even see the need to set a date," Silo suggested. "Let's simply tell Lucius Cornelius that he may now move at his own pace and as conditions allow?"

"Agreed!"

"I think I should embark with the next batch of troops as soon as possible, to join Caius. I want to be there before news of Lucius Cornelius gets to him," Silo continued.

"Well, your orders are to do that, so why not?" Cato failed to see anything outside the plan.

"My particular reason for going as soon as possible, instead of scratching together a couple more legions' worth of transport, is that I don't know how Marius might react when he hears about Lucius Cornelius returning to Rome. He might try to fight his way back into Rome," Silo explained.

"But by then it will be winter. Sailing would be too dangerous."

"You still seem to think Caius is behaving rationally," Silo said drily. "I see him every day, so I'm under no illusions."

"I see," Cato agreed. "And if he wants to return?"

Silo set his face. "As I said to you on the Appian Way; that's when he has a terrible accident."

Silo received a response from Sulla a few days later. He called on Cato to share the news.

*Your beloved Lucia,
To Quintus Poppeius,*

Thank you for remembering me! How sweet of you!

I just have to gather a few things together, and I'll be on my way; I hope to arrive at my destination on the tenth day of December. I expect to spend the winter there. It will be cold without you to warm me!

All the best to you as you defend Rome against its enemies!

Cato laughed heartily. "I am sure Lucius Cornelius really enjoys that sort of thing! He does it so well!" Cato shook his head. "*Amata tua, Lucia!* Written in the feminine all the way through, and in such an effeminate hand!" He held it under his nose for a moment. "And it's even scented! Don't let your wife see that!"

"Yes; and he has also given me a good head start, to get to Caius before the news does," Silo agreed. "Anyway, I sail tomorrow morning with another ten legions. Allow me to take my leave of you now, and then I'll say my farewells to Marcus Livius. Rome is in the hands of you three from this point onwards."

"Live long and well, Quintus Poppaedi!" Cato replied as he took Silo's right arm.

The first anyone in Rome knew about Sulla's approach were reports from horsemen who arrived about mid-day on the tenth of December. The approach of three legions down the Via Salaria was entirely unremarkable in itself, so many Italian legions had converged on Rome. Only Titus Lafrenius, now Silo's deputy at the Roman end of the supply chain, knew that these three legions were not on his schedule of expected arrivals. He quickly sent a runner to Metellus, to warn that he would be there himself within an hour.

"Thank you for seeing me at such short notice, Quintus Caecilius; I know your office of Urban Praetor is time-consuming," Lafrenius said as he entered.

"Not as time-consuming as it should be," Metellus grumbled. "I dare not prosecute any crimes at the moment; I can only receive complaints and testimony, and hope that the climate for prosecutions is better in the New Year."

"Well, by a co-incidence, that's what I am here to talk about," Lafrenius responded.

"What do you mean?" Metellus asked sharply.

"I'll soon have at my disposal three legions of Romans, not Italians. And these men are loyal to the Mos Majorum, not Caius Marius." Lafrenius smiled. "I think fifteen thousand veterans would be more than a match for Sulpicius and his bully-boys. Would you like to take command of them as an anti-crime body for the city? A bit like the Rabdouchoi in Athens?"

Metellus gaped. "You are sure they're not Italians? The People would riot if Italians took over the city!"

"No; genuine Romans. These are the men who supposedly deserted Lucius Cornelius, but in fact they went into hiding to avoid conscription into the Marian army."

"That would be excellent!" Metellus exclaimed, overjoyed at last. "When can I have them?"

"They're due to arrive this afternoon. I'll have them camp in the Campus Martius, and from there they can be organised into shifts to patrol the streets or arrest known law-breakers."

"I want them to go straight to Sulpicius' house and arrest him as soon as they arrive!" Metellus insisted. "Sulpicius laid violent hands on a consul of Rome as he was doing his public duty as chairman of a Senate meeting. That is treason!"

"That can't be done, unfortunately" Lafrenius corrected him. "Sulpicius is a Tribune of the Plebs, so he's sacrosanct. But his thugs are not, and I would suggest that as many as possible of them might suffer unfortunate harm as they resist arrest. If they survive arrest Sulpicius can demand they be released, and that simply wouldn't be acceptable. So it's to be preferred that they die resisting."

"Yes, you're right," Metellus conceded. "I'd like to cut the head off the serpent, but cutting off the body has the same effect. If we get rid of his gangs, he'll be powerless. We can arrest and try him in the new year when his office expires."

"If he's still here," Lafrenius added. "I'd expect him to make a run for it as soon as he realises he doesn't control the streets any longer."

"Well, exile is as good as anything else, I suppose." Metellus took what scraps of comfort he could. "And it's better that way than enduring the rest of the month under him. It also clears the Comitia for proper elections."

"So you might want to head out to the Campus Martius to take command of your men," Lafrenius came back to the main subject. "You have to do that yourself; a Military Man such as myself can't command inside the pomerium. The Mos Majorum demands it be done under the authority of the Urban Praetor."

"In fact, I think I'll ride out to meet them on the road," Metellus said with enthusiasm. "Who's in command of them?"

"Ah, I believe you might know him; a fellow named Lucius Cornelius Sulla," Lafrenius smiled. Metellus looked stunned.

At length he recovered his wits and smiled knowingly. "Drusus! I knew he was up to something!"

"Quintus Caecilius! How pleased I am to see you!" Sulla exclaimed as Metellus met him on the Via Salaria only two miles out from the city gates.

"I hope you can forgive me for voting to depose you as consul," Metellus said lightly.

"I'm pleased you did; otherwise Caius Marius and his rabble would still be around," Sulla laughed. "Having me deposed was an essential part of the plan."

"Actually, Lucius Cornelius, you're not legally deposed; the Senate didn't have a quorum that day," Metellus continued. "The appointment of Marius was completely illegal."

"Yes, but it worked!" Sulla laughed. "And I'm not concerned one way or the other, so long as Rome is restored and the proper government is returned. My personal standing is irrelevant to the main game. Anyway, Quintus Caecilius, I hear that you're having a problem with street gangs," Sulla changed the subject. "Allow me to hand over to you three legions of veteran soldiers, all Romans, and all willing to act as your servants in restoring and maintaining the rule of law."

"Thank you, Lucius Cornelius. Titus Lafrenius has already explained that to me. But I'm troubled by one thing. Sulpicius himself is sacrosanct. What can be done about him?"

"Oh, that won't be a problem!" Sulla assured him. "I know just the perfect way to get rid of him, while scrupulously observing the Mos Majorum."

"Really, Lucius Cornelius? How?"

"It's so simple, really, if only you have the imagination to think outside the routine," Sulla started to explain. "First, you find a half-dozen criminals who have been sentenced to crucifixion, or some other unpleasant form of death.

"Then, you take them under armed guard to Sulpicius' house to meet the Tribune of the Plebs. Problem solved!"

"I'm sorry but I don't see how that would solve the problem," Metellus objected.

"Oh, sorry; I left out a couple of details. Before they get there, you will have already warned them that if they kill the Tribune of the Plebs, thus violating his sacrosanctity, the guards will have no choice but to kill them on the spot. Not immediately, because these guards have very slow reaction times so they won't realise what's happened until Sulpicius is dead. In fact, they probably won't notice until the criminals have had a good meal, and put away as much of Sulpicius' finest wine as they can drink. But when the guards do eventually react, they'll kill quickly and cleanly, which is a much better death than crucifixion." Sulla finished his explanation with that smile that would have scared a bear.

"Oh, gods!" Metellus exclaimed as his spine chilled. "What sort of a man are you, Lucius Cornelius, to come up with a scheme like that?"

"I'm a man who can't tolerate anyone harming Rome with impunity!" Sulla replied harshly. "Not even Caius Marius; whom I loved like a father! I'll forgive him for all his crimes against me, but I'll repay him for his crimes against Rome! Perhaps not today, perhaps not tomorrow, but when the time is right, he will die."

Metellus was stunned. He had known Sulla for twenty years, including service directly under him in the war against Jugurtha. He knew Sulla to be resourceful and ruthless. But he had never seen such intensity of hatred pour out of any man before. Certainly he had seen men in a beserker rage and this hatred from Sulla was no less full, but was also focused through a cold, clinically rational mind. He made a note to himself; never become Sulla's enemy!

"Anyway, Quintus Caecilius; as soon as we reach the Campus Martius, the men will be yours. I trust you know what you want done with them?" Sulla was now completely affable. How quickly the man can change!

"Let them rest, Lucius Cornelius, but with the usual sentry roster," Metellus stumbled out. "Tomorrow I'll come out and assume command."

"Until tomorrow, then!" Sulla agreed. "Now I should ride ahead with some staff to do traffic control and set out the camp." Sulla saluted, and then started trotting down the road towards Rome, his staff following.

Metellus kicked his own horse to a slow gallop back to Rome, overtaking Sulla. He needed to organise a watchmen roster for his new 15,000-strong City Guard.

The morning dawned still and frosty. Metellus arrived soon after sunrise, and asked Sulla to call out the commanders of legion and cohort-sized bodies to advise them on the roster and areas of responsibility that he had determined on overnight.

“Men, I have decided to base the defence of good order in Rome on your current military formations,” Metellus opened. “Each legion shall draw duty in turn between sunset and sunrise; this means that each will serve for one entire night, from sunset to sunrise, then have the next day and night free. Then it will serve the following day from sunrise to sunset before having another twenty-four hours free before the cycle starts again.

“Each contubernium shall be allocated to a specific location, and required to keep the peace by patrolling the immediate environs of that location. In the event of a problem too great for the one contubernium to handle by itself, it’s to raise the alarm and the surrounding patrols will come to assist.

“The allocation of contubernia to specific locations will be the duty of the commanders of the legions and their centurions. Please emphasise to your men that they can expect to be posted to the same locations every duty, so they should get to know the locals. Also, if there are any complaints I will know who to call to account.

“I have here today maps of the city, divided into ten districts; there’s one copy for each legion commander. Each district is to be the responsibility of one cohort from each legion in the rotation; I expect the legion commanders to allocate which cohort is to take each district. How you divide your districts between your centuries and contubernia is up to you in the short term, but I reserve the right to make adjustments as we see where the men are required once the dust settles. Please make your dispositions as you see fit, and report back to me with maps showing how you have deployed your men.

“Finally, winter is coming on. A camp in the open is not going to be pleasant or good for morale. You might permit your men to move back into their homes if they have any in the city, or to find a place to rent. But that’s also your decision.

“Are there any questions?” Metellus finally asked.

One legion commander raised a hand.

“Yes?” Metellus prompted.

“Exactly what are the men expected to do? Are they authorised to use force? May they use their weapons?”

“Your men are expected to maintain public order,” Metellus answered. “This means that they’re to protect law-abiding citizens from nuisance, from theft or damage to property, from intimidation, and from physical harm. I expect that merely the presence of a group of eight veteran soldiers will be sufficient to prevent any wrong-doing, so they should have a quiet time of it. But if any criminal activity is encountered your men are authorised and ordered to use as much force as is required to prevent the crime and apprehend the criminals. If they find one of Sulpicius’ gangs then have no qualms about cutting them down in their tracks. But if they’re common criminals who submit without resistance you may bind them, but

only in so far as is reasonable to prevent escape. If they don't submit or if they have weapons, you may use weapons.

"Once apprehended, the criminal shall be brought to my office to be tried and punished. Bring with you any witnesses or other evidence." Metellus looked around the faces. "But emphasise to your men that I do *not* want to have an endless queue outside my office. If a word of advice or warning is enough to calm the situation, then a word is the right way to go. I don't want to see anyone except those who actually do some damage or harm, or repeatedly threaten to do so, or who have been reported to you as having done so by reliable witnesses. Your men are there to prevent trouble, not stir it up."

"I also want your men to know that they are there to serve the law. They are not to consider themselves above it. If one is hungry he must pay for his food, not simply take it. If he is cold, then let him buy a coat and not take one. Your men are there to protect, not to plunder." Metellus looked around the gathering again. There were no more questions. "Very well," he said. "I expect the First Legion to provide the first turn of duty starting at sunset today, the Second to take over at sunrise, and the Third the following night. Thank you, men."

Marcus Palleus was intrigued by this new form of duty. He was the decanus, the man elected by his seven fellow-soldiers in this contubernium to be their leader, having served in the army for eighteen years. He was also old enough to prefer a quiet life and wanted to make sure that his patch of territory was trouble-free.

The east was growing light as he marched his men to the cross-roads roughly in the centre of his patrol area. He could see the men who had kept watch through the night. They had a string of four men bound together, with their arms tied behind their backs. Marcus came to attention before their decanus and saluted.

"Marcus Palleus, relieving your patrol," he said briskly.

The decanus saluted in return. "Titus Varro, reporting conditions." The formality then dropped into soldierly discussion. "Marcus, these four were drunk and disorderly. When we instructed them to go home, they tried to argue with us. They had no idea that we were actually on duty. I suggest that we let them go now, with a warning; do you agree with that approach? I think we should have a common policy, since we'll be sharing the responsibility for this area in the future."

"Good thinking, Titus; I'll say the same to the next decanus when we are relieved," Marcus replied. "I think a warning should be enough, at least for the first few days while they get used to us. If we start to see the same faces, though, we might need to get tougher."

Titus turned to his men. "Release them!" he ordered. Then back to Marcus, "Have a boring day, Marcus!" he smiled. "Right now, I intend to make sure the locals start to trust us."

His men finished releasing the bonds on the four men. He said to his men "Come on; let's grab a hot breakfast!" The eight of them headed for one of the eating-houses that were scattered throughout Rome. It's a little-known truth that very few of the lower classes actually cooked meals at home. The cost in cash, time and most significantly fuel made it much simpler to eat morning and evening at one

of the thousands of eateries that served up pot after pot of soup and loaf after loaf of bread; the economies of scale meant they could produce an acceptable minestrone and bread for less than the cost of the fuel and ingredients that would be consumed in a private household.

"Very well, men," Marcus ordered. "Let's do the rounds of our area a couple of times, just to get familiar with it!" He set off at a stroll, to walk around each of the four large insulae adjoining the cross-roads, the extent of his beat. Always the methodical soldier, he walked in a loop around diagonally-opposite blocks, then around the other pair, to minimise the time between passing any one shop-front. Even at a gentle strolling pace the journey took a bit less than half an hour. "That's good," Marcus said with some satisfaction as he called his men together. "If we break into two teams of four, and go in opposite directions, our timing will be much less predictable. That'll make it much harder for anyone to pick a safe time to get up to mischief." He looked around. The streets were filling with people going about their business.

"Titus had the right idea," he commented. "We should make sure everyone knows we're here, and why. Junius, Amelius, Caius, Cassius; you four keep doing the patrol, but at a quicker pace, a proper march. We other four will introduce ourselves to the shops." The four on patrol set off.

"The rest of you, follow me and listen. Then we'll all leap-frog along the shops saying the same thing to each." Marcus walked into the corner shop on the north of the central cross-road. "Greetings," he said to the shop-worker. "Is the master available?"

"I am the master," the worker replied.

"Good," Marcus started his introduction. "My name is Marcus Palleus. I and my seven men have been put under the command of the Urban Praetor to respond to any criminal activity we find. We'll share this job with two other teams, each of eight men, on a roster system. There should be a patrol passing here regularly, about every ten minutes, day and night. If you become aware of any criminal activity, let us know about it and we'll put a stop to it. This includes any attempts to intimidate or extort."

The shopkeeper was wary. "I've never heard of anything like that before. I pay ten denarii a month to the local College, and they look after me well enough."

"Well, you've heard about us now," Marcus responded cheerily. "Keep paying the college if you want, or you can tell us where to find them and we will round them up and charge them with extortion. It's your decision. But keep us in mind." Marcus walked out of the shop. "All right, men; you know the pattern; just introduce yourself, and don't get into any arguments or long talks. Just work your way around this insula, going to the left."

By mid-day they had introduced themselves to every shop in their beat. Marcus intercepted the patrolling four at the cross-road. "Go and grab something to eat. And remember to be polite and pay for it! Come back here when you're finished, and then we'll grab a bite too."

By the time sunset was approaching Marcus was well satisfied with the day's work. They had apprehended a couple of young shop-lifters and let them off with

a warning, and broken up two brawls outside drinking-houses. Again, only a warning. But there were enough witnesses around that the word would spread. Metellus was doing something to maintain law and order!

Metellus himself was less pleased with the day's work. Now that the Senate had some protection, another Senate meeting had formally declared the deposition of Sulla and the appointment of Marius void. However, the State of Emergency had been confirmed. Both Drusus and Cato argued that Marius must be allowed to stand in absentia, and to win election as Consul. Were he to be prevented, then there was every chance that he would sail his legions back to Rome in the Spring, and there'd be a bloodbath. Not to mention the adverse effect this would have on the Mithridatic War.

Metellus had also been told that afternoon that Sulpicius had fled Rome, and was last seen heading down the Via Appia – probably to try to meet up with Marius. Sulla and Cato had been told because they were the consuls. Cato had just shrugged. "Better that he goes away than living here in Rome with his sacrosanctity," was Cato's verdict. Sulla just smiled vaguely, and Metellus remembered Sulla's recommendations for ridding themselves of Sulpicius. 'But surely Lucius Cornelius would be content to have Sulpicius out of the city; that's the only thing that really matters,' he thought to himself.

Lafrenius had gathered another five legions and ordered them to Brundisium, ready for the short crossing to Dyrrachium when the weather permitted, and then march to Thessalonica if possible. He had word that another seven were being formed by the Italians, and would march straight to Brundisium. Twelve legions in Brundisium should be enough to keep Macedonia quiet; and if they managed to get as far as Thessalonica, then their influence would extend into Athens and the Aegean as well, with the eighteen already bound for Rhodes at the other corner of the Aegean. There was every hope that Mithridates could be contained through this winter, and then rolled back in the new year.

Rome was back to normal. In fact, better than normal with the patrols having a marked effect on law and order. The big surprise was the candidacy of Sulla for a second term as consul.

"Lucius Cornelius," Drusus remarked when he heard, "I thought you were opposed to the State of Emergency! Then why are you now taking advantage of its provisions?"

"Because of Marius," he replied. Drusus noticed the refusal to use the familiar "Caius".

"But there's no way that you will defeat Marius," Drusus tried to reason with him. "Despite the chicanery of Sulpicius and his thugs, the People still love the Old Warhorse. He'll walk in!"

"Perhaps he will," Sulla conceded. "But I've been asked once to piss on my own dignitas, and I did so for the sake of Rome. But I won't do so a second time. I demand that I be vindicated! If I were to not stand again, I'd be conceding that there's one rule for Marius while the rest of us mere mortals have to operate under a different rule. And I'll simply not tolerate that after the way Marius tried to

destroy Rome this year! - would have destroyed Rome had I not acted as I did, risking everything including my own honour." Sulla clenched a fist. "Marius is an Enemy of the Mos Majorum, even if the Plebs love him. And the Mos Majorum *is* Rome! I'll destroy every enemy Rome has, in my own time and in my own way!"

Drusus stared at Sulla for a full minute. Eventually he asked "And do you intend to say that in public?"

"Don't think that I'll be stupid, Marcus Livius!" Sulla replied with a disconcertingly light laugh. How quickly his manner can change! Drusus thought. "Far from it! I'll instead ride his legendary cloak. I'll be the Heir of Marius, nominated by the Great Man himself! And you'll say so too, Marcus Livius, because you know it's what Marius would have said before he went mad. And all the Italians will sing along as well!"

"But will Caius?" Drusus asked.

"Marius won't know until it is too late. And so long as he retains his consulship and command of the War, Marius will fight Mithridates first and settle scores with me later," Sulla said with a dismissive wave of his hand. "The only thing he doesn't know is that there will be no 'later'. He'll never return to Rome."

"What do you mean by that, Lucius Cornelius?" Drusus shivered. "Are you intending to kill Caius?"

"If I have to, I will," Sulla said steadily. "He's a traitor and deserves it. But I don't think I'll need to. He'll die of his madness within the year, either naturally or because Silo will see the need. The stress will compound his illness, and a madman makes a very poor general. But anyway, he won't be coming back, so the issue won't arise," Sulla said dismissively. "All I need now is your support, as Patron of your Italian clients. Is there a problem with that, Marcus Livius? We are the only two left from the four men who brought in the New Rome only two and a half years ago!"

"Of course you have my support, Lucius Cornelius," Drusus pledged. "But you'll have to understand that it will be as Caius' colleague. Can you tolerate that?"

"Of course I can, so long as I never see him on Italian soil again," Sulla laughed.

"And I've been thinking of standing for Praetor," Drusus added. "I expect to be Urban Praetor; Metellus has agreed to publicly endorse and support me."

"That'll get up the noses of the Boni!" Sulla exclaimed. "They'll be screaming 'Italian takeover!' from every rooftop."

"Let them, if that's what they choose to do. But Metellus himself is as much a Bonus as any of them," Drusus said dismissively. "They've screamed about the sky falling for so long now; and the only threat that's come up was from the Roman Sulpicius. Meanwhile you I and the Italians saved the day. The People know whom they can trust."

Sulla nodded his understanding. "What about Tribunes of the Plebs? We need to keep our finger on the pulse there if you are not going to do it yourself."

"I have a few good men in mind," Drusus said. "If you're happy to trust me with that task?"

“Of course, Marcus Livius,” Sulla conceded. “We should never have been so hands-off last year, but it's easy to say that with hindsight.”

Chapter 4 – 666 Ab Urbe Condita (88 B.C.)

The election results were predictable. Marius was overwhelmingly endorsed as Senior Consul, with Sulla as his colleague. Drusus was returned as Urban Praetor, Lafrenius as Praetor Peregrinus, and Marius Egnatius the Samnite as another Praetor. Cato was assigned both Spains as his command, and Mutilus was retained in Sicily by popular pressure from the Sicilians. Word was sent as quickly as possible to Brundisium, to be relayed to Marius at Rhodes soon as weather permitted. One brave sailor decided not to wait for the weather. He set for Rhodes immediately and was never seen again. A fast ship from Rhodes had arrived, with news that both Marius and Silo had reached Rhodes safely.

The news from Rome reached Marius in late February. He read the letter from his son and howled his anger. He sent a runner to Silo's quarters, demanding immediate attendance. Silo arrived half an hour later.

“Those absolute bastards!” he spat at Silo as soon as he was admitted to the office.

“And it's good to see you too, Caius,” Silo responded.

“I just received a letter from Caius, my son; you won't believe what those turds in Rome have done!”

“Tell me, Caius,” Silo responded, trying to be as calm as possible. Marius had suffered a couple more headaches over the winter, and now flew into uncontrollable rages at the smallest inconvenience.

“Just listen to this!” Marius picked up the letter. “I'll leave out the family bits...” and started to read.

On the tenth day of December, about eight days after Quintus Poppaeus left to join you, three more legions arrived in Rome. These were legions that Titus didn't have on his schedule. But he didn't seem surprised. I asked where they had come from.

“Down the Via Salaria,” he answered. *I think he was being deliberately obtuse. I went out that evening to see who commanded them. Would you believe Lucius Cornelius Sulla? His men hadn't deserted him and he hadn't fled to Macedonia! Instead he and his men must have gone into hiding until they had news that you and Quintus Poppaeus had sailed; and then they turned up at the city gates.*

The next day I saw Titus take Metellus out to meet with Sulla. This had all been planned, a conspiracy between the three of them! And probably Drusus and Cato as well; they must have organised it when they met on the Appian Way last summer. The cunning pricks did well to hide it from Quintus Poppaeus, who returned to Rome with Drusus and Cato. They must have known that no plot like this would have succeeded so long as Quintus Poppaeus remained in Rome; but somehow they managed to subvert Lafrenius, who made a point of taking no action even though he had Italian legions close on hand.

Metellus took over these three legions and started patrolling Rome with them; supposedly to 'keep the peace', but actually to root out anyone loyal to Publius Sulpicius. It was obvious what they had in mind, so Publius Sulpicius ran for his life the next day. I expect he might already be with you by the time you get this letter, but I write it just in case he's delayed.

Once Sulla's men had control of Rome they re-convened the Senate. They overturned Sulla's deposition and your consulship on technicalities, but they retained the State of Emergency. Then came the Elections. They accepted your nomination in absentia, but Sulla used the same excuse to nominate himself as well. He even had the brazen, shameless gall to claim he was your favourite, your Chosen Heir, and that he must be elected with you to re-establish the Great Team that turned back the Cimbri! I could barely stop myself from vomiting in public!

And the conspiracy widened. Drusus made himself Urban Praetor, and kept his troops in occupation of the city. He rules it as if he were king! Lafrenius became Praetor Peregrinus, and Marius Egnatius latched onto their team to become another Praetor. They kept Mutilus in Sicily; whether out of favouritism, or fear that he might work against them if he were to return, I don't know.

But it certainly seems that half of Italy is complicit in this betrayal; how else could Sulla have moved three legions from Tarentum to Rome without so much as a whisper? If only Quintus Poppaeus had not been so busy in Rome, we might have foiled this coup. But at least the prophecy has been fulfilled; you have been consul seven times, and every one of those times by election! Such a twist of fate that it was done by your enemies, to keep you out of Italy, rather than by your friends!

Meanwhile the raising of legions continues. Twelve were sent to Brundisium, to be shipped across to Macedonia as the weather permitted. They are probably in Thessalonica by the time you receive this letter. Sulla is talking about raising more from Rome and Africa to send to you. I suspect this is just pretence, and he'll keep them in Italy, to oppose you if you return; but I'm not sure. If they had intended that, then why did they send the twelve to Macedonia? It's a tangled web indeed, as you might have seen from the way they all scrambled to identify with you in public during the elections while plotting against you behind closed doors.

Marius looked up. "What do you know about these twelve legions in Macedonia, Quintus Poppaeus?"

Silo frowned. "If they're the ones I think they are, then they would be mainly Marsi and Lucani; but Lafrenius might have switched them."

"Would they be loyal to me?" Marius asked.

Silo shrugged in exasperation. "Why ask me? I would have sworn Lafrenius was loyal to you! But if these are Marsi and Lucani, remember those are the territories that Sulla had to march through to get to Rome, and he did it without being reported. So perhaps they mightn't be loyal to you. My judgement has been shown to be very bad indeed!"

Marius pounded the table in front of him, slamming his palm down repeatedly in an ecstasy of rage, cursing Sulla and all who slept with him. Spittle

flew from his mouth. Eventually he tired of this, and regained sufficient clarity to speak to Silo again.

"Then let us go to Thessalonica now, and we'll see. If they're loyal, we'll march on Rome with them and put these scumbags on crosses. The legions we have here on Rhodes can see to Mithridates until we return!"

"Yes, Caius; I'll go down to the harbour now and arrange for a vessel." Silo saluted and left.

Silo took care in choosing a suitable ship. He wanted something small, so there would be an excuse for only a few travelling companions. But it had to look fast, to give him an excuse for so small a vessel. Eventually he settled upon a new-looking ship, made sure its sails were in excellent repair, and paid a talent of silver in advance for a trip to Thessalonica. Departure was agreed to be the next day, and supplies for the trip were ordered. Then he went back into the camp to find Herius Asinius, a Marrucini noble whose birthday was two days away. Within an hour Silo had arranged for himself, Marius, Asinius and Lucius Glauca to sail, each with two body servants and two horses. They were not the only arrangements he made.

The weather was fair and the wind was good, driving in from the east at the perfect angle for a quick passage. This was the evening of their first full day at sea and they were travelling light. Only the ship's crew, the twelve passengers and the eight horses were aboard. They were making excellent time. The ship's cook had been told to prepare a birthday feast in honour of Asinius that evening and the wineskins were brought out. The four nobles were in a private cabin in the stern of the ship. They drank heavily, in good humour. But Silo wasn't drinking nearly as much as he seemed to be putting away.

"Oh, I need a leak!" Asinius announced.

"Remember, always piddle downwind!" Silo joked.

"I'm coming too," Marius added. "You youngsters need to be shown how to do everything!"

"Now that you mention it," Silo came in, "I might join you."

Glauca chuckled. "Now that you mention it..."

All four men rose from their seats and filed out the door. They made their way across the sloping deck to the downhill, downwind rail on unsteady legs, partly due to the alcohol and partly due to the roll of the deck under the easterly breeze. Silo was careful to ensure he was directly behind Marius as the Old Warhorse loosened the draw-string on his trousers. Soon Marius was sending an arc into the sea below.

Silo waited for the next roll of the ship, and then deliberately stumbled into Marius' back, sending them both over the side rail and overboard into the dark water below. As he fell Silo searched for the rope he had left trailing in the water just a couple of hours earlier, in the last of the sunlight. There it was! He twisted as he fell and grabbed the rope with both hands. When he was sure of his grip with his right hand he loosened his left to wrap the rope around his right forearm a few times before regaining his grip.

"Help!" cried Glauca. "The General is overboard! Turn back!"

The helmsman pushed the steering oar over hard to bring the ship into the wind and kill its speed. The yardarm holding the sail was dropped smoothly and swiftly. Other sailors scrambled to drop a rowboat over the side and climb in.

“Can he swim?” The helmsman shouted to the two soldiers still on deck.

“I don’t know; just start looking!” Glauca shouted back. “There are two of them out there!” he added, it only dawning on him now that Silo was no longer on deck with them.

The two sailors got the rowboat launched and turned into the night, alternately shouting and listening as they tried to back-track the ships course. But in the darkness and with the turn into the wind, it was an unlikely errand. The seas, swelling over six feet from crest to trough, made it no easier.

Silo cried out for help. Now that the ship had turned into the wind and lost headway there was no longer the drag of the water passing around his body. Although the sail had been dropped and was not producing any forward power, the press of the wind on the hull was starting to push the ship back over him. Asinius heard Silo’s shouts, but had no idea where the sound was coming from. He frantically peered into the gloom. “Quintus Poppaedius! I hear you! Where are you?” Then over his shoulder “Someone get lanterns! We need light!”

Silo hauled himself along the rope until it was almost dead vertical from his grip to the bollard on deck that secured it. But even then, he could feel the hull pressing against him as it drifted downwind. He was being pushed under the hull, and the sea swell was starting to grind him up and down against the growths on the hull. Desperate to avoid being slashed but afraid to release the rope, he scrambled with one hand and his knees and then his feet to brace his soles against the hull. “Thank the gods for good army boots!” he muttered.

“I managed to grab a rope,” Silo called back. “Find a rope dangling over the edge, and you’ll find me hanging off it.” He used the sea swell to lift his body as high as possible up the rope, walking his way up the hull as he did so.

But when the water dropped his weight was no longer supported by the water. His feet slipped off the timbers and he dangled from the rope almost his full body length out of the water. He rotated as he dangled, and then the next crest came and lifted his back against the rough hull again.

“Hurry, and pull me in!” he cried out. “I am being ripped to pieces by these barnacles!”

A sailor soon found the rope over the side, and called for help to pull Silo aboard. After one more agonising push against the hull (but the sailor had the wit to not pull while the crest passed; a small blessing!) he was being tumbled back over the side and onto the deck. Blood was oozing from lacerations to his knees and back.

“Where’s Caius?” he asked as he looked around the deck.

“He went over too,” Glauca told him anxiously.

“Then go back and find him!” Silo thundered. He turned to the helmsman. “Why are we just sitting here! Look for the General!”

"Sir, this is the best way to find him," the helmsman explained. "If we're dead in the water it gives the rowboat a point of reference. But if we start moving around we are groping in the dark."

"All right then," Silo accepted grudgingly. "I suppose you guys know your business."

"Quintus Poppaedius; do you know if Caius can swim?" Glauca was on the verge of despair.

"He can, after a fashion. But I've only ever seen him swimming in still lake waters." Silo said. "But out there, in the waves and the darkness... And with a few cups of wine in his belly, too..." Silo shuddered, not only from the chill as the wind bit into his wet clothing. "But we have to keep on looking, even if it takes all night and all day tomorrow."

The intermittent calls from the men in the rowboat carried over the water to them. The boat seemed to be zig-zagging along a north-south line, and drifting westwards as the wind carried the larger ship.

"These guys are no fools," Silo said. "When the helmsman turned into the wind to kill the boatspeed, that would have meant he finished upwind of their track. Now as we drop downwind they have an excellent combing pattern. If Caius can only stay afloat long enough, they'll find him!"

The calls went on through the night, sometimes closer and sometimes more distant. Silo went below to towel himself and get into dry, warmer clothing. He continued looking out into the darkness, wondering to himself how far the boat had travelled before the rescue was launched. He had expected that the ship would take a hundred paces or more to turn, and then would try to sweep the area itself. In the total moonless darkness of the evening, that would mean they had no chance. That task would be even more difficult because of the time lost in hauling in himself. He knew Marius wasn't a good swimmer and wouldn't be able to stay afloat for more than a few minutes, even when sober.

But the rapidity of the response had surprised him. He estimated that the ship had barely gone its own length before the turn into the wind, and perhaps a couple more lengths before it stopped. The rowboat was in the water in less than a minute. That might have given them a real chance! But thankfully, the key factor was probably the alcohol. He would never know, but Silo was reasonably confident that Marius wouldn't have made it back to the surface; there had never really been a chance.

The wind had weakened overnight, and the sun rose into a clear sky. Eight hours of searching had achieved nothing. The Captain of the ship approached Silo, obviously fearful that the suggestion he was about to make would trigger an outburst of rage.

"Please, General Silo; we're probably more than two miles from where the search started, just because of wind drift. I fear that we have no chance of finding him now, even if he were still afloat."

Silo looked over to Glauca and Asinius. They both just shrugged in their despair. Silo took a deep breath and let it out with a sigh. "I take it that, as Caius

Marius' second-in-command, I'm now in command of this force? Is that legal, under Roman law?"

Glauca stood and walked over to face Silo. Glauca had made a respectable but not glorious career in the courts before taking up military duties. "You've served as Praetor, which puts you only one step below Consul. There being no other ex-praetor or consular among us, you're required to assume command until relieved by a consular."

"Thank you for your advice, Lucius. I'm always eager to act legally." Then Silo turned back to the Captain. "You're right, of course; you know your profession, Captain." Silo responded at length. "And I must say that I was very surprised at how quickly you managed to start the search. You're very good at what you do."

"Thank you, sir," the Captain replied. "But that doesn't ease the pain. This has been a bad night for Rome."

"A bad night indeed," Silo agreed.

"Then shall we resume the journey north?" The captain asked hopefully. "When the wind just drops away as this one has, without swinging to one side or the other, it often means we'll be becalmed soon. We must make distance while we can."

"Do as your judgement suggests," Silo ordered. "I would prefer to get to Thessalonica as soon as possible, but do what you think best."

"I'll continue towards Thessalonica. It's not far now, and I hope to be there before we are becalmed," the Captain decided.

"An excellent decision, Captain," Silo said, but with a flat voice. And it was not mere pretence. Silo felt hollow; not exactly guilty because he knew he had no other choice in the circumstances. He couldn't have allowed Marius to wage war on Rome while leaving Mithridates unchecked. But even so, his loss of a good friend of so many years was genuine and he grieved the more that it had been done by his own hand.

'Yet, I gave the gods every opportunity to kill me, if what I did was impious; I went into the water as well as Caius, and was willing to share Caius' fate if the gods had decreed that some sailor should have seen the rope and hauled it back inboard while we ate and drank, or even decreed that I might not be able to grab it for some other reason,' he told himself silently. That was his one comfort; that by allowing him to live the gods had shown their approval. He had not offended the gods.

The captain called one of his crew over to tend to Silo's cuts from the barnacles now that there was sufficient light. These sailors had a few rough-and-ready remedies to stop such wounds from turning nasty; but they were very painful! Silo took it stoically, as silent atonement for his surreptitious murder.

The legions waiting in Thessalonica included Marsi and Lucani legions as Silo had expected, with two Samnite legions. Pontius Telesinus the Samnite was the most senior legion commander among them and had already been recognised as primus inter pares so Silo confirmed him as commander of the Northern Army. He ordered Telesinus to march through Thracia showing the standards and thereby

discourage anyone thinking of siding with Mithridates. He was to press towards the Bosphorus, making public and obvious arrangements to gather sufficient transport to force a crossing; but not to cross until specifically ordered to do so.

Silo had also sent two letters back to Sulla, the sole consul now that Marius was dead, and one to Young Marius. Sulla read the letters from Silo very carefully, looking for any extra insight. However, he concluded, Silo had not been in any frame of mind to be overly cunning when he drafted these letters. He had been emotionally gutted, and wrote out a heavy heart. Just let the words say what they say, Sulla decided.

“Jason!” he called for his Master of House, “send a runner to lord Drusus, and ask when he might be able to meet me. I have news from Thessalonica.”

The runner was back some twenty minutes later. “Lord Drusus will be here shortly,” he reported.

“Then tell the kitchen to prepare refreshments, and the doorkeeper to send lord Drusus directly to my study.” Sulla dismissed the man. Half an hour later Drusus was sitting with him.

“I have two letters from Quintus Poppeius, from Thessalonica,” Sulla started. He picked up the first letter and started reading.

*Quintus Poppeius Silo, Acting Commander of the Army in the East,
To Lucius Cornelius Sulla, Consul of Rome,*

Salutations and my heartfelt condolences!

As you will have been able to guess from the prescript, Caius Marius is no longer with us. I have been advised that the command of the army falls to me, as the only ex-Praetor available, until proper consular command can be restored.

Late in February, when we were still in Rhodes, we received word that some twelve legions were waiting for us at Thessalonica. Caius insisted that we travel to meet them and take command as soon as possible.

While sailing to Thessalonica, Caius Marius, Lucius Glauca, Herius Asinius and I were on deck at night. While we were there, an unusually large wave threw Caius and me overboard. I was lucky to fall near a rope that was trailing overboard and grabbed it, and I was pulled back into the ship. Unfortunately Caius was not found, despite a highly professional and diligent search by the ship's company throughout the night and into the next morning.

I have already written to Young Caius, to break the news to him personally. This is a tragedy, a disaster of the first order. But life goes on, and so does Duty. I stand ready to prosecute the War as best I can, and have already issued orders to Pontius Telesinus. I await your further instructions.

Be assured that I grieve no less than you; we have both lost the man whom we for so long loved as a father. But I beg of you to be firm and resolved, placing our grief to one side until we have the luxury of being able to indulge it without dereliction of our duty to Rome.

Sulla stopped reading and looked towards Drusus.

"It looks like Neptune has intervened; we no longer have the Problem of Marius to deal with," Drusus observed.

"That first letter was obviously for public consumption," Sulla replied.
"Now the second letter..."

*Quintus Poppeius, your friend;
To Lucius Cornelius, my friend,*

Greetings.

That dreadful possibility that we had most feared has occurred. It was with a truly heavy heart that I did what had to be done. My one comfort in all of this is that the gods smiled upon me, and literally threw me a rope even as they took Caius from us. I take this as an omen, that it's their intention that I lead the army against Mithridates. It's a fate I accept with a calm heart.

However, my dearest Lucius Cornelius, I would be no less content if you were to resume the authority which was yours six months ago and which should never have been taken from you. It would be most fitting if the Army were under Consular control, and no-one could say that it would be not only your legal right but also your moral right to re-assert the Mos Majorum after the damage done to it by Sulpicius. Please let me know your wishes and I will support you in whatever way I can.

Sulla looked up again.

"A very short letter, Lucius Cornelius." Drusus noted. "Our friend was obviously very upset."

"Yes," agreed Sulla. "And my reading of the first part is that Caius' death might not have been entirely accidental."

"That was how I understood it, too," Drusus nodded. "But it would not be read that way by anyone else, even if it were to fall into the wrong hands. 'That dreadful possibility' would be read to mean Marius' death, because everyone knows he has had more than one stroke in the past and was on borrowed time; and the phrase 'what had to be done' would be read to mean no more than assuming command at a time when he wanted to do nothing more than mourn."

There was a short pause while the two men chased their own thoughts. At length Drusus spoke again. "What do you intend to do with the army, Lucius Cornelius? Will you take command?"

"That's one possibility, Marcus Livius; but I was wondering who might run things here in Rome if I go east. I don't trust the Boni; except perhaps for Cato and Metellus, they pay only lip service to the Mos Majorum. Their only constant dedication is to themselves."

"But you would have the veto," Drusus said.

"That just creates a different problem, Marcus Livius." Sulla stood and started to pace. "If I decide I can't trust the bastards, and opt to stay in Rome to ensure I'm able to exercise the veto, then how can I prevent a Boni consular from going east and taking control of the army instead? And once he does that, who is to say that he won't feed the Italian legions into the mincer and then come back with his own loyal legions to stage another coup? The one by Sulpicius was bad enough but one backed by veteran legions would be the end of the Republic!"

Drusus brooded for a moment. "So the answer is to find a colleague you can trust; and then see what's possible from there."

"I trust you but we need you to stay on as Urban Praetor," Sulla started ticking off names with his fingers. "I trust Metellus and Cato to a degree, but not enough. I trust Mutilus and Silo, but they're not here to accept nomination. What other ex-praetors or consuls can you name?"

"Mutilus wouldn't be easily made available in any case, because he has his own imperium in Sicily anyway. In fact, I'd suggest that Silo would be the only one we can support and who isn't already busy. Silo chose to go with Caius rather than take a posting of his own." Drusus paused. "But you've forgotten that we're under a State of Emergency, when nominations in absentia are still acceptable."

"But that only means a man can put himself up for nomination, not that anyone else can presume that he will accept nomination," Sulla countered.

"Read those two letters again, Lucius Cornelius," Drusus urged him. "Doesn't he say that he feels chosen by the gods to lead the army, and that he accepts that role? And doesn't he also say that it is fitting for the army to be under a consul?" Drusus shrugged. "Put those two statements together, and that can only be read as an acceptance of nomination as suffect consul, with specific responsibility for the war." Drusus paused for a moment. "Unless you want the command yourself?"

Sulla paused. "Yes, I would prefer the command to staying here in Rome. But whatever else happens, I feel I must stay in Rome. If we can arrange for Silo to be appointed suffect, then he can take command." The light went on in Sulla's face. "But if we're saddled with some Boni meat-head, then I'll take command but remain here with Silo as my subordinate actually running the show in Asia!"

Drusus smiled. "So let it be done!"

The augurs confirmed that the entrails were favourable. Sulla called the Senate to order.

"Conscript fathers, I have sad news from the East," Sulla announced as he stood. He took the first letter from Silo in his right hand, and started to read it slowly and with great gravity. When he finished he lowered the letter and scanned the Senate. "You can tell from the letter how devastated Quintus Poppeius was as he wrote this letter," Sulla intoned. "Yet like a true Roman, he says 'Life goes on, and so does Duty.' He continues to discharge his duty to the best of his ability, and completely in accordance with the Mos Majorum. He is a man in whom I have absolute confidence." Sulla sat.

“Do I have a motion that this Senate recognises with great sorrow that Caius Marius has been taken from us and that there is now a consular vacancy?”

Catulus was to his feet with indecent haste. “I move that this Senate recognise that there is a consular vacancy,” he said with undisguised glee. This brought murmurs of disapproval from even the Boni faction. Sulla simply ignored him.

Cato stood with dignity.

“Lucius Porcius, you have the floor.”

“I move that this Senate notes with great grief the passing of the most historically-significant man in living memory, whether for good or for ill to be judged by those who follow us; and that his passing has created a consular vacancy.” Cato sat.

The Senate erupted with applause. Cato, who had never been a supporter of Marius, had said what everyone knew to be true.

“Is there a speaker against the motion?” Sulla asked. Catulus stood again.

“There being no speaker against the motion...”

“I will speak against the motion!” Catulus interjected.

“...I put the question. All those in favour?”

A loud chorus of ‘aye’s rose.

“All those against?”

Catulus started ranting in his fury, but no other voice was heard.

“I think the ayes have it. Is there a call for a division?”

“Never mind a division!” Catulus shouted. “I demand my right to be heard!”

“You have a right to speak, Catulus,” Sulla said, deliberately using the offensive form of address, “but you have no right to be heard.” Sulla smiled his wicked smile, the one that would terrify a bear.

“But if you insist on your right to speak, then I will open the Great Doors so the People can hear you if they choose to.”

The message was clear; if you want to incite a mob to haul you out of the Senate and beat you to death, feel free! Catulus gaped for a moment, and sat. For a second time the Senate erupted into applause. As the applause started to drop off in intensity, Sulla called for order.

“Is there a nomination for suffect consul?”

Metellus stood.

“Quintus Caecilius, please speak.” Sulla invited him.

“We are currently under a State of Emergency, Consscript Fathers. The terms of that State of Emergency allow for consecutive consulships, as the incumbency of Lucius Cornelius himself demonstrates.” Metellus swept his gaze around the chamber. “I must say, as Urban Praetor last year, that Lucius Cornelius was vital to taking back control of the city from Sulpicius and his thugs. The way in which this was done without blood in the streets speaks volumes for not only his wisdom and restraint, but also for the wisdom of those who assisted him in this action; not the least being his fellow-consul in that year, Lucius Porcius Cato.

“These two men have demonstrated that they can work together in times of crisis, in the interests of Rome above all else. I recommend that we re-instate this

proven and trustworthy team. I nominate Lucius Porcius Cato as suffect consul.” Metellus sat.

“Lucius Porcius; do you accept this nomination?”

Cato stood. “It was an honour to serve with you once, Lucius Cornelius; it would be an even greater honour to serve with you again.” Cato resumed his seat.

Drusus stood.

“Marcus Livius, you have the floor.”

“I concur with the sentiments expressed by Quintus Caecilius,” Drusus started. “Lucius Porcius was an excellent consul, and would be my first choice if we were not confronted with circumstances that require very specific skills. And although Lucius Porcius is over-endowed in many areas, he is, unfortunately, not equally skilled in every field.

“Conscript fathers, we are at war! We are at war with a very powerful adversary! We need a Military Man! And right now, we have an excellent Military Man, trained by the Great Caius Marius himself; chosen by Caius Marius as his second-in-command; already in command of the army; and already on the battlefield! This Military Man has already shown his steadfast adherence to the Mos Majorum and having already served as Praetor has fulfilled all the requirements of the Mos Majorum to become consul.

“In short, we have a man who is the right man, in the right place at the right time, and with all the right credentials. Although Quintus Popphaedius Silo is not as eloquent as Lucius Porcius; not as experienced in Public Affairs; not as well versed in the Law; not as polished in his manners; yet he is no less dedicated to upholding the Mos Majorum, and to be preferred because he is, as I say, the right man in the right place at the right time!

“As he said in the letter read to us by Lucius Cornelius, he has accepted his duty is to lead the Army against Mithridates ‘until proper consular command is restored’. I propose to restore proper consular command by appointing Quintus Popphaedius Silo as suffect consul.” Drusus sat.

Catulus leapt to his feet. “The State of emergency allows for nominations in absentia,” he conceded, “But do we have evidence that Quintus Popphaedius Silo accepts this nomination?”

“I suggest that his letter to us indicates that he is willing to serve in whatever capacity we assign to him.” Drusus responded. “Consul, could you please read that part of the letter again, to refresh our memory of his exact words?”

Sulla scanned the letter again. “I think this is the passage you mean, Marcus Livius. *'But life goes on, and so does Duty. I stand ready to prosecute the War as best I can, and have already issued orders to Telesinus. I await your further instructions.'* Is that what you had in mind?”

“Thank you, Lucius Cornelius.”

“Then I think the question before us is, ‘Do we understand that Quintus Popphaedius Silo accepts nomination.’ Is there any speaker against accepting this nomination as valid?”

Catulus stood.

“Quintus Lutatius; please speak.”

Catulus looked around him belligerently. "Is this right? Am I hearing a proposal to put an Italian at the head of Rome's armies? Have you all gone mad?"

Sulla stood. "You will address the question, Quintus Lutatius. We are not voting for the consulship at the moment; we are discussing whether or not this is a valid nomination."

"How can it possibly be valid, when it is for an Italian to be made consul!" Catulus spat back. He started to prowl the floor. "I will at least say this for Silo; he knows his place! He specifically asked for instructions, not appointment as consul. If he had intended to accept nomination, then why did he not say so? Why did he simply ask for instructions instead?"

"The way I read that letter, Silo shows not even the slightest hint that he is interested in being consul!" Catulus sat.

Gnaeus Pompeius Strabo stood.

"Gnaeus, your floor."

"Unfortunately, I believe Quintus Lutatius is correct," Pompeius said. "My recollection of the way the letter ended gave me the feeling that he was asking to be relieved, not to be confirmed in command. Could you please read the whole of the letter again, Lucius Cornelius?"

Sulla stood again, and read the letter with gravity.

*To Lucius Cornelius Sulla, Consul of Rome,
from Quintus Popphaeus Silo, Acting commander of the Army in the East,*

Salutations and my heartfelt condolences!

As you will have been able to guess from the prescript, Caius Marius is no longer with us. I have been advised that the command of the army falls to me, as the only ex-Praetor available, until proper consular command can be restored.

Late in February, when we were still in Rhodes, we received word that some twelve legions were waiting for us at Thessalonica. Caius insisted that we travel to meet them and take command, to prosecute the war against Mithridates as soon as possible.

While sailing to Thessalonica, Caius Marius, Lucius Glauca, Herius Asinius and I were on deck at night. While we were there, an unusually large wave threw Caius and me overboard. I was lucky to fall near a rope that was trailing in the water, grabbed it, and was pulled back into the ship. Unfortunately Caius was not found, despite a highly professional and diligent search by the ship's company throughout the night and into the next morning.

I have already written to Young Caius, to break the news to him personally. This is a tragedy, a disaster of the first order. But life goes on, and so does Duty. I stand ready to prosecute the War as best I can, and have already issued orders to Telesinus. I await your further instructions.

Be assured that I grieve no less than you; we have both lost the man whom we for so long loved as a father. But I beg of you to be firm and resolved, placing

our grief to one side until we have the luxury of being able to indulge it without dereliction of our duty to Rome.

Sulla looked around the chamber. “ Both men have my complete respect and confidence. I will express no opinion myself, either about the validity of the nominations nor the relative merits of the nominees. I ask the Senate to resolve this matter without any influence from me. Are there any more speakers?”

There being no further speakers, I put the first question. Is the nomination of Quintus Poppaedius Silo valid? Those in favour?”

A few 'aye's were heard.

“Those against?” An obvious majority called 'no!'”.

“I think the 'no's have it. Is there a call for a division?” Sulla looked around.

“There being no call for a division, I declare the nomination of Quintus Poppaedius Silo invalid. I have the nomination of Lucius Porcius Cato. Is there another nomination?” The chamber was silent, except for a few murmurs. Sulla waited for a full minute before speaking again.

“There being no further nominations, I put the question; that Lucius Porcius Cato be appointed Suffect Consul for the remainder of this term. All those in favour?” The whole chamber called its approval.

“All those against?” Sulla asked. Not one adverse voice. “I think the 'aye's have it,” Sulla announced. “Is there a call for a division?” He looked around. “There being no call for a division, I declare Lucius Porcius Cato suffect consul.” Applause broke out, and in a wave the senators stood.

“Please, Lucius Porcius, take your rightful seat.” Sulla smiled as he stood and applauded too. All in the chamber waited for Cato to sit before resuming their own seats.

Sulla was first to speak. “Lucius Porcius; we must meet soon, to agree on our division of responsibilities. But if I could presume upon you in this public place, I ask that you agree that I shall have command in the east.” Sulla looked around the chamber, as if to ensure that his reasons were properly understood.

“I ask this not out of a poor estimation of your abilities because you have proven yourself capable in every endeavour you have put your hand to; rather, I ask because most of the legions in the east are Italian. I believe that I, as one of the men most closely identified with the Italian citizenship, will enjoy their confidence. Whereas you, although in fact no less respectful of them and their status as full citizens, might be incorrectly perceived by them to have less personal passion and commitment in that matter.” Sulla sat.

Cato also looked around the chamber, aware that this response would set the pattern for the remainder of this most critical year. “Lucius Cornelius, you have been too eager! Had you not spoken first, my first words would have been to beg you to take the command!” Cato paused. “I would have asked this for two reasons. The first and most obvious is that you are the better Military Man by far! The second is that you were given this command last year, and should already be there in the East, except for the Sulpician Coup; which you put down brilliantly. So by all rights, you should already be there!

“But you have added a third reason which I recognise as a plain statement of fact, and no insult or slight on me in any way,” Cato smiled. “Please, Lucius Cornelius, take full command of all forces outside Italy, and be assured that I will do nothing to limit your freedom of action in the conduct of the War.”

Again the chamber broke into applause. the Boni cheered because it would get Sulla out of Italy and put Cato in control, while most others because they recognised that both consuls were playing to their personal strengths as a good team. The remainder of the Senate's business was conducted smoothly and in good spirits. Rome was in good hands! Sulla closed the meeting and immediately stood and offered his right arm to Cato. Cato took it, smiling.

“Lucius Porcius, would it be possible for you to dine with me this evening? If not, when would be a good time to discuss our duties?”

Before he could answer, Drusus presented himself to Cato. “Lucius Porcius, please take no offence at my nomination of Silo, but it had not occurred to me that Lucius Cornelius could be sent east as commander. I was trapped in my thinking that he would remain at home.”

Cato offered his arm to Drusus, smiling. “Not at all, Marcus Livius! I well understand the logic of your position! And you will note that I didn't speak against your nomination of Quintus Poppaeus as the obvious choice. The last six months have proven to me that you have only Rome's interests in your heart.” Then, seeing an obvious way of demonstrating that there was no rift, he turned back to Sulla, “Lucius Cornelius; I think it is only proper that the Urban Praetor share that meal with us. This War will have ramifications here in Rome as well as overseas.”

“Yes, you are right, as usual,” Sulla agreed. “Marcus Livius, could you please dine with us tonight as we discuss the proper management of the Republic?”

Drusus made a point of arriving slightly late for the meal; he didn't want to create in Cato's mind any sense that he and Sulla had met earlier and prepared a common position. Rather, he wanted Cato to feel that this Urban Praetor was the junior member in this informal triumvirate, eager to do whatever Sulla and Cato decided. It worked. When he was lead into the triclinium Cato was already there chatting with Sulla.

“My apologies if I am late, Lucius Cornelius, Lucius Porcius; but I see you have put the time to good use.”

“Please come join us, Marcus Livius,” Sulla invited him in. “I was just mentioning to Lucius Porcius that much as the death of Caius is a personal blow, it feels much more proper to have a colleague nearer to hand to discuss our plans.”

“Yes, I can understand that,” Drusus conceded. “However severe the blow, the gods always provide some small glimmer of hope in every grief, if only we look for it.”

Drusus sat where Sulla indicated, in the third chair. Sulla was playing the same game as Drusus. They were in step with each other so far.

“Tell me, consuls; how can I assist you in your plans?” Drusus asked dutifully.

“Lucius Porcius has agreed that I should have command in the War, as you heard today, but there's the possibility that the Italian tribes might fear that their

rights might not be respected as scrupulously as they should, if there is no recognisably pro-Italian consul minding the shop.” Sulla paused and glanced across to Cato. “Of course we all know this fear would be unfounded, but in politics as in war, perceptions can be a powerful influence on events. We need to find some way of preventing this perception from arising, or at least minimising its effect if it does. What can you suggest?”

Drusus had not expected this direction in the conversation. He had rather anticipated that Sulla would want to stay in Rome, delegating the War to Silo. He was speechless for a moment.

“Well, perhaps Lucius Porcius might tour Italy, making himself known to as many of the tribes as possible and showing them respect and goodwill,” he suggested at last. Turning to Cato, “You might even care to pay homage at the temples of some of their special tribal gods; perhaps a pinch of incense at the Grove of Angitia, things like that.”

“Excellent idea, Marcus Livius!” Cato exclaimed. “And perhaps Titus Lafrenius, as Praetor Peregrinus, could go with me, to introduce and commend me to the local nobles.”

“I’m certain that Titus would be pleased to do that,” Sulla agreed. “He well knows how you were pivotal in the restoration of peace after the Coup, and how you honoured your pledge to support Caius Marius to command the legions in the east. That meant a lot to the Italians.”

“Now for administrative issues,” Drusus steered the subject to a point that was his main concern. “If Lucius Cornelius is in the East, and you are touring Italy, the Senate will need to be under the control of Lucius Valerius Flaccus, as Head of the Senate. He’s a level-headed man, and can be trusted by the Boni and Populares alike to avoid strife.”

Cato nodded in agreement. “Yes. The Italians know him as the consul who supported Caius Marius, and the Boni know him as the Censor who insisted on the integrity of the census when some Italians tried to abuse it.” Cato looked up quickly. “Would the Italians resent him for that?”

“I don’t think so,” Drusus assured him. “I myself urged Silo to not try that trick. Flaccus and I were of the same opinion, that everything had to be done legally if it were to endure.”

“Then all will be well!” Cato summarised cheerily. “I’ll send a message to Titus Lafrenius, asking his assistance as soon as he is able to provide it. You, Lucius Cornelius, can make arrangements to travel to the east.”

Silo landed back in Rhodes on the last day of March. He called a meeting of the legionary commanders for the first day of April.

“Men, we have twelve legions marching towards the Bosphorus, and eighteen here on Rhodes. We also have command of the Aegean, at least until Mithridates tries to send his Pontic fleet through the Propontis. But I can’t see him doing that; with Telesinus on the Bosphorus and Dardanelles, it risks having his fleet cut off if we attack through the Euxine. However, Mithridates had at least one hundred thousand men in the field last year and will probably be able to raise twice

as many in this coming season. Therefore we need to act quickly, making full use of our ability to move men quickly by sea, and keeping him off-balance.

“One important aspect of war that often gets overlooked is the economic side. To keep men in the field takes money; plenty of it. So my first objective is to move a significant force into Ephesus, and another into Pergamum, to secure their wealth. Better to have all that wealth in our hands than in the enemy's! Lucius Glauca, you are to take six legions and secure Ephesus; Herius Asinius, you take another six, and secure Pergamum. I'll remain here with the remaining six. As soon as we know where Mithridates is going I'll use them as a mobile reserve. If he tries to take a city, then he will be crushed between the defenders on the walls and my reserve cutting off supplies and reinforcements.

“Once Telesinus reaches the straits I'll leave him there with a blocking force and add his spare troops to mine. Then we'll have a force strong enough to push back into Cappadocia. We've also been promised more legions in the new year, drawn from Africa and the Spains. There are many of Marius' veterans out there; they might be getting on in years and perhaps not up to forced marches but they would make excellent defensive garrisons on the coast while the younger men join the push inland.” Silo looked around the room. “That's my broad strategy. Are there any comments or questions? I welcome your contributions.” Silo looked around the meeting.

Glauca put his hand up. “I understand that this is a two-step scheme; first we secure the coastal cities, and later we counter-attack. When do you intend to launch each stage?” Glauca had just been allocated to lead the Ephesian force. It would be understandable that he would be concerned about this question of timing. Ephesus, being near the Meander, is the gateway to Cappadocia. It would be the most likely to be attacked by Mithridates, and the logical jumping-off point for the counter-attack.

“The weather now seems stable enough for transporting large forces,” Silo answered. I expect to launch the force to Ephesus within the next few days. When the ships return they can take the Pergamum force. If Mithridates attacks either, we will crush him. If he doesn't, we'll wait until the warmth reaches to the inland areas and foraging is possible before we chase him. By then, the Spanish and African legions should also be on hand. So think in terms of mid-May for the push.” That seemed to satisfy everyone; organised, methodical, and no huge risks. A solid plan and one that inspired confidence. There were no more questions.

“Then please select five more legions to join your own for your force, Lucius. Ephesus is the more important centre, and I want you to be satisfied that you have the men you want,” Silo ordered. “Then prepare them, their equipment and their transport as quickly as possible. I want you out of here within three days.” Glauca showed his understanding, but remained unmoved in the meeting. He was uncertain that he had been dismissed. “Well, pick your five fellows!” Silo urged him.

“Yes, sir,” Glauca responded, scanned the faces around him, and called out five names. They moved across the meeting to surround him.

"Now, Herius Asinius, which five of the remaining do you want?" Silo asked. Asinius called out five more names.

"Excellent, men!" Silo commended them. "The twelve expeditionary leaders are now dismissed; you other five, please remain." The majority of the men shuffled out of the meeting in their two groups. Silo turned to the remaining five legates. "Men, you may take that as an indication that your legions, or your selves, are not as highly-considered as the others selected for the expeditionary forces." Silo chose one face at random, "Gnaeus Priscus; how do you intend to respond to that?"

Priscus, obviously embarrassed, saluted and responded formally. "Sir! I intend to speak to my colleagues and stage a practice battle, perhaps several if time permits. This will give our men some sense of what is required of them, and we can all discuss the battle afterwards and learn from each others' errors and insights."

"Excellent idea, Gnaeus!" Silo congratulated him. "I put you in charge of one of the opposing armies. Choose your colleague. The other three shall form the other army and agree on a commander. I'll have orders for you at sunset. Just make sure you remember that this will be an exercise. You are not to harm each other." Priscus saluted. "Thank you, men." Silo saluted them and left the meeting.

Glauca set sail about noon the day after the meeting. Silo was impressed by the quality of his staff work; he had managed to allocate men, animals and provisions to his ships with minimal confusion, and also written orders for each shipload were provided very efficiently. Meanwhile the five reserve legions had set out for pre-appointed spots to open their sealed orders. Silo's own legion was not directly involved so the decani of Silo's legions were embedded in the others. These were to act as referees, and order which units were to play dead as the battle unfolded. To distinguish between the referees and the combatants, all Silo's men were told to wear a white tunic over their armour. Gnaeus Priscus was handed his orders from Silo's observer just as the top edge of the sun disappeared behind the low ridge to the west.

Orders for Force Priscus.

1. *You shall march with all reasonable speed to the village of Koros.*
2. *You shall set up fortifications approximately two miles east of Koros, taking full advantage of the landforms so as to be able to resist an assault from the east.*
3. *Your success shall be measured by how long you can prevent the enemy from penetrating into Koros.*
4. *The battle is ended as soon as the enemy captures Koros, destroys it, or at sunset tomorrow, whichever occurs first.*

"Right!" Priscus said to his surrounding staff. "How far away is Koros?" There was some rustling of maps. "About twenty miles, sir, to the east. The road is noted "uneven surface" on my map, sir."

"That's more than ten hours of non-stop marching, even over a good road and in daylight." Priscus said. "I think we should abandon the artillery; it will slow us too much."

"Yes sir." His adjutant replied. "It will be a full moon tonight, sir; we should have light almost the whole night," he added.

"We'll need it!" Priscus commented. "If the battle is to end at sunset, you can be sure the enemy will be onto us before noon. That doesn't give us much time to build fortifications, and by then the men will be exhausted. Thirty-six hours without sleep and non-stop exertion!"

"I'm sure the enemy will be set no less difficult a task sir," his adjutant said hopefully.

Piso Gallienus was opening his own orders at the same time.

Orders for Force Gallienus

1. *You shall make camp approximately ten miles to the west of the village of Koros, a village in enemy hands.*
2. *You shall advance against Koros at first light, and seize locations suitable for artillery bombardment of the town and its subsequent storming.*
3. *Your success shall be measured by how quickly you can either take Koros or otherwise eliminate any enemy forces there.*
4. *The battle shall end at sunset tomorrow, or when you have forces unopposed in Koros, or you have destroyed it, whichever comes first.*

IMPORTANT NOTE! You shall not do any real damage to the village or its people. Your artillery shall lob empty baskets, and my umpires will declare the results.

"How far away is Koros from here?" Gallienus asked.

The maps were laid out on the ground. "About ten miles, sir," his adjutant advised him. "But the roads are marked "rough". It will be difficult to move our artillery quickly. Should we take another mile or two while we still have light, before we make camp?"

Gallienus looked back down at his orders. "The orders say approximately ten miles. If we're there now, we should make camp now. The General must have had a reason for saying that. Perhaps the enemy are under orders to patrol out to a certain line, and if we go any closer it could lead to us being observed. For all we know, they might be expecting us to come in from the east."

"Yes, sir. I'll give the order to make camp." The adjutant saluted and turned to his messengers to give orders.

Priscus was at the head of a column of legionaries marching six abreast along the road. The road was not as uneven as he had feared; but even so, he didn't regret leaving the artillery behind. It would have been little use in the coming battle. He would be required to protect an unfortified place against what would surely be mobile, infiltration tactics to gain the objective before sunset. Artillery is

of limited use when there's no real opportunity to set up a killing zone. But the increased road speed gained by leaving the big equipment behind will allow him another precious hour or two to dig his defensive line.

Gallienus was no a fool. He issued orders for a small cavalry contingent to patrol out a mile or two to the east, and then return. This cycle was to be repeated all night, just in case the enemy were trying to locate him. Apart from the cavalry he had set a minimum of sentries, and all of them cavalrymen; he wanted his infantrymen to be as fresh as possible tomorrow and a good night's sleep for his marching men would be invaluable.

Marcus slapped his colleague on the upper arm. "Do you hear that? It sounds like a tramping." Brutus cocked his head and opened his mouth to listen.

"I can't hear anything," he replied.

"Keep listening!" Marcus insisted. Then, almost a minute later, "Can't you hear that, you deaf bastard!"

The soft easterly breeze dropped to nothing for a moment. "Yes!" Brutus exclaimed. "Yes, an army approaching on foot! Raise the alarm!" Marcus grabbed his trumpet and sounded the long, loud blast for the general alarm.

Priscus, approaching along the road, heard the blast. He signalled for the column to halt, and rode forward with his close staff. When he was just a hundred paces further on, where the road rose over a small crest, he saw the enemy camp laid out in the moonlight. Only three hundred paces in front of him! As he watched he saw fires being brought to life and men scrambling to the palisades surrounding the camp. He turned to his adjutant. "What do you think, Clodius? Do we rush them before they can get to their positions?"

Clodius Manlius looked over the camp. "It will take us as long to organise an attack as it will take them to man their defences." He looked back to Priscus. "Our orders are to defend Koros; but it looks like the enemy has managed to put a blocking force in front of us. If we waste time here, that will give them time for a smaller section to sprint to Koros while we're out here slugging out a pointless battle."

"Good point, Clodius. Perhaps we should send our cavalry ahead to scout around Koros and delay any units they might find. Our infantry can march around this lot, and we can set a rear guard if they try to run us down."

Manlius nodded his agreement. "Will I lead the cavalry, or will you leave me with the infantry?"

Priscus thought for a minute. "I'll lead the cavalry, because that's the greater unknown. When I have better information I'll send a report and fresh orders back to you. In the meantime, I'll leave you to lead the men around this blocking force, perhaps even leave a force to block them in turn if you find a good defensible position. But otherwise, get the infantry to Koros quickly." He trotted back to the head of the column and gave orders. His messengers started galloping back along the force, calling out the cavalry units and ordering them to the head of the column at the gallop. The infantry started marching forward towards Manlius.

"We need to take a stroll cross-country for a mile or two, lads!" Manlius called to his troops. "We'll go around this blocking force, and then take to the road

again when we're clear." He then struck off the road to the right, through the bank of trees lining the road, and into the open pastures on the high side of the road.

Gallienus woke with a shock. He pulled a cloak about his body and ran bare-footed towards the sound of the trumpet. All around him soldiers were stumbling out of their tents and strapping on their body armour. It took him a few minutes to find the sentry, still blowing on his trumpet.

"What is it, man?" Gallienus demanded.

"Sound of a large body of men, approaching on foot, sir!"

"I can't see any!"

"We heard them, sir. But now, with all the noise in the camp, it's not possible to hear them any longer," Marcus explained.

Gallienus ran to the compound enclosing his horse. Some of the officers were already there, readying their beasts. "I want to know who is out there and what they are doing!" he demanded.

"Yes, sir! We'll send out parties in groups of ten to scout the area."

Report back as soon as you have any word."

"Yes, sir!"

Gallienus then ran to the artillery park in the middle of the camp. "Get your onagers aimed at the road to the west," he ordered. "Shower them with oil!"

"Yes, sir!" The artillery captain acknowledged, and called for pigskins filled with wool; the safe alternative to incendiary oil charges.

Gallienus then ran back to his tent to dress more like a commander. By this time the whole of the cavalry in the Priscus force was on its way through the fields to the south of the road. The progress over the unknown, poorly-lit terrain was little more than a canter, but within a few minutes they would be back on the road and able to maintain a comfortable gallop for the distance into Koros. The infantry was following the same line.

It was some quarter-hour later than the first cavalry reports came to Gallienus.

"Sir, the enemy forces appear to be at least two legions strong. It seems they are attempting an encirclement, with infantry passing some five hundred paces south of us."

"How did they get to that side of us, if they are supposed to be defending Koros?" Gallienus asked.

"I don't know, sir. Is it possible that there is only small force at Koros, and these men were being force-marched to join them?"

Gallienus flopped his arms in frustration. "What's happening here? This was supposed to be an exercise in bombardment and capture by us, and defence by them! Instead it's a complete stuff-up!"

"Perhaps that's what the General intended, sir. He wants to see how you and Priscus handle a complete stuff-up."

The light went on in Gallienus' brain. "No 'perhaps', Titus; that's exactly what's happening here." Gallienus paced the floor, completely refreshed now that he had discovered the vital key.

"Let's forget all the bullshit about where to camp and so on. The bottom line is that we have to take Koros by sunset tomorrow. That's how we'll be judged. And if there are two enemy legions here, there must be bugger-all in Koros itself." Gallienus looked up triumphantly.

"We hold the road, so we can move faster! Order the cavalry to head for Koros, and get the infantry to follow as fast as possible. Don't bother breaking camp. Just march them out deployed to be able to resist a flank attack or an attack on our rear. Leave the artillery where it is." He rubbed his hands together, already tasting the victory. "They won't be able to match our speed if they're forced to march cross-country while we have the road. The key is to get the front of our column ahead of the front of theirs, and it's all over!" Then another thought occurred to him.

"Wait! Don't send all the cavalry to Koros; tell a quarter of it to patrol up and down the first five miles of road, to make sure the enemy don't get their lead units past us. If that happens they must clear the road of enemy infantry until our men are well in the lead. Only then may they go on to Koros to join the other three-quarters."

The adjutant saluted and rushed out of the tent. Soon the sound of the assembly call could be heard, and soldiers rushing to the central square. There was not the time for a full tally and organisation into legions. As each century appeared at least three-quarters full, it was ordered to march down the road. Stragglers were slipped into scratch units and dispatched the same way.

Then a great roar was heard from the direction of Koros. The Priscan column marching around the camp had already made the road some four hundred paces away from the camp, and the advance of Gallienus' troops had run into them. Wooden swords banged against shields until Silo's referees could make their orders known. The referees had ordered the men engaged in the fighting stand still, while the others coming up from behind either walked around the stand-still fray, or plunged into it, however they were ordered by their centurion. The referees would walk among the stand-still fight, from time to time tapping individuals on the shoulder to tell them to sit down; they were now casualties.

Suddenly a cohort-strength body of cavalry came charging up the road from Koros, cutting into the leading elements of the Priscan infantry. The referees frantically tried to take control of the situation, saved only as the referees embedded in the cavalry themselves took charge. The Gallienan cavalry was marshalled, casualties chosen by the referees, and the remainder were permitted to follow their commanders' orders to track back up the approaching column of opposing infantry still heading for the road. Casualties on both sides were taken out; but this cavalry excursion allowed some units of the Gallienan infantry to set a defensive line to protect the road, while the other units passed safely onwards towards Koros.

In desperation the Priscans pushed overland to the west trying to turn the flank of the defensive picket. But as they turned towards the road again they found the picket had been extended faster than they could turn its flank. Manlius, realising the failure of this flanking manoeuvre, pulled his men back into a compact force and punched in one solid body into the defences. He made the road, and then set

up a blocking position. Those of the enemy who had already passed through couldn't be stopped, he conceded; but if he could hold up the bulk of the enemy then the cavalry ahead might be able to deal with them closer to Koros.

The situation had resolved itself by dawn. Manlius had an effective blocking position, but couldn't afford to send any of his remaining forces forward to Koros. The referees called the end of the engagement, and the men relaxed and started marching back to Silo's main camp. Those who had already broken through towards Koros would decide the issue now.

Meanwhile Priscus had reached Koros by moonlight. He found that the "village" consisted of one tent, with a sign hanging from it saying "Welcome to Koros". Four of Silo's centurions were waiting outside.

"Right!" called one of the centurions as the horses pulled up in front of him. "Are you here to defend us or to conquer us?"

"Gnaeus Priscus here! Don't you recognise me?" Priscus retorted impatiently.

"Of course not!" snorted the centurion. "We're humble Greek peasants, and know nothing about you noble Romans!"

"Well, Greek peasant;; we're here to protect you. What can you tell us about the enemy?" Priscus realised quickly that these four were playing by Silo's instructions, and he dare not step outside the exercise programme.

"We can tell you that they're horrible barbarians, that they fight well, and that we fear they will try to capture our village." The centurion replied. "But we have no idea how many or where they are."

"Can I ask you to do anything for me?" Priscus asked.

"You can ask us to do anything that a Greek peasant might be able to manage," The centurion answered. "But remember, we Greek peasants more often than not get confused by military things, and often run away if we have the chance."

Priscus contained his impatience. "Then please, Greek peasants; could you please prepare a meal for as many of my men as you can, with your limited supplies? We'll need every help today."

"Yes, sir. Where do you want us to light the fire?" The centurion asked innocently.

"Forget it!" Priscus snapped, embarrassed that this mere centurion realised the danger before he had done so himself. A fire would give away too much information. "Just stand by for further orders!" He turned abruptly to the staff officers behind him.

"Marius!" he snapped at one. "Form eight squadrons of ten men each, and instruct them to scout in all directions for a distance of five miles. Then return and report to me here if they see any sign of the enemy." He turned towards another. "Lucius, you will take thirty men back down the road to establish contact with the infantry, then return with a report on their expected time of arrival." Then he turned to the others. "The rest of you, sweep the surrounding terrain out to a mile for good defensive positions. We need to prevent their artillery from getting within range. I want your advice back here within the hour! Go!"

All the men moved away to their respective duties. Priscus turned back to the centurion. "You seem to be the mayor of this fine city," he said, with only a slight sneer. "Could I please requisition your fine villa as my headquarters?"

"It would be an honour," the centurion smiled.

By dawn Priscus had reports from all his details. None of them made him happy. His local scouting had revealed no enemy units. Did this mean that there were none, or that they were already in place and well-concealed? His defensive scouts had found a feasible layout of strong points but they were so widely separated that they couldn't support each other. Worst of all, the troop that had tried to contact the infantry had run into the enemy cavalry, and been repulsed at great cost because they had expected friends rather than enemies. Only eight of the original squadron of thirty had survived. But the message was clear; there would be no help from the infantry. The cavalry he had were the only forces that could defend. The big question was... Defend against what, and from where? The only solid information he had was from Lucius; perhaps fifty enemy cavalry, less whatever the referees had subtracted from them as losses in the ambush.

The orders in his hand said to defend to the east of Koros; but observations thus far through the night suggested that the enemy were to the west. But that enemy was a cavalry column, as far as reports could say. He decided to stage a cavalry battle to the west instead of the expected infantry/artillery arm-wrestle to the east. If the enemy had concealed forces to the east, that would be bad luck.

"Marius!" Priscus shouted for his second-in-command, "The enemy cavalry will be on us very soon! I want three equal squadrons; one with me blocking the road about a mile away and the other two to either side of the road, concealed a further half-mile along. When the two concealed squadrons hear the trumpet, come charging into their rear! If there are only fifty, we should be able to obliterate them, and clear the way for the infantry to come through."

Marius quickly selected a commander for the second concealed squadron and allocated him thirty men. He chose another thirty for himself, leaving the remaining forty to Priscus. All men rode after their appointed commanders.

Gallienus had managed to get far enough up the road early enough to avoid Manlius' final blocking force. He pushed his mount to reach the front of the cavalry column as quickly as possible, reaching it a few miles short of Koros. He called a halt.

"Our infantry should start arriving about dawn," he told Marcellus, his senior cavalry officer. "That gives us more than an hour to scout the land. Let's see if the General has played another little trick on us!" He ordered two squadrons of twenty men each to swing around to the north and south of Koros, and report back at dawn.

A short time later he heard horses approaching up the road from Koros.

"Quick, men! Off the road!" He ordered. "Fall on them as they pass!"

Silo's referee shouted immediately "Off the road, but do NOT attack them! We will award casualties!"

The Priscan horsemen thundered through, between the lines of concealed Gallienan cavalry, and were pulled up sharply by the white-clad referees.

"Congratulations, men!" The senior referee greeted them. "You have just been slaughtered. How many are you?"

"What do you mean, slaughtered?" Lucius asked indignantly.

The referee didn't answer directly. He just shouted down the road "Right, men; you can come out now!" The Gallienan men came out of the shadows of the trees and onto the road.

"I'll allow that perhaps a quarter of you might have been able to fight their way clear," the referee conceded. "Eight of you; head back now, and tell your commander that you were ambushed by enemy cavalry!"

Lucius was angry with embarrassment. He picked seven men at random, turned back towards Koros, and set off at a gallop.

"Hot pursuit, sir?" Marcellus asked Gallienus. "We can fall on them before they can use that information to prepare for us."

"No, Marcellus; tonight has been one long string of confusion and ambushes. I want to get some proper information before I commit any more men to anything." Gallienus looked towards the east. "The sky is starting to lighten, we shouldn't have to wait too long."

The two reconnaissance squadrons had swept right around the cross-road marked "Koros" on the map at a distance of a few miles, but had seen only a tent and a few men. Had they mis-read the map? As the light strengthened they spotted each other as they each swung around to the opposite side of Koros from their starting point. They met to share information. It would be most unlikely that both would have misread the map, so they decided to take a closer look. The forty of them deployed in extended line as they rode down towards the tent from the east. This was no trap. They cantered all the way up to the tent and greeted the centurions waiting for them. Then they saw the sign "Welcome to Koros" and they realised that they had found their objective.

"Which force are you from, soldiers?" the senior centurion asked.

"We are from Gallienus, sir; and we claim the right to loot. Do you have any wine?" The squadron leader replied with a smile.

"Sorry, soldier, no wine. And I don't care to be raped by you, either." The centurion smiled back. "Let's ride back to the forces and tell them the game is finished."

Priscus was still waiting in his blocking position when he became aware of the horses approaching him from behind. He turned to see Silo's centurions coming towards him.

"Greetings, Greek peasants," he said evenly. "What news?"

"We were conquered shortly after sunrise by those horrible barbarians," the centurion told him. "The exercise is finished, and we can all go back to base now."

Priscus gaped. "But how? No-one has got past us!"

The centurion shouted loudly and the forty men in the scouting parties trotted around the bend to join them. "These men seemed to have got past you, sir," the centurion replied. "Now let's go pick up the others."

Silo read through the reports by Priscus and Gallienus, and shook his head in dismay. Then he called in the two commanders and their staff. "Let's look at the big picture first." Silo started. "What did you do well, Gnaeus Priscus, and what did you do poorly?"

Priscus stood squarely facing Silo. "The thing I did well? I reached Koros first, despite starting twice as far away. The thing I did poorly? I didn't defend the immediate surrounds of the objective because I thought my forces would be better employed as a blocking force."

"What other things did you do, or not do, that deserve some examination?" Silo persisted patiently.

"My decision to abandon the artillery was sound, we had to move quickly. My decision to circumvent the camp rather than attack it was sound, the primary mission was to defend Koros, not to engage the enemy. My decision to go to Koros with the cavalry was sound, because it allowed me to scout the area." Priscus listed his positives.

"And your faults?" Silo pressed.

"I failed to secure the objective, but that was due to lack of sufficient forces."

"So on balance, you believe you did as well as you could, given the starting positions and the forces available to you?"

"No doubt I could have done better; but I think I did better than might have been expected, sir."

Silo turned to Gallienus. "Piso Gallienus; what is your assessment of your performance?"

"Not to put too fine a point on it, sir; we achieved our objectives twelve hours before the deadline." Gallienus said matter-of-factly. "I attribute that to the fact that I ignored the details of your orders as soon as it became apparent that the underlying assumptions were no longer valid. I showed adaptability and initiative. On the negative side, I should have had cavalry patrols rather than fixed sentries at the camp. That would have given me time to block the enemy's progress more effectively. But the orders created the strong expectation that the enemy would be either at Koros, or at least closer to Koros than we were. There was no reason to expect a night encounter."

"Now could you go into more specific detail?" Silo prompted.

"I believe I did well to send out scouts when the alarm was first raised. Had I adopted a defensive attitude, then the enemy would have been able to by-pass us in the night. Once we established their movement, I believe I did well to direct some of the cavalry to press towards the objective, while retaining a tactical reserve. That reserve ensured that the enemy infantry was blocked, while a substantial proportion of our infantry was able to march on Koros. Had the scouting squadron not taken the objective, we would have had a strong advantage in numbers once the infantry arrived."

"And faults?" Silo asked.

"I didn't use my cavalry to patrol around the camp. I have already conceded that. Also, by marching out of camp and abandoning our artillery for speed, we had

no way of effectively forcing our way through the blocking force Manlius managed to interpose.”

“What did you learn from these errors?” Silo continued.

“I learnt that the enemy could be anywhere, and the deeper the scouting, the better. I have also learnt to keep all options available. I erred in abandoning the artillery because it limited my future options.”

“Gnaeus Priscus,” Silo turned his attention, “What do you think Piso might have done better?”

Priscus held his palms open. “Only those points he has mentioned himself, sir.”

“Piso, what do you think Gnaeus might have done better?”

“I think, with hindsight, that there are a few points that could have been done better.

“First, he should have used his cavalry to scout further ahead. Had he done that, he could have diverted from the road a half-mile earlier and we would never have heard his men on the march; he would have been able to slip past us. That would have allowed him to set up several ambushes along the road to slow our march, and we might not even have reached Koros by sunset the next day, much less captured it.

“Second, he allowed his forces to be separated. His cavalry should have been used to prevent me from blocking the road, so his infantry could have by-passed us. Our infantry only managed to seize the road thanks to the intervention of our cavalry, and it might well have gone the other way had Gnaeus used his cavalry to support the foot-soldiers.”

“Tell me, Piso; there were several factors involved here, but what single issue decided the outcome? Your skill, good luck, or what?” Silo asked.

“I think the single biggest factor was hearing the soldiers on the road. Until then I had no intention of doing anything except a nominal sentry posting and a march after breakfast. Had Gnaeus scouted further ahead while on the march, he would have won this exercise.”

“Gnaeus, what is your opinion?”

“I believe Piso is right, sir.” Gnaeus submitted.

Silo stood. “Men,” he said, casting his gaze around the meeting, “Let this be a lesson to all of you. This battle was won and lost because Piso knew where his enemy was before Gnaeus did. “Not just when in the camp, as they have agreed, but at critical other stages as well.

“For example, when Gnaeus sent back a squadron to make contact with the infantry he expected to be following him, his men ran into an ambush instead. And when his scouts found no enemy around Koros, he didn’t continue his surveillance. He just assumed that once was enough. At the very least, he might have given those Greek peasants a horn, and told them to blow it if they saw someone approaching.”

Silo turned slowly. “I want all of you to learn this deep down into your bones; if you know where your enemy is, and he doesn’t know where you are, you have a better advantage than ten to one in a battle. Because that knowledge allows you to avoid a battle until you are certain of winning it. Do not assume that because you

don't see the enemy, he isn't there, either. It might just mean that you're not looking hard enough. You must have eyes everywhere, all the time!" Silo strode the floor for a moment.

"The second critical lesson is to be prepared for anything and to capitalise on circumstances. Piso did well to recognise that he failed by abandoning his artillery when he left camp. Sometimes you have to surrender one option to be able to exploit another, but I urge you not to do it simply because of what you expect or plan; only limit your options if you are forced to do something that precludes them. Gnaeus limited his options several times. First, by leaving his own artillery behind. As it turned out, he would have had to leave it to march around Piso's camp anyway. But he shouldn't have left it simply because he expected the road to be too rough. He should have taken it until the road *proved* to be too rough! He also limited his options by sending all his cavalry ahead. It gave him no scope to assist his infantry, with disastrous effects.

"And he limited his options a third time by placing all his forces in a roadblock and ambush defence. This relied too heavily on his enemy being just plain stupid." Silo looked around the meeting. "Thank you for your efforts, men. I'm very pleased with your performances, because you have provided an excellent learning opportunity. Now I'm much more confident in your abilities under campaign conditions. We'll have another exercise in three days' time."

The second exercise was under way when one of Glauca's ships returned with a most disturbing message.

*Lucius Glauca,
To Quintus Poppeius Silo, Commander in the East,*

Greetings!

I must report to you that Mithridates has taken Ephesus. I was informed by a passing fishing vessel that his forces had moved into the city on the fourth day of April, the day before I arrived in the area. I sent a squadron of fifty cavalry ashore at a small fishing village nearby to confirm, and found a Pontic detachment of about twenty infantry escorting a cartful of loot. The soldiers were killed or scattered and the loot was confiscated, naturally.

I considered it unwise to attempt to land and take the city, since I am not equipped for a siege that will doubtless be a lengthy one and I have no way of knowing where the main Pontic force is. I didn't want to land, send back the ships to transport Asinius, and then find myself trapped here. Therefore I intend to press on to Pergamum as swiftly as possible; hopefully I can reach it by sea faster than the Pontic Army can march. If I reach there first I will prepare the city for defence, and await Asinius as reinforcement. I will also send a message to Telesinus, who should be well into Thracia by now; he might even have reached the Bosphorus and be able to send help.

I trust that you approve of my improvisations, and expect to be awaiting reinforcement at Pergamum and/or orders. If Pergamum has also fallen, I will consider whether or not to assault it when I have a better appreciation of the enemy strength. I will report back to you.

Live long and well!

Silo was dismayed. Knowledge of the Roman force on Rhodes had not discouraged Mithridates. The man obviously means to not only risk war, but to guarantee it. He must know that Rome couldn't let this invasion of one of its provinces go unpunished, so he must be confident that he can hold his gains. Glauca was unquestionably right to seek a friendly city as a base, rather than land on a dangerous coast in the face of an opponent who has every intention of going all the way in this test of nations.

He checked the date on the letter again. Two days! Which means Glauca should be close to Pergamum by now, if the winds were fair. So another four days at least before he can expect word about the state of affairs in Pergamum. What was happening in Bithynia? Was Nicomedes still taking action against Mithridates, or was he cowed? Could he be relied upon to support Telesinus, or will he oppose Rome? Should Telesinus be ordered to cross over, or should the northern army be considered a reserve force? Silo rummaged through his correspondence files, and fished out the last report from Telesinus. He checked the date and the reported progress. Yes, Telesinus should be at the Bosphorus by now.

Silo paced the floor in frustration. Rhodes was too far from the action to allow timely decisions! He needed to be based somewhere more central! Pergamum would be a good base, if only Glauca can get there in time! Well, he can be reasonably confident that it will be at least another six days before he gets word, possibly longer before he can embark another six legions to re-inforce the position – if they hold it!

The second training exercise was going much better than the first. Two different commanders had been selected to lead the opposing sides, and they were taking great pains to show that they had learnt from the errors of Priscus and Gallienus. Silo smiled wryly; he might end up with one or two half-decent commanders out of this crowd, but it will be a long time before he can afford to lose Lucius Glauca and the other five top legion commanders he had taken with him! He would plan to stage one more exercise in the time he had left, and then he would ship the five of them and his own legion off to Pergamum, leaving Asinius here on Rhodes to mind the shop with his chosen six.

Another ship had arrived later that same day. It brought Sulpicius, expecting Marius to protect him. On hearing about the death of Marius, he naturally assumed Silo would take the same view. Silo would have preferred to have arrested him and send him back to Rome to be tried for treason, but that would have been a waste of transport and manpower. So instead he smiled broadly, offered his arm, and made the wretch feel welcome. All in good time, Silo said to himself.

Specially so when he had just the job for Sulpicius to handle! That same boat that carried Sulpicius also brought news that Nicomedes of Bithynia had been reduced; Bithynia as well as Asia was effectively under the control of Mithridates. The time had arrived to send a delegation to Asia, supposedly to discuss peace, but actually to assess the Pontic strength and dispositions. Much better to send Sulpicius than a Military Man, to lessen Pontic suspicions! Sulpicius and his small retinue were sent as a legation to Ephesus, to ask what terms Mithridates demanded.

Another note from Glauca arrived eight days later.

*Lucius Glauca,
To Quintus Poppaeus Silo, Commander in the East,
Greetings!*

I arrived at Pergamum only a day after a small advance force of some two thousand Pontic cavalry arrived. Thinking that I should try to secure the city as a base for future operations, that I should do this quickly before a major Pontic force arrived, and expecting to have no major difficulty against so small a force of light cavalry, I landed two legions immediately with orders to march directly into the city some sixteen miles away.

They arrived to find the city shut tight against us, and with the walls lined with angry citizens pelting our men with rocks, roof tiles, and the occasional flaming oil-bomb. This was not the work of the Pontic soldiers, none of whom came out against us or even harried us on the march; but thousands of common citizens, who clearly preferred Pontic rule to Roman rule.

This was a great surprise to our men. To have a whole city forswear Rome and choose barbarism instead was unimaginable to them. They fell back out of small projectile range, and the legates debated whether or not to force the gates. They decided that forcing the gates would be feasible, and estimated that perhaps a day or two would be required; but having done so, an isolated garrison of six legions (assuming we all debarked) in a city sixteen miles from the coast and filled with a population clearly unhappy with us did not seem to them to be a desirable deployment in the face of the Pontic forces which would surely be attracted to such a prize.

They sent a rider and message back to me in the fleet and I agreed with them. They returned to the fleet and I ordered the force to sail north. I intend to make a landing near Troas, and contact Telesinus to re-inforce my position there. The short distance from his forces to this place, and its position so close to the coast, will allow a more viable beachhead to be established. From there we will be able to strike either into Bithynia or back towards Pergamum as the opportunity arises, or even divert substantial enemy forces away from Ephesus for you to strike at that target.

I apologise that I have taken upon myself more initiative than you originally delegated to me, but the situation is fast-moving and I dare not allow Mithridates

to steal a month on us, which would be the result if I were to report back to you in person.

Silo nodded to himself. Glauca was not only a good soldier, he was also a good strategist. Then Silo stood and paced the floor in frustration. His instinct was to sail for Troas himself, with all available forces; but he had barely enough transport for one legion at the moment. He was dependent upon Glauca finding a good landing, sending his ships back, and holding out until strengthened. Given that Telesinus was so much closer to Troas, those ships would go to Telesinus before Rhodes saw them again.

So should he send his available transports now? Or should he keep them as a means of deploying a reserve, to permit him to intervene if an unexpected crisis arose? An easy question, he chided himself; he would not be asking it were he not so frustrated with the speed of the Pontic advance. He must not play his last card until he knew what he was dealing with. “Call for Sulpicius!” he called to his secretary in the outer office.

Sulla arrived in Rhodes on the first day of May. Five legions, comprised of aging Marian veterans from Africa and Latin towns in Italy, arrived with him.

“Quintus Poppeius! It's so good to see you!” he cried in greeting as he stepped off the ship. The two men embraced.

“Lucius Cornelius! I had to leave Rome before you arrived, and I was convinced that I would never see you again! I was sure that I would be here in the East for years, and probably until I died!” Silo was exultant at this renewal of friendship. Then he looked across the harbour. “And you've brought what I most need; transport!” Then he thought again.

“Actually, 'what I most needed' might be more accurate; you're in command now!” He corrected himself.

“Come, walk with me, Quintus Poppeius. I have many things I wish to discuss with you away from other ears.” The two men walked along the wharf towards the breakwater, and then out along the breakwater itself. The sound of the waves breaking on the breakwater would ensure no-one could overhear them.

“Quintus Poppeius, please turn so we are both looking out to sea,” Sulla requested. “I don't want anyone to even see our faces as we speak.” Sulla then sat on a large rock on the seaward slope of the breakwater. Silo sat beside him. “Cato has been appointed suffect consul in place of Caius; have you already heard that news?”

“No, Lucius Cornelius, but I expected someone worse would be put up by the Boni. Cato will play an honest game with us.”

“I like to think so, too; but I'm not certain, and I don't like taking risks,” Sulla responded. “My intention is to be so impressed by the way you're doing the job out here that I have appointed you commander, with my total confidence and full delegated authority.” Sulla paused a moment, to make sure Silo understood. “Then I can get back to Rome and keep the bastards under watch.”

Silo nodded. "So I'm to be given proconsular imperium, if I understand you right."

"Only if you impress me enough," Sulla smiled.

"Oh, I'll impress you well enough," Silo told him matter-of-factly. "I'll give you a full rundown on the situation and what I've done about it so far when we get back to my quarters."

"But I need to talk to you about Caius first." Sulla said bluntly. Silo drew a long sigh.

"It wasn't as accidental as it looked, was it?" Sulla sympathised.

"Not at all, Lucius Cornelius. In fact, it was so cold-blooded and carefully-planned that I wondered what sort of man I had become." Silo clenched his fists as he thought about it. "He was going to take command of Telesinus' legions and march on Rome. It would have been a bloodbath! I had no doubt that even Drusus would have joined with the Boni to resist him and it would have torn the Italian tribes apart as well. I felt I had no choice. I tell you, I feared the gods for the impiety I was planning to commit. That's why I deliberately went overboard myself, as well as taking Caius. I left it to the judgement of Neptunus to decide whether I should share Caius' fate for my wickedness, or live because I was doing it only out of necessity. And he decided I should live.

"But sometimes I wonder if that is really a greater punishment than death." He looked into Sulla's face with an expression that begged for absolution.

"What you did, Quintus Poppeius, was no impiety," Sulla assured him. "In fact, it was the greatest gift you could have given the Old Warhorse; he will be remembered forever as the Third Founder of Rome, the Great Man who defeated the Germans with a scratched-together army when everyone else had failed with Rome's full strength. But if you had not acted he would have destroyed his own reputation, not to mention Rome as well."

"Because of you, Caius will be forever honoured." Sulla dropped his hand on Silo's shoulder. "I can only pray that if I lose my mind, I'll have a friend like you who has the courage to do as you did."

The two men sat together for a while, Silo staring at the rocks in front of his feet. Then at last he stood. "Thank you, Lucius Cornelius. If I ever get back to Rome, I'll pay my respects at his family tomb." Then he pulled himself back into a more business-like frame of mind. "Come to my quarters, and I'll bring you up to speed with what's happening over here."

Back in Silo's quarters Sulla read through the correspondence with Telesinus and Glauba, and had the two military exercises explained to him. He had come only as a piece of theatre, always intending to find Silo adequate for the command and using this as an excuse to return to Rome. But Silo's training measures had convinced him that here was a commander made for the task.

"This is a brilliant innovation, Quintus Poppeius!" Sulla enthused. "Why has no-one ever thought of this before? We train our legionaries in mock-encounters, but you're the first man I know of who has made a point of training his officers for grand tactics in this way!"

“Thanks for the praise, Lucius Cornelius, but the idea first came from Gnaeus Priscus. He was the worst performer in the battles, but at least he has the imagination to learn from his mistakes,” Silo conceded. “In fact all five of them are much better now, after only two exercises. Asinius has also decided to use this technique in his own force of six legions, to polish the skills of his own subordinates.”

“Excellent! We need not only good commanders in this war, but good subordinates. The General can't be everywhere all the time.” Sulla dropped into a camp chair.

“Quintus Poppeadus, I intend to leave with you the five legions I brought with me and their ships. With what you have in harbour now, you should be able to transport at least six legions, perhaps seven if you cram them in tight.” Sulla meandered. “If you move seven legions out, that will leave you ten here as a reserve, but you won't have transport for them until one or other fleet gets back. So how do you intend to act?” Sulla put this last question with an abrupt intensity that caught Silo by surprise.

“I haven't thought that far ahead, Lucius Cornelius,” he stumbled out. “My first instinct would be to send four legions to support Glauca at Troas if he has made a good landing, or to go on to Telesinus if not. What I need more than anything else is to have enough ships in one place to carry a respectable force. Then I'll land on the coast with enough strength to march straight through to Pontus. What's left in Asia can be taken in detail by Telesinus and Glauca.”

Sulla nodded his agreement. “Then I'll leave you to it. I'll send as many transports as I can as soon as I can. And I think it might be a good thing to send you a few triremes to protect them. You can't rely on Mithridates keeping his own navy in the Euxine forever.”

“Thank you, Lucius Cornelius. But you've been here less than a day! Please stay for a few more days, and assess for yourself how the current exercise has gone. It started today and is due to finish in three days' time.” Silo explained. “You will see for yourself how proficient my officers are becoming, how well they can react to surprises, and how they discover and seize opportunities.”

Sulla smiled. “I'll do that, Quintus Poppeadus. I'll be most intrigued. In fact, I would like to be embedded in the staff of one of the protagonists, if you don't mind. I'll say nothing, but merely observe.”

“You're commander, Lucius Cornelius. Whatever you say!” Silo agreed with pride. “I'll ride out with you to Asinius' camp now, if you feel up to it without a rest first; he's only ten miles away.”

“I will get my horse now,” Sulla said as he stood. “Please grab something I can eat as I ride, and I will be back within the hour.”

Sulla arrived back from the exercise late on the fourth day. He reported back to Silo's quarters as his first call, as a matter of courtesy. “That was a very interesting exercise, Quintus Poppeadus! And cleverly set up to test out the legates in command of the legions.” Sulla stalled as he saw the heavy expression on Silo's face.

“What is wrong?” he asked.

"Mithridates is what is wrong!" Silo spat the words out. "I've just had a report from Ephesus; it seems all the Romans and Italians in the city have been slaughtered."

Sulla was stunned. "What? Why?"

"It was done by the city authorities," Silo went on. "They called a meeting of all Romans and Italians in their main theatre, blocked the exits, and then sent in their city guards. Women and children, the lot!"

"Not Mithridates, then?" Sulla asked. "The Ephesians themselves!"

"But the same thing was happening in the outlying towns, too; I see Mithridates' hand behind it, even if his own troops didn't lift a sword," Silo explained. "I think he ordered the Greeks to do it so they would never defect back to us in the future; they would fear our retribution too much!"

"How did you come by this information? Is it reliable?" Sulla asked. Then a thought occurred to him. "Didn't you send Sulpicius there to put out peace feelers?"

"The last I heard from Sulpicius was that the Pontic authorities were acting friendly but not taking any proposals seriously." Silo explained. "This report came from a handful of Romans who didn't go to the Theatre. They were smuggled out of the city by friends and put on a fishing boat."

"So if we're lucky, Sulpicius is dead." Sulla nodded in satisfaction.

There was a knock at the door. A messenger entered and offered a letter to Silo and then left, all the time trying to look inconspicuous. Silo turned the letter over in his hands. "From Glauca; marked "URGENT". He tore at the seal, and started to scan the print.

"May I?" Sulla asked. Silo smiled apologetically and handed the letter to his commander.

Sulla scanned the solid block of uncial letters, quickly breaking down the text into individual words, and then started reading aloud.

*from Lucius Glauca,
To Quintus Poppeius Silo, Commander in the East,*

Greetings!

I found Troas still unoccupied by Pontic forces on the 23th day of April, and decided to land. This might be the last chance we have to gain a foothold. As each ship was unloaded it was ordered to sail to Telesinus immediately and request that his forces join us as soon as possible. I made no exceptions, requesting all of his forces join with me to ensure we are not evicted when the Pontic forces arrive in strength. I have also ordered extensive defensive works in the plains surrounding the city. How fitting that I prepare to be besieged in that same place where our ancestor Aeneas once defended Troy!

The city authorities here are not all that pleased to see us, but seem decidedly non-committal; I have been surprised by how much these Asian cities

resent Rome! Those Publicani have much to answer for! For every mina of tax income they extort, it costs the Republic a talent of public expenditure to maintain! We should have listened to Rufus all those years ago! However, I've assured them that I will pay for every loaf of bread my men eat, and that Rome has ordained that the city will be exempted from taxation forever provided they remain loyal to Rome. I know I had no authority to tell them that, but if we lose this war it will make no difference! I don't think they believe me; it seems that Rome has made many promises in the past to the cities of Asia, but dragged its feet about their fulfilment. But I have the army with me, so they're not arguing.

I write this on the evening of the 24th day of April, and will send it by a fast boat in the morning; I expect you will receive it on or about the twenty seventh of April, winds allowing. By that time I hope to have some of Telesinus' legions with me as well. If he has been able to gather transport ships as he was instructed to do, then we have the beginnings of a base with the capability to land up to a dozen legions anywhere on the coast. Once I've finished the defensive works in the immediate area of the city I intend to block the Dardanelles to Pontic ships. The last thing we need now is a hostile navy at our backs.

The men are in good spirits and very pleased to be on land again. Having been ship-bound for so long, and with so many changes of plan, they are resolved to hold this place against anyone. The only problem I might have would be supplies once Telesinus is with us. Eighteen legions need a lot of food, and I don't have the funds to buy from the locals for very long. Thankfully there are plenty of Romans and Italians in this city that I can shake down for loans. They have a very strong interest in us staying here, and they have no illusions that Mithridates would bother to issue receipts for any money he might take from them.

I await further instructions from you. Although it's exciting to pretend I have all authority, I sense that I'm beginning to wade out past my depth!

Sulla paused after completing the reading. Then he commented "I like what I've read from Glauca's reports back to you. He seems to be an excellent man for the job you've given him."

"Yes, he is," Silo confirmed. "He's a Samnite, a close friend of Caius Papius. He came highly recommended, and I see why."

"Anyway, Quintus Poppeius; I ask you the same question as I did on my first day here. How do you intend to act?"

"I intend to sail for Troas immediately, Lucius Cornelius. When I get there I'll know that I have eleven legions and transport for seven here at Rhodes, and hopefully eighteen legions and transport for all of them in Troas. On the way there I hope to be able to gather information on the strength and disposition of the Pontic forces. Then I'll decide how to take back the initiative."

"I approve," Sulla responded. "Henceforth you have my full authority and support for anything you decide. Act as though you are the Senior Consul of Rome."

"Thank you, Lucius Cornelius."

"Now, back to the army exercise," Sulla changed the subject. "I was most impressed by Asinius; he gathered as much intelligence as he could, and weighed every option before making a decision. If ever a man was unfairly named..." Sulla joked.

"Yes, Silo agreed. "'He's the leading Marrucini noble; a small tribe, but he has the respect of everyone regardless of tribe. I'm surprised you did not meet him during the citizenship registrations. He and Glaucha are my two best men."

"But what of the enemy in the exercise? How did they manage?" Silo asked.

"Titus Herenius was the opposing general." Sulla recalled. "No serious blunders; but he was very tentative, and slow to act. He missed a few opportunities. I cheated and ordered Asinius to do a few stupid things, but Herenius didn't pounce. I wouldn't use him except for set-piece battles, or perhaps to command a defensive garrison."

"I'll note that," Silo responded. "This was his first time in overall command, so I'll review the reports with that in mind."

"Good. I need a rest, so I'll go down the bathhouse now and I'll see you in the morning." Sulla turned and left.

Another boat with Roman refugees arrived in Rhodes the next morning, confirming the slaughter in Ephesus. Sulla, who had intended to depart that afternoon, decided to stay a few days longer to hear more details. Over the next few days a picture started to emerge. Towns all along the coast had carried out the same style of massacre on the same day. As the days passed, more refugees from further afield had time to reach Rhodes and one of them was Publius Rutilius Rufus, from Smyrna. He had been held in such high regard by the city authorities in Smyrna that he had been warned to leave two days before the slaughter.

He presented himself to Silo's office as soon as he landed.

"Publius Rutilius Rufus, reporting for any duty you might care to assign to me, sir" he said to Silo. Silo was stunned.

"You're a consular!" Silo exclaimed. "Were I not under the command of the current Consul, I would surrender the imperium to you, sir!"

"I'm too old to play at war any more, sir," Rufus replied. "But if you can make some use of my experience, I would be pleased to serve."

Silo was at a loss. Rufus had made a name for himself in the Jugurthan War, when he had withstood and defeated a charge by Bomilcar's war elephants. He was also a great administrator, improving the Army training methods and serving a term as Senior Consul. He was worshipped in Asia as the man who had protected them against the worst of the tax-farmers' extortions, at the cost of being exiled from Rome for his troubles by the vengeful publicani. So who was Quintus Poppeadius Silo to command a man of this dignitas?

"Please, sir," Silo begged, "Let me tell Lucius Cornelius Sulla, the Senior Consul, that you are here. I am sure that he could use a man of your talents so much better than I." Turning to a staff member, "Get the Consul here immediately!"

Sulla arrived in less than an hour, to find the two men sitting in Silo's courtyard.

"It's an honour to meet you, Publius Rutilius!" Sulla exclaimed, his arms wide in greeting.

"And an honour for me to meet you, Lucius Cornelius!" Rufus replied. "I came to ask how I might be of some service to Rome."

"The best service you could provide is to return to Rome!" Sulla urged him. "My colleague Lucius Porcius Cato would welcome you, as would all the Boni, for your principled stand against the publicani. Marcus Livius Drusus, your firm friend, would be overjoyed to have you return, as would all Italians and most of the Lower Classes. The only people who would resent your return are the Second Class money-grubbers and they've been totally discredited by their support for the Sulpician Coup!"

"Thank you, Lucius Cornelius; but I don't want to desert my new home of Smyrna. Is there any way I can be of use closer to home?"

Sulla stared at him for a moment. "Yes, there is, actually." Turning to Silo, "Please, Quintus Poppaeus; could you find that last letter from Lucius Glauca?" Silo left the courtyard and returned in a moment, letter in hand. He passed it to Sulla.

Sulla read the letter to Rufus. "I intend to formalise that promise of tax-exempt status made by Glauca. I have the word of my consular colleague that he would support any decision I made in the prosecution of this war, so that means both consuls are confirming this promise. What I need is a credible man to proclaim it in Troas." Sulla said. "That man is you, Publius Rutilius. Will you go to Troas with me, to proclaim it?"

"If you do that, the Equestrians back in Rome will have you exiled to Caledonia!" Rufus replied.

"Let them try it!" Sulla said, with his terrifying smile. "It's long past time that Rome ruled the merchants, rather than the merchants ruling Rome. These money-grubbers would use the Mos Majorum to wipe their arses if the price of a good sponge was too high."

Rufus stood still for a moment. "I won't support any such announcement unless both the Assembly and the Senate legislate it first. It must be solid, unbreakable law, to endure so long as the city does not betray Rome; not just a promise of relief at some time in the future. If you can do that, I'll support you."

"I'll obtain that for you as soon as communications allow," Sulla promised. "Thank you," he added.

Sulla sailed for Rome the next morning.

Silo arrived in Troas on the fifteenth day of May, with six legions. He found Glauca and Telesinus with their eighteen legions comfortably fortified in the city and surrounds, and with a sizeable artillery emplacement at the mouth of the Dardanelles keeping watch over the barrier boom they had stretched across the waterway.

"Well, where are the enemy?" Silo asked after the greetings had been finished.

“A force of about 30,000 approached us from the south on the first of May, but withdrew when they saw we were here already,” Glauca reported. “Since then they've been sending cavalry to scout around us. We've also been sending out reconnaissance-in-force cavalry formations. There are no significant enemy formations between here and Pergamum to the south. We've also been scouting to the east and found nothing in the Troad or Mysia.” He glanced across to Telesinus. “My guess is that Mithridates is quite happy to have us dug in here, because he intends to attack elsewhere. But my colleague Pontius has other ideas.” Glauca gestured towards Telesinus, inviting him to speak.

“Thank you, Lucius.” Telesinus acknowledged the courtesy. “It's my opinion that Mithridates' aim is to lay claim to all of Anatolia, and that even this one city is a blemish on his grand plan. But so far he has been able to simply walk into every other city without a fight. Now that he's being actively opposed, he dare not lose the first real battle against us in this war. It could set the morale for every battle afterwards. So I suspect he's massing all his available forces to crush us with a single overwhelming blow. Once that's achieved he'll propose that the Bosphorus be the boundary between us. It'll be hard for us to refuse that offer; he'll have the psychological advantage as well as the military numbers, while we would have to land from the sea without a city to act as a base. Not forgetting that these Anatolian Greeks seem to prefer him to Rome in any case!”

“Once he's achieved that I think he'll be well satisfied and confident that we could do nothing to overturn it. Then, he'll treat his Greek cities gently while continuing to stir up trouble among the Thracian and Achaian Greeks until we come in to restore the peace, which will inevitably be portrayed as heavy-handed brutality. If he feels the time is ripe, he'll then come over proclaiming himself a liberator. So I see that he has a patient plan; to engage us in battle only when he has overwhelming force, to win Greek hearts and minds, and then to pose as a hero, not a conqueror.”

Silo nodded his understanding. “While you, Lucius, think he'll leave us sitting here while he goes around us?”

“Yes, sir. I think he'll go for Thracia, to draw us out onto his prepared ground. He'll make us attack him. And until we do he will continue to capture cities simply by knocking once on their gates.”

Silo heaved a huge sigh. “Both strategies make excellent sense,” he concluded. “I wouldn't be surprised if he's keeping both options open, depending on how we act. So I think we should take away the initiative; make him decide one way of the other. And we won't force his hand by sitting here. So if you're right, Lucius, we should attack him, but at a place of our choosing and not follow him around like a tame dog. And if you are right, Pontius, we should strike him in Asia, which he considers the core of his campaign, before he has his forces ready for battle. In other words, whoever of you is right, we need to get active as soon as possible,” Silo summarised.

“Very well, Quintus Poppeius. Where do we want to strike?” Glauca asked.

"We want to strike where he will feel forced to come out to meet us, and then when he has come out we strike somewhere else."

"What do you have in mind, Quintus Poppaedius?" Glaucia asked mildly.

"Let's all three of us put our heads together on this and see where this idea will lead us," Silo answered. "But the hatred we're attracting from these cities has convinced me of one thing. We need to remove that hatred or we'll need to garrison every city just to stop them from rising against us as soon as we turn our backs. And we don't have the strength to do that to every city in Asia as well as fight Mithridates. So there's one thing that must be established from the very first," Silo summed up. "I need to issue a new set of Standing Orders immediately."

Two days later all centurions were assembled to hear the new Standing Orders read to them and explained. Silo started by reading the new Standing Orders to them himself, in full.

Until further notice, and except where the Commander explicitly orders otherwise, the following Standing Orders shall be observed. These Orders have been issued for the following purposes:-

- A. *To provide a fair sharing of the benefits of victory among all soldiers entitled. This will allow soldiers to do their duty, without being side-tracked by other considerations.*
- B. *To ensure continuing peace in the areas subdued, without generating resentment, assassination or sabotage by the populace.*
- C. *To maintain good discipline, and thereby greater safety for all soldiers.*

These Orders are as follows:-

1. *Looting*

Individual soldiers may NOT loot. All looting shall be carried out by detachments specifically delegated to this duty. All loot shall be pooled, and the value evenly shared among all soldiers contributing towards the victory. Officers in the Second Class or above shall NOT be entitled to a share of loot. Distribution of proceeds shall be at the direction of the Commander, but the current intention is to pay wages only with the distribution of entitlements to be held safe until discharge or return to home. Any soldier who has a pressing need for earlier payment should speak to his centurion, explaining why an earlier payment should be made.

Any soldier who dies will not lose his entitlements. These shall be paid out to his next of kin.

Any member of a looting detachment found appropriating any loot without authorisation shall be considered a thief, and shall be subjected to harsh discipline. Any common soldier found with loot shall also be subject to punishment.

2. *Rape*

No soldier shall commit rape unless specifically authorised to do so. As a general rule, the citizens of a city which submits without resistance shall not be subject to rape, pillage or slaughter. If a city resists, then the Commander may, at his own discretion, permit rape, pillage or slaughter as an incentive to the next city to surrender more promptly.

Note that in consideration of this Standing Order, any city not subjected to rape shall be required to provide adequate sexual entertainment free of charge for all soldiers on leave, for such period of time as the Commander considers appropriate.

3. Pillage

Individual soldiers may NOT pillage. Pillaging shall come under the jurisdiction of detachments authorised to loot under Standing Order 1 above.

4. Slaughter.

Slaughter shall generally be prohibited, except against persons deliberately resisting or impeding Roman or Allied forces. Where time and circumstances permit, persons impeding action by our soldiers shall be apprehended and taken as captives to be sold into slavery. The proceeds of such sales shall be added to the loot to be shared among all soldiers. The dead are worthless as slaves, and do not pay taxes in the future; so minimise bloodshed.

5. Burning and Destruction.

Burning or other unnecessary destruction of property is forbidden. What cannot be taken as booty can be confiscated and sold, or put to other use. If nothing else, leaving it untouched reduces the cost of rebuilding, thus allowing more money and manpower available for taxes.

6. Supplies, Requisitions, etc.

Individual soldiers are not to requisition materiel without authorisation except under pressing circumstances, and shall pay or issue a receipt for such materiel. In other words, pay for what you take!

PENALTIES

Any soldier who is found to have not complied with these orders shall be subject to punishment as the Commander considers appropriate. This could involve forfeiture of privileges, loss of entitlement to loot, or beating. In extreme or repeated cases, enslavement or death may be expected.

“Men, I am sure you know that the key to keeping your men alive is to ensure they focus on the job at hand.” Silo started his explanation. “That is my first priority too; to keep my men alive. But I also have a second priority; to ensure that keeping the peace in the territories we control does not require so many soldiers that it weakens our main force. That not only slows our progress, but it increases

the risk of higher casualties in battle. And the key to satisfying that priority is to minimise resentment among the subject people.” Silo started striding the platform.

“You might have heard that the people of Pergamum actually pelted our soldiers from their walls, so much do they resent Rome. Yes, they would rather be under the thumb of Mithridates than remain Friends and Allies of Rome! And that applies not only to Pergamum, but to all the cities of Asia. There are two possible responses I could make. The first is to capture and punish these cities. That will gain us control, but it will not solve the root problem. It will build up resentment upon resentment, until the next Mithridates comes along, and when that happens another hundred thousand Romans and Italians will be slaughtered. And in the meanwhile, we will need to station a dozen legions in the province, at great and ongoing expense, and subject our men to the risk of assassination every day.

“The second possible response is to address their grievances, and solve the root problem. The root problem is that in the past Romans have been rapacious and arrogant. They hate us because we have deserved to be hated. Rome must adopt a different attitude in Asia! Rome must provide justice and security and the promise of an agreeable life! Rome must rule with wisdom, not arrogance! Then trouble-makers like Mithridates will not be seen as saviours, but as a risk to their peace and security.

“I intend to adopt the second approach. It is my policy to treat all who are under Roman rule with justice and dignity. No Greek shall be harmed, robbed or humiliated purely because some Roman has the power to do so. All will be accorded the protection of the Law, as any freeman in Rome might expect. In this way, the next generation of Greeks will rejoice that they are part of the Roman world, and not subjected to the whims of barbarian kings! They will resist the likes of Mithridates, rather than welcome him!”

Silo strode the platform for a few more moments, to allow this message to sink in. “But more importantly, this will also serve to protect your soldiers. Think about it! If one of your men takes to raping some woman, he is in no position to fight his way out of an ambush or attack! If he slips into a house to do a bit of pilfering, he is not available to protect his fellows – and anyway, why should the greediest get the spoils, while the dutiful get less?

“I expect some of your men might grumble; soldiers like a bit of rape and looting, I know! But tell them that this system will provide them with more booty than having a free-for-all, and better sex than grabbing the first woman he can find in the streets. And it will keep them alive in the process.” Silo looked over the assembly. “Are there any questions?”

The new Standing Orders were published.

It had seemed a good plan at the time, Silo told himself. And so far everything had gone according to plan. But there was this nagging dread deep in his chest... He had spent the best part of a month scouting the coast and making small landings in various places to gather closer intelligence. Of course, no landing had been made too close to the spot that was eventually chosen as the target; that

would have shown too much of his hand. But the element of surprise can work both ways...

Oh, why was he worrying so much? The invasion landings had been carried out on the plain near the mouth of the Meander. Priene, Myus and Miletus had been caught totally by surprise. They had opened their gates immediately, asking only that they not be sacked in return for their prompt submission. Silo had been only too eager to grant that request. He wanted to push inland quickly and couldn't afford the time to allow his soldiers to loot and rape. He had promised them plenty of plunder when they met the real enemy, Mithridates.

Silo was a Military Man by nature, but he had seen enough of politics to understand an opportunity had to be seized. So after instructing Asinius to move the troops on with all speed, Silo himself took the time to address the Assembly in Miletus. His proclamation had already been copied dozens of times for posting in territories as they were taken,

*Quintus Poppeius Silo, Commander of Roman forces in the East,
Acting with the authority of Lucius Cornelius Sulla and Lucius Porcius Cato,
Consuls of the Roman Republic,*

To all the Cities in Asia Province

Greetings!

Let the following proclamations be heard!

1. *Amnesty shall be granted to all persons and cities which were unwillingly forced by Pontic authorities to participate in the massacre of Romans and Italians. The specific application of this amnesty in individual cases shall be established by proper authority but there shall be a presumption of innocence unless circumstances or testimony prove otherwise.*

2. *All property rights and personal safety shall be respected in any city which submits to Roman authority at the earliest reasonable opportunity. Such a city shall not be looted nor its citizens in any other way harmed.*

3. *Any city which submits to Roman authority at the earliest reasonable opportunity shall be guaranteed the following rights for so long as it remains faithful to Rome:-*

a) Rome shall levy no taxes, charges or any other impost on any citizen of that city, other than those also imposed on a Roman citizen.

b) The rate of such taxes, charges or other imposts shall be no more for a citizen of that city than the same tax or impost on a Roman citizen.

c) No citizen of that city shall be enslaved, conscripted into the army, or suffer any other loss of liberty, except by due process of law.

d) That city shall be entitled to raise its own additional taxes, levies, etc., and expend the same as it sees fit. Such funds shall be inviolate from any seizure in part or in whole by Rome.

e) The form of internal administration of that city shall revert to that which was in effect before the occupation by Pontic forces, and shall be guaranteed freedom from interference by Rome.

Citizens! The Rome you see today is not the Rome of the former years. Recent changes in Rome, most notably the extension of Roman citizenship to its Italian Friends and Allies, has irrevocably changed the way in which Rome does business. Rome in its earliest days was a city based on the overthrow of tyranny and upholding the rights of each citizen. But after centuries of warfare Rome itself became a tyrant, imposing tyranny on foreign people.

But those times are now past. The Mos Majorum has been re-established in Rome and its scope extended. Rome shall be a tyrant no more but has become once again the champion of all who would resist tyranny. I, Quintus Poppeius Silo, elected Praetor of Rome and the first non-Roman to be given pro-consular command, am living proof that the Roman Republic has returned to its founding ideals.

I urge you all to join with this renewed Rome and help us establish Justice, the Rights of Citizens and the Rule of Law, overthrowing tyranny wherever it threatens any civilised People.

That should be a good counter to any claim by Mithridates to be a liberator, he had thought at the time, and given Sulla's enthusiasm to support the even more generous concession to Troas he was confident that it would be ratified in due course. Let the Publicani earn their sesterces honestly, like everyone else! So why was he so anxious? After leaving one legion distributed among the three cities as a garrison, the remainder of his army had been unopposed in its march up the Meander valley and his cavalry forces had already secured the route over the ridge between the Meander and the Cayster to come out some eight miles east of Ephesus. Thus he had already cut Ephesus off from the main route inland and was in a position to do some mischief to its water supplies. Yet the Pontic forces in Ephesus had not reacted.

“It would be tempting, Herius, to conclude that they don't know about us yet,” he commented to Asinius. “But that would be a big mistake. It would be only four hour's ride for a single rider or small group. Word must have reached them before noon! They could have sent a cavalry force to the ridge soon after noon and contested our possession. They could have tried to block the road inland. What are they thinking?”

“Perhaps their commander is inexperienced and waiting to see how we deploy,” Asinius guessed. “Or perhaps he has sent for orders or re-inforcements and is using his available manpower to prepare a defensive position.”

“Perhaps,” Silo agreed unconvinced. “The Magistrates back in Miletus said that Mithridates had about 20,000 men in Ephesus. I don't know if I believe them; that's a pretty small number for so important a city. Perhaps they have all been drawn off to mass for an attack on Troas as Lucius Telesinus predicted. Or perhaps to strike into Thracia, by-passing Troas as Glauca suggested,” Silo added quickly,

rather than allowing what might appear to his aide as a preference for Telesinus over Glauca.

By the time the conversation had reached this point they were atop the saddle in the ridge, and looking down onto the Cayster valley. Ephesus could be seen in the distance to the north-west. The sun was hanging over the city, almost as an omen. "It's getting late. When the first cohort arrives here, order them to set up defensive fortifications at the foot of the slope," Silo commanded. "I'll go back and order one of the following cohorts to fortify the inland road and some cavalry to scout further inland. I want no surprises from a snake that appears to be asleep but is actually waiting in ambush." He looked further to the west and a bit south to the bulk of Samos on the horizon. Perhaps he might not need to spring his own surprise after all.

The next morning dawned bright and clear, with only the gentlest of cool breezes from the east. "That will soon change," Silo said to Asinius as he dressed and ate. It will be warm soon enough."

"There's been no change overnight, sir," Asinius reported. "The Pontic forces have remained behind the city walls."

"Very good. Have a cohort march to each of the aqueducts and block the flow. Make sure they know that they mustn't damage them, only stop the water. And send a man forward to call for a surrender. You know the terms. The rest can form up on the plain in defensive formation and start to dig in. Keep them well to the east of the city. We want that distance to be as great as possible."

A lone cavalry officer slowly walked his horse towards the inland gate of Ephesus. He pulled his horse to a halt fifty paces short. "Men of Pontus!" He called in slow, clear Greek. "Rome offers you your lives! Hear these terms, accept them, and live!" He held out a sheet of paper, and started to read.

"Surrender the city today and no-one will die. Each officer will receive two denarii for every man under his authority, and be permitted to join Rome's legions as an officer. Service will be in Italy or provinces further west. He will be granted citizenship after fifteen years of service. Any preferring not to join the legions will be given his cash, taken to Spain, and granted his freedom.

"Any common soldier who so chooses will be accepted into Rome's legions to serve in Italy or provinces further west. He will also be granted citizenship after fifteen years of service. Of those who chose not to join the legions, half will be taken to Spain and there they will be granted freedom. The other half will be taken as slaves. The fate of each man will be determined by lot.

"If the city is not surrendered by this time tomorrow morning we will take it by force. All captives, regardless of rank, will be subject to either slavery or crucifixion, as General Silo determines."

The officer lowered the paper, looked up to scan the men on the walls and then slowly turned and walked his horse back to the Roman lines. An arrow whizzed past him, but he was steeled to not react. Then a cry and a thud. He stopped to look back. A man had been thrown from the walls, probably the man who shot the arrow. It seems that there's a taste for surrender under those terms, the officer thought to himself before resuming his leisurely retreat.

The rest of the day was taken up with deployment of men and catapults in the eastern plain. The forces were obviously well out of range for any attack but the number of men and artillery pieces made it obvious that the Romans had come prepared to fight. Meanwhile, the aqueducts in the city had run dry. They were restricted to cistern water now, and whatever was already stored in jars. There was no apparent reaction from the garrison.

The officer approached the city again an hour before sunset.

“Men of Pontus!” he hailed them again. “Tomorrow morning, at first light, you will come out without weapons and without body armour. Do that and you will be treated in accordance with General Silo’s offer. If you do not come out you will be attacked without any further opportunity for mercy.”

He turned again and walked slowly away. This time there was no parting arrow.

The moon set early that evening, only three hours after the sun. As soon as it was dark Roman sentries were sent forward to take up station in the six miles of no-man’s-land between the Roman fortifications and the city walls. A midnight sortie was an ever-present possibility. About midnight one party of sentries heard footsteps approaching. They quickly dispersed into the ditch beside the tree-lined road.

“Romaioi! Romaioi!” Someone was calling for Romans, but in Greek. It sounded a desperate whisper. The Roman decanus waited for the whisper to come level with him, and then ordered imperiously in Greek “Stop right there, or you die!” He heard the gasps of surprise not only from the whisperer, but many others following him. The whisperer gave a panicked instruction to those following, and the sound of footsteps stopped.

“You were calling for Romans; now you’ve found them. What do you want?”

“We want to surrender, sir,” the whisperer pleaded. “We are unarmed!”

“How many of you?” Here, under the trees with not even starlight, he could see nothing.

“Eight of us, sir; but there might be other groups following,” he answered. “No-body wants to fight.”

The decanus thought for a moment.

“Very well. Stand still and one soldier will pat you down for weapons. If he is satisfied he will guide you to our lines in safety.” He paused, and then in Latin, “Flavius, you speak Greek; take them back to our lines then get back here fast. The rest of you, back into hiding; there might be more coming.”

And more did come, in threes or fours or sometimes more. These were taken a mile paces down the road towards the Roman camp, and then told to sit still and wait for daylight. Then, about two hours before dawn, there was a much louder sound of scuffing along the road.

“Stop, or die!” the decanus ordered in Greek.

“We surrender!” came back the reply in Greek, and a sharp order in his own language.

“How many?”

"One hundred and twenty, sir! We are the entire midnight-to-dawn watch for my section of the wall. We noticed that many of the early watch were not at their posts, and it wasn't hard to guess why."

"Tell your men to stand still. We will search for weapons, and if you have none you will be taken to safety." The decanus reverted to Latin again, "Marcus; pat them down and take them up the road."

The Roman cavalry officer slowly walked his horse down the road to the gates of Ephesus in the first gleams of the dawn. "Men of Pontus! Now is the time to decide, as so many of your fellows have already done through the night." He looked along the tops of the walls. There were men up there, listening. "Open your gates and come out now, unarmed and unarmoured, and you will live. Indeed, most of you will prosper! If you have not responded to our generous offer by the time I return to my General, we will commence operations!" He slowly turned his horse and started walking back along the road.

"Wait!" A call from the walls. He stopped, turned, and scanned along the tops until he found the speaker.

"Wait for what?" he called back.

"I am under instructions from my commander to negotiate terms," the Pontic officer replied.

"You have our terms," the Roman replied curtly.

"It's in no-one's interests to be stubborn about this," the man on the wall replied. "Allow me to accompany you to your General under safe passage. We can sort out a few minor details and we will all get what we want. You will get the city without bloodshed, and we have some suggestions that we believe you would be pleased to adopt."

"You may certainly follow me back to my General if you wish to surrender yourself under the terms already stated. Many of your soldiers already have. But you have delayed me long enough already." The Roman turned again and heeled his horse to a walk, and then to a canter. Further calls from the walls were ignored. He went directly to the command tent.

"General, I suggest you call out the Samos force immediately! They're playing for time, which makes me suspect that re-inforcements are on their way."

Silo thought for a moment. "It's been two days since we landed. Enough time to get a message to Smyrna or Pergamum, and to start embarking men. If they can delay us for another day or two, we might be facing a horde of them. I don't want that, here in the open. Signal to Samos! I want them to sail immediately! Herius," he turned to Asinius, "take half of our cavalry and secure the coast for their landing, and prepare to resist a follow-up landing by the enemy!" Silo ordered. "Next, start pushing the siege engines forward immediately and preparing defences in front of them! They're not going to come out to meet us, so the original plan is abandoned. Also, I want two legions as a blocking force on the Smyrna road, just in case they come overland. Once they see that we've cut them off from the coast and are preparing to scorch them they might come out. Otherwise, I want this city under attack by noon!"

The beacon fire to the south was burning within the hour. By noon the message had arrived from the lookouts that the fleet from Samos had appeared around the bend in the coast and would be landing early afternoon. The reserve force under Gallienus had originally been told that the beacon would be lit when the defenders had been drawn out of the city, to confront the expeditionary force. They were intended to march on the city immediately, and thereby force the defenders outside the city to cover the new threat. This would allow Silo's forces to destroy them in pursuit.

As Gallienus' troops started landing a roar went up from the city. It was eerie, disturbing to his troops, to have the enemy cheer their arrival. But new orders were waiting for Gallienus as soon as he started landing. Fortify the coast against an enemy expected to arrive by sea and particularly make sure he could prevent any from reaching up river to Ephesus harbour.

"That's why the idiots are cheering; they think you're their relief force!" he was told. "Let's disappoint them really quickly."

And indeed the disappointment was quick coming. Instead of charging into the Roman cavalry there to meet him on the beach, Gallienus' men set their ballistae facing out to the sea and with overlapping fields of fire, each with a couple of contubernia of heavy infantry as close defence. The welcoming cavalry took up station behind them, as both a strategic reserve and also to cut off any sally from the city.

The onagers to the east of the city were now almost in position to start the attack. Then the city gates opened and men started marching out in their ranks, all of them bare-chested. Only their officers wore armour, with the senior officers on horseback beside them. It took half an hour for them all to march out, six abreast down the road towards the Roman camp, passing between the onager emplacements and their infantry detachments now only half a mile from the city walls. When the lead troops were little more than a mile down the road, the commander himself rode out at the tail of the column, ordered the column to stop, and started to canter towards the head. The order to stop marching flowed up towards the front of the column and the commander reached the front ranks, pulling his horse back from a canter to a walk.

"Romans! We accept your terms! The city is yours, and we give ourselves into your hands!" he bellowed in Greek. He continued walking his horse towards the Roman camp, repeating this announcement every hundred paces or so. Silo had realised what was happening as soon as the first bare-chested men had walked through the gate and orders were rapidly given to stand ready but not attack. Now he rode out to accept the surrender.

The Pontic Commander saw Silo approaching. When still some thirty paces short, he dismounted and approached Silo of foot, holding his sheathed sword in front of his chest with both hands outstretched. When five paces short, he placed the sword on the ground and took three steps back.

"My name is Philippos, commander of the garrison in Ephesus. We have come out to you as demanded by your herald, and call upon you to honour the terms

offered.” He smiled politely. “We know Romans are an honourable people and we have no doubt that you will perform as you have pledged.”

“The offer was conditional upon you coming out this morning. You are eight hours too late.” Silo responded flatly.

“There are always unavoidable delays in such matters,” Philippos shrugged the comment away. “What is important is that we did not do you any harm, nor force you to do Ephesus any harm.”

“It is for me to decide what is important.” Silo corrected him. “You have delayed me for a whole day, and this delay may well cost me and my men at some later stage in the campaign. I consider that very important.”

Philippos realised that he would not gain anything by contradicting Silo in public. “For which delay I most sincerely apologise,” he confessed, bowing his head.

“I accept your apology,” Silo responded in good grace. “But I must make it known that I will not accept such delays from other commanders in the future.” Silo swept his eyes up the road, to the enemy men waiting patiently and fearfully along the road. “The common soldiers cannot be blamed for your stubbornness, so the original terms will still be applied to them. But you and your officers will not be rewarded above them. You will be reduced to those same terms. Each of you will be permitted to join Rome's legions as a common infantryman for fifteen years, and then be granted citizenship. Half of those who do not enlist will be enslaved, and the other half will be granted freedom in Spain. No cash payments will be made.”

Philippos knew what was best for his future, and it was not to argue from a position of total vulnerability. He dropped to his knees. “You are a most magnanimous man, General.”

“Then you should ride back to your men and tell them the terms,” Silo told him simply. “You will then march them to a holding area that we will show you until you can be transported to the west. Until then I expect your officers to keep control.” Philippos regained his feet, bowed politely and took three steps backwards before turning and walking back to his horse.

“Herius Asinius,” Silo called to his second in command, who had just returned from the coast. Asinius trotted his horse to stand beside Silo's. Silo continued speaking, but at a whisper. “I would estimate about ten thousand men. March them back over the ridge into the Meander valley to get them away from any possible landing force that might arrive here overnight; they obviously expect one. Then get them to build a stockade for themselves and post two centuries to guard them, one until midnight and the other until dawn.

“Then get at least one legion into the city and make sure that there are no enemy left in there. Call for help if you need it. Next, get a legion back to Miletus, and another to each of Myus and Priene. Get everyone else onto the coast, in case re-inforcements for the garrison arrive and try to land. And finally; where do you think the rest of the enemy are? The magistrates in Miletus told me twenty thousand, and even that seemed a bit on the low side for a city like Ephesus.”

“I think that a report back to Lucius Glaucia might be a good idea, and ask if he has seen anything up north,” Asinius replied. “But I'll get to work on the other

things straight away.” Asinius kicked his horse into movement and started calling for messengers to send orders to the various legion commanders.

The faint sound of a dull roar drifted on the breeze from the west. Silo kicked his horse to a run up the hill to his command tent. Out to the west, in the bay, he could see a mass of ships approaching the coast. His own transports, used for landing the Samos division, were huddled up to the beach to the south. The Pontic re-inforcements! Silo estimated the distance from the coast to the ships. They would probably make for the Cayster and try to sail up into the harbour of Ephesus; or more accurately, that's what they would have intended. But now they saw that the coast was in hostile hands they would never try to single-file up the river, to be picked off one at a time by the artillery.

Even as he watched, Silo saw the fleet turn south and run on a long, flat tack towards Samos. The westerly wind was pushing them into the bay and they were trying to tack out. That in itself shouldn't be too hard, Silo mused; the wind was firm and steady but not overly strong. But dusk was coming, and a fleet of over a hundred ships, all trying to tack to windward across each other's bows in the dark... This might be an exciting night in the bay for those sailors! Silo imagined ships ploughing into each other in the dark, and the infantrymen on board trembling in the holds in fear of drowning. His mind flashed back to the trip from Rhodes to Thessalonica and Marius' death... He shivered and pushed the memory aside.

But it did drive home to Silo how poor a commander Philippos had proven himself to be! Had he come out of his walls and secured the coast and harbour his ten thousand would have been hard to shift in less than several days, by which time these reinforcements would have made the capture of Ephesus a long, hard business. But instead he had allowed himself to be trapped and cut off. He deserved slavery! May the lot fall against him!

There was a bit of wreckage blown onto the coast the next morning, and several bodies; but not enough to indicate a naval disaster. It seemed that the bulk of the fleet had managed to fight its way into the wind overnight. Silo could only hope that they had not landed on Samos, or rounded the corner to Miletus. But they were more likely to turn back to their home station, probably Smyrna; the channel around the corner to Miletus would have been very tight for so many ships in the dark, and they knew that Samos was under Roman control. And even if they had landed, the garrisons in each place should have been able to hold against a landing.

Silo called for Asinius and ordered him to transfer the prisoners to Samos as quickly as possible. The next order of business was to prepare the defences of the cities won in this sharp campaign. He wanted defences in depth with ambush points to demoralise the enemy before they even arrived. The ten legions on hand should be ample for the task, with two fresh legions on Samos.

“I want you to take control here, Herius; the overall objective is to hold the ground we have won but I also expect you to keep yourself informed about the enemy's strength and location and to seize any opportunities that might arise. Be active, not passive!” Silo urged his deputy. “I'm going to see how things are in Troas and the north. Then I'll plan the next phase.”

Silo returned to Ephesus on the first day of July. Telesinus had continued his deep reconnaissance throughout the Troad and the closer parts of Mysia, reporting no sightings of any enemy formations larger than scouting bands. He had also taken some initiatives, such as sending in traders as spies and interrogating others who had come from Bithynia. There seemed to be no substantial bodies of troops anywhere near his horizon.

Asinius had been busy. The approaches down the Meander valley had been scouted and suitable strongpoints and ambushes prepared. The overland route from Smyrna had also been prepared and one ambush of a raiding force of three thousand cavalry had been successful. He had also occupied Magnesia on the Meander upstream of the road from Miletus. Landings along the coast and other sources of intelligence indicated that Smyrna itself had only a modest garrison, reportedly in the order of twenty thousand.

"That is if you believe these Greeks," Asinius snorted. "They said the same about Ephesus, and there were only eleven thousand here!"

"I believe them to be accurate enough for our purposes," Silo replied mildly. "We march on Smyrna and then go on to Pergamum next. I don't want to go inland now. We've already lost too much of the summer to make a decisive thrust before the weather stops us. That can wait until next year. For the moment, we'll re-take Asia while it's so weakly defended. If and when we find where Mithridates is hiding his troops we'll go for the crushing blow but we can't just sit still until then. So here is the plan," Silo leant forward. "Telesinus will be here with nine of his legions soon, leaving the other three in Troas. Its defences are pretty well prepared now even if Mithridates does have a dip at them. I've ordered three of our legions from Rhodes to come here, leaving another three at Rhodes. That will mean we have a total of twenty four legions either here or on Samos."

"I intend to leave six legions here as a garrison and blocking force on the Meander, and take the other eighteen to Smyrna and then on to Pergamum. So long as we keep meeting weak garrisons and offering them terms, I expect to advance quickly and take few casualties, while capturing plenty of enemy soldiers. Taking them prisoner and sending them to Spain deprives Mithridates of manpower just as certainly as slaughtering them. But if we come up against a larger force, at least we'll know where they've been lurking."

"Whatever Mithridates has in mind at the moment, I half expect him to try to stop us once he sees that he's losing Asia. He can't afford to keep losing cities and armies at this rate. He'll have to bring out his main force to block us, to stop the bleeding. That's when we can stop covering our bases and concentrate our forces on him."

"And what do you require of me, sir?" Asinius asked. "Will I be left in command of this garrison while you push forward?"

"That's my intention, Herius. How do you feel about that?"

"Whatever you say, General." Asinius submitted. "But if I'm to stay here, how do you want me to deal with those Greeks who murdered Romans and Italians only two months ago?"

“For the moment, Herius, nothing,” Silo answered. “Just work with them at a professional level, show them respect, and expect their compliance. Retribution can come later, when Mithridates is out of the way.”

“Will I post your proclamation, as in Miletus?”

“Yes; that should have gone up the first day, but I was distracted.”

“Also, General, these messages from the Consuls arrived at Rhodes while you were away and they were forwarded on to Ephesus.” Asinius handed Silo two letters, their seals broken. “I took the liberty of reading them as soon as they arrived, in case anything needed urgent attention.” Asinius explained.

“Good man!” Silo approved. “That’s the sort of initiative I’m looking for.” Silo unfolded the letter and started reading the first.

*Lucius Cornelius Sulla and Lucius Porcius Cato, Consuls of the Roman Republic, and the Senate of the Roman Republic,
To Quintus Poppaeus Silo, Commander in the Field,*

Greetings!

The Consuls and Senate confirm that Consul Lucius Cornelius Sulla has been appointed Supreme Commander of all Roman forces east of Italy, with power to delegate officers to whatever commands under him as he sees fit. This appointment as Supreme Commander is to continue so long as the crisis lasts. Subject to this Supreme Command, Quintus Poppaeus Silo has been appointed Commander in the Field by and under Lucius Cornelius Sulla.

The Consuls and the Senate of Rome have also endorsed the declaration by Lucius Glauca regarding the tax status of Troas. However, this must not be extended to other cities without first gaining the approval of the Senate in each individual case.

The Senate has requested the Supreme Commander to report to the Senate at least monthly, and more often as appropriate, on the progress of the war. The co-operation of the Commander in the Field in satisfying this request would be greatly appreciated.

Silo flicked his eyebrows up “It looks like they might not appreciate my proclamation,” Silo said flatly. “Oh, well; they’ll just have to accept it. What is done is done.” He turned to the second letter.

*From Lucius Cornelius, your friend,
To Quintus Poppaeus, my friend,*

May Fortuna favour you!

This letter is intended to be read after the official one from the Senate.

I have to tell you that it wasn’t easy to get approval for Glauca’s proclamation! These idiots in the Senate chamber seem to think that wars can be

won by wishing hard enough. And I dare suspect that too many of them are being greased by the publicani, who have no scruples about paying in Roman blood to keep their cash-flows positive.

Thankfully Lucius Porcius has both intelligence and some influence over the Boni (That's a rare combination!). He simply said "I have total confidence in my colleague Lucius Cornelius to win this war. I have no doubt that if he says this is a necessary price, then I am prepared to pay it."

I was angry enough to challenge Catulus (now that Caius is gone, he sees me as the focus of everything that is wicked in Rome) to outline how he, as a Famous Military Commander (this got most of the House howling with laughter as they recalled his total incompetence against the Germans) would suggest I recapture Asia against an enemy with twice as many troops, well supplied and fortified behind some of the best city walls in the world, and supported by a huge, well-educated and prosperous population that absolutely hates Rome for allowing the publicani to strip them bare. Sorry to be so parenthetical there, but you get my drift.

I told him outright that the only way we could regain Asia would be by convincing the Greeks that it would be in their own interests to support us rather than oppose us; and if we fail on that point then not only Asia would be lost but Achaia and Macedonia as well. And soon after that, we would have an enemy worse than Carthage banging on our gates. Now is the time to deal with reality, and not retreat into some dream-world or stamp our feet like spoilt daughters.

So if you have to make promises or other concessions, then don't hesitate to do so. Leave me to handle the children.

I'm currently raising more legions for you. Because of the shortage of transport ships I will march them to Brundisium for the shorter crossing to Dyrrhachium. You can collect them from Quintus Bruttius Sura in Thessalonica. I'm also building a fleet of triremes for you. I know you keep saying you need transports, but If Mithridates breaks out through the Dardanelles, or if he builds another fleet in Cilicia, your transports will need protection.

Caius Papius Mutilus is still in Syracuse; I think he likes the weather down there! He has undertaken to raise more legions from Sicily and Africa.

Keep me closely informed, and in great detail. The Senate letter says monthly reports, but I would like them much more frequently than that, so I don't get taken by surprise. Also let your needs and your plans be made known to me, so I can support and advise more intelligently.

Live long and well!

"At least Lucius Cornelius has his priorities right," Silo grunted as he ended the letter.

Do you still want your proclamation posted in Ephesus?" Asinius asked.

"Yes, of course! It's already been posted in four cities, and it's addressed to all the cities of Asia province. We can't retract it now. At least Lucius Cornelius

will understand that, and I'll leave it to him to explain it to the children, as he put it."

"Yes, General. Is there anything else?"

"Yes, Herius. If you could please sort out the legions for my campaign. Allocate six legions for your garrison, taking the older veterans and leave me with the younger men. Right now I think I need to write to Lucius Cornelius, to give him my first monthly Report." Silo had another thought as he finished. "And where is Publius Rutilius at the moment?"

"I sent a message to Rhodes as soon as the letter arrived, asking him to visit Troas to confirm the tax status," Asinius answered. "I expect him back in Rhodes in perhaps ten days or so."

"Excellent. Ask him to remain in Rhodes while we liberate Smyrna. I'd then ask him to read my proclamation there."

"He might not want to do that without Senate approval," Asinius warned.

"Then I should include that in my Report." Silo smiled.

"Yes, General."

All the legions had arrived at Ephesus by the middle of Quintilis. Scouting by cavalry had established that there was no significant enemy presence for at least a hundred miles up the Meander, but there seemed to have been a substantial increase in the enemy numbers in Smyrna.

The uneasiness that Silo had felt during the march on Ephesus returned. Mithridates had commanded over a hundred thousand men at the start of the year. Surely he would have raised more in response to the Roman reaction, perhaps two hundred thousand by now. But where were they? Even after the recent build-up there seemed only forty thousand in Smyrna and there might be the same in Pergamum, but probably less.

Philippos was still under guard. He called for him.

"You had only eleven thousand men, Philippos, to defend the largest city in the world except for Alexandria and Rome itself. That seems hardly a force proportionate to the task."

"Yes, General. It was too small a force for the purpose," Philippos agreed. Silo masked his inward reaction. Small force or not, this feeble excuse for a soldier had made very poor use of it.

"How did you manage to take the city in the first place, with such a small army?"

"Archelaus took the city with a force of almost eighty thousand." Philippos answered. "And there was not even a full legion to defend it. But once the city was taken I was left with only a handful of soldiers and a promise that Rome would not even attempt to return."

"That was a foolish promise, Philippos. Why would we not return?"

"I was given to understand that by the time you could muster sufficient force, you would be drawn off to defend other places."

Silo handed his guest a goblet and pushed a plate of sweetmeats towards him.

"Well, you can see that we have mustered a good-sized force, despite that prediction," Silo observed.

"Yes, you have," Philippos agreed ruefully. "I was told that you would take until Sextilis to bring together twenty legions, and most of those would be needed to keep the islands under control. With the few remaining available for offensive duty you would be able to attack only one target at a time and we would be able to deploy reinforcements to the target city from the others within a matter of days. I was told I would need to last only three days and any Roman force would be caught between the reinforcements and our walls."

"So that's why you simply played for time? And when our re-inforcements landed on the third day, you thought they were your own?"

"Yes, General. We were prepared to launch out to fall on the rear of your men defending the beach. But we saw that the men from the transports were Romans. After that we knew there was no chance of help getting here in time."

Silo nodded as though sympathetic. What a complacent, unimaginative, in fact downright lazy soldier this man had proven himself!

"But why were you spread so thin? Why were you not given forty thousand for a city like Ephesus?" Silo asked as if incredulous.

"I don't know, General. I only know that the bulk of our army would be used to pose so great a threat to Rome that we would not need any greater forces to hold." Philippos allowed himself a tired sneer. "Archelaus is a fool! But good, honest officers like me have to pay for his mistakes!"

"Yes, unfortunately that's often the way," Silo said sympathetically. But in his own mind he was thinking that Archelaus would soon be paying for this man's laziness and incompetence. "But in the end, Archelaus will pay for his own blunders."

Silo stood. "Thank you for your time, Philippos. A man of your abilities will have no trouble building the future he deserves in Spain. Now, if you would please return to your quarters..."

Silo reviewed his options again. The march along the Asian coast was less attractive now with the larger force in Smyrna, but still feasible. Or should he go inland and take Cappadocia? As soon as he asked the question, he shook his head. More than a third of the campaigning season had passed already, and if that missing Mithridatic force re-appeared to his rear... Perhaps strike westwards from Troas, into Bithynia? But the Pontic fleet controlled the Euxine; he could have large forces land behind him.

The other option was the south coast, from Lycia to Cilicia. If he could seize those cities it would reduce the risk of a hostile navy being constructed and give him a second axis of advance into Cappadocia next year. But that would spread his forces too thin along the coast. Communications would take too long, apart from the risk of being picked off in detail.

Which way to go? Philippos had confirmed the guess made by Glauca that Mithridates intends to open a completely new theatre, probably by crossing into Thracia north of the Bosphorus. Well, he need not worry too much about that now. Sulla's last letter said he would be marching more legions to Thessalonica. Sura

was a competent soldier and he would be able to secure Thracia with those extra troops. Which meant that Silo's own Asian task force would be unlikely to bump into any surprises.

No; the boring option of grinding the Asian coastline seemed the safest. That way he and Sura could re-inforce each other as the circumstances demanded. Short lines of communication would win this war.

The time of waiting for his extra legions had not been wasted. His eighteen campaigning legions were well-supported by a mass of artillery, siege towers and specialist engineering squads. Smyrna was known to be well-defended, but with this well-prepared force he didn't expect a long siege.

The scouting cavalry informed him that the Smyrna garrison was not sitting behind its walls. The enemy had built extensive fortifications on the plains outside the city in an attempt to funnel the approaching forces into preferred lines of attack. No doubt these lines were well-covered by their own artillery that would use indirect fire, Silo knew, and subject to ambush. However, there was no indication that the works extended beyond the immediate vicinity of the city. No blocking forces or fortifications were found in the ridges surrounding the city's rich plain. Nevertheless Silo moved his army forward in skirmish formation, ready for a surprise attack. They were not challenged.

Silo stood on the ridge and looked out over the plain. From this height the pattern of the earthworks and the science behind them was clear. The fair roads, apparently fit for wheeled siege engines, were all torn up just beyond a rise that would hide the trap from those advancing. Rows of mounds and staked ditches constrained lines of infantry advance. It would be a battle just to get within onager range of the wall. Silo swung in his saddle to address Glauca, properly beside and a half-length behind his commander.

“Lucius; your thoughts, please?”

Glauca took two paces forward to be beside Silo.

“Start with the usual; cut off their water supply and offer them terms for their surrender. I expect that they'll be apprehensive at how quickly we secured the Meander valley and Ephesus, so the same terms as offered at Ephesus might seem attractive,” Glauca started. “But to take this city won't be easy if they decide to resist. It'll take time to push into artillery range and even then we will be subjected to indirect fire ourselves. I'd prefer to invest and by-pass; let them come out rather than us go in.”

“I agree,” Silo nodded. “I'll set up some onagers to cover the neck of the bay to keep them isolated by sea; that'll require perhaps half a legion to defend against sallies. Another two and a half should be enough to prevent a breakout or overland relief and to stop any repairs to the aqueducts.”

Silo looked out over the plain again, and then back to Glauca. “Can I leave the investment to you? I'll take the rest on to Pergamum, and with a bit of luck we should have the major cities under control before winter.”

Silo left the siege engines with Glauca. Pergamum was a city on a hilltop, not vulnerable to wheeled towers. And because it occupied the higher ground it

would be only marginally vulnerable to his artillery which would be much more vulnerable in return to indirect fire from the defenders.

Sulla was on the road, some hundred miles east of Dyrrachium, when Silo's latest letter caught up with him.

*Quintus Poppeadius Silo, Subordinate Commander in the East,
To Lucius Cornelius Sulla, Consul of Rome,*

Greetings!

*I trust you are in good health, and also Lucius Porcius and Marcus Livius.
As I write this letter I am preparing to march on Pergamum.*

I have already informed you of the proclamations I made in Miletus and other cities in that region, and sent you a copy. These proclamations were made in good faith before I received your advice to limit concessions to the Greeks. By their very nature these proclamations, once made, could not be revoked but needed to be applied generally.

Thus Ephesus was also granted the same privileges, except that I charged them a "Liberation Levy" of ten thousand talents. I informed them that this was for their failure to submit to Rome at the earliest opportunity by rising spontaneously against the Pontic garrison, requiring us to confront the enemy to achieve their withdrawal. The cash from this levy is being used to feed and equip my troops; I am reluctant to loot the land as I pass through but prefer to pay for my requisitions. This is all part of my aim to win local loyalty and thus reduce the number of men tied up in garrison and pacification duty.

I have also adopted the practice of offering the enemy units rather generous terms if they surrender without resistance. These terms are the option to serve in Rome's legions for fifteen years to earn citizenship. Those not willing to serve are divided by lot between free non-citizen status in Spain for half of them, and slavery for the other half. Not many are choosing the legions, perhaps because their experience in the Pontic army has been so abusive and perhaps because they have no real grasp of what it means to be a citizen. But even slavery seems attractive in comparison to service in Mithridates' army, and the even-money chance at freedom is almost irresistible.

This approach has allowed me to minimise casualties and also capture cities much more quickly, before the enemy can send reinforcements to relieve them.

Smyrna has been invested rather than assaulted. The garrison there was well-prepared and quite strong and an assault would have been a time-consuming and costly exercise. This would have prevented me from moving against Pergamum before winter sets in. So I have left Lucius Glaucia there with instructions to deprive them of water and defend against relief and sallies, but otherwise to preserve his force intact.

Throughout this campaign I have been surprised by how Mithridates has left Asia so thinly-defended. In some measure this might have been because he expects

the cities to actively co-operate with him against us – the publicani have much to answer for! But I now have good reason to believe that Mithridates has been concentrating his forces for a strike into Thracia, landing north of the Bosphorus. Therefore I suggest that the additional legions you are sending through Thessalonica might best be given to Quintus Bruttius Sura in anticipation of such an attack. If I were Mithridates, I would be planning this for late in the year, so that by the time Rome understands what has happened winter will prevent an effective counter-attack.

It is a by-word that Generals always complain that they need more troops. But while I would enjoy another twenty legions, I am confident that I have sufficient for the moment to achieve my aims for this year. We have regained all of the southern coast of Asia, we control the Troad and the Dardanelles, and will have Smyrna and Pergamum at least invested if not conquered. So if Quintus Bruttius can prevent an invasion of Thracia - or even better, destroy the invading army! - then we will be well placed to regain Mysia and Bithynia in spring next year, and then strike into Cappadocia as the higher country inland thaws out.

Please convey my respects to Lucius Porcius and the Senate as a whole, and I request that my command be extended into the new year so I can maintain the momentum.

Sulla was well pleased with the progress being made, even if against apparently weak opposition. But the threat of an invasion of Thracia was disturbing. Sura had less than a full-strength legion as his Prefecture garrison, and Sulla had only six legions with him on the road. He must make for Thessalonica as quickly as possible.

Bad news was waiting for him in Thessalonica. Archelaus had landed in Piraeus and been hailed a liberator. Athens had opened its gates to him, and denounced Roman hegemony. Most of Achaia had followed the Athenian lead. Sura had left Thessalonica two days before Sulla's arrival, heading towards Athens by road with his lone legion. This was an act of boldness, but perhaps not wisdom. The Cyclades had also fallen to Archelaus. This threatened Roman lines of communication with Asia and Rhodes, and demanded immediate attention.

Sulla immediately sent a rider after Sura, ordering him to wait for Sulla and his six legions. Another message to be forwarded on to Mutilus in Syracuse was sent back by rider to Dyrrachium to avoid the risk of interception at sea by Archelaus. Any African and Sicilian legions should be sent to reclaim the Cyclades rather than to Rhodes. Another message was sent to Ephesus advising Silo of the situation and his response and providing further instructions.

As Sulla marched south, the cities he passed through soon swung back to Rome, most importantly Thebes. This, plus contemplation of the ruins of Corinth as a reminder of the scale of Roman retribution, re-established Roman dominance in most of the province. But Athens was more obdurate. Sulla sent a message into Athens urging them to re-read Thucydides' History of the Peloponnesian War and then left Sura in command of the siege of Athens before returning to Rome.

Silo regretted leaving his artillery with Glauca back at Smyrna. While Pergamum itself was immune to its full power, these machines would have been very handy in reducing the outer defences in the valley below the city. It had taken the best part of a month to build replacements or capture Pontic machines on the hills overlooking the valley, forcing the enemy back far enough to actively interfere with the city water supply.

By the beginning of October he was satisfied that he now had the upper hand. Pergamum being some 700 feet above the valley floor, supplying water by sinking wells within the city walls was simply impossible; the water table was much too low. Husbanding what rain and snow might fall within the city would not be enough to provide even drinking water, much less enough to provide proper sanitation. Disease would break out soon enough. He was greatly heartened by the letter from Sulla.

*Lucius Cornelius Sulla, Consul of Rome in Command of the Army in the East,
To Quintus Poppeadius Silo, General of the Army in the East,*

Greetings!

Thank you for your timely warning about the likely invasion of Thracia or Achaia; as it happened, Archelaus has landed in Athens and fomented rebellion, but your warning allowed this to be contained to the areas under his occupation. Thracia and Achaia outside Athens remain loyal. Quintus Bruttius has invested Athens and Piraeus to destroy the contagion. Archelaus also managed to take control of the Cyclades, threatening communications between Asia and Italy, but this will be corrected before the end of the year. However, you should be alert to the possibility of small-scale interruptions until this matter is settled.

I agree that your proclamation in Miletus must be honoured. However much the publicani might scream foul, they are not the ones paying for this war with their own money and blood. Have no hesitation in continuing to act on that basis as you work your way through Asia, Mysia, Galatia and Bithynia.

Yes, that is right! Your task, in the long term, is not merely to restore the same fragile status quo ante, but to establish a more durable political structure. To this end, Galatia and all lands west shall be added to Asia Province, including Bithynia, Mysia, Lydia, Caria, Phrygia, Pisidia, Pamphylia and Lycia. Extend this as far as Lycaonia, Cappadocia and Cilicia if the opportunity presents itself. These squabbling princelings are not worth the good Italian blood that must be shed to rescue them each time they provoke a stronger neighbour into disciplining them like the children they emulate.

As for Pontus itself, we will think about that when the time comes; but they certainly will not be offered the same terms as the Asian cities. Perhaps we might let them have a generation or two of publicani attention, to atone for their sins!

Please re-assure Rufus that the Senate has given me complete authority to negotiate terms of peace, including indemnities and taxes. Thus the way is clear

for him to lend his own personal dignitas to the Miletus Proclamation. This might be particularly persuasive in Smyrna, where he is so well loved.

You are also doing well to pay for your supplies, rather than foraging. There is no sense in winning a war in such a way that you then need to spend all your efforts maintaining the peace. I will send you some accountants with a list of current tax rates applying in Rome, and these can be applied to your liberated cities as pledged in the Miletus Proclamation. This should raise enough revenue to finance your campaign. If not, then go into debt. I authorise it, and will repay out of the Treasury.

Continue sending your reports!

Silo called for his secretary and ordered him to copy the letter and take it to Glauca outside Smyrna. Rufus might yet manage to provoke an uprising by the citizenry to cast out the Pontic garrison. Then he settled down to think through how Sulla's instructions might be best applied in the circumstances before him. Sulla had made it clear that he expected initiative from his General on the spot, and not paralysis. First, there was no hint of objection to his current tactic of investing and besieging cities, rather than assaulting them. Sulla's endorsement of paying for requisitioned goods, and his explicit mention of winning hearts and minds dovetailed well with this; minimising damage and casualties was the way to go. Well, the fifteen legions now in front of Pergamum were a much larger force than he needed to besiege the city. Four would be ample. That gave him eleven legions free to be deployed elsewhere. Sulla mentioned Lycia and the other petty kingdoms and states along the southern coast of Anatolia; so why not show the flag down there? Or would that leave his main force too remote from his investments if Mithridates concentrated another sizeable army?

“Call Marius Millo,” he called to his secretary, as he started to do the mental exercise of apportioning numbers.

It was not long before Millo knocked on the door of the hut Silo had established as his quarters.

“You wanted to see me, General?”

“Yes, Marius, please sit down.” Silo indicated a chair, and Millo slipped into it.

“You did well in that siege exercise on Rhodes,” Silo opened. “How would you like to take over this one?”

Millo raised his eyebrows slightly. “It would be an honour, sir. Where are you going?”

“How many legions do you think you need?” Silo persisted, ignoring the question.

“Lucius Glauca has three at Smyrna,” Millo started his answer, “But he has friends both sides of him. I would like at least six, in case a relief force arrives.”

“How would you deploy them?”

“I would fortify the passes and use the cavalry to scout inland. That would take three legions, with the other three to guard against sallies,” Millo answered.

"Good. You can have five, and I'll leave another at Smyrna with Lucius. I expect you two to work together. I don't want another Arausio," Silo smiled. "And remember that there are six more with Asinius in Ephesus. Lucius Glauca will be in command of the three of you. I'll call all legion commanders together here tomorrow morning to issue orders. Until then, think about your deployments and fortifications so you can hit the ground running." Silo stood.

Understanding that the meeting was ended, Millo stood, saluted, and left the hut.

The sun was alone in the sky; not a cloud in sight. But it was a weak and watery sun, and the air was chill. November had arrived. In little more than a year since the Sulpician Coup so much had happened. Sulla was deep in his own thoughts as he entered the Senate chamber in time to hear the augurs pronounce that the entrails were favourable.

It was Cato's month with the fasces, which allowed Sulla to seek out Rufus.

"Quintus Pompeius," he hailed him with a smile. "You were an excellent Urban Praetor in your time! When do you intend to become Consul?"

Rufus was taken aback by the directness of the question.

"Why, Lucius Cornelius! ..." he spluttered. "Look at the competition! The first year I was eligible was when I came back from my governorship of Africa, when Caius Marius and you had the election in the bag. Now you and Lucius Porcius are doing such a good job, and being allowed to serve consecutive consulships under the State of Emergency... why would I waste my money even trying?"

"Do you have any intention?" Sulla pressed.

"In good time I might, Lucius Cornelius; but so long as the State of Emergency allows consecutive consulships there's no doubt that you and Lucius Porcius are the right men for the job." Rufus shrugged. "Perhaps when the war is finished, but by then I expect there will be triumphs and a handful of heroes will walk into the consulship by popular acclaim."

Sulla considered Rufus thoughtfully. "You're a good man, Quintus Pompeius; and I mean that in the best way. In your term as Praetor you were diligent, hard-working, efficient, competent, honest; all the qualities that only good men have but don't catch the eye of the Mob nearly so much as much trivial things like a polished speech or a handsome build concealing the rogue beneath. I'd like to send you to Asia as Governor," Sulla continued. "Your experience as Urban Praetor would make you the right man in terms of competence and your honesty would make you a most acceptable man to the Asians politically."

Rufus gaped. "You can't be serious, Lucius Cornelius! Every consul who has ever lived has wanted a term in Asia, to line his pockets with gold! There are still too many consulars who would have precedence over me."

"Not as many as you think will want the job now," Sulla chuckled. "The peace terms I've imposed in Asia provide little scope for gouging. The greedy won't want to go near it. But an honest man who does his job well can use it to build up

his dignitas, if not his purse. But even his purse will gain somewhat, at least enough to campaign for the consulship when he returns, if he attracts the right friends."

Rufus eyed Sulla carefully. "Is this another deep plan, Lucius Cornelius? You're always thinking three steps ahead of everyone else!"

"Yes it is, Quintus Pompeius," Sulla laughed. "A deep plan to make Rome not only great, but good as well. And it's to be done by making good men such as yourself great. Could you please spare me a couple of hours tonight? I'd like to host you, Lucius Porcius and Marcus Livius as I lay out my plans."

"I would be honoured, Lucius Cornelius." Rufus sensed the chat was over, gave a slight nod of respect, and slipped away.

Sulla had barely enough time to invite Drusus and Cato to the same meal before the Senate was called to order.

"Conscript Fathers," Cato called. "Conscript Fathers, I think the first item of business today should be a report on the war." Cato looked over to Sulla. "If you would please, Lucius Cornelius?"

Sulla stood and walked to the focus of the chamber. "In summary, the war goes well," Sulla started. "But I'm sure that you want more detail than that," he smiled. "Since my last Report to you, I have marched another six legions across Macedonia. While on the road I received a letter from Quintus Poppaeus, warning me that he expected Mithridates to invade either Thracia or Achaia in the autumn. This warning proved to be well founded. Archelaus invaded the Cyclades and Athens while the letter was in transit.

"The appearance of my six legions within days made a powerful impression on the Greeks. They couldn't believe how rapid was the Roman response! Coming after a similar act by Silo to occupy the Troad even as Mithridates was marching towards it, this convinced many that we have spies that know every move Mithridates intends to make. Let them go on believing it; it will make them less likely to betray us again! All the Greek cities came back into line except Athens, which is now under siege with Archelaus trapped inside. The enemy garrison in the Cyclades has been eliminated by African and Sicilian legions raised by Caius Papius Mutilus. These legions have since continued on to join Silo's forces.

"On the other side of the Aegean, Silo is making good progress. He has regained the loyalty of every coastal city except for Pergamum and Smyrna, which he has invested. He has done this almost without casualties, while capturing over fifty thousand enemy. We expect to capture Athens in the new year. We also intend to liberate Bithynia and march inland." Sulla paused for a moment.

"Our best estimate is that Mithridates can delay us, but can't repel us. We expect that we will have pushed him back to his original borders before the end of the next campaigning season. We will then demand terms that will ensure he is never again able to throw the world into turmoil. If he doesn't accept those terms then in the following year we will have a new province called "Pontus".

"For that reason I intend to stand for Consul again, to ensure that Quintus Poppaeus Silo is able to complete the campaign he has so expertly conducted thus far." Sulla returned to his chair and sat.

Cato was the last to arrive at Sulla's house, just as the lengthening shadows cut the last rays of sunlight from his garden. Sulla stood to welcome his colleague, Drusus and Rufus following. As they each took a couch, Sulla reached forward casually and picked out another grape from the table in the middle of the triclinium.

"My lords, thank you all for coming here this evening" he opened to the subject. "Of course, Lucius Porcius is already aware of the terms being offered to the cities of Asia and the enemy soldiers." Sulla smiled politely to his colleague. "And I have his support in these matters, or I wouldn't have put these policies into effect. It's also possible that some others know as well if they're in regular contact with friends in Asia. But to make sure you are properly aware of the exact policy, rather than misled by what might be inaccurate rumours, allow me to read to you the exact wording." Sulla took up a paper from the table and read the Miletus Decree to his guests.

"It's now proper for us to plan ahead how Asia is to be governed now that it has been restored. It is my belief that the policy proclaimed in Asia during this war will profoundly affect every other province in time. For one thing, the days of the publicani are over. The Equestrian class will have to find honest ways of making a sestertius, instead of pillaging. Rome's citizenry and Treasury cannot afford to lose gold and blood, holding the victim down while those Second Class money-grubbers rape her.

"Secondly, fewer Romans are going to be interested in governorships now that their capacity to arbitrarily plunder, confiscate and requisition has been cut back. In short, we are returning to the days when high office was a form of service to Rome rather than a means of personal enrichment. Quintus Poppaeus, an Italian to his last drop of blood, has put his finger on the heart of the Mos Majorum in his decree and in so doing has shown himself to be more Roman than any of the publicani. It's the essence of Rome that no-one is above the Law, but all are mere servants of it. No-one is King!

"To govern Asia under this new paradigm we need men of integrity and honour, men with a heart for service to the Republic. And as we put this new paradigm into effect in Asia and we work out the details of how to make it operate smoothly, we will gain such loyalty that never again will we have Greeks rise in revolt against us. Rather, they will take up arms to defend us against any foreign power that might threaten their prosperity as part of the Roman World." Sulla paused in his presentation for a moment. "It is my proposal that Quintus Pompeius Rufus be entrusted with the Governorship of Asia Province, with a special charge to put the Miletus Decree into effect; and that for this duty he shall be paid no more than required to cover his reasonable expenses. These expenses shall be subject to audit by the Censors.

"Why Quintus Pompeius, you might ask," Sulla continued. "He would not tell you this himself, but I have specifically asked him because of reports I received from friends in the City. These friends alerted me to how well he served as Urban Praetor and with scrupulous regard to the rights of the citizens here. I'm also familiar with many other characters in the City, each with his own personal... ah..."

shall we say ‘perspective’? He has proven himself impossible to bribe or be perverted.”

Cato and Drusus both looked towards Rufus. Cato spoke first.

“Are you prepared to do this, Quintus Pompeius? It won’t be profitable, like the usual governorships.”

Rufus smiled wryly. “My term as Praetor wasn’t very profitable either. I just don’t have the heart for plunder, I suppose. But if I can be of service and if you would support me, I’ll accept. Perhaps it will gain me sufficient dignitas to run for Consul one day.”

“Ah, I don’t mean to insult you, Quintus Pompeius; you know how highly I regard you!” Drusus broke in. “But don’t we already have the perfect choice for Governor already in place? Have you forgotten Publius Rutilius, exiled to Asia and greeted like a hero when he arrived?”

“Yes, Publius Rutilius is there, and I’ve spoken to him. But he’s now seventy years old. I don’t want to burden him at that age. However, I’m sure that he will provide encouragement and support for an honest man in the job.”

Cato and Drusus looked to each other. “I can think of none better,” Drusus conceded.

“Then it is agreed,” Cato concluded.

“Thank you, my friends,” Sulla clapped his hands together. “Quintus Pompeius, I suggest you appoint a scribe specifically for the task of recording your expenses. That means travel, food, official entertaining, wages for staff, clothing, rent, the lot. No-one will begrudge you a denarius, compared to what has been gouged out of Asia by the publicani.”

“Oh, the publicani might begrudge it!” Drusus joked.

Sulla gave his cold smile. “Let them!”

More good news arrived in early December. Publius Rutilius Rufus had been smuggled into Smyrna with one of the magistrates from Miletus and a copy of the Miletus Decree. Both men had found their way to a trusted friend of Rufus, and then been hidden among the household slaves. Over the next month one leading member of the City Council after another had been guests of this friend. Each had been assured by Rufus and the Miletan magistrate that the Decree was being scrupulously observed, and there was every reason to believe it would continue to be observed after the war was over. He reminded them that Silo was an Italian, and assured them all that Rome had learnt well their recent lessons. From their treatment of the Italians Rome had seen that generosity was rewarded, and from the Asian defection that brutality was counter-productive. The reign of the publicani had been ended. But could they be confident that the Mithridates who had ordered the slaughter of Romans might not also order the slaughter of prominent Greeks if it suited him to do so?

But more importantly, Rome was going to win this war and it would go better for Smyrna to side with Rome, regardless of whether or not the Decree was honoured.

The coup came in mid-November, taking the garrison completely by surprise. The Commander and his personal retinue were overpowered and slaughtered in the Commander's own quarters, and messengers sent out to call his senior staff one at a time. These were all taken by surprise in turn as they reported to their commander's quarters. Within a few hours there were notices written in both Greek and Pontic being posted throughout the city, carrying the authorisation of the commander and his senior staff. The Roman surrender terms would be accepted! All soldiers were required to form into their units and march out of the city when ordered.

The garrison soldiers and their junior officers were bemused. The city was well fortified, well provisioned, and well manned. What was happening here? But they were not going argue; that meant certain execution. Besides, the Roman terms were well-known and even slavery was arguably better than continuing service as a soldier under Mithridates, so why would anyone want to argue?

Two hours after noon the Commander appeared in his full dress uniform, surrounded by his close staff. Or at least, that was the appearance. All of them were Greeks wearing the full dress uniforms of the relevant officers and mounted on their horses, their faces hidden behind visors. They rode out of the city gates towards the Roman lines. Glauca was advised as soon as the horsemen appeared outside the gates. This looked official! He climbed into his own dress uniform and called his staff to do the same. Within fifteen minutes they were all riding out to meet this delegation, which had been stopped by the Roman advance units and told to wait.

Glauca pulled his horse to a stop some twenty paces from the delegation. "What is your business here today?" he called in Greek.

"We are here to discuss terms," their leader responded.

"You have our terms," Glauca called back.

"Yes, and we accept them," the delegation leader called back. "Now we need to discuss how they are to be implemented and applied. Allow me, alone, to approach you with your entire retinue. We can then finalise the details over a table, out of public gaze."

"Yes, you may approach alone," Glauca agreed. Casting his eyes around for a suitable place, he saw a farm shed currently being used as sleeping accommodation by the infantry in this section. "We will discuss your surrender in that shed."

The leader started walking his horse towards the structure. Glauca and six of his men followed. The man in fine Pontic armour dismounted and walked into the shed.

"You three," Glauca indicated some men, "Go in there and tell him to strip down. I want to make sure he carries no weapons."

Only a minute or two later came the call. "You can come in now, General." Glauca strode in, his eyes fixed on a nondescript man in no more than a loincloth.

"What is your name?" Glauca demanded.

"My name is Dimethes. I am the son of one of Smyrna's Councillors. We have taken over the city and killed the Pontic senior officers and we are play-acting their part in an attempt to compass the surrender of the rest."

Glauca was stunned. "You are Smyrnians?"

"Yes, and we seek to fulfil our duty as a Friend and Ally of Rome."

Glauca was still floundering. "How will you convince the enemy to surrender? As soon as you speak they will know you're an impostor."

"I will not speak. I will stand beside you in full vision as your men will give the orders." Dimethes shrugged. "Why would they not comply? They expect to see Aristobulos, the garrison commander, so that is what they will see. The helm and visor will prevent recognition. I hope you have prepared a holding area for your prisoners."

Glauca nodded. "Very well. Get your armour back on and we will try a little theatre."

Ten minutes later Dimethes was back in his armour and walking his horse slowly along the road to Smyrna, his notional staff following in two lines. Behind him was a single Roman officer, hailing loudly in Greek, and leaving pauses so those Pontic soldiers who knew Greek could translate for their fellows.

"Men of Pontus! Your Commander Aristobulos has granted you life! Lay down your weapons where you stand and remove your armour! Then come to the road and march towards the Romans. You will all live!"

Like ants converging on spilt honey, the defenders came streaming onto the road. Squads of Roman infantry directed them towards the stockade built in the first days of the siege for this purpose.

Finally they stood outside the gates of Smyrna, calling all of the garrison out onto the road.

That evening Glauca rode triumphantly into Smyrna to be greeted by the chief men of the City Council. Rufus was standing with them.

The bodies of Aristobulos and his officers were collected and their heads taken. A chest with this grisly treasure was rushed to Pergamum and delivered under a flag of truce to the commander there. The chest also contained a short message;

*Quintus Poppeadius Silo, Commander of Roman forces in Asia,
To the Commander, Pontic forces in Pergamum,*

Greetings, and be assured I would rather you live than die.

No doubt you are aware that Smyrna was well garrisoned, well provisioned and well fortified, apparently able to withstand a lengthy siege. Aristobulos thought that, too. He held out for little over a month.

Although Pergamum is better fortified than Smyrna, we know that you are already desperately short of water. You are hoping for relief before you run dry. Let me assure you that there will be no relief. Surrender, and live!

Come out to us now, and we will honour the terms we have already put before you. Delay longer at your peril.

Pergamum opened its gates the next morning.

Chapter 5 – 667 & 668 Ab Urbe Condita (87 & 86 B.C.)

Despite his statement to the Senate, Sulla didn't contest the election for the consulship. He decided to step aside for Drusus, so he could be appointed to the command of the War as a consular (a much more secure appointment than Silo could be granted), with a view to supporting Silo as the de facto Commander in the field. He was allocated the governorship of Achaia and Macedonia, and Rufus appointed to Asia - by default when the terms offered to and accepted by the cities became public knowledge.

Cato was prevailed upon by Sulla and Drusus to stand again, and was elected as Drusus' colleague.

Two more Italian nobles were elected among the praetors, one becoming Peregrinus. All of Rome, whether pro- or anti- Italian, were settling into a comfortable routine now. One consul acceptable to the Boni and one acceptable to the Italianists, two Italian praetors of whom the more senior would become Peregrinus, and thus two more Italian senators. Mutilus was again prorogued in Sicily after representations from some leading Sicilian citizens.

Quintus Sertorius, who had been Quaestor in Italian Gaul four years previously, was also elected as a Praetor and appointed to govern Nearer Spain. No consular wanted that appointment, but Sertorius was well known by the locals, having served with distinction ten years earlier under Titus Didius.

Memories of Didius' governorship were deep and bitter among the Spanish tribes for his exceptional brutality, treachery and wanton cruelty, but all knew that things would have been even worse except for the courage of Sertorius in restraining his commander's bloodlust; sometimes to the point of disobedience bordering on mutiny.

But Sulla was not pleased to see Sertorius elected, and even less pleased to see him appointed to a governorship.

“Really, Lucius Cornelius! The man is a brilliant jurist, has courage enough to share around, and is well-regarded by the locals!” Drusus said to him in exasperation. “How does he not fit exactly the pattern you have in mind for Asia?”

“I served with him under Caius Marius,” Sulla responded guardedly. “I know him better than you.”

“All the better!” Drusus threw his hands in the air. “So do you know something that should be held against him, or is it just that you have some personal grudge?”

Sulla opened his mouth to retort, but stopped himself in time. “Just make sure that you keep him at the opposite end of the world from me.”

“I'll take that as a 'Yes' with a condition,” Drusus agreed. Sulla scowled, but didn't answer.

The consulship of Drusus and Cato seemed amazingly tranquil compared to the preceding tumultuous years. There was peace in Rome, Sulla had isolated Archelaus in Athens and was slowly starving the city to death, and Silo had regained Bithynia, Lycia, Pamphylia and Pisidia. Naturally the Equites were pressing for access to Asia and the fulfilment of their tax contracts, but if there was

one point on which virtually all senators could agree it was that the Equites needed their wings clipped. Many had paid out in advance for five-year contracts which still had two years to run, but the Senate told them to blame only themselves for the loss of Asian income. They could wait until the end of the war. Or perhaps only until new contracts, based on the conditions set out in the Miletus Decree, could be drawn up.

Mithridates still held Galatia and Cappadocia but was hard-pressed on all fronts. His manpower reserves had been expended during that second year. Although winter would stop the Romans from driving deeper, he knew that he wouldn't be able to resist a renewed attack in the Spring. The strong army under Archelaus, bottled up in Athens and Piraeus by just a handful of legions, was sorely needed back on the home front.

But Tigranes had come to the throne of Armenia during the year and provided support for his neighbour. An ambitious king, Tigranes had in mind to cement a strong alliance with Mithridates of Pontus to protect his western frontier against Roman interference while he exploited Parthian and Seleucid weaknesses to the south. Tigranes started to provide troops to Mithridates for the purpose of garrisoning his territory so more of his own men were available for the war against Rome.

Rufus was proving himself to be a wise and diligent governor in Asia with support from Publius Rutilius Rufus and his local connections. Quintus Pompeius had shown great respect for the city Councils, even to the point of allowing effective autonomy. Rather than sending in tax collectors, he had negotiated with each city a levy in lieu of taxes, to be collected by the city itself by its own internal mechanisms. In effect, the City Councils had been appointed to be their own publicani, with a vested interest in moderation. He also allowed the cities to administer their own courts, reserving to himself only the right to appoint a delegate with veto powers to each. This substantially lessened his costs. And Rome benefited in other ways as well. There was no need to keep a garrison to maintain order; that was the duty of the city itself, thus allowing money and manpower to be diverted to the war.

The city Councils also benefited from this arrangement. The total tax burden was now less than the Roman charges alone had been before the war, so they could fairly claim to have increased the prosperity of their people. By the end of Rufus' first year it was obvious that there would be no going back to the days of the tax-farmers, who were the only party to suffer under the new arrangement.

In the last elections to be held under the State of Emergency, Drusus and Cato were returned unopposed as Consuls. Two more Italians were elected as Praetors, one being appointed Peregrinus. Sertorius, Mutilus, Sulla and Rufus were prorogued in their governorships, Sulla retaining overall command of the War and keeping Silo as his General in the Field.

Metellus Pius took on another term as Urban Praetor. He didn't want to make any enemies by standing for Consul against Drusus and Cato, but felt he needed to keep his profile high. He had plans to become consul as soon as the State

of Emergency lapsed, forcing Drusus and Cato to step aside. He was well-respected by all in Rome because of the city police force he had kept on after suppressing the Sulpician Coup. Although only one legion strong now and therefore spread more thinly, it was very effective in reducing petty crime and keeping order.

Marcus Tullo was one of the five wealthiest men in Rome, gained mostly by tax-farming in the provinces. He had an appointment with Lucius Domitius Ahenobarbus, son of one consul and descendant of three others, all with the same name. "Lucius Domitius, it was most kind of you to allow me some of your time," Tullo opened the conversation after the initial formalities and greetings had been observed.

"It's always a pleasure to meet one of the most eminent and respected men in Rome," Ahenobarbus replied.

"Not at all!" Tullo waved away the compliment. "I'm but a merchant of the Second Class; not an esteemed Senator with an illustrious pedigree! It was a great loss to Rome when your father was taken from us a year ago."

"But anyway, Marcus, your letter intrigued me," Ahenobarbus cut to the issue. "You say that the current conduct of the war will bring about the destruction of Rome, and that we need to work together to prevent this. How can you say such a thing, with Mithridates being pushed back into his box?"

"Mithridates is not the threat any more, Lucius Domitius. The real threat is the price of pushing him back!"

"You must excuse my obtuseness, Marcus; but as far as I can see, the war is being fought very well; the casualties have been surprisingly light, and the booty to be gained will far exceed the cost to our Treasury. It's Pontus that will be destroyed."

"It's not the cost in lives or cash that will destroy Rome, Lucius Domitius, but the cost in terms of the precedent it sets. Let me explain in more detail." Tullo leaned forward on Ahenobarbus' desk.

"No doubt you have read the Miletus Decree?" Tullo asked. Ahenobarbus nodded. "In effect, this Decree exempted the whole Province of Asia from taxation!"

"No, it didn't, Marcus," Ahenobarbus interjected. "It only limited the taxes to the types and levels imposed upon Romans."

"That's what I said, Lucius Domitius," Tullo pressed on. "Do you know how much tax the average Roman citizen pays?"

"I know that I pay enough!" Ahenobarbus snorted. "Two percent of my taxable assets last year!"

"Yes, and that same rate applies more-or-less to all citizens; the main differences being that some assets are not taxable," Tullo agreed.

"But in Asia, before the War, the tax on assets was five percent. And not only that, we also taxed transactions, space in markets, entry into cities, just about everything. Per head of population, Ephesian citizens paid twenty times more tax than Roman citizens."

Ahenobarbus was stunned. "So you are saying that under the new scheme, we will be losing 95% of our tax income from Asia?"

"Thereabouts; I can't be too precise."

"That will bleed the Treasury dry!" Ahenobarbus exclaimed. "We'll need to raise taxes elsewhere to make up for it!"

"That's precisely the problem, Lucius Domitius." Tullo moved smoothly along his prepared line of argument. "If you were a Sicilian, and found out that the Asian cities rebelled against Rome and then had their taxes reduced so much as a way of winning back their loyalty, what would you be thinking?"

The light went on in the back of Ahenobarbus' mind. "I would be thinking of doing the same thing. A quick revolt, then a bit of negotiation to have the same Asian solution applied in my own province."

"You're quick on the uptake, Lucius Domitius," Tullo congratulated him. "This same disaster could spread to all our provinces. And if that happens, who is left to make up the shortfall?"

"No-one," Ahenobarbus replied simply.

"Not quite correct, Lucius Domitius. There remains one source of income; Roman citizens themselves. Can you imagine what would happen if Rome itself had to pay enough tax to make up the difference? We would all be Head Count within a couple of years! There would go the financial basis of maintaining our armies, our courts, even our water supply and sewer systems! We would be reduced to barbarism, an easy target for any unwashed tribe that walked in on us!"

"I never realised what a disaster lurked in that Decree!" Ahenobarbus cried. "We must put a stop to it!"

"Indeed we must, Lucius Domitius," Tullo agreed solemnly.

Ahenobarbus paused for a while. "But how?" he asked eventually.

"We must do two things, Lucius Domitius. We must rid ourselves of the fools leading us along this path. Men such as Sulla, Drusus, Metellus Pius, even Cato must all go! And all their Italian hangers-on. And we must win the hearts of the People who currently are deluded into supporting them."

"Right. How do we go about it?" Ahenobarbus was completely out of his depth. Tullo suppressed any show of contempt; what else do you expect of a family that chooses wives for their sons on the basis of being red-heads, for the sake of their name? They worry more about what is outside the skull than what is inside!

"We can't argue our case in the Assembly, no matter how obvious its truth. Drusus will simply throw dust in their eyes and then move against us."

Tullo shook his head slowly. "No. We must first take power, get them out of the way, and then reveal to the People why we were forced to act."

"But how can we seize power?" Ahenobarbus pleaded. "We have no army, and even if we did those Italians would fall on us. They're devoted to Drusus."

"Simple!" replied Tullo. "We raise an army and we kill Drusus. The Italians are only pledged to him as long as he lives, not to his heirs."

"How can we raise an army? They'll see what we are doing and stop us in our tracks."

It took a huge effort for Tullo to refrain from rolling his eyes and sighing in despair. Poor breeding had worked its irrevocable ways and the days of the great

Ahenobarbi were gone forever! The only aspect of this conversation that cheered him was that this lunk-head was going along with the pitch without reservation or doubt.

“That's not a problem. We'll say we're raising and training legions to send to Silo in Asia,” Tullo explained patiently.

“Excellent idea!” Ahenobarbus agreed enthusiastically. “And then, when we're ready, we take the city! We get rid of Drusus and Cato, and I become the Consul, just like Marius did with Sulpicius' help! Who will we pick as my colleague?”

“I think Pompeius Strabo would be an excellent choice. He has the wealth and manpower on his farms to raise a couple of legions himself. And he qualifies under the Mos Majorum, as well.”

“Yes, and he has experience as a soldier, too, so Drusus will suspect nothing until it's too late for him.” Ahenobarbus rattled on, trying to show he was up to speed. “Right! So what should I do now?” Ahenobarbus asked. His period of being up to speed didn't last very long.

“I think you should approach Pompeius and talk to him. He will listen to you. You're a man with illustrious forebears, while I'm well below his class. In fact, you would probably be well advised to not even mention me; it would appeal to Strabo more if it were presented as the Senatorial Class protecting the Republic. Pompeius would be the first in his line to become a consul, so it should mean a lot to him to be a New Man who leads, while the ancient families follow. It will show that he has really made the top grade.”

“Yes. I will do that straight away!” Ahenobarbus pledged.

Tullo smiled and stood. “Then I'll take no more of your time, Lucius Domitius. Let me know how things go.” Tullo bowed and left the Senator's office.

Pompeius Strabo listened with some interest as Ahenobarbus prattled on. He was already aware of the cost to revenue implicit in the Miletus Decree, but that didn't worry him too much. Ephesians might pay twenty times as much tax as Romans, but less than a quarter of that found its way back to Treasury after the publicani skimmed it. And sending the publicani down a notch or two was something that Strabo would savour. All his wealth and income was from land, as befits a Senator. The less the publicani raised, the less they could spend on bribes, which left Senators at a comparative advantage. And he certainly resented the anti-rural prejudices that City Romans held against rural Romans such as himself.

Yes, it would be a good thing to take control and put this self-appointed Urban Elite in their places. And then, when he rescinded the Miletus Decree, it would not be to restore the rights of the Publicani but to hand over Tax Rights to the Governor of the day, how it should be. And Pompeius Strabo would see to it that he would take his governorship in Asia, the richest province by far. But there were more than enough troughs to go around. Anyone in the senate who dreams of a governorship will line up behind me, and the publicani can go whistle.

Ahenobarbus obviously thought that he would be the senior member in this coup, unthinking Old Family twit that he is. He couldn't even conceive of a New

Man taking precedence over him. Oh well, it will be my legions that take the City, and that's when he'll find out the truth. By then he will be committed to me and his only alternative would mean being tried for treason.

"You're right, Lucius Domitius," Pompeius said at last. "Absolutely right. We must act, or these idiots will be the end of us all."

"I knew you would see it that way, Gnaeus," Ahenobarbus said with relief. Pompeius had sat so quietly that his intended discussion had been a monologue presentation, with just a nod whenever he paused for a response. He had found this un-nerving.

"In fact, I'll see to raising four legions myself, up on my farm and out of sight," Pompeius continued. "I'll bring them down to Ostia when they're ready, so Rome would be just a short march up the road from the docks. You don't need to do a thing except wait until the time is ripe, then talk the Senate into going with us. They'll listen to a man of your heritage, and appoint you consul. We can let the Equites handle the Assembly; they have every reason to throw bribe money at everyone. So have we got that?" Pompeius summarised. "I see to the soldiers, you see to the Senate, and the Second Class can see to the People."

Ahenobarbus nodded his agreement, as enthusiastic as a puppy. "Yes, that's right!"

Pompeius stood to signify that he considered the business of the meeting done, and extended his right arm. "For Rome!" he proclaimed.

"For Rome!" Ahenobarbus replied, taking his arm.

Drusus heard through his Italian tribal grapevine that Pompeius Strabo was training 20,000 of his men as infantrymen. He made a point of crossing paths with him at the Senate, before the first meeting in March. "Gnaeus Pompeius," Drusus saluted him cheerily. "I understand that you are training some of your men as soldiers."

Strabo's eyes widened momentarily before he recovered his poise. "Why, yes, Marcus Livius."

"Are you thinking of taking them over to Asia, to join Quintus Poppaedius?"

"I don't intend to go over myself, but I thought that Quintus Poppaedius might find it encouraging to have a few more men behind him," Pompeius explained.

"Why didn't you tell me?" Drusus asked as if a young woman being offered a gift by an admirer. "This is so generous of you!"

"Well," Strabo stuttered out, "I was going to tell you later, after the meeting. I thought you would be too busy right now."

"How many are you preparing?" Drusus asked breezily. "How many cavalry have you included?"

"No artillery, no cavalry, just infantry," Pompeius replied. "Cheaper to transport without all the extra gear. If Quintus Poppaedius wants to equip and train them for some other role, that will be his decision."

"I see," Drusus said with a smile. "When do you think they might be ready?"

"Perhaps another month or so."

“Excellent! Fresh men just when they will be needed!” Drusus approved. “That’s very good of you to do this, Gnaeus Pompeius. Rome needs more men like you!”

After the senate meeting Drusus asked Cato to meet with him that evening. Then he went home to his office and took out a clean sheet of paper and wrote a letter.

Sulla received Drusus' letters in mid-March, just as the siege of Athens drew to a close. Archelaus attempted to escape by sea but the triremes constructed by Sulla in the previous year had been lurking behind Salamis. That was an old trick! Doesn't anyone read history any more? Archelaus' force was annihilated.

Sulla had complete faith in a “carrot and stick” approach to diplomacy. The Miletus Decree had been as succulent a carrot as anyone could have dreamt of and his stick was no less impressive. Athens and Piraeus were now razed to the ground, as had been done to Corinth just over half a century earlier. The smoke was still spreading towards the west as Sulla checked that the letter bore the seals of both Drusus and Cato. He cracked them, and started reading.

*Marcus Livius Drusus and Lucius Porcius Cato, Consuls of Rome,
To Lucius Cornelius Sulla, Commander of Roman Forces in the East,*

Greetings!

We trust the campaign is going well for you. The latest we have heard is that Athens is trying to bluster you into terms by ranting on about their “marvellous heritage”. Well, we have charged you with conduct of the war and authority to conduct it as you see fit, but we would be inclined to show them that no-one likes a traitor, and least of all an arrogant traitor. The only terms we would even consider would be to grant them their lives, but nothing more. By tying up your troops for more than a year in this investment, they have cost Silo the option to fight on an additional front, thus bringing Mithridates to heel even more quickly. Indeed their resistance has cost the Republic a great deal and they should be made to pay for it. We are sure that you are of the same opinion, and want you to be assured that your Consuls will support any measure you decide to take, however harsh.

We also have some unexpected good news. Gnaeus Pompeius Strabo has taken the initiative to train twenty thousand of his men as soldiers and equip them as legionary infantry, all at his own expense! He did this quietly, on his estates well away from Rome, and I (Marcus Livius, that is) heard about it only through some Italian friends in the area. When I asked him about these, he seemed slightly surprised that I knew about them. He told me that he would finish their training and send them down the Via Salaria to Ostia and then ship them to Quintus Poppaeus, hopefully around the end of March, early April.

Please report back on the progress of the war as soon as you are able.

Prosper!

Sulla took the second letter, noting it bore only the seal of Drusus. He cracked that, and started to read.

*Marcus Livius, your friend.
To Lucius Cornelius, my friend,*

Greetings!

This letter is to be read in conjunction with that from me and Lucius Porcius of the same date.

Sulla glanced up to the date of the letter, and then to that on the formal consular message. The dates were the same.

Strabo has no intention of sending those four legions to Quintus Poppea^{ius}. If he had, he would have been letting everyone know how he was foremost among patriots and clamouring for recognition!

I have no doubt at all that his intention is to follow the example of Sulpicius, except this time HE would have the legions on the spot, and not us! I urge you to ship at least four of your best legions as soon as possible and slip them back to Ostia secretly. They must make no intermediate landfall. Tell everyone that they are bound for Lycia, or some other cover story.

Once here they can be added to the forces under Quintus Caecilius as additional law and order patrols. This should discourage Strabo from attempting a coup and shame him into fulfilling his word to send his four legions to Quintus Poppea^{ius}. That should put him in an impossible spot. How could he refuse? What other explanation could he offer for raising these legions except for the one we will publish? He can hardly explain that he was attempting a coup!

I only hope that your men can make it back to Rome before Strabo springs his trap. Please act without delay!

What excellent timing! Sulla thought to himself. Just as the fall of Athens had provided him with good reason to move his troops out!

Sulla knew Strabo more by reputation than personally, but Mutilus in Sicily had told him a few stories about how the Sicilians both loathed and dreaded him for his actions during his promagistracy there. Cruel, arbitrary, avaricious, and rat-cunning seemed to be the words that best described him. Strabo was not the sort of man to go to the personal expense of training and equipping four legions purely out of love for Rome. There was no doubt that Marcus Livius had read this situation correctly.

Sulla sat back in his chair as he considered how much Drusus had changed over the last five years. The scrupulously legal, naive and idealistic Tribune who had won citizenship for the Italians was still a man of great integrity and still driven by ideals that seemed impossibly lofty to the street-fighter in Sulla; no doubt about

that! But Drusus had learnt the art of politics. He knew how to read people, how to manipulate them, and most importantly how to keep secrets from them. Take, for example, these two letters. It was obvious that he was completely playing along with Strabo like he were still the naive Tribune of five years ago, and that he wanted Cato to also be none the wiser or else the official consular letter would have said more.

Cato was a good man, but it must never be forgotten that he was still one of the Boni. If he knew what Drusus knew, he wouldn't ask for troops to stop Strabo. He would at most try to talk Strabo out of the attempt, which would simply startle Strabo into immediate action. At worst, he would befriend Strabo and try to twist things to suit the Boni agenda. But Drusus would use Strabo's own strength against him. He would force Strabo into appearing to support Silo, and thus isolate himself from the Boni. This will make Strabo completely friendless, while depriving the Boni of the benefit of his wealth. Yes, Drusus was becoming quite a skilful politician!

Sulla broke out of his contemplations abruptly. "Marcus!" He called for his secretary, who arrived in the doorway with the space of two breaths and saluted. "I want four good legions complete with their cavalry on ships by tomorrow night. They are to be ordered to go directly to Antioch and they must carry provisions to enable them to reach there without making landfall," Sulla snapped out. "And inform Quintus Bruttius Sura that I want to speak with him immediately."

"Four legions with provision for a journey to Antioch, to sail by tomorrow evening! Quintus Bruttius Sura to report immediately," Marcus repeated in confirmation and saluted again.

Sulla returned the salute to dismiss him. Sura was in his office within half an hour.

"Quintus Bruttius, I'm going on a special mission," Sulla started. "Officially, I'm heading for Antioch. That must be the story that everyone believes. You must believe it yourself with the front of your mind. But behind that face I have to tell you that my objective is not Antioch. I tell you this only to prevent you from sending a message to me there and wasting time waiting for a response" Sulla smiled weakly. "Until I get in touch with you you must pretend that I and four legions are in Antioch, but we won't be. You won't be able to contact me until I make contact with you first. I can't tell you more than that at this time. Keep in touch with Quintus Poppaeus and operate under his command until I return or send you an order to do otherwise."

Sura nodded his understanding. "A secret expedition. I can understand that. What are you telling Quintus Poppaeus? What should I tell him?"

Sulla thought for a moment. Any communication to Silo could be intercepted, which would be disastrous if properly understood. "You will assume that he has been told I'm heading for Antioch. I'll write to him myself informing him that he has overall command in my absence. You and the remaining legions are to comply with his orders."

"Yes, sir," Sura agreed.

Thank you Quintus Bruttius. If you have no more questions, that will be all.”

Sulla boarded the main transport vessel shortly after noon the following day. After sailing due south for a hundred miles, he signalled that all legion commanders were to meet in his room on the lead ship. “Men, we are not going East,” he announced flatly. The other four men around the table gave no reaction. “I have reason to believe that a group including a prominent Roman senator is planning a coup. You recall that when Sulpicius took control of Rome a couple of years ago his hold was broken only by the Urban Praetor taking control of three legions to restore lawful government,” Sulla continued, looking around the table. “That will now be your mission; to maintain lawful government against any who would make himself King. If we arrive too late to prevent this coup, then our mission becomes one of restoration.

“As soon as darkness falls we will turn west and sail directly for Ostia. We must not let the plotters know where we are or they might act immediately. We must make the best time we can while giving no warning of our presence until it's too late for them to act.”

“Who is this prominent Roman senator, sir?” Claudio Anninus asked.

“I said that I had reason to believe, not proof,” Sulla replied. “So it's probably best for me not to name anyone until we have proof.”

“Yes, sir” Claudio submitted. “But if we arrive too late, what do you intend to do?”

“We must prepare to be opposed as we land, just in case,” Sulla responded. “We will land in battle order but we must do no damage until we know the situation. Then we march to Rome, either to hand our soldiers over to the command of the Urban Praetor if all is well, or to invest the city if the coup has succeeded.” He looked around the circle again. “Let's pray that we arrive in time and the plotters run for exile. I have no taste for spilling Roman blood.”

Sulla's letter to Silo arrived just as Silo was preparing to march out of Nicomedia and against the Pontine heartland for the campaigning season.

*To Quintus Poppaeus Silo, Commander of Roman Forces in Anatolia
From Lucius Cornelius Sulla, Supreme Commander of Roman Forces in the East,*

Greetings!

Athens has fallen at last, and the legions engaged in that siege are now available for other tasks.

I have undertaken a surprise invasion of Antioch, to march north along a secret route, just as discussed with Drusus and Cato on the Via Appia and for precisely the same reasons as discussed at that time. I have taken forty cohorts with me, a slight increase over the strength envisaged in the Via Appia discussions with Cato and Drusus. I hope to remain undetected as I move into position, as

discussed on the Via Appia with Cato and Drusus, so I will not be able to communicate with you until I have reached my goal.

Continue your campaign as planned, and be aware that the remaining troops with Quintus Bruttius in Achaia are available to you if you decide to augment your main force, or perhaps strike along another line of advance. You are to assume overall command until I return and have my authority to act as you consider best in the meantime.

May Fortuna smile upon you!

Silo was left perplexed by this letter. When had the conduct of the Mithridatic War been discussed on the Via Appia? Why refer to these discussions when he had been in the East since he left Ostia to join Caius Marius! And why did he describe his strength as 'forty cohorts' instead of the more conventional 'four legions'? And three times he mentioned these "Via Appia" discussions, clumsily and repeatedly referring to Cato and Drusus each time!

The meaning hit him like a mallet! The only discussion he had ever held on the Via Appia with Sulla, Drusus and Cato was the plan to re-take Rome after the Sulpician Coup! He picked up the letter again, reading with new eyes.

Yes! 'march north along a secret route', as he had done through the lands of the Marsi; and his men in cohort-sized formations! And 'for precisely the same reasons as discussed at that time'! There must be another bit of trouble brewing back in Rome, and this reported Eastern invasion is a cover for it!

Yet he clearly commands me to continue the campaign without delay. Perhaps I can even make some extra leverage out of this situation. Perhaps if Mithridates got wind of an invasion in the East attempting to take him from the rear that would draw off some of his troops. He looked up at the date of the letter. If Sulla were actually invading Antioch, he would have probably be landing within a few days; not enough time for Mithridates to react effectively and if there is no actual landing soon then it will be seen to be misinformation; not much scope there! Best to press on with the main plan just as Sulla said.

But the legions now freed from Athens plus those already in Asia could open up a second axis through Galatia. He'll detach Glauca for that mission.

As Silo read this letter Sulla was off the coast of Neapolis. He intercepted a south-bound trader to ask for information. "Greetings, Captain! What was your last port of call?" Sulla smiled.

"I left Ostia yesterday, lord Sulla," the captain replied deferentially.

"And how were things in Ostia?"

The captain frowned. "It was a sunny day, lord, but still a bit cool."

"And any news of what's happening in Rome?"

"Nothing unusual, lord," the captain's frown deepened. "What were you expecting?"

Sulla laughed lightly. "I was hoping for nothing unusual, captain. But it's nice to pick up'n some gossip if I can. Thank you, and good sailing!"

"It would seem we are in time, General," Anninus commented as the trader was left behind.

"We won't be in time until we're there, Claudius;. But yes, we're not too late yet."

The transports pulled into Ostia at first light the next morning, the first man off the lead ship being sent on a fast horse with a message to Drusus. He returned by late morning, carrying a rescript.

*Lucius Porcius Cato and Marcus Livius Drusus, Consuls of Rome,
To Lucius Cornelius Sulla,*

Greetings!

We must ask you and your legions to make your way here with all speed. Yesterday afternoon Gnaeus Pompeius Strabo marched down the Via Salaria at the head of four legions of infantrymen, claiming to be bound for Ostia and transport to the East.

Marcus Livius was suspicious of this, and called upon Quintus Caecilius to shut the city gates against them. Quintus Caecilius did so and called out his whole legion-worth of city patrol to man the walls. Strabo was furious. He came to the gates and demanded entry. He was admitted with his personal retinue and brought to the Senate chamber.

He demanded the right to march his men through the city to show the People that he was supporting the war effort out of his own pocket. Many of the Boni supported him. But when Marcus Livius stood to speak he asked which ships had been engaged to transport these troops, from whom, at what cost, and where were they now? Strabo could answer none of these questions. It soon became evident that he had made no plans for their transport at all.

Marcus Livius then suggested that these men remain camped outside the walls until transport could be found for them. Strabo was agreeable to this, provided they be permitted to parade through the city first. Marcus Livius replied that the parade could wait until the day of their departure, and Strabo became very agitated. It came to light that they were not well-enough provisioned to camp for more than a couple of days. 'Why not feed them out of the provision you must have arranged for them during their voyage?' Marcus Livius asked. We then discovered that they were not only lacking transport but were also lacking provisions.

There came one fabrication after another from the mouth of Strabo, some later ones contradicting earlier explanations. Eventually Marcus Livius put it bluntly. 'I suggest that you have no intention of sending these men to the East. In fact, you have no intention of sending them even as far as Ostia. You intend them to enter the city, spread out once inside, and seize it in a coup. That's why you hadn't arranged transport; because they were intended to stay here! That's why you hadn't provided food for them; because they were to be fed by plundering

Rome! And that's why you want a so-called parade; so you can enter the city unimpeded to make yourself King!"

Strabo became rabid. He insisted that his men were expecting the honour of a parade through the city and that if they were refused they might well force entry themselves. He demanded that his parade be permitted the following day starting at noon or his men would parade without permission - even if it meant taking out the city gates. Quintus Caecilius, as Urban Praetor, took this as a threat to attack Rome. He arrested Strabo on the spot. He also disarmed his retinue and pushed them out the gates. Strabo is currently under guard, warning us that if he is harmed his men will tear Rome apart in their grief. The gates have been strengthened and the City Patrol is still on the walls.

Strabo's men, numbering about 20,000, are all equipped as heavy infantry and are camped in the Campus Martius. They're poorly deployed, apparently on the assumption that their only opposition is the City Patrol which lacks any type of artillery or siege equipment. Please come to our relief.

(Editor's Note. This is the letter as recorded in the official Records of the Republic. However, its length has always given rise to the suspicion that the original note actually sent to Sulla was much briefer, given the urgency of the situation. This might be an expanded version written shortly after the event, or perhaps even as the actual rescript was being carried back to Sulla, with a view to how history would view the incident.)

Sulla glanced up at the sun. It was between the fourth and fifth hour now. "Claudius; how many of the cavalry are on shore?"

"About three hundred, General."

"I'll take them to Rome now. Get the rest off the ships as fast as you can and send them up the road after me. Then get the infantry and artillery up the road too." Sulla looked around for his own mount. "Call to assembly!" he ordered the bugler on his personal staff.

It was after mid-day when Sulla led his three hundred horse towards the Campus Martius from the north-west. He was appalled by what he saw. This was no army! It was a pack of semi-trained oafs dressed in uniform. The camp hadn't been set up in an orderly way with a grid of streets, but was randomly laid out. Shallow open ditches served as latrines and there wasn't even a perimeter, much less a perimeter guard. He rode to a small rise on the edge of the Campus.

"Men!" he bellowed in his full martial voice. The few hundred men within earshot turned suddenly to see their ex-consul looking over them. "You know who I am! Lucius Cornelius Sulla! For the second time I have come to save Rome from a mob!" He paused for dramatic effect. "I have four veteran legions behind me. Not four legions of rabble such as yourselves, but battle-hardened men who could take you on at a ten-to-one disadvantage and still not raise a sweat! But you're lucky! They're still an hour's march away. If you strip off all that weighty armour, drop your weapons and shields, and run while you can, you might yet escape with your lives!"

"Go now and live! Or stay and be slaughtered! The choice is yours." Sulla slowly turned his horse and rode back to the formidable line of cavalry standing just behind him. As he passed, they folded inwards on him with a precision as if on a parade ground, and cantered back to the north.

Strabo's men had seen enough. Those who had heard Sulla dropped their equipment and started jogging towards the Via Salaria, telling others as they passed "Sulla is here!" Soon the Campus Martius was like a hive of ants, streaming onto the road as men raced each other for safety up the road to the north-east. By late afternoon, when Sulla's infantrymen started to arrive, the Campus was empty except for the wealth of armour and weaponry left behind. Sulla turned his line of battle to the left and flank-marched onto the Via Salaria, much to the panic of the last men to flee. There they halted. Sulla rode the the gates with his personal staff.

"I ask Lucius Porcius and Marcus Livius to meet me here!" He called up to the walls. "I obey the Law with scrupulous zeal, and that means that I cannot enter without surrendering my command in the East."

The commander on the gate called back. "Please wait while we send for them."

Cato arrived on the wall within a few minutes. "Lucius Cornelius!" he cried out in glee. "This is the second time you and your legions have saved Rome! You're making a habit of this! I'll be with you in a moment."

A few minutes later the city gate swung open and the two consuls walked out together. Sulla dismounted and walked towards them, arms outstretched and face beaming. "Its good to see you again, my friends!" He took the arm of Cato first, then that of Drusus.

"It's even better to see you!" Cato replied. "By what miracle did you arrive here at the precise hour you were needed?" This question reminded Sulla that Drusus had written separately about his suspicions, not sharing them with Cato.

"Let me just say that some senators think that if they do something out of the sight of the Senatorial class, then it's a secret. But I have many friends in Italy and nothing escapes their notice!"

"That's a good thing, too!" Cato agreed warmly.

"If I may change the subject, Lucius Porcius; I have four legions with me and the Campus Martius has been turned into a pig sty by that rabble. I ask you to provide a proper site for an encampment."

Cato and Drusus looked at each other. "Is the whole Campus fouled? It's a big place!"

"The area fouled is only a small section, I agree; but the stink of it will affect the rest," Sulla argued.

"We'll send out men to cover over the filth while your men make camp at the northern end," Cato offered.

"I suppose that will be enough," Sulla agreed. "But one other thing; these men have saved Rome after being cooped up on a ship for too long to be pleasant. They deserve a feast tonight."

Drusus smiled. "They certainly do! Send each decanus to us and he will be given a lamb, a pig, or a hind of beef, a bucket full of vegetables, and a barrel of beer or wine. I'll get it all organised and gathered at the gate for them."

Sulla smiled in return. "Excellent! And maybe a woman for each tent, too?"

"Of course!" Drusus laughed.

Silo read through the letter by the Pontic emissary from Sinope a third time. His conversational Greek was as good as the next educated noble's and even his classical Attic was better than most, but this was written in a formal, archaic style, almost impenetrable in places. At last he gave up. He understood the bulk of it, but this was too important for anything less than absolute clarity. "Your name is Hieronymos, you said?" he asked the envoy who had brought him this letter.

"Yes, lord Silo."

"I'm not pleased with this offer. Although the substance of it seems in order, the phrasing is lacking in the precision and clarity that I require." He paused a moment, as if to invite a response. Hieronymos offered none. "Therefore, I would be grateful if you would either translate this into Latin, or alternatively re-phrase it into a less flowery style of Greek so that these problems are overcome."

"My lord, I don't have authority to do that," Hieronymos objected. "These are the King's words, and far be it from me to alter them in any way!"

Silo shrugged. "In which case I find these words unacceptable. The War will continue," He dropped the sheet of paper onto his table and stood, to signify the end of the parley.

"However, my lord, I do have authority to answer any questions you might have about the proper application of the King's words." Hieronymos jumped in. Going back to Mithridates with a flat refusal was not always a wise way of furthering one's career.

"Very well, this phrase here. Let me put it into my own words and you tell me if I've understood it correctly... "Pontus will accept and acknowledge the authority of Rome..."

"Not quite, my lord," Hieronymos interjected. "Had the King meant "authority", he would have said authority. The words he actually used are better understood to mean "pre-eminence" or "special position"."

"So what does this "special position" mean in practical terms?"

"Precisely that, my lord," Hieronymos smiled. "Rome will have pre-eminence."

Silo felt his patience unravelling.

"Does that mean that these territories will be subject to Roman law, Roman taxation and Roman sovereignty?"

"Not precisely, my lord; but within them, Rome will have pre-eminence, a special position." Hieronymos smiled again. The man must practice that smile for hours every day, Silo thought to himself. It comes out exactly the same every time.

Silo drew a deep breath. "Hieronymos, you are indeed a very skilful diplomat. You can answer my every question, while leaving me no better informed.

But I'm tiring of your silly smirks and your insulting non-explanations. So I'll will give you a choice of three options. You may actually answer my questions to my satisfaction rather than dodging them; or you may go back to Mithridates right now, reporting that I used your terms to wipe my arse; or you may continue in the same manner, in which case I will have you crucified." Silo raised an eyebrow inquiringly.

"I must apologise, my lord, if I have offended you," Hieronymos said as he stood. "Perhaps it would be helpful if I report to the King that he might care to rephrase his offer into more precise terms."

"That's a fourth option that I didn't list," Silo responded. "But if you come back with anything less than absolute clarity, I will take that as a default into "continuing in the same manner". Result, crucifixion. So I urge you to counsel your king to make his meaning very, very clear, under pain of your death. Just to help out, I have taken the liberty to draft some terms that he might care to read through, as an example of what I expect." Silo opened a drawer and took out a sealed letter of his own, offering it to Hieronymos.

"I know you mean well, my lord, but this will appear to the King as though you are setting terms. That would be a grave provocation. The King is the one who graciously offers terms to others. He will find it most insulting that you have usurped the initiative. It could destroy the whole negotiation."

Now it was Silo's turn to smile. "Excellent! That would mean progress!" Silo slowly and deliberately tucked the letter into Hieronymos' belt and gestured towards the door.

Hieronymos took the letter out of his belt immediately and concealed it in the folds of his robe. Once back into the privacy of his room in the Royal Quarter in Sinope he cracked the seal and unfolded it. There was no way he was going to tell Mithridates that the Romans had 'suggested' terms; that would send him into a rage. But if he knew what the Romans expected, then he might be able to swing the King towards that.

DRAFT TREATY BETWEEN THE REPUBLIC OF ROME AND THE KINGDOM OF PONTUS

1. *The Kingdom of Pontus shall withdraw its armed forces and those of all its allies from Paphlagonia, Galatia, Cappadocia, Cilicia, and all areas westwards. These areas shall be under the protection of the Roman Republic, and any interference in them by the Kingdom of Pontus, its allies or its agents shall be considered an act of war.*
2. *The Kingdom of Pontus shall pay to the Roman Republic, by way of compensation for losses incurred during the war, the sum of one hundred thousand talents of gold, or other goods as may be agreed by the parties to be of equivalent value and acceptable to Rome. This shall be paid in one initial payment of twenty thousand talents, followed by ten annual payments of eight thousand talents each.*

3. *The Kingdom of Pontus shall accept a Permanent Legate who will be granted sacrosanctity and be free to enter, leave or go anywhere within territories under the care of the Kingdom of Pontus. He shall also be permitted to communicate freely and secretly with any other person within or outside Pontus. His servants shall also be sacrosanct.*
4. *The Republic of Rome will confirm the independence and sovereignty of the Kingdom of Pontus within the territories it claims and effectively controls from time to time, outside those entrusted to Roman protection in Point 1. Rome will not interfere, nor permit its Friends and Allies to interfere, in those territories thus recognised.*

Hieronymos shuddered. There was no way that Mithridates would tolerate those terms. A sacrosanct spy! Reparations of a hundred thousand talents! Loss of all the territories still held, which would make the reparations impossible to pay in any case! To suggest any one of them would cost him his head. He held the sheet of paper over a candle until it caught alight, and carefully held it so it was consumed except for one small corner he held between thumb and forefinger. Then he crumbled the ashes to dust.

He thought carefully for the next two hours and then dressed in his finest court robe. He walked to the city gates and looked out over the Roman encampment outside the city. In their typical, methodical way the Romans had cut off the external water supply as a first step before Mithridates had sent him to offer terms. So far the truce had held; three days of pointless talking while Mithridates hoped for relief from the sea. But it was clear now that Silo would wait no longer. He descended the staircase from the wall, reaching ground level near the gate.

“Open the gate! I have a message to take to the Romans,” he ordered the captain of the gate detachment. “And come with me, Captain, with ten of your men. The King has required that this meeting include an honour guard and told me to draw them from your detachment.”

The gate swung open and Hieronymos stepped through followed by the captain of the guard and two files of five men each. The gate closed behind him. For the second time that day, just as the sun was setting, he reached Silo's headquarters. After the customary but thorough body-search he was shown into the house Silo had commandeered as his headquarters.

“Back already, Hieronymos!” Silo exclaimed. “That was quick!”

“Both quick and easy, my lord.” Hieronymos agreed. “I surrender myself to you and I offer my services and knowledge for your use.”

Silo looked at him cautiously. “Why?”

“Because I have only two other choices,” Hieronymos answered. “To be crucified by you for doing Mithridates' will, or to be impaled by Mithridates for failing to do it. I prefer to live by doing your will, but beyond Mithridates' reach.”

Silo considered him for a moment. “Hieronymos, I'm inclined to accept your surrender on the understanding that you become my personal slave. That means I have the legal right to chastise you as I see fit, up to and including crucifixion. Do you surrender yourself on those terms?”

"Yes, lord Silo," Hieronymos agreed. "But I believe that I will be of better use to you if I remain apparently faithful to the King in the immediate future." Hieronymos bowed his head. "And I pledge that I will serve you with total sincerity. You will have no need to be harsh with me."

"So long as you give me reason to remain confident in your faithfulness, you will be treated well," Silo promised.

"Then it is done," Hieronymos agreed, and prostrated himself on the floor in front of Silo.

"Get, up, man!" an embarrassed Silo urged him. Hieronymos regained his feet. "Very well, what can you tell me about the enemy's forces and plans?" Silo asked.

"The forces within Sinope are thirty two thousand strong, but most of these are fresh recruits. There are only some twelve thousand experienced men," Hieronymos started. "The King is waiting and hoping that more will arrive by sea from Thracia, and either strengthen his garrison or fall on you from the rear. That's why I've been talking with you so evasively; I was under orders to cause as much delay as possible, gaining time for this relief force to arrive."

Silo nodded. "That makes sense; Archelaus has been wiped out, but Mithridates wouldn't know that yet. What of other forces from Pontus itself?"

"Our forces are almost totally depleted. Apart from the army under Archelaus, we have perhaps another twenty thousand at Ancyra to hold the inland route, and another thirty thousand in Cilicia. These other forces are about half veterans, and the rest mere boys."

"So if we can take Sinope quickly, Pontus is almost undefended past this point?" Silo asked.

"Not entirely, lord," Hieronymos cautioned. "King Tigranes of Armenia has made an agreement with the King. Tigranes wishes to expand against Parthia, and wants Pontus to shield him from Roman interference. For this purpose he has provided the King with fifty thousand men to hold the subdued areas under control. But Tigranes demanded that these men should not be used against Rome; he didn't want Rome to know of his support for Pontus. But if it appeared that Pontus was on the point of collapse, Tigranes might permit these men to be used against you. It's not certain, but there is a chance," Hieronymos concluded.

"You know the city and its defences, Hieronymos. How would you go about taking it quickly?"

"I have already considered that, my lord," Hieronymos smiled, this time more sincerely than his diplomatic smirk. "I have outside an honour guard, made up of half of the men at the nearest Gate Guard. They think they're here as a formality of State, but I have other plans." Hieronymos quickly outlined his scheme.

Silo stared at him for a long minute. "You'll have to lead them back or they'll sense something unusual."

"Yes, my lord," Hieronymos agreed.

"How do I know this isn't a trap to entice in an entire legion into a killing ground, so you can slaughter them on the spot?"

"It would be foolish of me to betray you like that, my lord," Hieronymos suggested. "What would become of me when you finally take the city?"

Silo continued staring. Eventually he decided. "Very well! We'll try your plan. Wait here!" Silo gestured to his retinue to hold Hieronymos in the room while he walked out to give orders. Within half an hour all was ready and Hieronymos followed Silo out to meet the Pontic soldiers.

The Pontic honour guard were surrounded by three times their number of Roman veterans.

"Men of Pontus," the centurion said in his rough Greek, "Today is your lucky day! Your lives will be spared and you will avoid the dangers of battle as we take Sinope. All you need to do is drop your weapons, take off your armour, and walk into that building over there." He waved his sword to vaguely indicate the nearby stables, now empty.

Hieronymos appeared through the ring of Romans, apparently anxious as he confronted a diplomatic problem. "Do as he says, men; I can guarantee your lives if you co-operate for the moment." He urged the men in Pontic. "The Roman General has perceived an insult, and I'm working to convince him it was an innocent misunderstanding. Please be patient and don't make things any worse!"

The Captain of the Guard looked around, and was quietly relieved that he had been ordered to surrender. "You heard him, men," he said with a feigned grimness. "Drop your weapons, strip to your shirts and trousers." The speed of compliance assured him that his soldiers had reached the same conclusion.

Hieronymos was walking back to the gates less than an hour later with eleven men behind him. The crescent moon, low in the west, was sufficient to identify the uniforms as Pontic, but the faces were hidden by shadow. "Open the gate!" Hieronymos ordered. The sound of bars being lifted was clear in the night air and the gate swung open. The twelve men marched through. "Thank you, Captain; your men may return to their posts now." The words spoken in Pontic meant nothing to the Roman centurion in the captain's uniform but the slight bow from Hieronymos was the signal they had all been waiting for. Some men climbed the ladders to the ramparts, others stayed at ground level, until each man was near one of the genuine Pontic guards.

Hieronymos looked around the scene until he was confident everyone was in position. "I want to thank you men for your help tonight." Once again, the words were unintelligible to the Romans; but the abrupt turn as he finished speaking was the signal for the next phase. Almost simultaneously, nine Pontic throats were cut. Barely a sound was heard. The gate was now in Roman hands. The most recent victims were stripped.

Now the waiting started. In less than an hour the moon would set. So long as there was no surprise inspection of the watch, all would be well. Daggers were kept at the ready as the eleven men in Pontic uniform stared out from the top of the wall. The flesh on their backs tingled.

At last the moon set and the darkness of the night was impenetrable. One leaf of the gate was quietly be-barred and swung open, and a small torch dropped

in front of the leaf still across the opening; the torch could not be seen from inside, but only from outside.

Within minutes nine more Romans slipped through in the shadows and dressed in the Pontic uniforms stripped from the earlier victims. As quietly as possible, they followed Hieronymos through the streets to the main barracks. Almost a cohort of Roman legionaries followed at a distance. Only the dim light escaping from the buildings either side was available to them but they dared not use torches that could be seen from the high points of the city. To the people of Sinope it sounded like just one more re-deployment of the city garrison.

It was almost midnight before the Romans were in position, just short of the barracks. The men in Pontic uniform again played their part, flanking Hieronymos as he approached the sentries on duty. The King's servant again ordered the gates to be opened so he could bring orders for the Commander. The gates were unbarred and swung open, the visitors walked through, and the sentries were slaughtered silently. Their bodies were quickly dragged out of sight.

The barracks had its own wall and patrols. One nearby watchman had sensed the movement below him by the light of the torches at the gate, and called out a challenge. "No problem, soldier; just a silly practical joke." Hieronymos answered in Pontic. "But come on down; you're all relieved tonight. These men have been ordered to do additional duty as a punishment."

The six watchmen on the barracks walls were not going to argue with news like this. They made their way to the steps on the inside face of the wall and converged on Hieronymos to hand over their watch. When they were all together they were quickly despatched.

Word was quickly sent out to the legionaries waiting out of sight in the side-streets, and within minutes three ranks of crossbowmen were readied. They stretched the full width of the parade ground, the only open space within the barrack walls. More legionaries equipped as conventional heavy infantry formed up outside.

A few dozen men carrying torches then ran into the dormitory area at the far end of the parade ground. Starting from the far end, they quickly ran along the rows of huts, splashing oil and torching the timbers. The front edge of burning buildings followed them back to the waiting crossbowmen. It took a few minutes for some among the sleeping Pontic soldiers to wake and realise what was happening. They roused their comrades, but it was soon apparent to them that the sleeping huts throughout the whole barracks were in flames and there was neither hope nor space to try to fight the fire. They streamed out of their dormitories half-naked and in panic. They ran towards the parade ground, the only place clear of burning buildings. As they reached this open space and were back-lit by the flames, they were brought down by salvoes of cross-bow bolts.

It was like mowing down standing grain. As more came, the bodies piled up giving some protection to those coming after. But the relief was short-lived. The heat from the burning buildings became more intense, driving the barely-clad men forward and into the field of cross-bow fire. The roar outside the walls started

to grow louder as the soldiers outside the barracks were marshalled and attempted to break through the screen of heavy infantry outside. There was never any chance of this succeeding.

The glow from the fire was now obvious to Silo back in his camp. The attack had penetrated to its objective! He ordered the rest of the attack legion through the open gate, to exploit the confusion in the city. This force was directed towards the Royal Quarter; if Mithridates could be trapped or even killed the war would be as good as over.

Dawn revealed a city in its death throes. The Royal Quarter was in flames and the fire from the barracks had spread to the poorly-built areas of the city downwind. The stink of burning flesh was everywhere. Silo moved into the city to impose some order. Rape and pillage were a soldier's right, but not until the resistance had been broken - and even then indiscriminate slaughter and destruction should be minimised. He wanted his captured cities to be in a position to contribute to his campaign, not be a burden upon it.

The walls and the gates were now free of defenders. Many had stripped off their equipment and tried to blend in with the civilians, the rest had been slaughtered by attacks from within the walls. The barracks area was a pile of burning bodies and rubble. Only the Royal Quarter still offered resistance, and flames were already making that less tenable. Silo made his way to the gates that were the only access to the Royal Quarter and gave the order for his men to fall back. As the tumult of battle quietened he ordered the terms to be offered; life as a slave, or death. A volley of arrows were his only answer.

"Burn them out!" Silo ordered. "Bring in our onagers and keep flinging oil into there until the stones melt!" Then he turned to one of his personal staff. "Find Hieronymos. I want him here beside me. And bring back the legion commander as well." This didn't take long; the former negotiator was still in the parade ground of the burnt-out barracks, surrounded by a century of infantry while the rest of the assault legion had set to cleaning out the walls. He was taken back to Silo in front of the Royal Gate.

"Marcus Claudius," Silo greeted the commander. "You've done well!"

"Thank you, General. Everything went smoothly and exactly as planned."

"And Hieronymos here; how did he perform?" Silo continued.

"I didn't understand a word he said to the Pontic soldiers we encountered, but he seemed to be very effective in fooling them."

"Excellent!" Silo turned to Hieronymos. "You offered yourself as my slave. Do you have any regrets?"

"No, my lord," Hieronymos was quick to answer. "I am greatly heartened that my service was helpful."

Silo stared at him for a moment, as if having second thoughts. Then he decided. "Hieronymos, I set you free," he announced. "Then I grant you Roman citizenship. Next, I grant you a talent of gold as your reward. Finally, I offer you a position on my personal staff with the rank of Legate. Will you serve with me, or do you decide to take your reward and your citizenship, and leave?"

Hieronymos was clearly stunned. "I.... I will serve you, my lord."

“Good man, Hieronymos!” Silo encouraged him. “You may yet finish this war not only wealth, but honoured as well.” Then after a short pause, “But please make a point of learning Latin as quickly as you can.”

It was five days before the Royal Quarter was cool enough to explore. There were traces of bodies, but none were recognisable. It was assumed that Mithridates had been entirely consumed in the flames. Sinope was pacified so Silo set out for Amasia.

Word of the death of Mithridates spread rapidly. Tigranes wasted no time; the Armenian troops doing garrison duty in Pontus on behalf of Mithridates were now ordered to seize as much of Pontus as possible before the Romans arrive. Having troops already within Pontus and also having Mithridates' authority behind them to ensure ease of movement, Tigranes managed to occupy virtually all of inland Pontus and most of the coastal areas.

Glauca, on the southern axis of attack, managed to occupy Galatia, and Cappadocia only as far east as Nyssa. In effect, Pontus has been partitioned with the lion's share going to Tigranes. The Pontic dependencies on the north coast of the Black Sea yielded to Roman demands, but Colchis became an Armenian possession.

Silo knew what he wanted to do about this situation. Three years of Roman blood and Roman gold had not been spent so Tigranes could take the prize! But his authority extended only so far as to wage war against Mithridates. He knew he needed to report back to Sulla, his immediate Commander, before he committed Rome to another war.

*Quintus Poppeius Silo, General in the Field,
To Lucius Cornelius Sulla, Supreme Commander of Roman Forces in the East,*

Greetings!

Following the presumed death of Mithridates in the fall of Sinope as reported in my earlier letter, I moved to occupy the rest of Pontus as quickly as possible to prevent his forces from being rallied against us by an heir or other pretender.

As I moved inland and sent the fleet eastwards along the coast, we found that the country was occupied by Armenian soldiers sent by Tigranes. It became apparent that these were originally intended to support Mithridates, but on hearing of Mithridates' death Tigranes had decided on annexation. Hieronymos, a high servant in the court of Mithridates who defected to me and was instrumental in the capture of Sinope, confirms that Tigranes had been playing the part of a silent ally to Mithridates for more than a year.

But even so, Tigranes put out the story that he had sent his forces in to Pontus to deprive Mithridates of the ability to raise any more manpower or material against us. Our forces were not permitted free passage by the Armenians,

and it was made obvious to us that any attempt to force the issue would risk a new war. Galatia and western Cappadocia had not been occupied by Armenians, probably because Tigranes feared that an advance by our forces along this axis would disclose his complicity. These areas were held only by Pontic forces, who promptly accepted our terms of surrender. These areas were secured by the end of June, before Tigranes could move his forces in. We thus have a situation whereby Pontus is Roman by right of conquest, but already almost all of it is occupied by Armenia, officially a Friend and Ally (despite his obvious support for our enemy) who refuses to pull back.

I am inclined to enforce our claim more vigorously, even so far as to take the remainder of Pontus by force if I need to. I don't believe that Tigranes would continue to resist were I to do so, but I expect him to concede these lands in exchange for a free hand against Syria and Parthia. But this is a decision that must be taken above my level of command.

I seek your instruction on how to manage this situation and authority to act within the limits of your delegation as circumstances might demand.

Sulla nodded to himself as he read the letter for the third time. Silo was right; Tigranes was trying to bluff his way into winning a windfall. But if he were given a choice between war with Rome to hold onto Pontus, or war with the Seleucids for all of Syria, then he would certainly prefer to fight the easier foe for the greater prize.

But still, this was no longer his concern. After the report of the fall of Sinope and the presumed death of Mithridates, Sulla had given up his imperium and re-entered the city. Silo didn't know it yet but he was himself the Supreme Commander of Roman forces in the East, by resolution of a Senate that kicked, screamed and dragged its feet to that appointment only because both consuls insisted upon it. Yes, even Cato agreed to a non-consular Italian being given the imperium! Better than taking it himself only to be seen by all of Rome as an opportunist taking credit for another man's hard work.

But starting a war was a matter that should be referred to the consuls first. "Jason!" Sulla called for his Master of House. Jason appeared almost immediately. "Please send to the consuls, asking when it might be convenient for them to hear a report from the East." Jason nodded his understanding and left the office to order two runners.

It came as no surprise when a runner from Drusus arrived little more than an hour later. The Consul would be pleased if lord Sulla could share a meal with him and his colleague that evening.

"Lucius Cornelius, welcome!" Drusus greeted him at the door. "Come, the triclinium is set and you are early; we can chat privately for a while."

"Really, Marcus Livius!" Sulla said in mock rebuke. "Surely you wouldn't keep secrets from your consular colleague!"

Drusus laughed. "As you already know, I keep no secrets from Lucius Porcius except those he would rather not know!"

The two men dawdled into the triclinium and sat on the couches. Cratippus poured out wine for them both. "Now that the war is as good as over, do you intend to head east again this year? Just to tidy things up?" Drusus asked.

"That's precisely why I need to talk to you and Lucius Porcius tonight, before word spreads wider," Sulla replied. "But do you mind if I leave that for the moment? I'd rather not have to explain things twice, and we have other matters I'd prefer to discuss between just the two of us. That's why I came early."

Drusus raised an expressive pair of eyebrows as his response. "Speak," he invited.

"We need to think more carefully about the issues raised by Strabo's coup," Sulla opened. "The publicani are not going to take the loss of their Asian milking cow quietly now that Mithridates is no longer a threat. And there are any number of consulars who also want their pot of gold. And that's not the end of the story. Just as Strabo said, the other provinces are wondering why they're being squeezed for staying loyal, while Asia is rewarded for supporting the enemy." Sulla leant forward, elbows on knees. "Everything comes down to money, Marcus Livius; and our enemies have it, while we're cutting ourselves off from it."

Drusus shrugged. "With respect, Lucius Cornelius, that was your own doing; or at least, Silo's under your authority. How can we now undo it?"

"Silo did what he had to do at the time. And even in hindsight I have to agree it was the right thing to do. Otherwise we would still be camped outside Smyrna," Sulla acknowledged. "And I don't think we should 'undo' it, either; that would be a retreat into the same pattern that caused this war in the first place. We need to come up with something completely new." Sulla rocked back on his couch. "We need to do with the provinces what we have already done with Italy," he declared slowly. "We need to bring them into the Mos Majorum, just as we have with the Italians. Then they'll be prepared to die to defend Rome, rather than prepared to die rebelling against Rome."

Drusus was stunned. He sat still for a full minute, trying to get his head around this concept.

"But... that can't be done!" he responded at last. "They're different people! They have different gods! They have different languages and different customs..."

"Yes," agreed Sulla. "Just as was said about the Italians some six hundred years ago. And was said by some Romans only six years ago!"

Drusus shook his head, as if to clear it. "But they don't even want to be Romans! At least the Italians wanted citizenship!"

"The Italians didn't want citizenship six hundred years ago!" Sulla replied. "If we can show the provincials, specially the Greeks, that the Mos Majorum is a noble code to live by and worthy of all true men to honour, and if it is applied properly and justly, then they will learn to love it. And once they love it, the provinces will eagerly support Rome, rather than being a drain upon its blood." Sulla leant forward again for emphasis.

"Just as Italians have been the salvation of Rome in this last war, the provinces will be the salvation of Rome in the next generation. *If* we have the courage to make it so!"

Drusus was still bemused. "I've always said you're three steps ahead of the game. Give me time to think through this and we can talk about it later." Drusus smiled weakly. "But I can see why you wanted to talk about this before Lucius Porcius joined us."

Sulla knew that he needed to lighten the moment. He flopped back to recline on the couch. "I'm exhausted!" he sighed.

"Yes, it's a big thought to carry around," Drusus agreed. "But you said earlier, 'Everything comes down to money'. And we're on the wrong side of the ledger there; how do you tie that in?"

"We need to make sure that a small fraction of the money that is *not* being plundered by the publicani is re-directed to our side of politics," Sulla explained. "We have to make sure the provincials are not only grateful, but show that gratitude."

Drusus nodded his appreciation. "So that's why you sent Quintus Pompeius to govern Asia! That was a trial run for how you want to manage the whole Roman world!"

Sulla threw his hands up. "Guilty as charged. And it works! The Asians love the new arrangements, Rome is still making a profit from them, and all of that is going into Treasury instead of the pockets of our enemies. And they still have some left over to subsidise the election of our Reformists where it matters. I think we have not only Right on our side, but also a good business plan to make it work," Sulla summarised.

Just then they heard a bang on the street door.

"But more about this later," Sulla cut himself short. "That would be Lucius Porcius." Both men stood and walked to greet the third member of their meeting.

All the proper courtesies were exchanged with sincerity. A leader of the Boni though he might be, each of these Italianist men had served multiple consulships as Cato's colleague and had a genuine respect for him. Drusus led his guests to the triclinium, asking Cato to sit in the seat of honour.

"Your runner said you had news from the East, Lucius Cornelius," Cato started. "I was given to understand that the war was as good as over, with Mithridates dead and his forces broken."

"Indeed so, Lucius Porcius," Sulla agreed. "That war is over. But let me read to you a letter from Quintus Poppeius that arrived only this morning."

Sulla read clearly and smoothly. When he finished he put the letter on the table between them.

"The bastard!" Drusus muttered.

"Absolutely!" Cato agreed. "Supporting our enemy against us, and then being cheeky enough to pretend that he was assisting us!"

The three men sat for a moment, each with his own thoughts. Eventually Cato spoke. "Do you know this Tigranes, Lucius Cornelius?"

"I met him once, very soon after he took his throne," Sulla admitted. "He was attempting to assert hegemony over Cappadocia at the time. I told him that the lands west of the Euphrates were to be considered under Roman care, while he could do as he pleased east of the river."

"He was agreeable to that?" Cato continued.

"Actually, he was very resentful. He had ideas about mastery over all of Anatolia, Cappadocia being only the first step. But I warned him that Rome would destroy him if he transgressed."

"You had no authority to say that!" Cato rebuked him.

Sulla just smiled. "It worked! That's justification enough."

Drusus entered the discussion. "If it worked, then it worked because he fears you. All the more reason to expect he'll comply if you warn him again."

"Yes; but I expect he'd put on a brave front, daring us to try to move him out. I doubt he'd continue once he sees we're resolute. It might take one battle to convince him, but no more."

"Then it's agreed?" Cato summarised. "Lucius Cornelius is to be appointed Supreme Commander, and authorised to wage war against Tigranes. The war objective is to secure possession of all of Pontus."

"No, it's not agreed," Sulla broke in. "That would be a great insult to Quintus Poppaediis. To appoint him Supreme Commander as soon as one war is ended, only to replace him as soon as the next breaks out!"

"But he isn't a Consular!" Cato objected.

"He wasn't a consular last month, either; but you agreed to his appointment," Sulla retorted.

A commander in peacetime need not be a consular; but he must be either a consular or subordinate to a consular in time of war," Cato explained laboriously.

Sulla stared at Cato for a full minute, expressionless. Then he turned to Drusus.

"I have a favour to ask of you, Marcus Livius. Would you please assume command of the war against Tigranes? I expect it will last for no more than one battle, probably less."

"But I'm not a Military Man, Lucius Cornelius!" Drusus protested.

"That's precisely my purpose, Marcus Livius. I would ask you to assume command, and then move to your villa outside the city walls, delegating everything to Quintus Poppaediis. Make it obvious to everyone that this is no more than a legal device and that Quintus Poppaediis is the real commander." Sulla explained. "Were I to do that, there would be some who would detract from his dignitas by whispering that I had sent a brilliant plan to my subordinate, but – with all respect – I doubt they will whisper that about you."

Drusus paused before answering. "I'll do that, if my colleague agrees. Otherwise, I'll put it before the Senate." Drusus looked across to Cato.

Cato glared back. Then he sent a second glare towards Sulla. "Over the years, I've come to see both of you scrupulous to maintain the Mos Majorum. And now you conspire to make a mockery of it!" He turned again to Drusus.

"If you assume command, I expect you to take command! Go to Pontus, and take the advice of your General on every single question if you want; but be seen to be in command! Anything less is dereliction of duty! I'll take command myself before I allow such a sham to take place!"

Drusus returned Cato's glare with a level countenance. "I've always respected your position as my colleague, and I'll continue to do so. You've made it plain that you don't approve of this proposal, so nor will I."

"It is good that you've regained your senses," Cato conceded reluctantly. "Even if I had to shame you into it."

"You didn't have to shame me into anything, Lucius Porcius," Drusus replied evenly. "We have slightly different perspectives, but no more. You would have agreed if I had undertaken to go to Pontus and there do whatever Silo recommended; which I see as no less of a sham, but a less honest one than admitting to the truth of who actually deserves the credit for the victory." Drusus paused. "It saddens me that you think I'm motivated by shame rather than honour," Drusus continued. "And it saddens me that we are no longer friends, but only colleagues."

Cato was sobered by this. "My apologies, Marcus Livius; I leapt to the wrong conclusion."

"Yes, you did, Lucius Porcius. And I can forgive that error. What I can't forgive is that your opinion of me is so low that you were capable of making that error." Drusus heaved a deep sigh. "We are still consular colleagues, and I trust we can still work together with proper respect and courtesy." Drusus continued. "But I will not go to Pontus and take command. That would be dishonest in my own eyes, to pretend to be a commander that I know I am not. You may go, if you wish."

Cato now realised whom he had shamed here. If he followed his own advice and took up nominal command of what everyone knew was really Silo's war, he would be doing what Drusus had already labelled not only a sham, but a dishonest one. He cast around for an honourable way out.

"I don't think it dishonest to assume responsibility, even if I delegate all the decisions. We're talking responsibility here, not expertise, because I'm no Military Man, either, Marcus Livius. But I won't go either, out of respect for your sensibilities on this matter. I can make no more sincere an apology than that."

Drusus looked at Cato with a strange expression on his face. At length he reached out his right arm. "Thank you, Lucius Porcius, and I must apologise for being perhaps over-sensitive."

Cato took the arm offered, and smiled. "I will never doubt your honour again, friend." The two men smiled to each other, and then dropped their grips.

The two consuls then turned their eyes to Sulla.

"You can see our difficulties, Lucius Cornelius," Drusus said. "Will you not re-consider?"

"I will not humiliate a man who is not only my friend, but also an excellent soldier. I recall no too long ago when the same insult was heaped upon me, when Marius usurped my consular command, and I will not tolerate that same insult being directed at Quintus Poppeius," Sulla replied stubbornly. "You must permit him to remain in command. If you genuinely find that intolerable under your understanding of the Mos Majorum, Lucius Porcius, and insist that only a

Consul may have that command, then the only way out is for him to become Consul.”

“That's absurd, Lucius Cornelius!” Cato dismissed the suggestion with a wave. “We have any number of Consulars who can take command; even yourself! In fact, I can think of none better!”

“Then we really are reduced to only one option,” Sulla said with an air of finality. “The status quo must hold. We don't go to war, and Quintus Poppaedius retains his peacetime imperium.” Sulla looked to the two consuls. “Which of you will tell the Senate that Rome will allow Tigranes to steal our spoils?”

The silence was not broken for some minutes. At length Drusus spoke. “I'll write to Quintus Poppaedius myself, and ask him to nominate himself as suffect consul. As soon as his nomination arrives, I'll resign to create the vacancy.” He looked to Cato. “How do you think the Senate will react, when they realise that they will be obliged to appoint an Italian as Consul? It was pandemonium even having them confirm him in a peace-time imperium at the edge of the world, but now they will need to make him Consul!”

“No, they won't Marcus Livius,” Cato contended. “They'll appoint another before they agree to Silo. Your gesture would be wasted.”

“If they appoint another, then Italy will recognise the insult when they see it,” Sulla warned. “There will be civil war! But this time, the Italian Silo will have all the legions. Silo must remain as Commander. It's up to you to decide whether he needs to be a consular for this to happen, or whether propraetorial imperium is sufficient.”

Cato gaped for a moment as the inevitability of the position stood before his mind's eye. “I suppose, since he's already confirmed as Commander, and is on the spot... If a war breaks out unexpectedly, it's only to be assumed that he would take whatever action is required, until he can be replaced by a consular... If the Senate never actually gets around to appointing his replacement...” Cato muttered weakly. “And by the time we do appoint a replacement, the new war might well be over, so the need to do so will lapse... But if the war is not over soon, to change Commanders in the middle of a war is not a good thing, and should only be a last resort...”

“I think you have a much better grasp of the issues now, Lucius Porcius,” Sulla said approvingly. “We simply tell Quintus Poppaedius that he is to occupy all of Pontus as spoils of war, and this will include overcoming any local opportunists that might be in his way. If, perchance, Tigranes objects to this and reacts badly, well.... how were we to know that would happen?”

“I think you're right, Lucius Cornelius.” Cato conceded. “There is no war at present. We mustn't get ahead of ourselves, but deal with matters as they arise.”

Silo was satisfied with his deployments outside Cotyora. He was less happy about how Tigranes was approaching this war. He was maintaining his pretence of being a Friend and Ally of Rome, claiming he occupied Pontus to prevent any chance of a resurgence against Rome. But he was also telling the Pontic cities that he was their protector against Rome. Well, this would probably be the test case. So far

the Armenian forces had not actually opposed any Roman moves. They had only deployed for battle in an attempt to intimidate. But today they will need to make a choice.

Gnaeus," He called, turning to Priscus, "It is time for you to make your delegation. You have the letter?"

Priscus took the letter from his pouch to show it. "Yes, General."

"Then on your way! Good luck!"

Priscus and his six escorts rode in formation to the city gate. Priscus hailed in Greek.

"Greetings, Roman!" came the reply from the walls. "What brings you here today?"

"My name is Gnaeus Priscus, and I come in the name of the Senate and People of Rome. I request entry, and a meeting with the governing officials of this city."

"Unfortunately I am under orders to admit no-one who has not been specifically listed by the King's governor," came the reply from the wall. "Your name is not on that list."

"Then go fetch the Governor." Priscus demanded.

"Unfortunately the governor is not available at the moment."

"That is indeed most unfortunate," Priscus responded. "Any governor who doesn't automatically include in his orders that a delegate from Rome must be granted entry is a negligent governor indeed! It is such a pity that what could be decided in a day by discussion might need to be decided in a week by conflict. The next time we approach your walls it will not be to request entry, but to force it. But perhaps not all is lost. We will allow you until sunset to send a delegation to our camp to apologise for your rudeness and make proper arrangements for our peaceful entry. If we don't see you before sunset, we will assume you are hostile towards Rome and we will act accordingly." Priscus pulled his horse around and started walking back to camp. His retinue followed him.

Silo saw Priscus returning. That could mean only one thing; entry had been refused. He waited for Priscus and his retinue to be clear of cross-bow range from the walls, and then ordered the trumpeter to sound the advance.

As the sound of the trumpet was heard, forty-eight onagers were rolled forward to bring the walls within their range, but still outside range of any arrows or bolts from the walls. At that range only another onager could touch his own forces, and he doubted the Pontic or Armenian forces had catapults with a range to equal that of his onagers. The onagers were in place within the hour and the infantry were throwing up earthworks and stakes to defend them against any ground sallies. Ballistae were being placed around the heavy catapults as well. Normally Silo would have waited until after dark to move his men and equipment into position to conceal his dispositions from the enemy, but today the aim was to make sure the enemy knew he was deadly serious. He wanted the men on the walls to see what was waiting for them.

The sun was an hour above the western horizon and the onager positions had been fully-stocked with oil bombs when the gate swung open. Seven mounted

men came out and cantered their horses towards Silo's command position on a small hill six hundred paces from the wall. Their armour and finery glowed in the low sun. The riders were called to a halt a hundred paces short of Silo's tent and asked to dismount. They were then asked to surrender their weapons before drawing closer. A corpulent but resplendently-dressed man walked towards Silo, his face beaming in a smile. As he came within a dozen paces Silo put up a hand to stop him. He complied, and gave a short bow as he stopped.

"My name is Kosthenes; I had the honour of speaking with your man at the gate."

"I am Quintus Poppeadius Silo, Commander of Roman Forces in Anatolia. I am pleased to meet you."

"I have been able to speak to the Governor this afternoon. He has instructed me to discuss with you whatever matters you might care to raise," Kosthenes said.

"Thank you, Kosthenes; there are several issues that need to be discussed," Silo took up this invitation. "The first is whether or not your city is under Pontic control or Armenian."

Kosthenes smiled. "The city is under the control of the Governor appointed by King Mithridates."

"King Mithridates is dead," Silo said bluntly. "To whom is the Governor responsible now?"

"The Governor is autonomous until such time as a successor to the King takes control."

"The successor to the King is here now," Silo announced. "I am he, by authority of the Senate and the People of Rome. I have been appointed Commander and Military Governor of all Roman territories in Anatolia."

"With respect, General; I was not aware that this city is a Roman territory."

"You might be right there, Kosthenes," Silo conceded. "My orders are that I am to include all Pontic territories into Roman territory. So I have to ask you if this city is a Roman territory? Or is it a Pontic territory? Or does it fall under the sovereignty of another?"

"I will need to consult with the Governor on that matter," Kosthenes replied.

"No, you will not need to consult with the Governor," Silo corrected him. "You will need to *inform* the Governor. As of this moment I consider the city part of Roman territory. If it submits to my authority by noon tomorrow, we will take over its administration peacefully. There will be no damage, no deaths. But if it doesn't submit by noon we will treat it as a rebellious city; one that will be a warning to all other cities as we establish Roman control over what was formerly the Kingdom of Pontus." Silo raised an eyebrow. "Do you have any questions?"

Kosthenes looked uneasy. "Ah..., there are some guests in our city. Foreign guests. These foreign guests might not understand the peaceful nature of your mission."

"That would be most unfortunate," Silo responded. "If any of these guests were to do anything that might lead to a misunderstanding, how could we Romans be able to distinguish between them and your own people? It's possible that their actions might be mistaken for those of your own citizens."

“Yes, that is possible,” Kosthenes agreed.

“So how do you propose to ensure your guests don't cause any problems?” Silo continued.

“I don't know how that problem can be best managed, General,” Kosthenes admitted. “Their leader did ask me to convey to you a message that might best convey his current state of mind.”

“And that message was...?”

“I will read it for you, exact to the word,” Kosthenes took a paper from a fold in his robe. “King Tigranes is a Friend and Ally of Rome, and occupied this city to prevent it being used as a base for actions hostile to the Senate and the People of Rome. This city is now an autonomous city subject to Armenian overlordship to ensure it remains unable to take any action hostile to Rome. Therefore any attack on the city will constitute an act of war against the Kingdom of Armenia.”

Silo nodded to himself. “I expected something along those lines. So did our Consuls back in Rome, and also Lucius Cornelius Sulla, who is known to King Tigranes in person.” Silo drew a letter from his own pouch. “Do you understand Latin?” he asked Kosthenes.

Kosthenes gave a slight shrug. “Not very well, but I will try.”

“Then I will read this to you slowly,” Silo conceded. “Please feel free to ask for a translation if you wish.”

*Lucius Porcius Cato and Marcus Livius Drusus, consuls of Rome,
and from our beloved Lucius Cornelius Sulla,
To Quintus Poppeadius Silo, Commander of all Roman Forces in the East,*

Greetings!

First, we congratulate you on your confirmation by the Senate as the Commander of all Roman Forces in the East. This appointment has arisen by the resignation of Lucius Cornelius Sulla from that imperium, and his recommendation that you be appointed to it in consideration of your outstanding performance in this war. We also confirm that this appointment includes the role of Military Governor of all Roman territories in Anatolia, other than those subject to a Civil Governor. At present, only the Province of Asia is excluded from your authority.

We have been advised that King Tigranes of Armenia, a Friend and Ally of the Senate and the People of Rome, has intervened in the Mithridatic War. We understand that he has occupied many Pontic cities. Should you encounter any Armenian forces in Pontus you must thank them for their assistance and relieve them of this garrison duty as promptly as possible. If any such forces are unable or reluctant to leave you must offer them every assistance to return to Armenia. You shall insist that all formerly Pontic territories are to be placed under direct

Roman administration and that no Armenian forces will be permitted to remain on Roman territory.

You may remind any commanders you encounter that King Tigranes and Lucius Cornelius Sulla addressed the issue of Roman and Armenian spheres of influence at their meeting some ten years ago. It was agreed there that the Euphrates River shall be the boundary. Rome will not entertain any attempt to set aside this agreement. North of the Euphrates, Pontus and its colonies are ours by right of conquest in this most recent war.

You are authorised and commanded to use such methods as you consider necessary to take swift possession of all Pontic lands, including all those west of the Euphrates so recently over-run by Mithridates. You may use military action against any forces that would hinder you in this mission if you consider it warranted. We are confident that King Tigranes will co-operate with you in this effort but if any of his forces do not comply with your reasonable requests then you can only conclude that they are in revolt against their King. As rebels against King Tigranes, a Friend and Ally of Rome, you must subdue such rebellious forces on his behalf.

Please report back regularly on your progress.”

Silo looked up as he finished reading. “Is that clear to you? If you want I can provide you with a copy to take back with you.”

“I think I understand well enough, General,” Kosthenes replied. “In summary, any Armenian forces that oppose you are to be considered rebels against King Tigranes, and treated as such.”

“You have it in a nutshell, Kosthenes.”

“So the Armenian garrison commander, when he says that to attack him is to attack King Tigranes...?”

“We would consider him a rebel against his King if he resists us and we would crush him. He can only show himself to be a loyal servant of Tigranes by complying with our requests.”

Kosthenes smiled. “I would be most grateful if I could have a copy of that letter, as you offered. I think it would be of some interest to our guests.”

“That won't be a problem, Kosthenes. I have a copy already at hand.” Silo smiled back. “And I also have a Greek translation for you prepared if you wish to take that back with you.”

“That would also be most helpful, General. We might yet have a happy outcome by noon tomorrow.”

Less than an hour later Kosthenes was reporting back to the Governor and the commander of the Armenian garrison. The two documents, one in Latin and one in conversational Greek, were on the table.

“Lord Polycarpos, I have no doubt that we would be under bombardment now had I not met with the Roman General. His orders are quite clear; he must assert Roman authority over all of Pontus and do it swiftly. He has allowed us until tomorrow noon for one reason only; that he wants to be able to report to his

superiors that he did not attack Armenian soldiers without first giving them the opportunity to withdraw."

Polycarpos himself had no desire to resist. Whether his city fell under Roman or Armenian control made little difference to him, provided it wasn't caught in a battle between the two. But unfortunately he didn't have the final word on this. That fell to Artanes, the commander of the five-thousand-strong Armenian garrison.

"And how many men does he have under his command, Kosthenes?" Polycarpos asked.

"That doesn't matter unless he's prepared to use them," Artanes broke in brusquely. "He knows that if he attacks he risks a war."

"What he knows, Commander, is that King Tigranes is being offered a way of avoiding war," Kosthenes retorted. "Look at the wording! If this Roman slaughters all of us he only has to say 'We thought these men were rebels, because they were breaking your agreement with Sulla.' That gives both sides some room for diplomacy, and the only bodies left rotting in the field will be ours."

Artanes caught Kosthenes across the face with the back of his hand. "Mind your tongue, or you'll lose it!" Artanes paced the room. As he passed the table he swiped the letters to the floor in his annoyance. After several minutes of pacing he came to a decision. "I'll withdraw to Pharnaceia. That way I'll keep my force intact without risking a war that the King might not want but also without giving away anything more substantial than this one city. I'll also send to the King for instructions on how to handle this situation. I should have an answer soon, before these Romans push too much further." Artanes stopped pacing. "But there's one piece of unfinished business I need to attend to first." Artanes drew his dagger and plunged it into Kosthenes' ample belly and then withdrew it in one smooth action. Kosthenes' eyes widened with the surprise and the pain, and he crumpled to the floor.

Artanes casually knelt beside him to wipe his blade clean on his victim's robe. Then he stood and walked out of the room. As soon as he was outside, Polycarpos shouted at his staff "Get the surgeon here now! He might yet live!"

Polycarpos rose early the next morning. He found Kosthenes still alive; the surgeon had opened the piercing wound wider, to see if the thrust had perforated any organs. He had sewn up a cut in the intestine and washed the wound with vinegar, and then repaired the overlaying tissues as he worked his way back out to the surface. But even so he was not confident.

Soon Polycarpos became aware of a clamour in the city. The Armenian soldiers were looting the city's temples. This was where everyone, including the city itself, kept their cash and gold for safekeeping. Well, if the Armenians didn't take it the Romans would. Nothing to be done about that; just try to survive the day. He called for his staff and issued orders for the Romans to be admitted without resistance. It was important that there be no excuses for Roman retribution. And finally, he called for his secretary to walk with him to the gate closest the Roman camp.

One leaf of the gate swung open at his order. "No, I said 'Open the gates!' not just one of them!" he shouted his annoyance at the watch commander. The second leaf swung open. "Now leave them open! I want there to be no doubt that we're submitting." Polycarpos stepped through the arch and started walking towards the Roman command post. No need for a mount; he wanted the Romans to see as soon as he appeared that this was a total surrender. Ten minutes later he and his secretary were standing before Silo.

"I am Polycarpos, the Governor. The city is yours, General," he announced. "The Armenians are moving out even as we speak. And of course, they are taking all the silver and gold they can find."

"I expected they'd do that," Silo replied. "My men will enter the city an hour after noon. That should avoid any chance of unpleasantness with the Armenians. You are Pontus, the enemy. You will not be given terms as generous as those we offered the Greek cities. My men deserve some booty, and some enjoyment, and they will have it at your expense. But this will be done in a controlled and orderly way. Your people will not be slaughtered unless you resist us. Please return to your city and do what you can to ensure calm. And make sure the Armenians are told that any of them still within the city by noon will be killed. That should get them safely out of the way." Silo thought for a moment longer before continuing.

"My men will not abuse your people, provided they are not provoked. They are under orders not to loot; I have my own trusted officers to collect any treasures the Armenians might have left behind, and the men will get their share of that. They are also under orders not to rape, but instead they have been promised free use of any brothels in the city. You shall ensure that there are enough women to satisfy them. You have until then to recruit as many whores and buy as many slaves as might be needed to meet the demand."

Polycarpos bowed slightly. "Yes, General." He took three steps backwards before turning, as a sign of respect.

"Oh, Governor!" Silo called to him. "Why are you here yourself? What happened to Kosthenes?"

Polycarpos stopped and turned to face Silo. "The Armenian commander didn't like the message Kosthenes brought back from you. He stabbed him." Polycarpos started taking his three steps backwards, but stopped when Silo spoke again.

"He shouldn't have done that. It's the act of a petulant child, not a man of dignitas." Silo paused. "Thank you, Governor."

Polycarpos took his three backward steps, and then turned back down the road towards the gates.

Artanes was surprised some two hours after noon, when he came to the Roman position five miles east of Cottura. What would they be doing this far from the city they were supposedly preparing to attack? Then he realised the earth on the ramparts was freshly-dug. They had only taken this position this morning. They must have marched overnight. The next thing he noticed was the horse, its

reins tied to a shrub beside the road. A horse with an Armenian Cavalry saddle and colours. That must belong to the courier he sent to the King, for instructions.

He called a halt. To the left and right the earthworks and stakes formed a barrier that could not be assaulted; at least, not by an army in marching formation and there was no room or time to evolve into an attack formation. He called to his personal staff to join him as he walked his horse towards the line.

“Stop there!” came a cry in Greek as he reached a point some twenty paces short of the palisades. He reined his horse to a halt. A legate detached himself from his staff and strode to the line of palisades.

“Why do you block the path of a Friend and Ally?” Artanes asked. “We are withdrawing from Cotoyora as your General requested.”

“I have my orders from my General,” the legate replied. “The first is that your force must be stopped and that any loot taken from Cotoyora must be handed over. The city is ours by right of conquest, not yours.”

“We can discuss that later,” Artanes dismissed with a wave. “What are your other orders?”

“They are to be addressed after the first has been completed.”

“Will you allow us to pass peacefully or will you not?” Artanes demanded.

“Not until my orders have been carried out,” the legate replied. “The first is that your loot must be surrendered.”

“And I will not surrender anything as a pre-condition,” Artanes responded impatiently. “We either negotiate everything, or we negotiate nothing.”

“I have my orders, commander,” the legate insisted stubbornly. “I await the surrender of your loot. Until then, we have nothing to discuss.” The legate turned his back on Artanes and strode back into the defensive line.

“What shall we do, Commander?” one of his staff whispered to Artanes.

Artanes turned his horse and started trotting back to his troops.

“Give the order to march. No weapons drawn, no shields, no trumpets, no evolution into a line of battle, just a march,” Artanes ordered. “This legate has no idea what to do. He won’t dare to attack us unless we attack them first.” The shouted orders were heard going back down the line as the front rows started tramping towards the Roman line.

The Roman response was immediate. A dozen burning oil bombs were seen arching towards the Armenians, obviously thrown by concealed onagers. The men saw them coming and started to scatter, but too late. The bombs landed among and around the front division of the Armenian army. Soldiers splashed by the oil panicked, trying to get out of range of the flames. Those already ignited ran screaming, bumping into their fellows and spreading the flames. Those clear of the fires rapidly fell out of formation and started running back up the road, away from the Romans.

The officers towards the rear of the column managed to restore some sort of order once the men were out of range of the Roman onagers but it took over an hour to re-gather the men into their proper units. Artanes sent out some of his officers on their mounts to find a line of march around the Roman position. There was none; the line stretched from the coastal beach to a river half a mile inland.

The Romans blocked the access to the only bridge within two days march. By this time sunset was only two hours away.

"Very well," Artanes decided. "Have the men prepare their evening meal and take some sleep. We attack under cover of darkness after the moon sets. I want the wounded and burnt to stay back and make as much noise as possible so the attack force can approach undetected."

"Commander! Look to the east!" The hills behind Artanes started bristling with javelin points. Within a few minutes it was obvious that at least two legions of Romans were already deployed into a battle line and only three hundred paces away. There was only one way to avoid annihilation. Artanes leapt onto his horse and galloped his horse towards the Roman line. "Philes! Philes!" he shouted. "Friends! Friends!" He reined his horse back to a walk as he came within easy conversational range. He saw a centurion among the ranks, and trotted over to him.

"King Tigranes is a Friend and Ally of the Roman People!" Artanes pleaded as a man totally wronged. "Why do you march against us like this? Please take me to the General so we can sort out this terrible misunderstanding!" The centurion's Greek was not up to this standard. He looked around for his legate before answering, and saw Priscus and Asinius riding towards him.

"Commander Artanes, I assume?" Priscus asked as he drew near. "Please be kind enough to ride with me. General Silo would like to speak with you." He turned without waiting for a response, and started his horse at a walk. Asinius cantered through the Roman lines towards the Armenian camp.

Artanes knew he had no choice. This would mean the loss of the loot from Cotoyora. Oh, well, he would make a point of looting other cities well ahead of time, and getting the goods well clear of the Romans. He followed Priscus at a walk. Silo was coming to meet them, surrounded by half-a-dozen staff. They stopped ten paces short of the General.

"Commander Artanes?" Silo asked flatly.

"Yes, General. I come to ask why your men are preventing us from withdrawing as you requested."

"Dismount, Commander," Silo ordered without expression.

Artanes was perplexed, but complied.

"Take his horse away, someone," Silo ordered his staff without looking around. Someone took Artanes' horse by the reins and walked it away.

"Drop your weapons and armour, Artanes," Silo ordered.

"Am I being taken prisoner?" Artanes demanded.

"Yes," Silo answered simply.

"But I am an officer of King Tigranes! This is an act of war!"

"No, it is an act of justice. Strip off your armour, or else!"

Artanes looked around, and realised he had no choice but to comply. Soon he was down to his trousers, padded undershirt and boots.

"Bind him!" Silo ordered. "Then bring him to the front line. And let him walk!" Silo pulled his mount around and trotted towards the Armenian camp. He

arrived on the crest to see a stream of Armenians coming up the hill, unarmed and unarmoured.

"The enemy have accepted your terms, General," Asinius reported. "And the booty has been secured. The prisoners will be searched for concealed treasures as they pass through our lines."

"Good work, Herius," Silo commended him. "Have the men make camp. Send a rider to the cutoff legion and bring them back to the main body."

The next day was occupied with sorting the Armenian prisoners and arranging their transport back to the west, counting the loot captured and arranging for its safe transport and stationing a small garrison in Cotoyora. Polycarpos was asked to convene a public meeting for noon. Artanes arrived back in Cotoyora just before noon. A timber upright was set up by the road outside the main gate.

Silo addressed the town meeting, speaking Greek for those who understood it, and pausing to allow Polycarpos to translate into Pontic. "Men of Pontus! Mithridates is dead! He will remain dead! Henceforth, Pontus will be administered by Rome! But don't fear that this will mean hard times for you. The New Rome, the Rome that upholds justice, will not ravage you. I swear this to you; you will enjoy greater personal security, you will enjoy greater prosperity, than you ever dreamed about under your kings!"

"I give back to you what is properly yours. Your city shall be under the authority of its own trusted officials, your courts shall be your own and your laws shall be respected. Rome asks only two things of you; that you remain a faithful Friend and Ally of Rome, and that you ensure justice for all. To this end we will appoint a trusted and honourable man as a liaison between the city authorities and Rome to ensure a smooth and happy relationship henceforth. I give you my pledge on this! Anyone who deprives you of property or liberty or anyone who maliciously harms you, except by due process of the law, any such person will be called to account and will be required to make restitution in so far as possible. This punishment of wrong-doers will apply to Romans and Greeks no less than Anatolians. In the New Rome not only the rich and powerful but all men are protected by the law! I have already made sure my soldiers are aware of this. So long as you give no offence they will do you harm at their peril.

"Last night, Artanes, the Armenian Commander, wantonly and without provocation stabbed Kosthenes, one of your city's respected officials. It is still not clear whether or not Kosthenes will survive; but one thing is certain. Artanes will not. He will be executed this afternoon, in a way fitting for powerful men who abuse their power over the unarmed and innocent. He will be crucified outside the city gate. He will learn first-hand what it means to be helpless in the face of those who mock him and hold him up to scorn, just as he abused those who were helpless before him! May all who look upon him be assured that the same fate will come to any who do likewise, whether they be Pontic, Greek or Roman."

A cheer erupted from the crowd. Whether it was one of genuine support or merely a crowd knowing what was expected of them, Silo neither knew nor cared. The important thing was that it would become sincere over time, so long as his

pledge to them was honoured. He was determined that it would be. Artanes was tied to his cross-beam and the cross-beam hung in place about two hours after noon. He was provided with a step, and his feet bound to it. At noon the next day his legs were broken. The point had been well made; Rome was ruthless but not entirely merciless.

The point had been made clear to Tigranes as well. All Armenian forces were called back from the cities of Pontus, and the new Roman province was vacated within two months. Tigranes invited Silo to meet with him to formalise the new understanding, and a treaty was concluded at Melitene on the Euphrates on the last day of October. Silo returned to Italy in late November, before winter made sailing too hazardous. He was granted the first ever Triumph permitted a non-Roman.

Now that the war was over and the State of Emergency had lapsed, the way was open for two new consuls to be elected.

“Lucius Porcius, we have had our day in the sun,” Drusus said to his colleague. “And quite a long day it was, too!” He shifted on the couch slightly.

“You and Lucius Cornelius, and then we two together, have proven that the Senate works best when the Boni and the Italianists work together. If we split, then the Populares will stir the People up against us. We simply have to make sure the Senate is undivided.”

“Well, there are a few voices to both extremes, but I think it's holding together reasonably well,” Cato observed.

“That has been no accident,” Drusus went on. “We of the Italian party have complete respect for you and have not tried to destabilise you or lower you in the eyes of your Boni supporters. Not that I am saying you owe us anything; we supported you because we saw in you a man worthy of support. But now that you are no longer eligible we are wondering what to do next. Do we attempt to have two Italianists elected? We fear that if we do, the Boni will be incensed and the Senate will be paralysed. That will lead to either another Sulpicius from the Populares or a Pompeius Strabo from the Boni. Rome can afford neither. So I ask you, as one who loves Rome as we do; which of the Boni can we trust to work honestly with us?”

Cato looked at his colleague with an expression that verged on distaste.

“Do you mean, which of the Boni can you manipulate as you have manipulated me?” he asked at length.

“Not at all, Lucius Porcius!” Drusus hastened out. “How have we ‘manipulated’ you? No more than you have ‘manipulated’ us into not registering deserving Italians as pedarii, to limiting Italian Praetors to only two each year, and not nominating an Italian for Consul, even though half-a-dozen are eligible.” Drusus shook his head. “This is not ‘manipulation’, my friend, but we have been most moderate in our agenda out of a respect for you and your position while you have shown respect for ours by accepting in good humour these small advances. We are willing, eager even, to continue with these baby-steps, so that it will be generations before Italians are numerous enough in the Senate to be a significant

force. By then they will be as Roman as the grandsons of any other Novus Homo. Better than than to drive them into an alliance with the Head Count! So which of the Boni do you recommend as wise enough to follow your lead?"

Cato sat silently for a long moment. "Quintus Caecilius Metellus Pius would be my choice," he answered at last. "He's not a deep thinker, and is perhaps a bit more hard-core Bonus than I am – but that goes for most of them. But he is highly principled. If he agrees with you then the others will follow. But it also means that you will need to keep your expectations low; he will not be as flexible as I was during the Silo appointment." Cato looked up after he finished speaking. "And whom do you Italianists propose?"

"We're undecided. Some want to call Gnaeus Pompeius Rufus back from Asia, but the Equites will hate him for stamping on their fingers. Some of our more eager even say Quintus Poppaedius, but an Italian might be too provocative for the Boni. Perhaps Publius Rutilius Rufus could be recalled from exile, but he says he's too old for the job. I wouldn't mind Quintus Sertorius but Lucius Cornelius is implacably opposed; I don't know why. Perhaps our nomination is open to negotiation with a suitable Bonus."

Cato nodded to himself. "This might shock you, Marcus Livius, but I think Silo would be a good choice."

"That does surprise me, Lucius Porcius!" Drusus remarked. "What's your line of reasoning?"

"I think that Silo might be able to draw a lot of support that might otherwise go to the Populares," Cato explained. "Look at it! He and Lucius Cornelius are seen as the twin heirs of Caius Marius, their demi-god. But Lucius Cornelius isn't eligible, having been Consul too recently. And Silo is completely Romanised; he'd be an excellent role-model to knock the rustic corners off his peers. His help in putting down the Sulpician Coup was brilliant. And I also like him personally.

"But most importantly, he has proven that he is totally constitutional in his behaviour and has done more than anyone else in history to put the Equites in their proper place. None of the Boni will admit it in public but they all wish they had been brave enough to write that Miletus Decree themselves!"

Drusus saw the attraction of that last point very clearly. At heart the Italianist Party and the Boni were both fundamentally socially conservative in their attitudes, supporting the old Republican virtues and the authority of the Senate against the encroachments of the money-grubbing opportunists of the Equites on one side and the Populists ever-ready to rouse the Lower Classes on the other. The only difference between them was whether or not the society they wished to conserve included Italians. Then, suddenly, the recent words from Sulla flooded back to him. Sulla, perhaps the most conservative Italianist of all, wanted to include Greeks as well! Push that thought back down fast, he told himself.

"Thank you, Lucius Porcius. Can I leave it to you to sound out Quintus Caecilius, and discuss his preference among the Italianists?"

"Yes; I'll do that, Marcus Livius. I'll report back as soon as I can."

As soon as Cato was politely out the door Drusus sent a runner to Sulla and another to Silo.

Chapter 6 – 669 Ab Urbe Condita (85 B.C.)

Five years of co-operation had left the two Conservative factions in the Senate with an excellent working relationship. As a result what would have been unthinkable ten years earlier now unfolded with an assured inevitability. Quintus Poppaeus Silo was elected as a Consul of Rome with Quintus Caecilius Metellus Pius as his colleague.

Mutilus had been to visit Pompeius Rufus in Asia and had been impressed by the Rufan Reforms. He had started to apply the same model in Sicily and the locals demanded that his governorship be continued while the system settled down. Sertorius was prorogued in the Spains and set in motion plans for a similar programme to that in Asia, but the wide diversity of sub-cultures in his imperium required considerable adjustment to be properly applied to the variety of local circumstances. All other Governorships are awarded to members of the Boni. Finally, Sulla and Cato were elected Censors. Four years and a great deal of civil disturbance had passed since Scaurus died. There was a serious need to update the Census.

Silo returned to Pontus as soon as the weather permitted safe sailing. He was confident that he would be back in Sinope long before the campaigning season. Although Tigranes had complied with the demand for withdrawal there was no guarantee that this would be a lasting peace. Several members of Mithridates' family had found refuge in Armenia, and Tigranes might well wish to place one on the Pontic throne as his puppet.

Silo was not surprised when King Nicomedes intercepted him as he passed through Nicomedia.

“Congratulations, Quintus Poppaeus!” the old king enthused as he entered Silo's office. “Everyone knew that you would be Consul one day; but so soon!” he continued. “Your star is so bright so early, purely because of your outstanding merit!”

“Thank you, Nicomedes,” Silo replied, his smile as deliberate as his refusal to accord his guest the honorific 'King'. He stood to greet his guest and offered his right arm, a courtesy as measured as his snub. “How can I be of assistance to you today?” he asked politely as Nicomedes took the proffered arm.

“No, Consul, it's long past time that I should be of use to you,” Nicomedes made a show of his gratitude. “I've already thanked you for liberating my kingdom from that scoundrel from the east, and for over six months you have deployed your troops and your civil administrators to put back in order that which had been overthrown. And they have done a marvellous job of it too!” Nicomedes offered his praise. “But I'm now able to restore Bithynian administration and have selected governors to put into place in all my prefectures.” Nicomedes went on, smiling. “Your men can now be transferred to Pontus, where the need is greater.”

“Indeed, the need is much greater in Pontus, Nicomedes! How truly you have spoken!” Silo agreed heartily. “Tell me; how many of your hand-picked men are fluent in Pontic?”

Nicomedes stood still, confused. “Some, but not all; but why do you ask?”

"I ask because I have a great need for administrators in the new Pontic areas, and very few Romans or Greeks can understand their dialect." Silo shrugged to show his quandary. "How are my men to be confident that they are fully aware of their circumstances, if they need to have everything translated for them?"

"That will not be a problem, Consul!" Nicomedes beamed. "I will assign as many translators as you might need. Our border regions are full of bi-linguals, some of them even literate!"

"Excellent!" Silo enthused. "Quintus Pompeius Rufus in Ephesus has trained up almost a hundred men in the arts of administration, Asian style; but they speak only Greek. Your translators are exactly what we need. Can you provide a thousand? Preferably as high-born as possible, because they'll have considerable authority in their own hands."

"I'll see to it right away, Consul," Nicomedes agreed. "Is there anything else I can arrange for you?"

"Ah, yes; there are a few things," Silo started as though surprised. "But how careless of me! I have not yet allowed you to sit! Here, have a chair." Silo swept his arm towards a couch. Nicomedes waddled over to the couch and sat. The relief showed on his face. Silo grabbed the back of his office chair and turned it towards Nicomedes.

"The Rufan System is being introduced throughout Asia, Bithynia, Galatia; in fact, throughout all of Anatolia." Silo started to set the context. "This is a single, uniform, standardised method of civil administration. It provides justice in the law courts, certainty in business transactions, and security of personal rights. It also provides for an efficient and equitable means of collecting the taxes required to pay for all these benefits of civilisation. You shall remain in authority in Bithynia but your exercise of authority will be required to observe a few basic principles." Silo paused deliberately, to draw Nicomedes into discussion. Nicomedes sensed the question that he was required to ask.

"And what are these principles, Consul?"

"I'm glad you have understood the situation, Nicomedes," Silo continued, implying that Nicomedes had already agreed. "First, you may make no laws or decrees that our Legate considers offensive to Rome's interests or civil good order. Second, your courts shall be presided over by men independent of your control. They shall consider each case on the basis of the evidence presented and the law. They may not favour one man over another on any other basis and our Legate reserves the right to quash any decision he considers unjust. In this regard he will serve your people in the same way that a Tribune of the People does back in Rome. Third, your personal wealth shall be separated from the kingdom's Treasury. Your wealth is your own, subject to the law, but the treasury of the kingdom may be spent only for the public good." Silo looked at Nicomedes steadily, inviting a comment.

Nicomedes returned the look, his lips smiling but his eyes hard. At last he replied. "Those are very interesting suggestions, Consul. They really do deserve to be discussed at greater length."

"In fact, Nicomedes, they are so good that they deserve to be adopted immediately," Silo responded. "We can talk about the details of implementation tomorrow, and be finished before sunset. I can't delay here any longer than that."

"Such haste!" Nicomedes decried. "It would be such a pity if such important reforms can't be agreed, all for the sake of delaying a few days!"

Silo had taken enough of this banter. "You seem to misunderstand the situation, Nicomedes. Allow me to enlighten you." Silo started to count off the points on the fingers of one hand. "First, Bithynia was completely over-run and conquered by Mithridates. As of that time, you had lost your kingdom. Second, Bithynia was not regained by you or any forces under your command. You have no claim by right of re-conquest. Third, Rome conquered Bithynia from Mithridates, completely without any assistance from any other power. Therefore Rome has an indisputable claim by right of conquest. Fourth, Rome is inclined slightly, but not all that strongly, towards appointing you as Governor of Bithynia, with the title 'Ethnarch'. This will require you to acknowledge that you are not sovereign but a subject of Rome. The other option under consideration is to join Bithynia to Asia to form a single Proconsular Province. Finally, if you don't accept the first four points in full and without reservation, you are expendable."

Silo raised an eyebrow.

"There's no need to respond immediately. You may go now and return at the third hour tomorrow morning. Don't be late!" Silo stood and gestured towards the door. Nicomedes was old enough, experienced enough, wise enough, and (most of all) frightened enough to stand and walk out without opening his mouth. "And when you come tomorrow, please bring with you a list of at least twenty suitable men to act as translators on the staff of our Administrators in Pontus. Don't forget now!" Silo called after him.

"Marcus!" Silo called to his secretary in the corner desk. Within a moment Marcus was at his side. "Send a few contubernia down to the Treasury of the city. Do it immediately," Silo ordered. "If anyone from Nicomedes asks for anything to be withdrawn, he is to be told that nothing will be released except to Nicomedes in person and in response to a written instruction. I am to be informed immediately. If Nicomedes demands anything without putting it in writing, he is to be arrested. And if he makes any claim to be King of Bithynia, he is to be arrested." Marcus saluted and turned on his heel.

Nicomedes behaved exactly as Silo had expected. By sunset Nicomedes had been arrested and placed under guard in Silo's Praetorium. He was held in a comfortable enough room, if any confinement under six armed soldiers can ever be considered 'comfortable'.

"Ah, Nicomedes! Whoever would have thought that you were nothing but a common criminal!" Silo cooed to him as he entered Nicomedes' room.

"Consul! I object in the strongest possible terms!" Nicomedes started to bluster. "Not only am I a sovereign in my own land, but I was going about my lawful business when your ruffians seized me!"

Silo stopped suddenly. His eyes were harsh.

"Stand when a Consul of Rome enters the room!" he barked. Nicomedes gaped for a moment, and then dragged his huge body to stand.

"I have already told you, Nicomedes, you are NOT a sovereign," Silo continued. "Nor are you going about your lawful business when you demand public money from the Treasury without the authorisation of the city authority, which in this case is my Administrator, not you." Silo slowly paced across in front of Nicomedes, looking him up and down. "You have been told to separate your personal wealth from public funds. Yet you presented the city treasury with a demand for – and I quote – 'all the gold you have on hand'!" Silo shook his head as if in amazement. "My Administrator asserts that your demand can be considered criminal. If proven, the penalty is death." Silo came to a halt.

"You will be tried the day after tomorrow, at the third hour. The trial shall be held in public, in the Market Square. I will permit you three runners, so you can summon any witnesses or advocates you might want to call upon." Silo clapped his hands, and three of the slaves that had been arrested with Nicomedes as part of his retinue entered the room. "These men will have free passage to and from you at any time, with up to three unarmed men with each of them at any one time. I have already granted them immunity, so they have no reason to run away, and I have promised them a talent of silver each if they serve you faithfully. You shall be the judge of whether or not they deserve it. And here is as much paper and ink as you might require," Silo gestured to one of them to place a box on the table in the room, "and a few quills. Start calling for advocates and witnesses and preparing your defence." Silo left the room abruptly, closing the door behind him.

The Advocate for Nicomedes had made a point of getting to bed only a few hours after midnight, lest he appear poorly in public the next morning. That had been easy enough; the defence case was simple and straightforward. Now he appeared in the Market Square in a brilliant white robe, subtly scented and with enough facial makeup to appear strong, intelligent and stern without it being too obviously an artefact. He carried himself with a solemn dignity and confidence. Then he found that this case would not be tried before a jury of eminent citizens of Nicomedia. Silo was there in his curile chair as sole judge.

"Lord Silo! It is an unexpected pleasure to have you presiding here today!" Antiochus declaimed. "But it is the law of this city that all criminal cases be judged by a jury of eminent persons. Surely a Consul of the Roman Republic would be scrupulous and meticulous to observe the law?"

"I am aware of what was once the law in this place," Silo replied with gravity. "But this city is now a Roman domain, and Roman law will be followed."

"Even so, lord Silo; does not Roman law require that cases of robbery be heard by a jury of Senators?" Antiochus pointed out.

"You are most learned in Roman law, no less than the laws of the former Kingdom of Bithynia," Silo agreed. "However, I am the only man of Senatorial rank available. Besides, as Consul I have imperium in this place."

"Yet even so, lord Silo; you are a party to this case, so that would preclude you from being judge."

"I am not a party to this case, honoured Antiochus. I bring no charge against this man, nor shall I give any testimony. I am here to judge between a prosecution brought by the City Administrator and the defence presented by your client."

Antiochus bowed slightly in response. It was clear that Silo would not be induced to disqualify himself from hearing this case. Not that Antiochus had ever expected him to do so but it was worth a try and at least these matters were now on record. "Then please, let the prosecution state its case." Antiochus walked over to his chair and desk, and sat. Silo nodded towards the City Administrator, who rose from his chair and strode to the space in front of Silo.

"The prosecution asserts that the defendant, Nicomedes, formerly King of Bithynia, presented himself at the city treasury yesterday and demanded that all the gold on hand within the treasury should be delivered into his possession. This demand was accompanied by a written instruction in which Nicomedes asserted that he was King of Bithynia. In fact he had already been authoritatively informed that he was not sovereign. He had also been explicitly and authoritatively informed that his personal wealth must be considered separate from the wealth of the city.

"Nicomedes, having no rightful claim to that wealth, attempted by means of this demand, both spoken and written, to misappropriate public assets to his personal wealth by making claims which he knew to be unfounded. This is the offence of fraud. For a fraud of this value the death penalty may be applied at the discretion of the Court." The Administrator sat.

Antiochus rose to his feet, and paced slowly, pensively into the space before Silo. Silo had said publicly that he was not going to be a witness in this case; that means that his conversation with Nicomedes earlier in the day can't be presented as evidence. That might be the chink in the case! Whether or not Silo would import it into his judgement was another question, but at least it would be an obvious illegality which Silo might not want to hang around his own neck.

"This allegation is so serious that it must be examined with great care," Antiochus started. "Yet, there is not one shred of evidence, not one witness. How can I defend my client against so insubstantial a case? Indeed, why should I need to? Let us examine the evidence and the testimony and then we will see this fog of false allegations vanish like a mist under the searching rays of the sun!" Antiochus returned to his seat.

The Administrator stood again. "I call Andronicos as a witness." A well-dressed man in his middle years stepped forward. "Please state your name and official position." The Administrator prompted.

"Andronicos Polites; I am the Superintendent of the Treasury of Nicomedia."

"Did anyone claiming to be a servant of the accused Nicomedes speak to you yesterday?"

"Yes, he first spoke to me shortly before noon."

"And what did he say?" the Administrator continued.

"He told me to make ready all of the gold in the Treasury, and that King Nicomedes would collect it in three hours' time."

“He definitely referred to Nicomedes as 'King'?”

“Yes,” Andronicos confirmed.

“And how did you respond?”

“I told him that nothing could be released except to King Nicomedes in person, and under his written instruction,” Andronicos replied. “This has been Standard Practice since the city was liberated from Mithridates, as decreed by lord Silo. Public money may only be delivered into the hand of the person authorised to withdraw it, and must be exchanged for a written directive to release those funds.” Andronicos went on to explain. “This is to ensure that the person in whose name the withdrawal is made is fully aware of what is being done in his name.”

“So you referred to him as 'King', too?”

“Yes, I did,” Andronicos agreed, bowing his head slightly.

“Why?” the Administrator probed.

“Because, to the best of my knowledge at the time, Nicomedes was still King of Bithynia.”

The Administrator nodded. “So what happened next?”

“The servant was quite angry. But I agreed to gather together all the gold we held in preparation while he informed the King that it would not be released unless he presented himself in person and with a written instruction.”

“And then?”

“He left, and I started to empty the store rooms into chests. Then a message arrived from Consul Silo, giving me specific directions about what to do if Nicomedes arrived.”

“What were these directions?”

“It basically reminded me of Standard Practice and made clear that this extended to withdrawals by Nicomedes. First, I was to ask for Nicomedes' written instruction. I was then to read it, and note if it contained any claim to be 'King of Bithynia'. If it did not contain any such claim, I was to ask on what basis he was asking for the gold. I was to continue questioning him until he provided a valid basis for having the authority to make that request. If he made the claim that he was demanding it as King of Bithynia, I was to inform the commander of the guard. If he claimed authority on any other basis, I was to ask for evidence of that authority.”

“In fact,” the Administrator continued, “What actually happened?”

“Nicomedes sent in a man to demand I come out to speak to him. I did that with my assistant and we spoke with him as he sat in his carriage in the street outside the Treasury.”

“Did he give you a written instruction?”

“Yes he did.”

“Is this the instruction he gave you?” The Administrator reached into a leather-bound folder, and drew out a sheet of paper. He handed it to Andronicos, who scanned it quickly.

“Yes, that is it,” Andronicos agreed.

“Please read it out aloud.”

Andronicos cleared his throat and commenced reading.

*Nicomedes IV Philopator, King of Bithynia,
to the Officers of the City Treasury,*

I command you to release to us as much gold as can be assembled into a transportable form by the tenth hour of this day. I require you to package this gold into chests and other containers appropriate to a journey. I will endorse this instruction with the amount of gold provided when this is known at the time of collection.

Make haste! The prosperity of the Kingdom is at stake!

The Administrator waited for some time after the completion of the reading to ensure the words were savoured by all.

“What did you do when you read this instruction?”

“I thanked him for putting the instruction into writing, and went inside. Then I informed the commander of the guard, as per my orders from the Consul, that Nicomedes had demanded public gold on the basis of him being King of Bithynia.”

“Thank you, Andronicos. I have no further questions for the moment.” The Administrator turned to Antiochus. “Your witness, defence.”

Antiochus waved a hand casually. “His testimony is irrelevant to the case.”

As Andronicos walked out of the space, the Administrator called for Marcus Amaelianus as his next witness.

“My name is Marcus Amaelianus. I am on the personal staff of the Consul Quintus Poppeius Silo,” he volunteered without prompting.

“Marcus, were you present in the Consul's office when he and Nicomedes spoke yesterday morning?”

“I was present during one such conversation, sir. I don't know if there were any others.”

“Excellent! I like a witness who exercises such clarity and precision!” the Administrator smiled. “Do you recall the matters discussed?”

“I recall the points clearly, sir, but not word-for-word.”

“Did any parts of this conversation touch on the subject of the status and role of Nicomedes?”

“Yes, sir. That was discussed in some detail,” Marcus confirmed.

“Please tell us, in as succinct form as possible, what the Consul told Nicomedes about his status and public role?”

“The Consul told Nicomedes that he had lost his kingdom when Mithridates over-ran it and he was unable to repulse the invasion. Bithynia had become Mithridates' by right of conquest. Rome had defeated Mithridates with no assistance from Nicomedes, and Rome thereby had an irrefutable claim to all territories taken from Mithridates, again by right of conquest. Therefore Rome had sovereignty over Bithynia. Rome was prepared to appoint Nicomedes as the Roman Governor of Bithynia with the title 'Ethnarch', but only under certain

conditions. These conditions included a requirement that Nicomedes explicitly acknowledge that he was himself a subject of Rome. Another condition was that there must be a strict separation of public funds from Nicomedes' personal wealth."

"And did Nicomedes hear and understand these conditions?"

"Judging by his reaction, he understood them very clearly." Marcus confirmed.

"After Nicomedes left the Consul's office, were you ordered to take a detachment of soldiers to the city treasury?"

"Yes, sir."

"Why?" The Administrator asked.

"I was under orders to arrest Nicomedes if he attempted to take any public gold out of the treasury under the pretence that he was still the King of Bithynia."

"Why would you expect him to do that?"

"I had formed no expectation, sir. I simply followed my orders."

"Well, what happened at the Treasury?"

"Andronicos and his assistant were approached by a man in fine garments and asked to follow him into the street. A short time afterwards Andronicos approached me and showed me a letter which he said had been given to him by Nicomedes. This letter contained an assertion that Nicomedes was King, and an instruction to supply him with all the gold available."

"How did you respond to that?" The administrator pushed on.

"I thought it highly improbable that all the gold in the Treasury was Nicomedes own personal wealth. Surely at least some of it must be public property. And the letter instructed this to be provided to Nicomedes on the basis that he was King, and the fate of the Kingdom depended upon swift compliance. Therefore, I determined that the conditions set by the Consul for the arrest of Nicomedes had been satisfied. I took my soldiers into the street and arrested him."

The Administrator turned to Antiochus. "Your witness."

Antiochus rose to his feet and strolled into the space. "You say that the Consul told my client that he was no longer King of Bithynia...?" The statement was left hanging, inviting a response.

"Yes, sir."

"Did he provide my client with any evidence to support that assertion?"

"What do you mean by 'evidence', sir?"

"Did he show my client any decree from the Senate and the People of Rome, deposing my client?"

"There was no document shown to Nicomedes. The word of a Consul of Rome is proof enough."

"So one Consul of Rome has the authority to depose a sovereign king? Without any reference to the Senate? Without any reference to his colleague? I thought Roman law prevented one man from being king, but this would make him even more than a king!"

"It was my understanding of the conversation that the Consul did not depose Nicomedes. Rather, he made the point that Mithridates had deposed him by means of conquest," Marcus responded.

Antiochus had not expected that. His line of argument collapsed under him. He rapidly changed his line of attack.

"My point, Marcus, is simple. No competent authority has determined that Nicomedes is no longer King. Consul Quintus Poppeius Silo has asserted it, but King Nicomedes asserts the contrary. In a case where two men disagree, is it not appropriate that a judgement be sought before either side presumes to act unilaterally?"

"Consul Quintus Poppeius Silo, as the man holding Roman imperium over all those territories conquered by Rome from Mithridates, is himself the competent authority to make that judgement."

Antiochus could not dent this response. But there was one last line he might try. "Which leads us to the inevitable conclusion that the Consul is indeed a party to this case, and therefore should not be the judge in it. The prosecution is condemned out of the mouth of its own witness! This whole process is illegal." Antiochus crossed to his chair and sat.

Marcus waited a moment, and then left the hearing space. The Administrator walked back into the space. "That is the prosecution case, Consul. We have demonstrated that Nicomedes was aware that he was no longer King, but attempted to take funds from the city Treasury as though he remained King. That is fraud, pure and simple. However, the defence has implicitly suggested that Nicomedes might still have considered himself the rightful king, in spite of Rome asserting otherwise. If he holds to this defence then he stands in danger of being found guilty of a much more serious crime; that of Sedition.

"So I must ask the defence to clarify one crucial point. Does Nicomedes acknowledge that he is genuinely and properly a subject of Rome? If he does, this inevitably means he knows he is not King of Bithynia, and effectively becomes a plea of guilty to this charge of Fraud. Or does he maintain that he is still King of Bithynia, which is Roman territory by right of conquest? If he continues to maintain that he is a sovereign over lands rightfully Roman, then he makes himself guilty of Sedition!" The Administrator sat.

Antiochus felt a shiver go through his body. That was the trap! Silo's intention here is not simply to have Nicomedes found guilty of fraud; it is to either wring an abdication from him or execute him for rebellion! This was not a criminal case, but a political one! Antiochus stood. "I seek permission to approach the Judge."

"Approach," Silo invited him.

Antiochus not only approached Silo; he bent slightly to whisper to him. My lord Consul; if my client acknowledges Roman sovereignty, what punishment would you impose?"

"If Nicomedes acknowledges Roman sovereignty and declares himself a freeman subject to Rome, then he will be fined but not otherwise harmed."

"Thank you, my lord," Antiochus went back to Nicomedes and there was a whispered exchange between them. Finally Antiochus stood and walked to the space. "My client apologises for his actions. He declares himself to be no King, but simply a citizen of Bithynia, subject to Roman law as any other man. He begs the court for mercy."

Silo sat unmoving. "Then let him do so, here and now for himself."

Antiochus glanced across to Nicomedes who sat stunned by Silo's response. It was one thing for an advocate to do such a thing on one's behalf; but to actually have to humiliate himself in person? It took almost a minute of silence before Nicomedes pushed himself to his feet.

"Consul, I apologise..."

"No!" Silo snapped impatiently. "If you would address the judge you shall do so from the floor of the court, not from a corner!"

Nicomedes trudged to front-and-centre. "Consul, I apologise for my actions. I acknowledge Roman sovereignty over all the lands I once ruled. I declare myself to be a subject of Rome, and under Roman law."

"Do you renounce all claims to any throne," Silo pushed. "Now and in the future, for yourself and any claiming to be your heirs?"

"I renounce all such claims," Nicomedes choked out.

Silo stood. "It is the judgement of this court that the accused be spared his life. He shall not be subjected to servitude. He shall be fined, but in all other regards he shall be unharmed. The defendant shall prepare a comprehensive list of all his personal assets, including any which might currently be in the hands of others. He shall not dispose of any of his assets, other than as required to routinely sustain himself and satisfy his minimum obligations. He shall also prepare a list of all who have received favour or benefit from him in times past, and the value of that benefit. This listing shall be provided to me within seven days. Once this is done, the amount of the fine shall be determined. This court is now closed."

Silo moved throughout Roman Anatolia, setting up Administrators in all the main cities and introducing the Rufan Reforms. The terms of the Miletus Decree were scrupulously honoured throughout all the former province of Asia, but with once-off fines imposed on cities which had been tardy in resisting Mithridates. The benefits of the Miletus Decree were also granted to other cities throughout Bithynia and other territories which had not allied themselves to Mithridates. But this leniency stopped when it came to the cities of Pontus and its allies. These cities were virtually stripped bare of any transportable assets not required for production. The only mercies shown, and it must be agreed that these were considerable, was that rape, wanton slaughter and burning were prevented. Although the cities were reduced to poverty in cash and treasure terms, yet their citizens and their means of production were left intact. Silo had no interest in destroying local economies which he wanted to be as productive as possible so they could pay their taxes in the future.

Unlike the Publicani regimes so hated among the Greeks, Silo's demands were imposed on the cities, not on the individuals. This was cheaper for him to

administer and brought the odium upon the city councils rather than on Rome. Yet even so, the natives were not inclined to rise in revolt. These measures were no harsher than had been imposed upon them by Mithridates in his time and were made somewhat more tolerable by one thing that had never been the case under their own kings; the level of tribute was set and known. There was at least the confidence that once the bill had been paid there would not be any additional arbitrary exactions.

Cato and Sulla commenced a new Census as soon as Spring arrived. By winter they had confirmed what all the Italianists already knew, but very few of the Boni; there were many Italian nobles eligible for a place in the Senate who had not been appointed. Cato was scandalised.

“Lucius Cornelius, it's a good thing that this Census is not being conducted by two men from the one party,” Cato stated. “If the Censors were both Italianists, the Boni would never believe the results, and if they were two Boni Censors there would be every chance of an attempted cover-up. That could cause great unrest.”

“Yes,” agreed Sulla. “I remember when Sextus Julius was Censor. Marcus Livius had to ask many of the Italians to not seek Senate membership, or the Boni would have exploded. But surely you knew that already, Lucius Porcius!”

Cato shook his head in worry. “I knew that there were many Italians who were eligible for the Senate but were not appointed; but I didn't know there were *this* many!” He looked searchingly to Sulla. “What are we to do?”

“You are asking me, an Italianist?” Sulla replied with a smile. “What do you expect me to say? Fill the vacancies on the basis of qualifications, starting at the top and going down!”

“But Lucius Cornelius! Even you must realise that if we fill all the Senate vacancies that have arisen over the last five years purely on the basis of eligibility, then almost every new Senator will be an Italian! How do you think the Boni will react? They will see it as the End of Civilisation As We Know It! Our modus vivendi will be destroyed, the Senate will be split down the middle, and that will open Rome to the power of the Rabble.”

Sulla nodded his understanding of his colleague's fears. “Yes, you are right. We have to take a completely new approach to this; still within the values of the Republic, but those values might have to operate through different structures.” Sulla pulled his focus back to Cato.

“I think we might do well to talk to the Consuls. Let's see what they have to offer. And Drusus, too.”

It was fortunate that Silo was back in Rome, having appointed Lucius Glauca as his General in the Field with Titus Lafrenius and Herius Asinius under him. The five met in the house of Metellus Pius. The table was piled with fruit and finger-foods, and Chian wine filled their goblets.

“Friends, Lucius Cornelius and I have almost finished our Census. We think we might have a problem,” Cato took the lead. “The problem is that we have fifty two vacancies in the Senate. The strictly correct way of filling these vacancies is to list all men eligible for the Senate, which means cutting out anyone involved in

commerce or other non-Senatorial occupations, and appoint them starting from the most eligible. If we follow this process, then forty eight will be Italians.”

Metellus was stunned. His jaw dropped in shock and horror, and after a moment he very carefully put his wine down on the table in the middle of the gathering. At length he found a weak voice. “But... that cannot be! Are you telling me that only four Romans against almost fifty Italians? There must be many more eligible Romans than there are Italians!”

“Of course there are, Quintus Caecilius,” Sulla responded. “But those Romans are already in the Senate! We are only taking about new admissions, not the Senate as a whole. Once this batch is in, the next intake will be roughly half-and-half, and the next batch after that will be mostly Roman. This situation has only arisen because of the backlog when Crassus and Caesar admitted none after the citizenship Census.”

“Even so...” Metellus’ voice still had not recovered, “People will not see the next intake, only the one they are looking at. They will think that this ratio will be the new norm. It will create the impression that the Senate will become an Italian Club within a generation.”

“Which is precisely the problem,” Cato re-entered the discussion. “The difficulty is the perception, not the actual balance of the Senate as such.”

“But with these extra numbers, the Italianists will outnumber us Boni!” Metellus objected. “We will not be able to stop them!” Metellus pleaded with his fellow-Bonus.

“Take a look at the last five years, Quintus Caecilius,” Cato answered flatly. “They have known all that time that they could have the numbers if they wanted to take over; but they haven’t made a move. Both Marcus Livius and Lucius Cornelius have been very restrained as Consuls and the Italianists have only ever put forward two candidates for Praetorships, even though they could have filled more positions if they had set their minds to it. I’ve come to realise that these Italianists have been stunningly patient with us; more patient than we have deserved!” Cato’s voice, having started deadpan, was becoming more passionate as he worked into his thesis.

“And as for an Italianist take-over... The biggest threats to the Republic in that time have been a Popularist coup by Marius and Sulpicius, and then that attempt by Pompeius Strabo and that dolt Ahenobarbus, both of whom were Boni; two takeovers, both by Romans, and both put down by Lucius Cornelius the Italianist!

“The Italianists have been the salvation of the Republic twice in five years, while the Boni and the Populares have been the ones trying to take over! So take those Boni blinkers off your face, and start looking at reality instead of believing your own scary stories!” The silence as Cato finished this rebuke was eerie. Cato, defending the Italianists as saviours of the Republic! It sounded unreal. Metellus’ jaw worked, but no sound came out.

Eventually Sulla spoke. “Thank you for the kind words, Lucius Porcius; but this isn’t a matter of Boni versus Italianists. It is a common crisis which we need to solve together.” Sulla looked around the ring of faces. “What do we do

to stop another Boni coup attempt? How do we re-assure everyone that the sky will not fall in?"

Metellus found his voice. "There is only one way possible," he answered. "Don't admit so many Italians. Ration them!"

Sulla threw him a wry smile, midway between pity and disgust. "So much for Boni support for the Mos Majorum!" he snorted. "Noble words when it suits them, but always looking for a way to twist their way out when it works against them!"

Metellus stood suddenly. "Do not insult me in my own house, Lucius Cornelius!"

Sulla stood slowly, casually, "My apologies, Quintus Caecilius. Let us go to my house instead."

Drusus and Cato both leapt to the feet at this rejoinder.

"Now, my lords!" Cato urged. "This sort of confrontation is precisely what we need to avoid! Please, resume your seats and look for ways of controlling this situation."

Sulla looked to Cato and Drusus and sat. Cato and Drusus followed him, leaving Metellus alone on his feet.

"Quintus Caecilius," Cato implored him, "Will you be part of the solution, or part of the problem?"

"I will be part of the solution," Metellus answered. "We must limit the number of Italians who may be admitted to the Senate; that's the only solution that's acceptable." Metellus lowered himself to his couch.

Throughout the discussion Silo had remained silent and still; the other four had almost forgotten he was present. "I fear that my colleague is not himself at the moment. The shock has been too great for him." He turned to address Metellus personally.

"I would ask a favour of you, Quintus Caecilius; please don't mention this to anyone outside this room for the moment. The Censors have raised this with us Consuls as a matter of courtesy, and for the good governance of the Republic. It should not be made a party-political battleground. I fear that if the issue becomes widely-known we will have another Pompeius Strabo incident; and this might not be managed as well as the last one."

"Remember that the Italians have been model citizens. If their reward for this is to be placed under further restrictions, there might be some who would impose their own solution, with no less conviction than you might like to impose yours. We need to think carefully, and then act carefully, or we two could become the last Consuls in history of the Republic."

"Rome has been threatened before, and no less seriously," Metellus replied sourly. "Yet Rome has always come through, stronger for the test. And that's because Rome belongs to the Romans; not the Celts, not the Carthaginians, not the Germans, and not even the Italians! Rome must always be under the control of the Senate and the People of Rome!"

Silo took a deep breath. "You insult me, a Consul of Rome, but I am prepared to suffer that rather than start a civil war. What are you prepared to suffer to keep the peace?"

Metellus waved away his unintended insult. "You know that I have total respect for you, Quintus Poppaeus. I was speaking in generalities, no more. But the core point remains. Romans must not become a minority in their own Republic. Find a way to ensure this if you can, and I will support it. But if not," Metellus shrugged, "It would not be the first time Rome fought for its survival."

The other four men were appalled. "Is this why I laid aside my own reputation while Consul, and became a fugitive in the lands of the Marsi?" Sulla asked. "Only to betray those who sheltered me and who thereby saved Rome from Mad Marius?" He leaned forward abruptly. "Let no-one forget that the Head Count still regard me and Quintus Poppaeus as the Heirs of Marius. If we can't work with the Boni to save Rome from the rabble, then perhaps we need to consider working with the rabble to save Rome from the Boni!" He glared at Metellus.

"You are indeed a good man, Quintus Caecilius" Sulla said, softening his face and voice while punning on the party name 'Bonus'. "I believe that you genuinely want to respect the Mos Majorum, however imperfectly you understand it. But now is your greatest challenge; can you take the next step up, from being a good man to being a great man? Or will you fail Rome at a time when she is facing a threat much greater than any that has ever come from outside? Because now, just like a woman with her first pregnancy, she is facing her greatest threat possible. Can the Rome of today give birth to the Rome of tomorrow? Or will she die in the process?"

As Sulla put this question Drusus was overcome with the memory of that private talk some months earlier. Sulla was even speaking of Greeks being adopted into the Mos Majorum and Rome becoming not a single race of men, but a single point of allegiance for all civilised men. If Metellus could even guess where this would lead, he would commit suicide on the spot!

"The Rome of tomorrow must be the Rome of her founding!" Metellus exploded. "How could she be otherwise, and still be Rome?"

"So you want to bring back the kings, do you?" Sulla taunted Metellus. "That was the Rome of her founding!" Sulla put up a hand to stop the reaction; and so grim was his face that Metellus was restrained. "A city must grow, and a nation must grow, or it dies. And as it grows it must change. A new-born baby is a blessing but we work eagerly for that boy to become a man. A city, a Republic, is no different. It must continue to mature, so that everything that was inherent but hidden within it at birth may blossom to fulfilment." Sulla dropped his raised hand and leant back in his couch.

Metellus paused before speaking. "Sometimes you scare me, Lucius Cornelius," he said darkly. "Who knows what end you have in mind when you say such things?"

"I've come to know him well enough as we have served together, Quintus Caecilius," Cato answered for him. "He has in mind the Glory of Rome. Question his policy all you like, but never question his purpose."

Silo looked around the group. "Nice words, everyone, but this simple Italian wants to get back to practicalities. What are we to do? Or should we just go away and think about it for a month?"

"I think this problem is fundamentally an Italianist responsibility," Drusus commented. "We set the process in motion, so it's up to us to manage it. So perhaps we should come up with a realistic proposition to put to Quintus Caecilius and Lucius Porcius, and then see how it can be adjusted to meet their own legitimate concerns." He flicked his eyes to the two Boni. "All we ask is that any proposal we make should be considered on its merits as a compromise that will keep the peace. You mustn't demand a total victory, only something that we can all live with."

Cato nodded his agreement. Metellus looked more doubtful. "If you can come up with an answer that will actually be acceptable, I'll welcome it."

Drusus, Silo and Sulla stood to take their leave. Cato stood as well, to offer them his arm, and Metellus followed. The three Italianists were soon on the road and heading for Drusus' house.

"If only Scaurus were still with us!" Drusus said as the three sat in his triclinium.

"Yes," agreed Sulla. "I miss the Old Fox, too."

"But still, you must have something in mind, Lucius Cornelius. You're always ahead of the game."

"Actually, I do have a rough outline of a proposal," Sulla admitted. "But I owe it to Quintus Poppeus, and his Miletus Decree."

Silo looked puzzled. "So I'm a genius but don't know it?" he joked.

"In fact, yes you are," Sulla confirmed candidly. "Or it might be better to say, you have an instinct, and that comes to the surface in the Decree. The pattern for the relationship of the Asian cities to Rome can be applied to the Italian Tribes as well, and even to the City of Rome within the larger Republic." All eyes were on Sulla, begging to have this Delphic utterance explained.

"Look," Sulla started, as he leant forward on the couch. "What is Rome? Is it the city, or is it the Republic? Everyone seems to think that the City is the Republic, and the Republic is the City; but this is no longer true. So think of one possible arrangement. Just as each Italian Tribe has its Tribal administration, subject to the laws of the Republic, and just as each Asian city has its own ethnarch or Council, why can't Rome itself have its own local administration separate from the Republic as a whole? This would allow the Roman Senate to be composed entirely of Romans, and the Roman Comitia would include only men from the Roman Tribes. In this way Rome would be entirely Roman. But the Republic as a whole would be under the authority of a Republic Senate, drawn from all tribes of the Republic. And a Republic Comitia, too, if you think it's needed."

"In this way Romans would be entirely responsible for Rome, for maintaining Rome and its services. Meanwhile the Republic Senate would

administer all things that are common to all tribes and cities such as roads, the army, and the Provinces. Of course, Romans would still have the dominant voice in the Republic Senate, but because it's one step removed from the city of Rome a stronger Italian representation wouldn't be so obtrusive." Sulla looked around to see how this comments were being absorbed.

Drusus was the first to speak. "How would this system be financed?"

"Each Italian tribe would raise its own taxes or revenue for local works, like its own roads, water and sanitation, just as the Asian cities do, and the city of Rome would do the same. But on top of that, each Italian Tribe and Rome itself would be subject to a Republic Tax just like the Asian cities. This would pay for the Army and Republic-wide responsibilities like major roads and Provincial Governors' expenses."

Marcus Livius," Silo asked, "If this new Republic Senate were to be set up from scratch, how many would be Italians?"

"That would depend on how many members it has," Drusus replied. "If it had, say, fifty members, then almost all of them would be Romans because the very wealthiest of the Senatorial Class are Romans. But if it had a few hundred members, then the proportion of Italians would be higher; perhaps one in four, perhaps more. I could work through the rolls and find out."

"And this compares to about one in five if the existing Senate were to be filled in the usual way?"

"Yes," Drusus replied. "Starting from scratch would catch up the backlog by excluding the lowest-ranked Romans who were appointed when Italians didn't qualify."

"I like it," Silo announced. "Not only does it give better Italian representation, but it also means that taxes paid by Italians won't be spent on projects that benefit only Rome itself; at least the proportion that's paid as Tribal taxes will stay in the area."

"Don't be too certain of that," Sulla warned him. "A Republic Senate dominated by Romans would still be able to divert much of the Republic revenue to Rome's pet requirements, and the cost of genuinely Republic projects will be made up by increasing the Republic part of the tax."

"Even so, it's better than the existing arrangements," Silo shrugged.

"I agree too," Drusus added. "I'll look through the rolls and come up with lists of what size Senate will give what proportion of Italians. When I have those numbers we'll be in a position to bargain with the Boni. Our fall-back position would be to make a new, smaller exclusively Roman Senate for the city from scratch, while the existing Senate becomes the Republic Senate, but adding Italians without any special quota. This way, existing Senators will become Republic Senators, and Italians will have no say in the running of Rome itself."

Sulla reported back to Cato and Metellus four days later with a fully-detailed organisational structure. Metellus was puzzled and could see no reason why there should be two Senates. Cato was quicker to see what was being proposed.

“Quintus Caecilius,” he explained to his fellow-Bonus, “The key concept here is that the Republic is not just Rome; it’s all citizens, be they Roman or Italian. If each Italian Tribe has its own local administration to look after local issues free from interference by outsiders, then it’s only fitting that the city of Rome should also have its own administration without Italians having any say. And then, above all local bodies, is the Republic Senate. And yes, I agree that we don’t need a Republic Comiti. If the Comitia is restricted to city issues, then that keeps them away from any say in the Army. Leave that to the Senatorial class,” Cato added.

“But what do you mean by saying ‘the Republic is not just Rome’?” Metellus was struggling with the concept; his instincts simply would not let him imagine anything outside his own comfortable certainties. “What *is* the Republic, if not Rome?”

“The Republic is the Heir of Rome,” Sulla said bluntly. “There was a Rome before the Republic was established, and there will be a Republic even if Rome dies. Rome gave birth to the Republic; the Republic will always owe filial piety to Rome, but is now mature. She can’t stay tied to her mother’s apron forever.”

“And the granting of citizenship to the Italians was the critical turning point,” Metellus said bitterly, as at last the significance of the proposal snapped into clarity in his mind.

“Yes,” Sulla agreed. “That’s what happens to a family when children are born; the old must give way to the young eventually. Better that than to die childless.”

“But Quintus Caecilius, the key point here is that Rome will be ruled by Romans. Only they will be eligible for the city Senate,” Cato pressed his fellow-Bonus. “Italian influence will be removed from Rome! Isn’t that what you want? And the only decisions where Italians will have any influence at all will be in the Republic Senate, where Romans will always have the majority and no Populares will be able to enter because their elected officers will only progress to the city Senate, not the Republic Senate!”

“This is a big win, Quintus Caecilius! We’ll get rid of the Italians from the city Senate, and the Populares from the Republic Senate!” Cato concluded.

Metellus was still not convinced. “Perhaps; but how is it to be achieved? I won’t agree until I see the text of the Law and have it properly examined and debated.”

“Of course! That’s assumed!” Cato agreed. “Lucius Cornelius, let’s draft the Law together and submit it to the Senate as soon as possible. Before we draw up new Senate lists.” he added.

“Absolutely!” Sulla agreed. “Let’s begin tomorrow!”

Sulla took his leave from Metellus, confident that Cato would be able to impress the Boni to be in favour of the proposal in the face of Metellus’ sheer blind stubbornness.

The proposed Law was introduced to the Senate in mid-October. It was titled “Cato’s Law Concerning the Senate and the Comitia”. Sulla and Silo had deliberately not attached their names to it, to avoid resentment from those of the Boni who would blindly oppose any law sponsored by an Italianist (‘Isn’t that all

of them?" Silo had quipped.) Metellus had been invited to examine the proposal before Cato took the bill to the Senate, but had refused to even read through it. Cato was convinced that Metellus simply couldn't grasp the concept behind the proposed law and he instinctively feared anything he could not understand.

"Conscript Fathers," Cato opened his address in support, "I know that many of you are uncomfortable that Italians have a voice in Rome's affairs. I am also uncomfortable with this arrangement. Although I accepted the extension of citizenship to Italians when Sextus Julius Caesar and Lucius Marcius Philippus were Consuls, I did so only to avoid the certainty of civil war, trusting in the assurances of Marcus Livius Drusus that he would use his influence as Patron to the Italian nobles to ensure that the Mos Majorum would be maintained. I acknowledge that Marcus Livius has fulfilled his word, and that our Italian brothers have acted with complete respect for our institutions and customs. Indeed, I would go further; that the Italians have twice been essential in the preservation of the Republic. They were vital to restoring the Republic when Sulpicius ruled the streets, and again when Pompeius Strabo threatened the same.

"But even so, my work as Censor this last year has revealed something that I can only consider profoundly disturbing. In the time since the last review of the Senatorial Lists the number of senatorial vacancies has increased to fifty two. Of the fifty two most eligible candidates for appointment to these vacancies, forty eight are Italians." After a moment of stunned silence the section of the Senate Chamber favoured by the Boni erupted. There was genuine outrage on many of the faces. Metellus, who held the fasces that month, could not be heard as he called for order. He resorted to walking to the centre of the floor and gesturing with his hands for calm. Eventually the outpouring of contempt faded.

"I agree with you, Conscript Fathers," Cato continued. "This is not acceptable! Why should Italians have such a large voice in the affairs of Rome, while we Romans have no say whatsoever in the Tribal affairs of the Italians?" The Boni section of the chamber erupted again, this time with cheering and clapping. This died away quickly as the Senators were eager to hear more. "So I propose a new Law that would exclude Italians from the Roman Senate, and also exclude them from the Roman Comitia!" Again a burst of applause, quickly fading.

"I propose the formation of a new body, which I will call the City Senate for clarity; and a new Comitia, which I will call the City Comitia. This City Senate and City Comitia will act in all ways as the current Senate and Comitia do now, except that only members of the thirty-five Roman tribes will be eligible to speak, vote or be elected. And these city bodies will be responsible for all that happens within Rome, without interference from Italians." More hearty applause interrupted Cato. He waited for it to pass.

"What, then, is to become of this Senate? This Senate, where Italians are permitted?" he asked rhetorically. "It will continue, but it will be restricted in its scope. It will be responsible for those things outside Rome. Matters such as the administration of the Provinces, Foreign Relations, the Army and the conduct of war, and all those other things that concern the Republic as a whole, outside the

pomerium.” He scanned the terraced seats. “In this way, we will grant the Italians their rights as citizens of the Republic, but they will not be able to interfere with or hold influence over anything peculiar to Rome itself.”

Cato returned to his seat. He did not want to confuse the situation by turning over the details one by one. The important thing was to ensure a positive frame of mind before these details were considered.

Silo stood, seeking the call. A couple of the Boni also stood and a handful of Italianists. “Quintus Poppaedius, please speak.” Metellus invited him, as the most senior man on his feet.

“As an Italian, I fully understand that Lucius Porcius might want to reduce any Italian influence in the city's internal administration. We Italians enjoy and indeed we treasure the autonomy of our own Tribal ways and it is entirely fair that Rome should enjoy the same autonomy. In fact, we Italians have been acting on this basis since we first became citizens. You will note that even when an Italian ranks first in the election of Praetors, we always pass the position of Urban Praetor to a Roman, out of respect for this principle. You might also have noted, when you observe Comitia meetings, that the Italian tribes refrain from voting on matters that don't extend outside the city walls. And you will also note that no Italian has ever sought election as a Tribune of the Plebs.

“So I accept and support this principle of Roman autonomy within the Republic and pledge to work with Lucius Porcius to establish the means by which this is realised. I also note that the composition of this body, the Senate of the Republic, will not suddenly be dominated by Italians. Even if over a hundred Italians are admitted to this Senate, there will still be three Romans for each Italian. But even that is to over-state the Italian influence; most Italians would rather stay on their own ancestral lands than move to Rome to take up a Senate seat. My guess is that fewer than twenty would accept appointment, even if it were offered. We Italians might seem as conspicuous as black dots on a white page; but the page itself continues to be mostly white!

“Finally, the proposal to remove all the City issues from the scope of this Senate is to be applauded. This will allow this body to spend more time considering the weightier issues before it. So in summary I can see plenty that I like in this proposal by Lucius Porcius, and nothing objectionable. He is to be congratulated and honoured, worthy of that same title as his illustrious grandfather; 'Cato the Censor'!” Even the Boni section rose to applaud Silo as he turned back to his curule chair. Some Senators remained standing. Sextus Julius Caesar, being an ex-Censor, was most senior.

“Sextus Julius, you have the floor,” Metellus announced.

Caesar walked to the centre of the floor. “There is indeed much to like about this proposal,” he commenced. “As one more inclined to the Popularis sentiment I can see merit in allowing the People of Rome to make their own decisions without bothering the Italians, though I do acknowledge the truth of what Quintus Poppaedius said about their custom of abstaining. But I can see some difficulties. The first is that of election of officers. If the Italians are to be excluded from the

Comitia, then how are we to elect Praetors and Consuls? I can't see how the Italians would tolerate being deprived of their right to vote!

"The second is that of automatic membership of the Senate. Officers elected as Quaestors or higher automatically become members of this Senate. Will this still be the case, or will future Quaestors become members of the new City Senate? These details need to be worked through before we can vote this proposal into law," Cato stood again as Caesar sat.

"Lucius Porcius?" Metellus asked.

"If I might answer the questions just put by Sextus Julius?"

"Please do," Metellus invited.

"It was to be expected that a Consul and Censor as wise and experienced as Sextus Julius would see these issues. If Senators would be kind enough to study the full text of my proposal rather than relying on my summary speech, they will see that these matters have been addressed. The general principle is that the City bodies would elect city officials and positions involving the Republic as a whole will be elected by adding the votes of the Italian Tribes to those of the Roman Tribes in Comitia. In effect, it will be the same as today, except that the Italian Tribes will be able to vote in their own lands and not need to send delegates to the City. The proposed law lists which positions I consider 'City' positions and which I consider 'Republic' positions, and I have added some notes to explain why I have made that division. But the precise division is always open to debate in this chamber.

"As for progression to the Senate; a man elected to a city office will progress to the City Senate and a man elected to a position pertaining to the Republic as a whole will progress to this Senate. For the sake of clarity, I have called this the 'Senate of the Republic' in the proposed law."

Other Senators rose to their feet, but Metellus stood himself. "If the Senate agrees, I suggest that we ask Lucius Porcius to read the entirety of his proposal to us and his explanatory notes before we take further questions or speeches. To my mind, this would be a more orderly and efficient approach." He looked around the banks of seats. "Do I have the agreement of the Senate?"

There were murmurs of agreement.

"Then please, Lucius Porcius; if you would be so kind...?"

Cato was not happy with this request. The proposed law was an intricate document running over several pages, with internal cross-references giving the package intellectual and legal cohesion but making an incredibly boring recital. He made the best of what he could by parenthetically explaining the cross-references as he went, but he knew that a document like this had to be studied to be understood and not merely heard. His hope had been that the handful of sharper minds would go to that trouble and then lead the rest after them.

Eventually he finished his reading and looked to Metellus. "I am happy to take questions now, Quintus Caecilius, but I think that the Senate's time would better be spent on other business. Therefore I invite all interested Senators to meet in my house on any of the next four mornings at the third hour so we can discuss the details of this bill in more depth."

Sextus Julius Caesar rose again.

“Sextus Julius?” Metellus invited him to speak.

“This is a complex proposal, and must be studied in detail. I suggest that it would be much more helpful if we examined it more closely in smaller, less formal groups as offered by Lucius Porcius, and then resume this formal debate when all interested Senators are more familiar with it.” Caesar swept his hands in a wide gesture. “It is only wise that we understand this proposal in detail before we speak, rather than debate out of uncertainty. I formally move that the debate on the bill titled ‘Cato’s Law Concerning the Senate and the Comitia’ be postponed until the first Senate meeting in November, and that we ask the Tribunes to bring it to the Comitia for discussion and debate in parallel with our own considerations.”

Metellus had hoped to kill the proposal by a combination of fear of novelty and boredom with its intricacy. The more time that it is under consideration, the more risk that the Senators will become accustomed to it. “Sextus Julius has moved that the debate be postponed. Are there any who prefer to address this bill now?” There was no reply. His tactic of requiring Cato to read the bill at length had already bored those who were not interested, and those who were interested now realised that this should not be dealt with summarily.

“Those in favour of postponement?” A chorus of agreement rose. “Those against?” No sound. “Those in favour prevail. The bill will be debated at the first meeting in November.”

Cato rose again.

“Yes, Lucius Porcius?”

“My colleague and I report that the Census has been completed, but we intend to delay the publishing of the new Senate List until the decision has been made on my proposed law.”

“Thank you, Lucius Porcius. The timing of these matters is entirely at the discretion of the Censors,” Metellus replied. He could see why Cato had made this announcement; the Senators will have in the back of their minds what effect their decision will have on the Censors and on the Italians who are eligible for the Senate. ‘Support us, or we will flood you with Italians!’ was a none-to-subtle threat.

Cato was not surprised when only twenty-three Senators arrived at his house the next morning. Cato’s sponsorship had made most Boni agreeable to the plan, even though few of them understood it. Silo’s approval had satisfied the Italianists. Most of the small Populares faction knew that the Comitia would be easier to manage if the Italian tribes were not there. So the Senators who arrived were more interested in the legalities and structure of the proposal than in the party-political implications. Each wanted to tilt the scheme towards his own personal agenda. Cato had drawn up a chart to show his proposed organisational structure and which positions would be responsible for what.

Sextus Julius Caesar was the first to start asking specific questions. “Lucius Porcius, I notice that you have abolished the position of Military Tribune.”

"That is correct, Sextus Julius; all matters to do with the Army are Republic issues, not City issues. So Military Tribunes should be either elected by all, including the Italians, or appointed by the Senate," Cato explained. "My personal preference is to allow the Commanders in the Field to appoint their own staff, which would make the Military Tribune redundant. But I remain flexible on this point and would welcome your wisdom."

"You have also reduced the number of Quaestors to five," Sextus Julius continued.

"Yes. Being a City position, they will no longer be expected to serve in the provinces. But again, I'm flexible," Cato conceded. "If you think a greater number is required then that can be discussed."

"I would suggest a larger number," Caesar commented. "Quaestor is a burdensome office if it is to be done properly. It would also mean that each officer has a narrower area of responsibility, so he will be able to be better informed and hopefully more diligent in that area." All of which was true, but Caesar's main point was that Cato's proposal included the provision that quaestors won automatic entry into the City Senate. The more scope there was for plebeians to enter the Senate, the more the Populares liked it.

Cato scanned the room for comments. "Any other opinions?" he asked.

"I think five is a good number" Catulus said in response. "Quaestors rarely do the actual work themselves. They tend to hire accountants or buy skilled slaves for that. So long as they watch closely enough to make sure there's no embezzlement, five is enough."

Cato looked around the room again. "Does anyone else want to comment?"

"I agree with Quintus Lutatius on this," Sulla volunteered. "If the City Senate is fixed at one hundred in number as suggested, then five new quaestors being admitted each year would be almost enough to match replacement due to deaths or retirement. If we had any more quaestors, there could be more entering the Senate than there would be room for them." There were murmurs of agreement around the room.

"Please, a show of hands for five," Cato asked. Almost every hand in the room was raised. "It seems we stick with five," Cato summarised. "Next, I have proposed only three aediles." Cato continued. "They won't be required to do any public works distant from the city. I imagine that repairs to the aqueducts will be as far as they need to travel, so there's no need to elect several of them to manage works throughout Italy. Because only former Quaestors may be elected Aediles, this will not add to the number of Senators. And finally, two Praetors will be sufficient. Both will be Urban Praetors because their jurisdiction will be limited to the City. The election of two is a precaution, in case of death or incapacity of one. A praetor must also be an ex-Quaestor, so this will not add to Senate numbers either."

Cato looked around the room again. "Are we all comfortable with that?" The murmurs suggested that no-one objected. "Now we get into the more significant matters; those of responsibilities and costs." Cato prefaced the next section of his presentation. The City Senate will be responsible for all the City's

needs. That means water supply, sewers, road repairs, temples, and all other infrastructure, just as each Italian Tribe is responsible for their own towns. This will require a source of funding to pay for the work. It will also require a separation of the City Treasury from the Republic Treasury, just as the Italian Tribes keep separate their Roman taxes and their own Tribal funds.

“It is proposed that the City be permitted to raise its own revenue from whatever tax base it might choose, just like every Italian Tribe. That will be none of the Republic’s business. Meanwhile, all taxes raised outside the City will be directed to the Republic treasury, to pay for Republic-wide costs such as roads, ports and armies. These costs will be considerably less than they are at present, because the Republic Senate will not also be paying for those responsibilities transferred to the City Senate.”

“Wait a minute!” Sextus Julius Caesar interrupted. “That means that Romans will be called upon to pay two sets of taxes; one to the Republic, and one to the City!”

“That’s precisely the situation that occurs throughout Italy today,” Cato replied, “unless the Republic decides to provide funding for specific purposes. For example, the damage to the aqueduct at Corfinum was repaired with the help of a grant from the Senate.”

“The Plebs will not like extra taxes,” Caesar warned.

“Citizens throughout Italy are paying extra taxes to subsidise Rome; why should not the Urban tribes be expected to carry their share of the costs?” Cato returned.

“What the Plebs might expect is not relevant,” Caesar replied. “What the Plebs will tolerate is the vital issue here.”

“Then what do you propose, Sextus Julius?” Cato asked appealingly.

“I propose that Romans be subject to only one level of tax,” Caesar replied. “And it would seem that this should be the City tax, since this money would be ear-marked for City works. No Republic Tax is to be imposed on Romans.”

“Then how is the Republic to be funded? How will we pay our army?” Cato challenged.

“I think I might be able to answer that one,” Sulla broke in. “And I think the Italians will like it, too.

“I suggest that the Republic tax be imposed only on non-citizens. Let the cost of the army be paid for by the provinces that give rise to the need for an army and let the works in the provinces be paid for by the provincials!” There was no doubt that the other senators in the room agreed with this sentiment.

“Are we agreed on that point?” Cato asked. Heads nodded, and no-one objected. “Good. Citizens shall be subject to taxes from their own City, or Tribe in the case of Italians, and non-citizens such as the Greeks or Pontics shall pay a tax to the Republic as well as their own internal costs.”

“Now we finally come to the composition of the Republic Senate,” Cato moved on. “The initial Republic Senate shall be the existing Senate. However, it no longer needs all the officers involved in administering the City. I propose that the Citizenry at large elect only the two Consuls and two Censors.

“New members shall be added to the Republic Senate in two ways. Firstly, each Italian Tribe and each Roman Tribe will elect two Republic Praetors, in addition to their own City Praetors. A tribal Republic Praetor will automatically become a member of the Republic Senate so long as he holds that office and he shall be eligible to stand as consul. If he is elected Republic Praetor five times, or Consul once, he shall become a life member of the Republic Senate. Secondly, if the number of Senate vacancies reaches fifty, resulting in a Senate membership of less than two hundred and fifty, the Censors will fill the shortfall in ranks by elevating eligible new Senators from their List. I expect that there will usually be more senators than this minimum number, so entry by Censor's List should be rare.

“The election of the Consuls and the Censors shall be in the traditional way, by a combined vote of the Roman and Italian Tribes. All other officers of the Republic, such as Head of Senate, provincial Governors and Republic Aediles responsible for building works of significance wider than any one city, shall be appointed by a vote of the Republic Senators.” Cato gave his now-habitual look around the room. Does anyone see any need for any other Republic officers, or have any other comments?”

“This scheme will make it almost impossible for a Plebeian to reach the Republic Senate,” Lucius Cornelius Cinna, the Urban Praetor said drily. He was well woven into the Populares faction.

“There'll be quite a few who make it, actually,” Cato demurred “A man with merit can reach Republic Praetor for his Tribe without too much trouble, and that will qualify him as a member of the Republic Senate. And once there he will have seniority, while most who make the Senate via the Censors' List will remain pedarii all their lives. That will make him eligible for nomination as Consul. If elected by his tribe five times, he becomes a Life Member of the Republic Senate and will remain there forever afterwards.

“Through this mechanism you will find that we could have 20 new Senators every year simply by being a Tribal-elected Praetor five times; even more if some are elected Consul before their fifth year. This would be almost enough to make up the attrition of existing senators, which is a great advance on what happens now. So entry by property qualification through the Censors List will be extremely rare and in fact I expect that the Republic Senate will always be close to, or perhaps even over, the nominal establishment. The new Republican Praetors from the tribes might result in the Senate growing to more than three hundred before it is large enough for deaths to match the rate of new entries, and since virtually all the new entries will be Republican Praetors from the tribes, this will result in more plebeians becoming Senators than happens now.”

“Lucius Porcius is right,” Drusus broke in. “This is not an anti-Populares proposal. It simply recognises that the residents of Rome deserve to make their own decisions and most plebs have no need to look at any bigger issues than that. But if any Plebeian is minded to do so, and has the ability, he can still become a senior member of the Republic Senate.” Drusus shrugged. “And while many Patricians have a distrust of Plebeian senators, this route will ensure that those

Plebeians who do make it are men of top quality. Plebeians now have an entry path which they didn't have before. How is that unfair?"

Caesar didn't argue any further. His Populares faction was the smallest in the Senate and any more argument would only push the Boni and the Italianists closer together. But at least he had managed to strike down the double-taxation provisions. That would guarantee him generous support not only from his Equites backers but also from the Head Count. He expected the Italians would also be very grateful but that would be a debt harder to collect. They seemed to hate the Head Count and the merchant classes of Rome even more than the Boni. Why the Lower Classes loved Silo and Sulla as 'the Heirs of Great Marius' was beyond any rational imagination!

Sulla, Drusus, Silo and Cato met after the other Senators had left. They agreed that everyone seemed to support the suggestion to make citizens exempt from taxation the Republic Senate, which would therefore need to support itself from the provinces. Not a problem! Amend the bill to reflect this! How did this fit in with the terms of the Miletus Decree? Again, not a problem! That Decree limited taxation to the forms and levels imposed on 'a Roman citizen'; it said nothing about which body was imposing the tax! So long as the City or any Italian tribe imposed any sort of tax, that could be imposed on any Asian city as a Republic Tax. All were confident that there would be funding enough, even without stripping the Pontic cities not entitled to the conditions set out in the Miletus Decree. And that would be specially so as the City found that the taxation level would need to be raised considerably higher now that the hidden subsidies from the Italians and the provinces were flowing into the Republic treasury and not Rome itself! Let the Populares worry about that!

The second session the next morning saw most of the faces from the first day and a handful of new attendees. The amendments arising from the first day were written into the proposal, and all were happy. The third and fourth days saw only Caesar, Catulus, Cinna and two pedarii attend on each day, other than the four proponents. On neither day did anyone suggest any changes or ask any questions. They seemed to attend purely to keep an eye on progress, or in the case of the two pedarii to be seen to be taking interest so they could perhaps attract some support for promotion.

The first Contio in the Comitia Well had also gone well, with Caesar and Cinna both speaking for the proposed law. Some of the more astute Equites were suspicious that the rate of tax might go up, but the Head Count were more interested in gaining what Cinna and Caesar held out as the 'same rights as the Italians', the right to decide their own city's policies without 'interference' by the Italian Tribes. The bill passed the Senate in early November, and the Comitia a few days later. Cato and Sulla presented their Senate List for the City Senate, which included all living Consuls, and then the non-consuls who had been elected Praetor the most often to fill out the 100 membership.

The new Senate List for the continuing Senate, now to be called the Republic Senate, was also presented. At Silo's urging all forty eight eligible Italians had accepted nomination to the Senate even if they had no intention of

actually attending. Sixty out of the total of three hundred Republic Senators were now Italians, and with their fellow-travellers the Italianist Party could rely on almost a hundred and twenty votes in a full Chamber. However they generally could raise barely forty under normal attendances, in which less than half the entire Senate List might be present.

“Gaius Papius! How good it is to see you!” Silo exclaimed as Mutilus was shown into his office. He stood and embraced the Samnite Bull.

“And much as I enjoyed Sicily, it's good to see you again, too!” Mutilus returned the hug with equal affection.

“I was surprised to hear that you had asked for your governorship to NOT be extended again. Were you having problems?”

“Not at all, Quintus Poppeius, Sicily is a wonderful province, and five consecutive years allowed me to make some changes down there. I've been in touch with the two Rufuses in Asia and I've put a few of their ideas into practice as well. I think the province is now set up as well as I can do it, so it is time for a fresh mind to take it further.”

“Do you mean me, Gaius Papius?” I'd rather go back to Pontus, given the choice.”

“Oh, heavens, anyone but you!” Mutilus affected shock. “You're a soldier! I wouldn't want you tramping all over my delicate work!” Then he burst into a peal of laughter. “No, seriously; it would be stupid for you to go anywhere except Pontus. We need you there to keep Tigranes in his box,” Mutilus agreed. “What Sicily needs is an Administrator, and I'm thinking that Caius Vidacilius might be just the man. He's been Leader of the Picentines for almost ten years now and done a good job, and he's Praetor Peregrinus this year so he is entitled to a Province next year.”

“Yes, Caius knows the Law inside out. He'd be an excellent choice,” Silo agreed. Then, changing the subject, “So what about you? Back to the farm and the shade of the olive groves?”

“Well, I was thinking of something slightly more demanding. What chance would I have of gaining support to run for Consul?”

“Why would you want to do that?” Silo exclaimed. “The job is a total pain in the butt!”

“So why did you take it on?”

“Marcus Livius asked me to,” Silo explained. “He and Cato had it all planned. They thought that I was the only way they could block the election of a Populares candidate. The Head Count still like a Military Hero and I was seen as the Heir of Marius.”

“Yes, a shame about Marius,” Mutilus followed the distraction. “Was he really as mad as rumour says?”

Silo paused a moment, that night on the Aegean coming up before his eyes again. “Yes, he was totally out of his mind. When he died, he was on his way to take command of an army so he could march on Rome.”

"Then the gods must be thanked for their intervention," Mutilus commented. That was a most fortunate accident."

Silo took a deep breath. "It was no accident, Gaius Papius. I pushed him overboard. Marcus Livius, Lucius Cornelius and I had agreed beforehand that I might have to take action if Caius continued to deteriorate," Silo stood stony-faced and his eyes moistened. "I still feel such a weight of guilt for that! But as Lucius Cornelius said, had I not done so then everything Caius had worked for would have been destroyed by his own hand. I saved his dignitas, at the cost of his life."

Mutilus stood quiet for a moment. Then he spoke softly. "I can't imagine how difficult that must have been for you. Yet I can see it was the act of a true friend, a soul-friend. May the gods favour you for your piety."

"Piety!" Silo challenged the term. "I murdered a trusting friend, and you call it 'piety'?"

"Indeed; what you did was a piety that goes deeper than most men could bear to look," Mutilus confirmed. "I only hope that if I go the way of Caius, I'll have a friend like you close to hand."

For a moment Silo was silent. "That's exactly what Lucius Cornelius said."

"Then you know it must be true," Mutilus put his right hand on Silo's shoulder. "So put that burden down now. You have no duty to carry it."

Silo gazed into his old friend's face. "Thank you, Gaius Papius," he whispered. Silo dropped into his chair, emotionally exhausted. He gestured towards another for Mutilus.

"Anyway, why do you want the worry-seat?" He asked Mutilus, getting back to the subject.

"Oh, a few reasons," Mutilus said airily. "The first is to emulate you, my role-model!" he said with a grin. "Another is to line myself up for another province afterwards, perhaps Africa. I'd like to bring in the same reforms as I have made in Sicily. But the most important is to do whatever I can to make the Senate as interested about peaceful development as they have been about war." Mutilus leant forward, warming to his subject.

"If we spend as much time, money and thought about how to improve a province as we do about war – things like roads, harbours, irrigation and so on – then the increased productivity is as good as war plunder, or conquering a new province. Except you get it not just once but year after year, with no risk, no loss of life, and no need to pay an army to hold it against a rebellion. In fact, the natives thank you for it! So when I read a copy of your Miletus Decree I had it framed. It's finer than any poem I've ever read! That document outlined exactly how the whole Roman world should be governed! And I want the Senate to start thinking in those terms."

"Well, thanks for the compliment, old friend. And I'd like to see you in the Senate arguing that case, whether as Consul or just a front-bencher. Let's get the crowd together and see what they say about your candidacy." Silo broke into a smile. "But in the meantime, would be my guest here in Rome?"

The core of the Italianist party gathered together in Drusus' house three days later to celebrate the return of Mutilus to Rome and to finalise their choice of candidate for Consul. Titus Lafrenius had put himself forward as one option; a Military Man in the tradition of Marius and Silo but not with the personal reputation of either. Was this enough to overcome being an Italian? Lucius Glauca, a Samnite who had served as Silo's second-in-command, had been sounded out but he hadn't been a Praetor and wasn't eligible. It was resolved to get him elected Praetor so he could be called upon in the following year.

Thus the Italianist party had been in despondency. The only members who had been praetors were either Italians without sufficient appeal to the Plebeians to gain election, or Romans who had already been Consul within the last ten years. By process of elimination, Mutilus was the only reasonable choice. But was he electable? Sulla had an idea; perhaps they should support an agreeable independent candidate. He mentioned Lucius Valerius Flaccus, who had been Consul with Marius fifteen years earlier and Head of the Senate since the death of Scaurus some four years ago.

Drusus nodded as he mulled it over. "Catulus was a colleague of Marius, too, but that is another story. Flaccus and Marius remained on good terms."

"I hear that Sextus Julius Caesar and Young Marius are promoting Cinna's candidacy," Sulla volunteered. "That name 'Marius' could win a lot of votes from us unless we counter it."

"On balance, I think Flaccus would suit the Italian tribes as the best Roman eligible," Silo commented. "What say you, Titus?"

"I agree," Lafrenius responded. "But I think an Italian would be better. I lean towards Mutilus. Meanwhile we have to get more sympathetic Romans through the Praetor qualification."

"One factor we have to allow for is the Boni," Drusus asserted. "Quintus Poppaeius was acceptable to them because they considered him so Romanised that it didn't matter. But will they have the same attitude towards the Samnite Bull? I don't want them to line up behind Cinna because we couldn't put up an acceptable alternative."

"Would they really opt for Cinna?" Silo asked. "He's a smooth talker, the sort who will stab you in the back at the first chance."

"Perhaps that's why they might," Sulla answered. "I'd trust him to agree with everything I said, so long as I gave him no opportunity to do otherwise. The Boni might think along the same terms and try to make him a puppet."

"Yes, Lucius Cornelius," Drusus agreed. "They would much prefer a Roman puppet before an Italian with self-respect. Cinna is dangerous to us precisely because he's so unscrupulous."

"So it looks like we need a Roman, and I can think of none better than Flaccus to keep the Boni with us," Sulla summarised.

"If we want to keep the Boni with us, you are right," Drusus agreed. "But what if we decide to keep the Populares with us? Cinna has shown that he's a supporter of the Italian cause, even if it's secondary to his own Populist agenda."

Sulla looked at Drusus sharply. "That's precisely why he must be opposed. His primary objective is to weaken the Senate. The Mos Majorum is that the Senate rules Rome, by the consent of the People. He would have it that the People rule Rome, and that would leave Rome vulnerable to any rabble-rouser that dares. Look at Sulpicius!"

"Actually, Lucius Cornelius, the Mos Majorum requires that 'The Senate and the People of Rome' rule," Drusus tried to correct him. "Only three little letters tacked onto the end of 'People', but they're essential to the Republic."

Sulla thought carefully before answering. Drusus had been Tribune of the People, and had taken a few measures in his time that might be considered 'Popularis Orthodoxies'. But Sulla had assumed these had been to gather support for the citizenship vote rather than objectives in their own right. And Drusus had pledged never to use his Patronage over the Italians to oppose the Senate. But was this pledge only to gain enough Senatorial support for his programme? Where did Drusus really stand on Senate ascendancy?

"I take your point, Marcus Livius," Sulla conceded, "But that partnership must be practised so that the better-educated and the better-informed take the lead, and the People follow those whom they have found most trustworthy. The leadership must not come from the Comitia Well, or our society would be torn in different directions from one day to the next, depending on the randomness of which citizens bother to turn up and vote."

"And I take your point too, Lucius Cornelius," Drusus responded. "But think about it. If we have a partnership with the Populares, then we have influence over them. But if they see us as nothing but enemies we will have no control over their weather-vane opinions. Remember that Sextus Julius Caesar co-operated with us, appointing Caius and you to carry out the first Enrolment. It wouldn't have been possible without his support."

The three men sat for a moment, each following his own chain of thought. Silo broke the silence. "We are the largest faction in the Senate now, and the Boni can do nothing unless they can gain either our co-operation or that of almost everyone else," he reminded his colleagues. "Also, I resent on principle the assumption that we need permission from the Boni before we chose a candidate," he went on. "I suggest we put up the candidate we want, and then it's up to the Boni to either support us or oppose us. And if they oppose us, I'm confident that the Populares would rather work with us than with the Boni. It's time the Boni were shown that we are no longer the tail in this partnership; we are now the dog. If they don't like being the dog's tail, then they can become the rabbit instead."

Thirty two other men in the courtyard had gathered around to listen to this conversation between their three acknowledged leaders. Drusus lifted his gaze and swept around their faces. "And you gentlemen? What do you say?" he invited their responses.

Lafrenius was first to speak. "I think we would be more natural allies with the Populares than with the Boni," he said, "But the People seem to think otherwise. They went along with Marcus Livius for the citizenship vote not because they genuinely believe we Italians are their equals, but because they

trusted Marcus Livius. I think they hoped that we would be eternally grateful to be granted citizenship and be submissive ever afterwards. But now that we've had an Italian consul they're becoming resentful."

"For crying out loud!" Sulla broke out. "We've saved Rome from two coups! Why do they resent us?"

"I am not saying that this is a carefully-thought-out position, Lucius Cornelius! In fact, they seem to not think at all!" Lafrenius answered. "They just seem to resent that Italians are no longer their inferiors."

"So how should we respond to that?" Silo asked. "Promise not to act as their equals any more? Get ourselves all enrolled in the Head Count? Even if we support them politically, will they see that as a partnership or will they think that it's an admission that we are in their debt?"

"I don't know, Quintus Poppaeus," Lafrenius admitted. "You can give a man information, but you have no control over the conclusions he draws from it."

"I think that the Boni are not as strong as they were a few years back." That was Glauca. "I think we should pick the man we want. If the Boni continue as our allies, so well and good. But if not, then we talk to Sextus Julius and agree to support each other. Let the Boni come back to us when they have a less exalted view of their place in the world!" There were mutterings of agreement from the listeners.

Drusus stood. "It seems there is a broad consensus to follow what Quintus Poppaeus and Lucius Glauca say; that we choose our own man, and give the Boni the choice of supporting us or forcing us to co-operate with the Populares. But before we decide, I would ask Lucius Cornelius to remind us of his reasons for opposing that course of action."

Sulla stood to speak. "My friends, whatever you decide I will support with all my strength. Better to follow a good plan with determination than to turn back because it might not be the one I think is the best." Sulla smiled. "My position is simply this; that whenever the Populares feel they have power they always end up over-playing their hand. Look at the Gracchi brothers! Look at Sulpicius!" Sulla cast his eyes over the assembly, somehow making each man believe that he, personally, was being addressed. "And to bring it closer to your own situation; would you have your peasants tell you how to administer your own Tribes? Of course not! The common people need to be guided by their betters, just as an adolescent son needs to be guided by his father and a junior officer needs to be guided by those with more experience!"

"So certainly I will agree that we should pick our own man. Of course we should! But the selection of that man should take into account that we are one of three factions in these coming elections. We need to make sure that not only we chose our own man, but that the People choose him too! This is best done by convincing the Boni to work with us rather than against us, or the Populares will capitalise on our divisions. And the key to Boni support is a candidate they can feel comfortable with. For the sake of that consideration, I suggest we should invite Lucius Valerius Flaccus to be our candidate to the office of Consul." Sulla smiled, and gestured to Drusus to put the question.

"First, those in favour of Lucius Valerius Flaccus being considered a candidate for our support? This not a vote to accept him as our choice; only that he should be considered." Drusus asked. There were many voices chorusing 'aye'. "Those against?" No voice was raised against Flaccus. "Very well; Flaccus is acceptable as one possible candidate," Drusus announced. "Now we get to the business end of it. Are there any nominations?"

"I nominate Lucius Valerius Flaccus, subject to him being agreeable to our conditions," Sulla called.

"I have Flaccus," Drusus announced. "Are there any others?"

"I am also ready to serve if chosen," Lafrenius announced.

"I have Titus Lafrenius," Drusus accepted.

"I nominate Gaius Papius Mutilus," Silo called.

"I have Gaius Papius Mutilus." Drusus acknowledged. There was a pause. "Any more nominations?" Drusus called. "There being no more nominations, I ask for the nominators to make a short statement in favour of each. In favour of Flaccus first." Drusus stepped back into the ranks.

Sulla stepped forward. "I have already explained why I am convinced that we need someone whom the Boni can support. Lucius Valerius is one such man. He is a Roman from an ancient house, and has served as both Consul and Censor. He is currently Head of the Senate, and highly respected. His nomination will ensure our working partnership with the Boni will continue.

"However, his credentials are not with the Boni alone. He served as Consular colleague to Caius Marius, and is well known to have been fully supportive of Caius in that time. So supportive, in fact, that some have accused him of being a servant rather than a colleague to the Great Man! Let his enemies repeat that insult and see how well it rings in the ears of the Populares, who see any service to Caius Marius as an honour! He will attract many votes from the Populares for this if nothing else! And he also has respected Italian interests. As Censor, he enrolled more Italians as citizens than anyone before him until the general enfranchisement!" Sulla swept the gathered men again.

"Here is a man who will support our agenda as he has in the past; but is also able to command respect from both the other factions and thereby stands the best chance of actually being elected. Support him!" Sulla stepped back.

"Titus, will you speak your case?" Drusus asked.

"Lucius Cornelius has persuaded me otherwise," Lafrenius answered. "Provided we gain the agreement of Lucius Valerius, I will support him. Otherwise I will support Gaius Papius, of whose candidacy I was unaware until Quintus Poppaedius spoke for him."

"I take that as an unwillingness to accept nomination," Drusus acknowledged. "Quintus Poppaedius, please present the case for Gaius Papius."

Mutilus spoke before Silo could gain the clear space in the centre of the gathering. "I will also submit to Lucius Valerius as our candidate, provided I become our nomination if Lucius Valerius can't agree to our programme."

"Then it is my understanding that Lucius Valerius Flaccus, Head of the Senate, be invited to stand for the office of Consul with our support; on condition

that he satisfies myself, Quintus Poppaedius and Lucius Cornelius that he will support our programme," Drusus announced. "If he is unwilling, or if we find his commitment to our cause is insufficient to justify our support, then Gaius Papius Mutilus is to be our candidate. Do I understand correctly? First the ayes." The meeting chorused its agreement. "Those against?" There was silence.

"Then we three will speak to Lucius Valerius as soon as possible and report back when we have an answer." The meeting burst into applause.

Flaccus had been intrigued to receive the note from Silo, the incumbent Consul, asking for the earliest convenient time to visit and discuss 'affairs of State'. Not surprised by the substance; the Head of Senate and the Urban Praetor were often the unofficial third and fourth consuls. But the timing was strange. Why had this not been arranged when they were last in the Senate together, only two days earlier? Unless it's something arising from the last Senate Meeting... and there was no mention that Metellus, the other Consul, would be included. Time will tell, he mused. He told the runner that he would be pleased to receive the Consul the next day, if the Consul so chose, or the day after that if the morrow was not suitable. The same runner was back less than two hours later. The third hour in the morning would be excellent, if Flaccus was still available. He sent the runner back with his agreement.

He was ready to greet his consular guest in person the next morning. But to his surprise he saw Drusus and Sulla waiting outside his door as well.

"This is a surprise, Quintus Poppaedius! I might have expected Quintus Caecilius to be with you, but to see these two consulars with you but not your colleague..."

"The purpose will become clear to you shortly, Lucius Valerius," Silo answered with a smile as he took Flaccus' arm in greeting. He released and Flaccus greeted his companions.

"Please, into the courtyard; we catch the morning sun," Flaccus invited his guests. Then, turning to his Master of House, "Demetrios, set another couch in the triclinium!" A young female slave used her initiative, taking the bowls of fruits and cheeses from the triclinium table and followed her master outside.

"This is indeed a pleasant garden, Lucius Valerius! Even at this time of the year!" Silo was genuinely surprised by the charm of the courtyard.

"Thank you, Quintus Poppaedius," Flaccus replied. "But if it comes over cloudy, we will go inside." The four men sat in two long benches, arranged in a 'V'-shape with their backs to two white-washed walls that reflected the warmth of the sun onto their backs. The girl put the bowls on a table in the jaws of the 'V' and went inside.

"Your note yesterday mentioned 'affairs of state', Consul." Flaccus cut straight to the subject. "I assume it's something that arose from the last Senate meeting that you want corrected before we meet again?"

"Nothing like that, Lucius Valerius," Silo responded. "I was rather hoping that you would be kind enough to do me a very great favour. One which I am

confident will be for the benefit of Rome as well as to your own great honour. But it will be burdensome.”

“Rome has done much for me, Quintus Poppeius. As a Consul yourself you would be aware of the burden of that duty. Even after your term is ended the obligation remains.” He gestured towards Sulla and Drusus, “as your colleagues will tell you themselves, and you will soon discover from your own experience.”

“The fact that we three are here, but not my consular colleague, should have already told you that this is a factional issue” Silo commenced. “But as you would know, we Italianists are scrupulous to honour the Mos Majorum and to work in harmony with other the other parties in the Senate whenever possible. For example, I am Consul only because Lucius Porcius suggested that I would be the most acceptable of the eligible Italianists to his Boni faction.”

“Ah!” Flaccus interjected. “I must admit that I thought it was a bit bold of you to nominate, and wondered why the Boni were so placid in the face of that move!”

“Indeed; for some years now, ever since the Sulpician Coup, we have had this modus vivendi, allowing each other a respectful role and division of offices,” Silo continued. “But we are now at a stage where we need to act with even greater wisdom and caution. Of the Italianists eligible to nominate for Consul, none has both the prestige to be able to guarantee election and also the record that would make him likely to be acceptable to the Boni. We need to present a man who is both able to win election and enjoy Boni acquiescence at the same time. Otherwise we fear that Cinna, supported by the Populares, may be elected. And if he is, we fear that he will be unwilling to work harmoniously with any successful candidate supported by the Boni. This could be very disruptive.”

Flaccus paused for a moment before responding. “That could be the case. What do you propose to do about it?”

“We are prepared to not put up an Italianist candidate at all, rather than offend the Boni,” Silo explained. “But there must be another candidate who can prevent Cinna from becoming Consul by default. We believe you are such a candidate.”

Flaccus looked stunned. “You mean, you want me to become your candidate? For the Italianists?”

“Not *our* candidate, Lucius Valerius. You are your own man, a puppet to no-one,” Silo hastened to say. “That’s why we would be confident that you would be just and even-handed, protecting the interests of all Romans. We have no such confidence in Cinna.”

Flaccus pondered for a moment. “Are you saying you would make no demands upon me? That you would not consider me indebted to you in any way?”

“We would consider you indebted to the Mos Majorum, and every citizen who would look to you for justice,” Sulla took up the conversation. “And we are confident that this would not restrict you in any way, because you have already shown that you acknowledge those debts already. We seek only your assurances that you would defend the rights of those citizens who are of Italian descent no less vigorously than the rights of the Old Families; that you would treat an Italian

with as much respect as any Roman of equal rank, and not discriminate against him. And we know you will do so, because you have already demonstrated this in the enrolment when you were Censor. The fact that some of those enrolments were fraudulent is the fault of those who presented themselves and no blame attaches to you. But your willingness to listen to a man's case on the evidence he presented shows you are not anti-Italian, while your care and diligence in prosecuting the frauds demonstrated your commitment to the Mos Majorum.

"We three are convinced of your integrity in this regard and we mean you no insult by asking you to pledge yourself to maintaining these standards. But for the sake of the formality we need to report back to our friends that you swear to that effect." Sulla reached towards the table for a raisin, to make his request seem a casual formality rather than a major test.

"Lucius Cornelius, I would be insulted if it were only you asking for this, as if there was any doubt as to my integrity." Flaccus sighed. "But I understand that many of your colleagues have not known me very long or very well, so I take no offence. Be assured that I will always support the Mos Majorum, the Rule of Law, and the rights of all citizens. Be assured that I will treat Roman and Italian of the same status alike in all respects. Whether I decide to stand for election or not, I swear to that much."

"But whether to stand or not; I will not decide that in a single hour. I will speak to trusted friends and let you know in good time." Flaccus smiled. "Are there any other matters to be discussed?"

Silo stood. "Thank you for your patience with us, Lucius Valerius. We await your advice." The other two guests also stood and thanked their host.

Flaccus farewelled his guests at the front door, and then went back to the courtyard to think through this strange proposition. An hour later he called for a runner.

That evening Flaccus greeted Young Marius at his door in person, and led him to the triclinium. Fine Chian wine was on the low table, and finger foods to nibble on. "Thank you for coming to see me at such short notice, Caius." He welcomed his guest.

"I am honoured that you invite me, sir," Marius replied courteously.

Flaccus looked Marius up and down with an expression that was half-wistful and half-admiring.

"I remember when I was your father's consular colleague, and you were – what? - about eight years old at the time," he commented. "Such a big lad for your age, and full of confidence! And now you're a grown man, paterfamilias in your own house, every inch your father's son!" Flaccus declared. "In three years' time you will be able to be elected Quaestor, and the climb to Consul will be inevitable."

"That's my hope, sir," Marius agreed. "It's kind of you to take an interest in my prospects."

"Please, sit and enjoy," Flaccus urged his guest, as he sat himself. As they settled onto their couches, Flaccus took a small cake for himself. "Doubtless

you're aware that Caesar was the last Popularis consul we have had, apart from the tragically short consulship of your father. Since his terrible death, the Boni and the Italianists have worked hand-in-glove to protect themselves and each other." Flaccus looked squarely at Marius. "I don't think this has been good for the People of Rome."

"Nor do I, sir," Marius agreed. "The war made it difficult to do anything about that stranglehold they shared, but now is the time for the People to take their share of the victory."

"Please, Caius; call me 'Lucius Valerius'. You're no longer a child, but a paterfamilias in your own right!" Flaccus protested, now that the psychological relationship of mentor and student had already been cemented in place. "Now, I have nothing against the Italianists as such," Flaccus went on. "Your father supported their cause twenty years ago, and continued to do so until he was taken from us. And I find Quintus Poppaeus a very steady and likeable fellow as well as being very competent.

"But Sulla is fanatical in his support for Senate privilege against any attempt to give the People any say at all, and even Marcus Livius, for all his integrity, is blind to the need for the Plebs to have some control over their own lives. This is not good!" Flaccus declared. "If the People feel that they are being ignored, then resentment will build as it did when your father was passed over in favour of Sulla to command the War. We will have violence in the streets again!

"We must assure the People that they are being heard! Not that they will get everything they ask for; the world will not allow us that luxury!" Flaccus waved a hand. "But that they are at least being heard without having to make their point more brutally and that whatever is reasonably possible to satisfy their needs is being done in good faith. The Senate and the People of Rome must go forward together as partners, not as adversaries, and this cannot be done unless at least one of the Consuls has the trust of the People."

"An excellent analysis, sir - Lucius Valerius," acclaimed Marius. "Sextus Julius and I have been speaking to each other along much the same lines. Sextus Julius can't stand for consul again just yet, and I'm too young; but we have it in mind to support Lucius Cornelius Cinna in the election."

"Oh!" Flaccus interjected, frowning. "Are you sure that's wise? He has a reputation for bribery, and be assured that our two Censors will do all in their power to undermine him. Sulla in particular will sniff out anything, even if innocent, if it can be twisted to look like corruption. And his tame colleague Cato will be only too pleased to see another Popularis cut down."

"Then who would you suggest, Lucius Valerius?"

"Actually, I was going to ask for your support," Flaccus said bluntly. "I've been Consul and Censor in my time, and I'm Head of Senate even now. I have a reputation for dealing justly and properly. They won't be able to touch me!"

"And you would support a Popularis agenda if elected?" Marius' eyes rounded with excitement.

"Not all of it, Caius, not all of it," Flaccus replied. "But as much of it as has a chance of being successful. There's no point in overplaying our hand. We

do not want to antagonise those who could be our allies if only we were more moderate in our programme. Remember that moderation and persistence is how Drusus managed to get his Italian Citizenship accepted.”

“Then I'll speak with Sextus Julius and Lucius Cornelius Cinna,” Marius promised. “If we can work together to get both you and Cinna elected, that would be excellent!”

“You have misread the situation, Caius,” Flaccus put up a hand. “If we both run, we will divide our support, and neither will win. The Boni-Italianist duopoly will continue. Therefore, I won't run without your undivided support. Further, I hear that the Italianists are genuinely afraid that they might not be assured of winning, either, without a so-called “Heir of Marius” as their candidate. The only certainty is that the Boni will get their man up, and the Italianists and the Populares will have to fight out the second place; and the Boni are looking forward to their two enemies destroying each other!

“I have considerable support among the unaligned senators and their backers. If this could be enhanced by your supporters throwing their weight behind me, this will convince the Italianists to do likewise rather than be cut out of the action altogether. Then we are guaranteed a victory as a consensus Italianist/Popularis consul. An alliance such as this is what your father supported all his life, and only with his passing did Sulla and Drusus induce the Italianists turn to the Boni.”

Flaccus gave the young man a final, sobering stare. “Give the People a Consul who will hear them, and the fortunes of your party will be revived. Enough, at least, for you to be a credible candidate in a few years' time.”

Thoughts tumbled through Marius' head. The first was the boost in prestige that Flaccus would lend to the Popularis cause which he, Caius Marius the Younger, had inherited after the death of his father. If an ex-Censor, Old-Family man like Flaccus could be recruited to support their moderate wing, this would lift his own status enormously! It would allow him to remove the whiff of anarchy that still clung to the Marius name after the raw intimidation of the Sulpician Coup and make the Marii respectable again. Then he thought that Flaccus was an old man now. Give him this consulship and he will be dead before the ten-year gap for his next one would pass. There would be no significant future threat.

But what about Cinna? Well, what about him! At present he had a chance but not a certainty of being elected this year. But if he's prepared to wait another year in which Flaccus will put the Popularis agenda in the public eye, he would stand a much better chance to win election. Cinna could be told to wait. Caesar was the next. Sextus Julius was no fool, being a consular and Censor himself. He would be a hands-down candidate himself, except for his previous term as Consul being only seven years ago. Three more years before Sextus Julius can be used to carry the flag again! But he has the smarts and the experience to be the power behind the throne. Would he therefore prefer the younger Cinna, who might be more easily lead than this old fox? That will need to be discussed. “This sounds an excellent idea, Lucius Valerius!” Marius smiled. “I will urge Sextus Julius and Lucius Cornelius to support you.”

"Thank you, Caius; I hope you will be able to give me a final decision within the next two days; but in the meantime, continue to act as though Lucius Cornelius will nominate." Flaccus stood to escort his guest to the door.

Cato stood to welcome Flaccus into his triclinium the next morning. "Lucius Valerius, it is good to see you!" Cato beamed. "Here, take a seat! Tell me what I can do for you."

"I think it's more a matter of what I can do for you, Lucius Porcius," Flaccus answered as he sat.

Cato sat with him, a puzzled look on his face. "Well then; what can you do for me?"

"Tell me, Lucius Porcius; who do you expect to be the Italianist Consul in this coming year?"

The puzzled look remained on Cato's face. "I have no idea, Lucius Valerius; they haven't said anything to me yet."

"Whom do they have who is eligible now that Silo, Drusus and Sulla have all served in the last ten years?" Flaccus asked.

"They have a few Italians who have served as Praetor, but no-one of great repute."

"So would your Boni be prepared to accept, say, Mutilus as Consul?" Flaccus pressed.

"We wouldn't like it, another Italian. At least Silo looked every inch a Roman, but that Samnite is still a bit coarse." Cato shrugged. "But what can we do about it? At least Drusus and Sulla will keep him in line."

"They will keep him in line; if he is elected. But have you been down to the Comitia well lately?" Flaccus asked. "The Plebs are getting sick of these Italians. Silo they accepted, as the Heir of Marius; but Mutilus can't make that claim. I doubt he'll get the votes."

Cato raised his eyebrows. "Are you serious? Then whom will the Plebs support?"

"Lucius. Cornelius. Cinna." Flaccus said, making each word a separate sentence.

"But he's a nothing! Everyone knows he's corrupt!" Cato argued.

"The Plebs don't care, so long as he is willing to do as they demand. For all his noble ancestry, Cinna is another Sulpicius. And when that happens, are you going to ask the Italians to save Rome a third time? At least Sulla had imperium those other two times; but with Cinna as Consul, with the legions as well as the Mob behind him, what could anyone do?"

"By the gods! That's a scary thought!" Cato muttered.

"Yes; a very scary thought," Flaccus agreed. "Therefore I have taken an initiative to prevent that from happening."

Cato's eyebrows flew up again. "What do you have in mind?"

"I've spoken to Young Marius. The Popularis leadership feel that they must have a victory this year, or their followers will either desert them or replace them.

And they're not certain that Cinna can get up in a three-way contest against the Boni and the Italianists. So I've offered them certainty."

"You are going to campaign for Cinna?" Cato said, horrified.

"No; I told them that if they supported me, I would actively pursue a moderate Popularis agenda. That I would be able to achieve more by my moderation and reputation than Cinna could with his brashness. And that if they agreed to this, I would be certain to win because I would make a similar arrangement with the Italianists." Flaccus smiled. "I would be a compromise Popularist/Italianist candidate, and I would keep the Boni honest on behalf of both of them."

Cato was wondering where this was leading. "Go on."

"There's only one minor matter that needs to be cleared up," Flaccus continued. Cato said nothing, but raised an eyebrow. "The matter of who will be my colleague, of course." Flaccus smiled. "It would be most helpful if the Boni put up a candidate with whom I could work comfortably."

"Of course, that won't be a problem," Cato assured him. "Whoever our candidate is, he will be worthy of the office."

"Lucius Porcius, you seem to not understand. Whoever he is, he must be acceptable to me or I'll tell the Italianists and the Populares that I'll throw my weight behind Cinna and Mutilus. I think I carry enough influence to pull them both in front of whatever conservative nobody you care to put on the platform." Flaccus stood and smiled warmly. "And that would be such a pity! Thank you for making yourself available to me, Lucius Porcius, and I hope to have your short list of candidates within two days. If any of them please me, I will indicate which one shall be your candidate. If none please, me, I will need to make that nomination myself; and he might not be a recognised Bonus. But I promise you, he will not be an Italianist or a Popularis either. He might just be an unaligned man whom I consider appropriate."

Cato stood as Flaccus was speaking. "Yes, Lucius Valerius; I'll talk to my colleagues. Thank you for this little chat."

The response from Young Marius and Sextus Julius Caesar arrived the next morning and was as expected; they would drop Cinna if Flaccus could gain the support of the Italianists. Flaccus sent a runner to Drusus' house immediately, inviting him and any friends to meet him that evening for a light meal and some planning. The three Italianists arrived just before sunset, knowing from the invitation that the news would be good.

"Please, sit down," Flaccus smiled as he invited his guests into his triclinium.

"I assume from the tone of your message that you will nominate for consul, Lucius Valerius?" Drusus asked as he took a place on one couch.

"Yes indeed, Marcus Livius," Flaccus replied. "And I have no doubt that I will be successful; Young Marius has thrown the weight of the Popularis faction behind me as well."

Sulla visibly stiffened. "The Populares? But you pledged support for the Mos Majorum!"

"Indeed I did, Lucius Cornelius," Flaccus agreed. "Do you see any contradiction?"

"Forgive my surprise, Lucius Valerius;" Sulla recovered his poise. "But some of the Popularis demands run counter to the Mos Majorum. I would be interested in knowing which aspects of their agenda they will ask you to promote."

Flaccus smiled as he handed Sulla a goblet of wine. "You need to remember, Lucius Cornelius, that many of your own faction have some sympathy with the Populares, and many Populares have sympathy with the Italian Cause. Indeed, without Popularis support, the Italians would still not be citizens. The moderate wing of the Popularis faction is your natural ally," Flaccus continued. "Or if not your personal natural ally, Lucius Cornelius, at least the natural ally of the Italians." Flaccus amended his comment. "Not all Italianists are as you are; a Bonus in disguise." Flaccus stared pointedly at Sulla as he said this last sentence.

Sulla met his stare. Then he smiled his terrifying smile. "Do you intend to make an enemy of me, Lucius Valerius? Or are you so old that you no longer care?"

"Lucius Cornelius!" Silo broke in. "You two don't have to like each other; but you do need to work together!"

Flaccus waved his hand dismissively. "I say this not to make an enemy of you, Lucius Cornelius; but if it has that result, then so be it!" Flaccus continued. "I know you're a much more ruthless man than you show publicly, and that the only issue on which you depart from the Boni agenda is that you would graft Italians into it. Well, I have no problem with Italians becoming model Romans. Our point of difference is quite simple, really; what is a model Rome?" Flaccus strolled around the room as he continued. "Make no mistake; I'm not a Gracchus! I agree that the Senate must remain the governing body in Rome, not the Mob. And I believe the best way to ensure this is to pull the fangs from the extremists by supporting the moderates.

"So measures that will satisfy the reasonable Populares should be supported," Flaccus went on. "A Grain Law here, a Land Grant bill to veterans, all well and good. Teach them by force of habit that so long as they are content to share the benefits of Senatorial supremacy, they will prosper. But to attempt to seize power is the preserve of rebels who deserve nothing except exile." Flaccus gestured towards the couches, and Silo, Drusus and Sulla sat quietly.

"That sounds fine as a general principle, but let us get down to specifics." Drusus said at last. "Exactly what will you support, and where will you draw the line?"

"Actually, your new Constitution has made that much easier, Lucius Cornelius." Flaccus put up his hand to forestall an objection. "And yes, it was a new Constitution, even though you prefer to see it as within the Mos Majorum! Because where other men see laws and customs and precedents, you see deeper, into the soul that animates all these external things. I agree with you; it was

within the Mos Majorum, but within the spirit rather than the letter. That's how I know it came from your mind, even if it bears Cato's name.

"Anyway, the separation of the Republican Senate from the City Senate will make things much easier for all of us. It leaves the Senate supreme as the only effective governing organ of the Republic. The Comitia might make whatever resolutions it wants, but that has effect only within the pomerium. This means that many of the issues that have been battlegrounds for Boni vs Populares fights in the past no longer exist. Or if they do exist, then the Tribal Assemblies will be much less effective, because the vote cannot be taken all on a single day. The votes of all the Italian tribes will need to be included. For example, Grain Laws! If Rome votes to provide subsidised grain, then the City will have to pay the subsidy, not the Republic! Control of the courts to the Equites, perhaps, for a second example. This will exclude courts for offences against the Republic so they will be limited to civil claims or crimes entirely within the city, such as theft. The big issues will be Republic matters, and the Senate will rule supreme there."

Flaccus looked back to his guests. "But I suspect you had already realised that. You have already pulled the fangs of the Populares, and that was a dangerous thing to do without providing some form of compensation. I intend to offer this compensation before the People realise that they have been tricked."

After a pause, Sulla spoke. "Was it that obvious, Lucius Valerius?" he said wryly.

"Not obvious at all, Lucius Cornelius!" Flaccus said warmly, almost in admiration. "In fact, it was too clever by half! Which is why, when you first came to me, my first instinct was to talk to the Populares and try to give them some reason to support it. That's the only way your new Constitution can avoid being overthrown by riots once the Head Count see how it has hurt them."

"So what do you intend to do?" Sulla asked.

"I have a few ideas," Flaccus said casually. "My first proposal would be to make it illegal for a Senator to serve on both the Republic Senate and the City Senate at the same time. This will appeal to the Populares, because the Boni will prefer to sit in the Republic Senate, giving the Populares control of the City. But once the Populares have control of the city, any failures will be their problem. They will not be able to shift the blame to the Republic Senate. That should teach them a bit of responsibility!"

"My second proposal will be to do with the Roman Tribes what the Italian Tribes have already done, at least as far as the Republic is concerned. Instead of every citizen voting on every question, I'll propose that each tribe elect a dozen men each year, to act as Tribal Representatives on the City Comitia. This will further separate demagogues from actual power by removing regular gatherings that can be turned into a Mob. And because these chosen representatives will effectively be involved full-time in politics, they will tend to be more reliable and less likely to swing from one extreme to the other like a Comitia meeting might. Once these representatives realise how complex a thing it is to govern they will not respond so easily to extremists."

“But best of all; if the People don't like the decisions they make, the popular hatred will be directed at them, and not the Senate.” Flaccus threw his hands up expressively. “That's as far as I've thought through the matter so far.” Another pause followed as the guests took in the implications of what Flaccus was proposing.

“I think I see where you're going, Lucius Valerius. Your measures will turn the City Comitia into a Plebeian version of the Senate.” Sulla took in the big picture. “The Popularis party will become a thing of the past!”

“Not totally a thing of the past,” Flaccus warned. “Don't misunderstand me; I'm no Bonus myself. I believe that the People must be given a voice in our Republic, but it must be filtered through representatives who have the time and the resources to think through their decisions, and not just follow the momentary excitement of the latest rabble-rouser. I'm talking about giving the People a considered, rational voice in the Republic, not about locking them out. The only ones I want to lock out are those like Sulpicius and Cinna, who can stir up a mob but do nothing of lasting benefit,” Flaccus finished.

Sulla slowly stood. “To allude to my earlier remark, you are certainly *not* so old that you no longer care! You obviously care much, and think deeply and clearly. I apologise for my intemperance, and would be honoured by your forgiveness,” Sulla offered his right arm.

Flaccus took it, smiling. “I provoked you; you have my apology, too.”

Despite the explanations offered to senators by Cato and the explanations in the Comitia, there was considerable confusion about the separate roles of the City Senate and the Republic Senate and the rules for eligibility for each. Cato and Sulla had to issue several clarifying rulings. They declared anyone who had qualified for the Senate under the former system would remain a Republic Senator. By this time the process was so confused that the Senate decided that the new scheme should be delayed another year.

Chapter 7 – 670 Ab Urbe Condita (84 B.C.)

Gnaeus Octavius was elected as the Boni colleague of Flaccus. Sulla and Cato continued as Censors, their term being for a five-year lustrum. Lucius Glauca returned to Rome in time to nominate and was the last Praetor elected; but this still qualified him as a candidate for Consul at some time in the future so that was considered a success. Mutilus was the only other Italian elected as a Praetor, in Peregrinus position. He was sent to Africa as he requested, to carry out reforms similar to those received so well in Sicily.

“That was a disappointment,” Silo said as he and his guests sat around the triclinium table.

“It was good enough,” Drusus replied. “We secured two Praetors, both Italians, even if only one was a new face. Lucius Glauca will now be able to stand as our candidate for Consul, even if he was the last Praetor elected.”

“I agree with Quintus Poppaedius; I sense the balance of power is shifting,” Sulla contributed. “The Populares did much better this time around, and that's a worry.”

“We're no longer at war. The People tend to be a bit bolder when there's peace; they expect more.” Drusus shrugged. “So unless you want to start another war, just to keep the People quiet....”

“No, no,” Sulla waved the thought away. “It's one thing to be a good general, but another thing altogether to enjoy war. I take no delight in having blood spilt. I'd much prefer to conquer by persuasion.”

“Well, remember what Flaccus said about reforming the way the Plebs vote? If he can get that off the ground it would go a long way to making the Plebs behave more responsibly.”

“Yes,” agreed Sulla. “That Representative system will filter out a lot of the rubbish. And I can see the Boni going for it for the same reasons.”

“At least if that happens,” Drusus continued, “even if more Populares are elected, at least they won't be firebrands. I would rather three reasonable Populares than one Sulpicius.”

Sulla's ears pricked up again. Drusus seems to be favouring the Populares more and more as time goes by. “And why would you prefer that, Marcus Livius?” He asked casually.

“Because moderate Populares can be reasoned with. They can be shown when something isn't possible without doing too much damage, and will back off rather than risk that damage. They can be negotiated into a position where they'll accept something less than complete victory for the sake of us being equally flexible. They know that if they promise a small thing to the People and achieve it, they will be hold their support base more than a rabble-rouser who promises the world and delivers misery,” Drusus replied. “And that's how the Senate can use moderate Populares to control the Mob, instead of a Sulpicius using the Mob to control the Senate. Making moderate Populares more successful than rabble-rousters is how the Senate will remain supreme.”

Sulla nodded as though in agreement. But he wasn't convinced. Every 'moderate' concession was another slice of the Senate's prick, he thought to himself; eventually it would be totally emasculated. "I think we should ask one of the Rufuses back to stand as our candidate next year," Sulla suggested. Silo and Drusus had become accustomed to Sulla's sudden changes in subject.

"We could try," Silo responded, "but Publius Rutilius make it very clear to me that we wanted to stay in Asia. He wears his exile there as a badge of honour."

"Even if we did," Drusus broke in, "They would both be a red rag to the Equites."

"Which is exactly why I want them back," Sulla snapped. "I refuse to bend to the wishes of the Publicani, those money-grubbing maggots!"

"I'm not advocating 'bending to their will', Lucius Cornelius," Drusus retorted impatiently. "I am talking about walking *between* their spears rather than deliberately impaling ourselves upon them! Why force a battle when we can win the war by out-manoeuvring them?"

"They need to be put in their place!"

"No; they need to be starved to death! The Miletus Decree is in full effect. So long as we don't give them an opportunity to over-turn it the Publicani will wither on the vine. Why play double-or-nothing when we have an assured victory by being patient?"

"Sometimes you're too patient, Marcus Livius!" Sulla snorted.

"That's how I win, Lucius Cornelius. Would you prefer to lose?"

"Please, my friends!" Silo could take no more of this. "We all want the same thing! And any win is a good win! I have never yet seen a heroic loss that I would prefer to a dishonourable victory! I tell you this; if we can stay on top of this game for just five more years, then what we have today will become the new norm, and there will be no going back. The Populares will become accustomed to their subordination to us through force of habit and out of gratitude for small favours, and the Boni will be powerless without us. All we need for this tactic to work is a steady stream of sympathetic consuls.

"So let's keep our wits about us, and be alert to any changes in conditions. At the moment I'm prepared to see how Lucius Valerius manages the Populares. If he proves that we can use them to our own benefit, then let's continue to do so; if not, then let's continue to work with the Boni. And if at all possible, let's continue to use one side as a threat to keep the other under control. That should be our focus now; and to have a properly-thought-out programme to produce good candidates even if it means lining up Sextus Julius on our side for another term just to fill a gap."

"Sextus Julius!" Sulla almost screamed. "Are you joking?"

"He's a full-on Popularis, for certain," replied Silo. "But he more than any of them knows that the Republic is more than just Rome. Remember how he supported the Enrolment? He's no fool! He supported us then because he knew the alternative was the destruction of the Republic, and he knows that's even more certain now."

"And there's another point you missed, Lucius Cornelius," Drusus broke in. "If anything looks like going wrong, we have a Bonus as the second Consul. He can exercise his veto if he wishes to."

"And what will happen then?" Sulla sneered. "Young Marius and Cinna will call out the Mob!"

"And if they do, that will convince the Boni all the more that they must line up behind us!" Silo snapped back. "Flaccus has this going for him; he knows that we are the kingmakers and both sides need us to have control. That gives *us* control.

"The more Flaccus talks about his "Concordia" as a vision for the future, the more I like it," Silo continued. "We Italianists are the only core around which such a vision can grow. We can give the Boni the supremacy of the Senate within the Republic while giving the People the confidence that they'll be rewarded in trivial ways for their submission."

Sulla looked across the Drusus. "And what do you say about this, Marcus Livius?"

"My father opposed the Gracchi. He was absolutely convinced of Senate supremacy, and he taught me well," Drusus answered. "Also I have pledged that I will never direct my clients to oppose the Senate. The Senate must be the supreme body within the Republic and I will not resile from that conviction. But that supremacy must be exercised intelligently, honourably, and with due respect for the Mos Majorum. A Senate that doesn't rule with the consent of the People is not a Senate that adheres to the Mos Majorum; instead of being the governing body of a Republic, it would better be described as a club that shares the Kingship. And I have no room for kings in my vision of Rome." He fixed Sulla with a stare. "Do you have room for kings in your vision of the Republic, Lucius Cornelius?"

"Do not insult me, Marcus Livius!" Sulla exploded.

"Excellent!" Drusus smiled. "We're all Republicans, we all support the Mos Majorum, and we all want the Senate to govern with the consent of the People! Why are we arguing?"

"Precisely because of that!" Sulla replied. "I want the Senate to rule with the consent of the People; but what you seem to be advocating is that the Senate rule only with the *permission* of the People! There's a big difference!"

"Perhaps you see the difference, Lucius Cornelius," Drusus responded. "But I don't. So why are we getting so impatient with each other about the fact that I use one word while you use another to describe exactly the same thing?"

"You seriously can't see the difference, Marcus Livius?" Sulla asked quietly.

"No, I can't," Drusus replied. "But my family tradition and my own actions show that I'm no Popularis. That should convince you! But if it doesn't, then I am quite happy to adopt your terminology. I agree that the Senate must rule with the consent of the People." Drusus looked to Silo. "Are you happy with that, Quintus Poppeus?"

“Absolutely,” Silo replied with conviction. “I didn't see this conversation as being about any difference in purpose, but only about tactics on how to achieve that purpose.”

Sulla appeared mollified. “Then we are all agreed,” he summarised. Then smiling, he offered his right arm to Drusus. “My apologies for my shadow-boxing, Marcus Livius.” And then he turned also to Silo. But behind the smile, he was deeply troubled.

Three days later the three were invited to Flaccus' house. They arrived to find Sextus Julius Caesar, Young Marius and Lucius Cornelius Cinna sitting in the triclinium, on the side of the host that conveyed greater honour. The three earlier guests stood to greet them with courtesy.

“Quintus Poppaedius!” Young Marius was first to speak, his voice genuinely warm and offering his arm. “It's a pity that we seem to have gone separate ways, but be assured of my love for you for your loyalty to my father.” Little did Young Marius know how this intended compliment stabbed Silo through his guilt-ridden heart.

“He was a man worthy of any man's loyalty,” Silo replied more evenly.

“And Lucius Cornelius,” Young Marius continued his greetings, this time with considerable frigidity and only an inclination of the head. Sulla responded with an unemotional formalism. “And Marcus Livius,” Young Marius finished coldly, with another slight nod.

Drusus responded to Young Marius, nodding his head almost wistfully.

Sextus Julius Caesar was warmer to the three Italianists. They had all dealt honesty with him in the past and knew that it was only the legacy of familial hatred that had turned Young Marius against any of them. Cinna managed to appear both aloof and smarmy at the same time. How could he possibly be seen as Consul material? Sulla asked himself. Perhaps he just agrees with whatever anyone says to him, and ingratiates himself in that manner. When all were seated, Flaccus took control of the meeting.

Flaccus looked around all six with a faint smile, “I make no secret to Lucius Cornelius and Marcus Livius, perhaps the most conservative of us here tonight, that I am convinced the Republic's future can only be ensured through a harmonious relationship between the Senate and the People.

“Although the Senate is the effective governing body of the Republic, each Senator must realise that he is a servant of the Republic and thereby a servant of his fellow-citizens. It is fitting that every officeholder should be constantly aware of the legitimate aspirations and needs of the People and constantly seeking to satisfy those aspirations and needs to the best of his ability. Does this make me a Popularis in your eyes?” Flaccus asked Sulla. Then he turned to the other side. “Nor do I make any secret to you three how much I fear how the rightful power of the People can be easily abused and turned against their own best interests by unscrupulous men. The political power of the People must be expressed through proper channels and according to Law. Does this make me a patronising Bonus in your eyes?

"I hope not," Flaccus continued. "Personally, I have considerable sympathy with many items on the Popularis agenda, and will do all I can to promote them. And I think that you trust me on this or I would not have enjoyed your support at the elections. And I'm adamant that Italians must be treated as full citizens, and not as half-worthy men to whom we have been overly generous and who should therefore be grateful and submissive. Italians must be given their full honour and due and I know you trust me on that point as well."

"But if you continue to distrust each other, only the Boni will benefit," Flaccus continued. "We must find ways of respecting each other's positions, even if we disagree from time to time. Disagreements must be resolved not by brittle half-measures that will fall apart at the first sign of tension, but by adopting creative and mutually-reinforcing programmes that provide for all of you what you really want while conceding what is less important. I think the first step in this process would be to provide a forum in which your parties can discuss matters of mutual interest and work co-operatively. This must be done in a way which can't be lead astray by a fiery orator or an impatient mass in the Comitia, or dissipated by a spray of unrelated and uncoordinated individual issues."

"Which leads me to the second step. I think this forum should be one in which the People as a whole should be represented by men whom they trust, rather than an unwieldy gathering that can resolve one way on a question one day and then reverse their opinion the next day, all depending on who can stack the most voters on any particular occasion. In particular I have seen how the Italian tribes operate, and I think this is an excellent model to be followed by the Roman tribes. The Italians have each selected some trustworthy men to attend Comitia meetings, to discuss the issues among themselves to come to a common mind and then vote accordingly. Their private discussions are doubtless robust at times, but I have no doubt that they are argued with intelligence and reason, rather than instinct and base emotions.

"So I suggest to you that you pass a bill through the Comitia to establish that each Roman Tribe is to elect ten men each year as their representatives. That these men be charged with the duty of taking careful and intelligent note of all proposals and discuss these proposals carefully, and that only those men be permitted to vote in the Comitia. This will allow more careful and effective decisions to be made by men who will be able to consider how one proposal might strengthen or weaken the effect of another. At present each vote stands alone and quite often they in conflict with others. Co-ordination of your programme would do much to make the total package more effective. This will allow the Comitia meetings to be much smaller, and will permit thugs and ruffians to be excluded from the Well. Violence and intimidation, the favourite tactic of the both Boni and Perople when they fear each other, will no longer be possible. The people will no longer be at the mercy of those who would disrupt their voice. And at the other extreme, rabble-rousers will not be able to fire up the Mob to act outside the lawful process." Flaccus looked around the group one final time. "Your comments, please?"

There was a pause, no-one wanting to be the first to commit his opinion. At length Drusus spoke. "We are all of us Senatorial Class. Perhaps these issues should properly be the reserve of the People themselves."

"Indeed," replied Flaccus. "But I would like to know if you would commend this approach."

"As you said, Lucius Valerius, we Italians already follow that model," Silo pointed out. "How the Roman Tribes organise their affairs is for them to decide. We have no right to interfere."

"I think I like the principle," Caesar said at length. "I'm sick of getting a consensus at one Comitia meeting, and then having to hold it together for the next six months so the consequences of that consensus can be properly applied. A smaller and more consistent attendance would make it much easier to build an integrated programme."

"And I think that this is probably one of the reasons why the Italian Party is so effective, even though it has so few numbers," Young Marius put in. "Their people are disciplined, consistent and cohesive, like a good army. If all the People can be brought to this level of co-ordination and clear thinking, we would present a much more compelling case in the Senate."

Which is why I don't like it, Sulla said to himself. But I wont let anyone know just yet. Let them continue to think I'm going along with them.

"If I may interrupt," Flaccus broke in. "I would be pleased if you could each move to the couch opposite your present position. I wish to make it clear that I hold all of you in equal esteem. I do not want to generate any misunderstandings on the basis of what is a purely random seating order." Flaccus stood as he finished speaking. His six guests hesitantly looked at each other and stood also, shuffling around the room as requested. Flaccus spoke again as they resumed their seats. "We have not yet heard from the two Lucii Cornelii," he quipped, playing on the co-incidence of Sulla's and Cinna's names.

Sulla stared stonily at Cinna. He had not been amused by Flaccus drawing attention to any form of commonality between himself and this rabble-rouser opposite.

Cinna was not in favour of a more controlled and professionalised Comitia. His strongest weapon was precisely the stirring of emotions, usually fear or greed. He rarely built a reasoned argument; that was too boring and his hearers lost interest. Any reform that would result in a more careful and critical Comitia would weaken his chances of success. "I'm not so sure that what you suggest would be a good thing," he said at last. "It would mean that the vote on any question would be restricted to only ten men in each Tribe but our tradition is that every adult male citizen is permitted to vote. What you are proposing is contrary to the Mos Majorum, and shouldn't even be considered," he concluded with what he hoped would be the exact goad needed to appeal to the two conservative Italianists opposite him. "What do you think, Lucius Cornelius?" He prompted Sulla.

Sulla could barely restrain a sneer. "I understand why you would be opposed to it, Lucius Cornelius," he replied. "You would be the last person who

would like his proposals examined carefully and in detail; you prefer lies before facts, and ridiculous promises before reasonable expectations."

"Please, Lucius Cornelius," Flaccus interjected, "We are here to discuss plans, not trade insults!"

"That was not an insult, Lucius Valerius, but a well-founded assessment," Sulla retorted. "This man is ever the champion of the Mos Majorum where it can be used to sow discontent; but he opposes those aspects which create any social harmony. If he were able, he would overthrow the Mos Majorum in the name of the Mos Majorum!" Sulla waved his annoyance away. "Caius Marius, you know how I loved your father until his illness drove us apart! You know, Sextus Julius, that you can deal with us trusting in our integrity, and we know the same of you. But I will only deal with this man" - flicking a hand towards Cinna - "if you two swear that you will guarantee his compliance with anything we might agree together. If I have that, then your integrity will be ample to make up his shortfall."

"How can you dare to impugn the integrity of Lucius Cornelius Cinna, when you went to the consular elections claiming to be 'the Heir of Great Marius', knowing that he considered you his chief enemy?" Young Marius exploded.

Sulla paused, to allow the tension in the room to drop slightly. Then he replied softly. "You know yourself, if you are honest in your own heart. But if that doesn't convince you, ask anyone close to Caius about his last year. He was not the man beloved of all Rome. The gods had raised him high only to drop him so low at the end," Sulla sighed deeply. "The Caius Marius who hated me in that final year was not the Caius Marius whom we all loved; and whom we loved to the end, knowing that he can't be blamed for what the gods did to him."

Young Marius was not prepared for such an answer. It had evoked in him the memories of when he was adolescent and his father healthy, the times when 'Uncle Lucius' was the template for every virtue a commander could ask of a subordinate. And even when the second stroke felled his father, his heart-felt appreciation for Sulla's ingenious walking-frame was evident. Yes, perhaps 'Uncle Lucius' is right; perhaps I should not hate this man. "Tell me this, Lucius Cornelius," Young Marius responded at length. "When you marched down the Via Salaria with those three legions, who else was in on your conspiracy?"

"If by 'conspiracy' you mean re-establishing the lawful government of Rome and restoring the Mos Majorum, then I will tell you the names of those who risked their lives to help me," Sulla replied intently. "I was assisted by Marcus Livius Drusus, Lucius Porcius Cato, Titus Lafrenius, Quintus Caecilius Metellus Pius, and more Italians than I could list; but above all, the man whose genius invented the scheme and who had the courage and judgement to carry it out under the very nose of Sulpicius and Caius; our saviour Quintus Poppeius Silo."

Young Marius gaped in astonishment. He turned towards Silo, gaping.

"He speaks the truth, Caius," Silo confirmed. "It was the only way we could restore lawful government, and at the same time allow your father to take command in the war he so desperately wanted to fight. And it also allowed us a lawful way of ensuring his seventh consulship. I tell you that sincerely. You have no idea how deeply we all loved your father, how much we all wanted him to

fulfil the prophecy and be remembered as the Greatest Roman of all, despite the illness of his last days.”

Flaccus had deliberately sat back during this exchange. He knew he had lost control of the agenda, but realised that no progress could be made until these buried issues had been aired. As he looked at Young Marius, he knew that he had made the right decision. He paused while Young Marius took it in.

“We might or we might not be political adversaries on some issues but we are certainly not enemies,” Flaccus interrupted quietly, sensing the need for an explicit conclusion.

‘Except for Cinna!’ Sulla thought to himself, but had enough grace to not say it aloud.

“Lucius Cornelius Sulla,” Flaccus turned his attention to Sulla. “Would you share your thoughts on our proposal, please?”

“Yes, Lucius Valerius,” Sulla responded, changing his mind on the basis that anything that Cinna opposed must have some merit. “It’s certainly an innovation but I’m not convinced it is contrary to the Mos Majorum or even the current practice if you look closely at it. Although it’s customary for every adult male citizen to be permitted to vote, it’s rare that more than one man in ten actually is present and voting. In other words, nine out of ten effectively allow the tenth man to decide for them; to act as their representative, in a way. Your proposal does little more than formalise this practice but with the safeguard that the tribes can select those representatives rather than relying on whoever happens to be there on the day. And that’s a good thing, because more often than not it’s the idle or the worthless who attend the Comitia, while honest men doing honest work are unable to attend. If anything, it will result in a more accurate representation of the mind of each Tribe as a whole, and thus be more true to the underlying principle. So I would support it.”

Flaccus next looked to Drusus. “You were reluctant to express an opinion earlier, Marcus Livius. Would you care to comment now?”

“I was a Tribune of the plebs, and I can agree with the comments by Sextus Julius,” Drusus conceded. “It does take a superhuman effort to shepherd any major measures through because it takes only one meeting to be stalled or disrupted by one spoiler. Then the whole process can fall over. I think that your proposal would make the Comitia a much more efficient body. Whether or not this is a good thing or a bad thing depends on your perspective. I expect that the more moderate Populares would welcome that, as would many Italians who live in fear of a redneck reaction from the Head Count. But many enemies of the People would fear a Comitia that can’t be disrupted or perverted at will.”

“Quintus Poppaedius?” Flaccus invited.

“It is not for this Italian to interfere with how the Roman Tribes want to organise their internal affairs,” Silo said, “but we would welcome any measures to make our men safer. The crowd can sometimes be intimidating to our small numbers.”

“Would the Italian Tribes vote on this matter, or would you abstain?” Caesar asked.

"I can't speak for them," Silo answered. "But depending on what conclusion we seven can reach, I would be prepared to urge them to support it."

"And what about the Boni?" Caesar continued. "Have you spoken about this to any of them, Lucius Valerius?"

"Not yet," Flaccus answered. "But I think they'll be split by it. Some of them dread the thought of a Comitia meeting turning into a mob, and they'll support anything to ensure we never get twenty thousand idle Head Count in one place being whipped to a frenzy. Others don't care too much about the Mob, because it has no coherent or long-term political agenda; these Boni will have more fear of a better-organised Comitia that can actually effect any changes over time."

"This is a very bad idea," Cinna said emphatically. "It doesn't matter if this small Comitia is organised and efficient; if it can't get numbers of citizens together as a show of strength it will be ignored. The only resolutions that the Senate takes any notice of are those backed by big numbers! If you give away those big numbers you give away your means of enforcement."

Caesar was visibly losing patience with his Popularis colleague.

"Lucius Cornelius; stop talking rubbish! If the Senate refuses to pay due regard to resolutions from the Comitia, there will always remain the opportunity for the new Comitia to call a Convention. Then they can explain to the whole city how the Senate is thwarting the Comitia's will, and that will carry a much stronger consensus than any resolution made on the spot. That should impress the Senate, if it ever needs to be impressed."

"It would appear that we are generally in agreement, except for Lucius Cornelius Cinna," Flaccus summarised. "I'll discuss this proposal with Gnaeus Octavius as soon as I can, and we'll see if we can gain Boni support as well. If not, we go ahead without it."

Octavius was wary of the proposal when Flaccus outlined it to him and Cato two evenings later. "Who else has heard about this?" he asked.

"I have spoken to Drusus and Sulla, and they both see it as a way to moderate the Comitia. They think it will keep out the likes of Sulpicius. I have also spoken to Silo to get an Italian perspective, but he has no interest in what he calls 'purely internal Roman affairs'. On the other side, Young Marius and Sextus Julius Caesar support it, also to lock out the demagogues so they will have more influence. Cinna hates it; he is the sort that the others are targeting."

"Rightly so!" snorted Octavius. "Well, if Sulla likes it, then there must be some merit in it. If it were not for his links to Drusus and the Italians, he would be a leader of the Boni by now. But why would Caesar support it? This plan would tend to lock the Comitia out of sight, where it would have less influence."

"Caesar can see that it would be easier for the likes of him to control," Flaccus explained. "And once he has it under control, then he can use it more effectively. Say this about Caesar, he always preferred the stiletto to the club. A much more precise instrument!"

"Yes, he would," Octavius nodded. "And he could be quite an opponent with a disciplined Comitia behind him instead of having to spend all his time playing sheep dog. But at least it won't be mobs in the streets."

"I was just thinking about how this might tie in with the new separation of City and Republic Senates," Cato mused. "Perhaps Sulla likes it because it provides an opportunity for separating the Comitia system as well. And if there is formed a new Republic Comitia, then the psychological disadvantage of the Italian tribes being represented by only a handful will largely disappear. The Italians might become bolder."

"Yes, that's a point," Octavius agreed. "But so what if they get bolder? I suggest that they're already very organised and professional about the way they do things. Even if they might appear stronger in numbers compared to now, they'll still have only one vote per Tribe, and this reform will make the Roman Tribes as organised and professional as the Italians already are. I think it will weaken the Italians, on balance."

"I agree, Gnaeus," Cato concurred. "And besides, anything that gets Plebeian politics off the streets and into quiet rooms has to be a good thing. It will get the passion and thrill out of their speechifying, and make them think through the consequences of what they're asking for. They might even start seeing themselves as a People's Senate, and start behaving like mature men instead of spoilt children."

"Then you'll talk to your associates about this?" Flaccus asked.

"Yes; we'll see what they have to say and get back to you," Cato promised.

Cato relayed the Boni position back to Flaccus on the last day of February. Another meeting of the leading Populares and Italianists was called.

"The Boni will support the proposal, but only if a new building to house the Republic Comitia were to be built in Rome," Flaccus informed them. "It must remain within easy reach of the overwhelming majority of the Republic's citizens, and not hidden away where it might lose touch with Romans."

Flaccus smiled without mirth. "In other words, the Boni want to be able to keep an eye on the shop, and remind them how vulnerable they are!"

Caesar was delighted with this response. "Excellent! It also means that we'll be able to play a hard game against the Senate, too, if ever the need arises. Hopefully, just our proximity will ensure that any disputes can be smoothed down before anything gets out of hand."

"What a pity!" Silo responded. "I had hoped we could build a new Auditorium in Tarentum, closer to our provinces in the East, where all the money is! It would also mean that Italian tribes could intimidate more effectively than the Roman tribes."

All heads turned towards him in surprise.

"Just joking," Silo smiled back. "But I thought you should all have some idea of how this appears to us Italians. The sooner the Republic out-grows this infantile cradle of a city and the petty arrogance of so many of its inhabitants, the better!" Despite the smile, there was no doubt about the hard edge underneath.

"Remember, Quintus Poppeus, that we have shown ourselves to be your friends," Caesar said softly. "Unlike the Boni, to whom you were at best a necessary evil."

"I accept that, Sextus Julius," Silo softened as well. "But I feel myself getting older and I start to despair that either Boni or Populares will ever rise high enough to look over the city walls. The Republic is so much bigger than these few square miles!"

"It's unfortunate, Quintus Poppeus, that everything in life starts from where we are'," Flaccus counselled. "If we hope to start from anywhere else, the first necessary step is to get from where we are to that other place. So be of good humour and let us work to get there as soon as we can."

Young Marius spoke after a short pause. "I have no problems with that condition," he announced. "In fact, I'll put up half the cost to the building and invite the Boni to provide the other half as a show of solidarity in this enterprise."

"Provided we can agree on a suitable site," Caesar added hastily.

"Of course," Marius agreed.

"Actually, a decision like this is properly within the responsibility of the Censors," Flaccus remarked. "As an ex-Censor, I have no doubts about that. So perhaps it would be better for everyone to address their suggestions to Lucius Cornelius and Lucius Porcius. Let them decide on the site and then you can decide whether or not you want to contribute to the project."

Sulla nodded his agreement. "Yes; I'll talk to Lucius Porcius about this as soon as I can arrange to meet with him."

"But Cato is a Bonus, and you are a Bonus in everything except the Italian Question!" Cinna objected.

"It's not 'The Italian Question' any more, in case you have been asleep for the last seven years. It is now 'the Italian Answer,'" Sulla countered menacingly. "But if you're saying that I'm not trustworthy, then perhaps I need to discuss a second issue with my colleague; the suitability of a certain Lucius Cornelius Cinna for Senatorial rank."

Cinna leapt to his feet. "Just try it, Sulla!" he said, using the offensive form of address. "See how long it takes for the People to respond to such an insult!"

Sulla's response was most unexpected. He smiled broadly, and reclined back into his couch. "My, my! It seems the little cockerel believes he is an eagle!" Sulla chuckled softly. "Lucius Cornelius, my little piece of light entertainment! Please sit down and remain quiet until invited to speak. We men have important things to discuss and you are really quite a distraction."

Cinna remained standing, unsure of how to react. He didn't have time to decide before Caesar spoke to Cinna. "Lucius Cornelius, perhaps you should go home now. Your further contribution to this discussion is not required." Caesar looked pointedly towards Young Marius.

"Yes, Lucius Cornelius," Marius agreed after a moment. "Thank you for your assistance thus far."

Cinna looked from one of his companions to the other, and back again. His rage was barely contained. Then he turned abruptly and started stamping his feet.

towards to door. After a half-dozen paces it occurred to him that he should take his leave of Flaccus, and he turned on his heel.

"If you would excuse me, Lucius Valerius," He nodded curtly, however politely he might have intended, and turned away again. The other six men heard him call his retinue from the courtyard and leave, the door banging behind him.

Sulla spoke soberly to Caesar. "I admit that I've had my doubts about your agenda. But if you're prepared to cut loose from that piece of pestilence then I put all my doubts away." He turned to Drusus. "And I freely admit that you were right, Marcus Livius. The best way to keep the scum under control is to deal constructively with the honourable men among the Populares."

"Thank you, Lucius Cornelius," Caesar responded. "I take it we are agreed to the condition set by the Boni. In fact, I'd be happy if the new building were to front onto the Forum itself." Then Caesar caught himself. "Unless that would be seen as an attempt to confront the Senate, but I meant only to show a commitment to the partnership that is the basis of the Republic. Of course, the decision is for you and Lucius Porcius."

"Thank you for your insights, Sextus Julius," Sulla replied respectfully. "I expect that a decision as important as this will need to be considered by augurs and architects as well as the Censors. I'll talk to my colleague and we will take it from there. But be assured that I won't allow any decisions to become final without your involvement."

"However, I suggest that we have a more urgent matter to discuss at the moment," Sulla went on. "If I'm not mistaken, Cinna is even now planning how to thwart this process. I expect he'll revert to form by calling an Assembly and trying to stir up a mob. You must be ready to put a stop to him, and ruthlessly. That man values nothing except his own ambition, and must be brought to heel immediately."

"You're right, Lucius Cornelius," Caesar agreed. "Caius and I were confronted with a decision; do we oppose him, and fracture our movement, or do we try to work with him? Our decision was to try to control him. But his confrontations with you have been making that decision harder every time we meet. Today was the last straw. I had no real choice but to cut him loose." Caesar shrugged.

"If its your aim to destroy the Populares, then you won't find a better time than now to do us great damage. However, you'll damage me and Caius much more than you'll hurt the likes of Cinna. But if your aim is to undermine Cinna, you would do well to support us. Grant us small concessions so we can claim to have achieved something while Cinna is seen to be impotent in comparison."

Drusus broke in at this point. "It's what I've been urging you, Lucius Cornelius. It's much better to work with moderates than to drive the mass of the People into the arms of the Radicals."

Sulla nodded as he thought. "There's doubtless a great range of subjects we could discuss in good faith. Perhaps we could present each other with short notes about our objectives and programmes, and start to find more common ground. Let's meet at my house in three days' time. But in the meantime keep a close eye

on your former colleague. Cinna is the sort of man who learns nothing and forgets nothing,” Sulla cautioned. “He’ll be more dangerous to you two than to the Boni now that he has lost your favour; but in exchange, you have our trust.”

That first meeting between Populares and Italianists three days later proved very surprising to Sulla. He had expected the Populares to demand a raft of laws requiring subsidised grain for the Head Count and control of the courts for the Equites; these groups were respectively the muscle and the purse of any Popularis politician. Sulla came prepared to argue that these should be the province of the City authorities, and not the Republic. Only Republic laws should be within the jurisdiction of Republic Courts, meaning matters such as treason, extortion within the Provinces, or abuse of Republic office. And since these would invariably be administrative matters rather than civil, all Republic courts must be under the control of the Senate as the supreme governing body. He was prepared to leave civil matters for the City courts, and didn’t really care too much who ran them; they would almost always be cat-fights among the Equites anyway, so let them sort out their own arguments.

Instead, the topics listed on Caesar’s sheet of paper were much more shrewdly considered.

“Item 1; Army remuneration,” Caesar recited. “At present, Head Count who enlist in the legions are paid a pittance. They’re given enough food to keep them alive but not of any decent quality and they rely on loot to be able to buy a farm when they’re too old to serve any longer. This isn’t a good way to run an army! It means that those soldiers who serve against foreigners can become comfortably rich, for a man of the Head Count; but those who keep the peace in the provinces are permitted no plunder, nor may they engage in extortion, under the Miletus Decree. They retire from the Army fifteen years older, and without a denarius in their pockets.”

“That’s a problem,” Sulla conceded. “But it has ever been so, since the founding of the city.”

“Yes, but since the reforms by Caius Marius, our legionaries are no longer men of some substance, who would have a farm to go back to after the campaigning season,” Caesar continued. “Now many of the legionaries are Head Count, who have nothing to their name. If these men grow restive they could do anything.”

“If my father had not made those reforms, we would all be learning German by now!” Young Marius leapt to the defence of his father.

“Indeed that’s true!” Caesar agreed. “And the Marian Reforms also promised young men of the Head Count a career that was never open to them before. But like all great reforms, some fine-tuning and adjustments are required once it’s put into practice.”

“And the problem you perceive is that some are lucky and make their fortunes, while others miss out and could grow resentful,” Sulla summarised.

“Precisely!” Caesar agreed. “We must do something to guarantee every recruit will have something to retire to once he’s past his peak.”

"We could pay a better salary to those not able to profit from plunder," Sulla mused. "But that would be expensive. And it would probably be spent on wine and women, anyway. They would still retire with empty pockets."

"Ah, if I may," Drusus interjected. "We already have the answer to that problem. Remember the Ager Publicus Laws we pushed so hard back in the consulate of Lucius Julius and Publius Rutilius Rufus? They lapsed when everyone became fixated on the Italian citizenship debate, then the war, and then the turmoil around Sulpicius. So why don't we re-introduce my Ager Publicus Laws in the form that Caius Marius suggested all those years ago? Twenty iugera of farmland from the Ager Publicus for each man after fifteen years of service! Limited to Fifth Class or lower, to make sure we have enough to last for a long time to come." Drusus was confident that the mention of Marius as the principal supporter of that bill would ensure Young Marius supported it.

"Excellent!" Caesar exclaimed. "I remember that bill, now that you mention it. It was debated at a few Contio sessions as you say, but it was pushed off the agenda by other considerations."

"Yes. I like it too," Young Marius joined in.

"Then we all agree," Sulla concluded. "Do you have any other suggestions?"

"Yes; Professional Administrators," Caesar recited. "At present, consuls and praetors are appointed to govern the various provinces. It's customary that they take with them their own staff; sometimes educated slaves, sometimes family of their own or of friends, sometimes clients. This results in inconsistencies from one Province to the next, or from one governor to the next. The merchant classes find this variability confusing, and sometimes expensive if the new governor has a different view on the legality of a practice that was tolerated under a predecessor.

"I recommend that a College of Administrators be opened, and suitable men be trained to serve under the governors as their staff. Once allocated to a province, it would be expected that they would serve there for several years, with promotions to those who prove themselves most competent. Some movement between provinces would be expected as the need arises, particularly in the upper levels, but stability over time will bring greater uniformity in Public Administration. It should also act as a check on any attempt by a transitory governor to engage in corruption or extortion.

"Please note that this doesn't alter the practice of the Senate appointing governors in the customary way; but it will provide stability and uniformity of approach throughout the Roman World, thus stimulating more trade and investment. In other words, more wealth, which means more prosperity for my supporters in the higher classes and more taxes for the Republic. Everybody comes out a winner!"

"Im not so sure about that," Sulla responded. "I've been a governor. A governor needs men he can trust personally as his subordinates."

"And he can take such men with him as advisors and to ensure his wishes are not being subverted," Caesar replied. "If any Administrator acts improperly, the governor will be able to punish or even dismiss him. But a governor also

needs staff members who are expert in the local customs, precedents and politics if he is to be effective. A permanent professional cadre will be of great assistance.”

Sextus Julius,” Silo interjected. “I’ve been a governor too, and the best example of governing I have seen is from Quintus Pompeius Rufus, in Asia. He has set up exactly this type of training in Ephesus. I asked him for suitable staff to administer the cities of Bithynia and Pontus as part of my Military Governorship. Believe me, it’s a good idea to extend this to all governorships!”

Sulla was influenced, but not convinced. “Give me some more details, and time to think about it. I could yet be persuaded,” he conceded.

“Now, what other points did you want to bring to this discussion?” Caesar asked.

“I want some clarity about control of the courts,” Drusus said. “You know that I took control of the courts away from the Publicani after their shameful treatment of Publius Rutilius. My law made every jury to consist of equal numbers of Senators and Equites. Since then the Courts have moved back to being entirely Senatorial, principally because the Equites started to decide among themselves and then vote as a block, instead of every man forming his own opinion. Do you have any intention of restoring the courts to the Equites?” he asked at length.

“You might be surprised by this,” Caesar started disarmingly. “I think that Republic crimes should be separated from the routine cases, and tried in Republic courts. This would cover such things as Treason, abuse of Republican office, etc. Everything else should be left to the City courts, or the Tribal courts if it’s outside Rome. And every province should also have its own court system, under its governor. So in my vision, there would be very few Republic trials,” Caesar went on. “And since these will be crimes against good government, they should be under the control of the Republic Senate. No need for the People to be involved. Does that satisfy you?”

“I am surprised, Sextus Julius,” Sulla exclaimed. “I had been thinking along the same lines!”

“Then we are agreed?” Drusus asked.

“Yes!” the other four answered in unison.

“And I have a point I think should be discussed,” Sulla added. “If the Comitia is reformed into a representative body, will elections be determined by the mass of the People directly, or will the representative Comitia do the voting?”

“Remember, the only Republic offices to be filled by election by the People will be Praetors, Consuls and Censors,” Drusus interjected. “That should be easy enough for a popular vote for the Roman tribes, but it would be more cumbersome for the Italians if it’s a mass vote.”

“It’ll make little difference to us Italians,” Silo shrugged. “We use the representative model anyway. The most important difference in my view would be that a representative vote would allow more scope for debate, compromise and agreement than a mass vote.”

"I would prefer a representative vote, myself," Caesar commented. "That will reduce the influence of demagogues."

"I'm sure the Boni would say the same thing," Sulla commented drily. "So we're agreed that each Tribe will elect its Praetors, and everything else will be the Praetors voting on behalf of their tribes."

"Things have gone surprisingly well today," Drusus observed. "It seems we're agreed on everything and that the Boni would probably support us as well. Why can't politics always be this easy?"

"So! Shall we write up a summary of our recommendations and present them to Lucius Valerius?" Caesar suggested.

Sulla took pen and paper and started to write. After five minutes he had finished, and read his summary back to the other four. All agreed, and the five signed their names to the document. Sulla called for Jason to make five more copies, one for each of them, and then called for refreshments to be served in the courtyard. His guests followed him into the late morning sunshine.

Young Marius asked Sulla aside for a private chat. "I greatly regret that we became estranged, Lucius Cornelius. I would like that rift to be healed."

"Indeed, it became a cause for sadness for me, too," Sulla replied, telling the lie with great sincerity. He cared nothing for this upstart, but politics is all about telling people what you want them to believe. "I'm very much heartened that we're now reconciled."

"Yes," Young Marius agreed. "Thank you for all you did for my father right to the end, whether he was thankful or not."

Sulla inclined his head in acknowledgement.

Flaccus was impressed by the agreements between the five. He was even more impressed that Caesar and Young Marius had dumped that poisonous piece of work, Cinna. He was confident that Cinna would try to stir up trouble to block the representative model being proposed and this by itself would ensure the Boni would back it. There could be no doubt about it; Sextus Julius Caesar, although a Populares, was fundamentally a true Roman! Perhaps he might even be able to mould Young Marius into one, too! He called on Octavius, his colleague, to arrange a meeting with the Censors. Both Cato and Sulla were available the next afternoon.

"I like it!" Cato enthused when the outline of the agreement with Caesar was read to him. "The retirement land for the soldiers is an excellent idea. Every soldier has to know that his future is the gift of the Republic, and not from his General. There has been a dangerous tendency since the Head Count were enlisted for them to see themselves as the personal tool of their generals and not as defenders of the Republic. And the Permanent Administrators is another excellent idea. It sets up a legal framework that will stop the plunderers and protect the honest governor. I don't want to be turned into another example of the power of Publicani hatred when I take a province!"

"Making all the Republic Courts entirely Senatorial makes sense. Let the Equites have their commercial courts but we must control the political courts.

And making the Comitia thoroughly representative will civilise Plebeian politics. That will give no scope for rabble-rousers. All-in-all, an excellent program!"

"I like it too," confessed Octavius. "But that's what worries me! Where's the trap?"

"The trap is that it divides the Populares," Sulla answered. "It will take them a generation to work out how to use this new representative system instead of mobilising the Mob. And by then they'll be so tame that they'll fear the Mob as much as we do."

"Yes," Drusus chimed in. "This will make Popularis politics obey the Rule of Law, with proper meetings using proper Standing Orders and rational debate. The days of the lowest common denominator rampaging through the streets will soon be over."

"And it's no secret, either," Sulla added. "Caesar knows that as well as we do. This is how the People will be reconciled to the Senate at last; how it was before the Gracchi tried to turn Rome up-side down."

Octavius pondered a moment. "I think you are right. I'll support every point, and I'm eager to hear any more ideas like these."

"Excellent, Gnaeus!" Sulla exclaimed. "Now that we know we have all three parties supporting the plan, it's time Lucius Porcius and I started discussing the location of the buildings we need."

"If I know you, Lucius Cornelius, you've already done your thinking!" Cato commented with a wry smile.

"Indeed I do have an idea or two; these have been formed in response to the Boni conditions of agreement and the response by Sextus Julius. Allow me to outline what I have in mind." Sulla pulled a folded sheet of paper out of the sinus of his toga, and spread it on the table. It was a rough plan of the Forum, but where the Basilica Sempronia stood in reality Sulla had drawn in a completely new building. "The Boni response required the new Comitia building to be within easy reach of the citizens of Rome," Sulla explained. "And we need not only a Comitia building but also a new Senate building. Let the City Senate have the old building, it's really too small for 300 of us, but ample for the City Senate of 100 men.

"So I suggest that both the Republic Senate and the Republic Comitia should be included in one new single building, to show physically and architecturally that the Senate and the People of the Roman Republic are united and must remain so forever. Here, as you stand in the middle of the Forum, you will see to your right hand side the entry to the Senatus Magnus; and here, to the left, what I have presumed to call the Auditorium Gentium. The buildings will be large enough for each member of the Senate or the Auditorium to have his own office, and also for the various clerks and other functionaries. There will be a colonnaded garden between the two wings, open to both Senators and Auditorium Representatives, and opening onto the Forum."

"My, you have put a lot of thought into this!" Cato said as he took in the plan.

Sulla smiled as if embarrassed. "I couldn't sleep one night so I just let my head go. Then I had Jason make a fair copy in the morning."

"Well, you certainly don't propose to let the Comitia meet out of sight!" Octavius noted. "How many will fit into these buildings?"

"I've allowed for 750 members of the Auditorium, and 500 members of the Senate," Sulla replied. "That's much larger than needed, but it allows that there might be an increase in the numbers of Tribal Representatives elected some time in the future, and also it allows for Senators living longer in the future, while new Senators are being added through the normal legal processes, increases in Senate numbers, etc."

"I like the concept of both being in two wings of a single building," Cato said at length. "And giving them office facilities on site. Over time this will tend to make the Representatives think and act more like Senators."

"Yes," Octavius agreed. "As you say, Lucius Cornelius, this is indeed a trap for the Populares."

"Very well, Lucius Cornelius," Cato said as though making a judgement. "Let's adopt this as a concept for the moment. We'll need to commission surveyors and architects to work it up, of course, but it certainly has a lot going for it."

"Just one thing," Sulla said semi-apologetically. "I want to pass it under the nose of Sextus Julius Caesar first. I promised him we would make no firm decision without him having some input. I didn't promise him a veto but I did promise that he would be heard."

Cato bristled slightly at this. "If you promised to hear him then you should hear him. But I made no such promise." Then he softened. "Yes, take your sketch to him! If he has anything to say that we've missed, then we'd be foolish to not take it into account."

"Then if there's no more business we need to discuss now...?" Sulla asked.

The other three looked to each other. "I don't think so," Octavius answered.

"Sextus Julius, you said that you would like the new Comitia building to front onto the forum, if possible," Sulla commented as Caesar indicated a couch to sit on.

"That would be nice," Caesar replied. "But the Boni might not like that. They've grown accustomed to meeting indoors, while the Plebs stand under the weather. To grant the plebs not only shelter but prime position might be asking too much!"

"Well, look what I have got them to agree to. If you like it, we'll start making more definite plans." Sulla unfolded his sketch on the triclinium table between them.

"I propose one long building running for about 70 paces along the southern edge of the Forum, from the Temple of Saturn to the Temple of Castor," Sulla started explaining. At the left hand end, for twenty-three paces, is the Auditorium Gentium where the Republic Comitia sits. At the right hand end, for twenty paces, is the Senatus Magnus, where the Republic Senate sits. Between the two, some

twenty-seven paces wide, is a colonnaded garden twenty paces deep, where Senators and Representatives may meet and talk. Behind the garden and the two meeting chambers will be a four-floor building with offices, one room for each member of each House. Offices for the clerks and workers in the building will be under the floors of their relevant chambers. Well, what do you think?" Sulla grinned.

Caesar was stunned. "I don't believe it! They're treating the Plebs as their equals!"

"Well, not quite," Sulla corrected him. "They have the right-hand side of the building as seen from the Forum. And also, that is the side closest to the Temple of Saturn. That's how they are asserting their ancient lineage."

"That's but a trifle!" Caesar exclaimed. "Lucius Cornelius, you silver-tongued devil! This is excellent!"

"Then I'll tell them you will accept it?"

"Yes!"

"Excellent!" Sulla closed that conversation. "Now, about the cost. I realise this is a lot bigger than anyone might have had in mind so Caius Marius might not be eager to pay half the cost any more. Please talk it over with him; I've told no-one about his pledge and he deserves the opportunity to re-consider now that we know the scale of the works."

"I will, Lucius Cornelius. May I keep this sketch, to explain it to him?"

"Certainly, that copy was prepared for you." Sulla stood to take his leave. "Let me know what you two decide."

Sulla reported back to Cato that the Populares leadership also supported the basic concept. Augurs were consulted, and the signs were propitious. Three days later an architect was engaged.

Greetings, Lucius Porcius!" Sulla smiled as he stepped through Cato's front door. "Thank you for being available today." He followed his host to the courtyard after the return of his greeting. "I've been going through the records of income and expenditure over the last ten years," Sulla continued, "but with a slight difference. I've separated out, in a rough way, how much has been spent on Rome and how much has been spent on the army and other expenses outside Rome, just to get an idea of what sort of funding the separate Senates will need."

"That was a good idea, Lucius Cornelius; I had just assumed that all that would sort itself out over the first year or two." Cato replied.

"Then your instinct is better than mine," Sulla smiled again. "Because you're more or less right. But I was getting a bit anxious, so I went through the exercise to put my mind at rest. I found that the current tax levels will result in Rome raising slightly less than is currently spent on it. The Italian tribes will be much more comfortable; if they halve what taxes they currently pay to Rome, and add that to their own internal levies, then they will still be able to afford much better public facilities than they currently enjoy."

"And how will the Republic Treasury look?" Cato asked.

“So long as we hold onto the Provinces and apply the Miletus Decree to all of them, and if Pontus pays the reparations set for them, the Republic will be able to pay its way. That's including an allowance for the Soldiers Retirement Land Grants we discussed with Sextus Julius. But if we have another major war requiring a substantial increase in numbers of soldiers, we will be going backwards. We'll need to make up the shortfall with plunder or other penalties.”

“But plunder is for the generals who seize it, and for their soldiers!” Cato objected.

“The Retirement Land Grants will go a long way towards replacing the plunder for the lower ranks,” Sulla countered. “And as for the share taken by the officers; let them learn a bit of restraint! I recommend that we bring in a new Law of Plunder, allocating half of all plunder to the Republic, with the remainder to be distributed to the soldiers. Second Class and above need no plunder; they have wealth enough already,” Sulla concluded.

Cato compressed his lips as he considered the matter. “No,” he answered at last. “Let's get the scheme up and running as it is at the moment. If and when we need to make such a Law, let it be done then. I don't want to bring problems forward.”

“As you say, Lucius Porcius,” Sulla conceded. “That measure can wait until it's needed. And who is to say that a long peace won't bring greater prosperity and therefore greater taxes?”

“Anyway, how is the architect coming along?” Cato asked. They had decided on a division of labour in their Censorship, in which Cato managed the day-to-day works and Sulla supervised the forward planning. Cato felt much more comfortable with this; he was a man with routines, finding them re-assuring, but he was out of his depth when it came to imagination.

“Very early days yet, he tells me,” Sulla said breezily. “The first thing he did was send surveyors out to measure the site exactly, and ask me how much we're prepared to pay for its construction so he has a target to work towards.”

“What budget did you set for him?” Cato asked warily.

“I didn't,” Sulla replied. “I told him that it had to be functionally adequate, structurally robust, and with finishes that were pleasant and durable without being ostentatious. Within that, I wanted it as cheap as reasonably possible. I told him to come back to me with an estimated cost within a month.”

“And he said...?”

“The basic structure, ready to be operational with basic-average quality fittings, would be about one hundred thousand *sesterium milia*. That's about four thousand talents of gold. Add to that whatever we wanted to spend on decoration, murals, marble finishes, gilded doors, etc.”

“Ouch!” said Cato. “That means twice as much if we want to fit it out as anything to be proud of! Where are we going to get that much money? We won't have ten years to save up for it!”

“That won't be a problem,” Sulla answered with a wave of the hand. “Caius Marius has already promised twenty thousand sesterces out of his own purse. Perhaps we should write to Caepio and invite him back if he would care to toss in

another fifty thousand – the gods know his family still owes the Republic fifteen thousand talents of gold from his father's crimes, which would pay for of the project in one clean swing! Or perhaps some of your wealthier colleagues might offer to match any donations from the Populares.”

“Hmmm,” Cato pondered. “You know, that's not as silly as it sounds. Young Gnaeus Pompeius is rich, ambitious, and still trying to live down his father's shame. He might well rise to a challenge like that.”

The proposal for the separation of the City Comitia from the Republic Comitia sailed through the next Senate meeting without a problem. The representative nature of the the Republic Comitia was also overwhelmingly endorsed, with the notable opposition of only Cinna and three of his allies. Finally, Cato and Sulla announced their intention to build a new building for the new Republican Houses. This being entirely within the powers of the Censors, the matter wasn't put to the vote but both Consuls led the Senate in a standing ovation in response.

“Conscript Fathers,” Sulla announced as the applause died down. “It's my intention to mount a stone on the wall of the new building, facing the Forum. On that stone will be engraved not my name, nor that of Lucius Porcius, even though we as Censors are entitled to that honour; but instead will be engraved the names of the one hundred most generous contributors to the cost of the building, in order of the value of their contributions.” He looked around the chamber. “All future generations will be able to read the names of those who were part of this marvellous endeavour! For the moment contributions will be accepted up to a total of two hundred and fifty thousand *sestertium milia*, to cover for any possible cost over-runs. If you want your name on that stone then you will need to put your money into the fund quickly, before it's fully subscribed, or you will miss out.” Sulla again scanned the terraced benches.

“Naturally, I don't intend to waste money. I won't spend simply because I have the cash to spare! Should the actual cost be less than the total of the Fund I will repay to contributors in proportion to their contribution. But that's in the future! I want the purse to be full before we start and the refunds can wait until completion. I'll give an updated report of money received each Senate meeting. For the first three months I'll accept contributions only from Senators; if the fund isn't fully subscribed and paid in that time I'll then start to accept contributions from non-senators.” Sulla returned to his seat.

Gnaeus Pompeius stood as Sulla made this request for funds.

“I am sorry, Gnaeus Pompeius; you are pedarius, and not entitled to speak,” Octavius responded.

“Please, Gnaeus Octavius,” Sulla intervened. “With the permission of the Senate, I would like to hear him.”

Octavius looked around the chamber. “The Censor seeks permission of the Senate for Gnaeus Pompeius to speak. Is there any objection?”

Catulus stood. “I object to the son of Strabo even being in the Senate, much more do I object to him speaking in it!”

"There is an objection, so I ask for voices," Octavius announced. "Those in favour of granting leave for Gnaeus Pompeius to speak?" A murmur of 'ayes' rose. "Those against?" Only four voices. "Permission is granted," Octavius decreed, not even asking if a division was required.

Pompeius rose to his feet again.

"I thank the Senate for the privilege of being permitted to speak. As Quintus Lutatius has so correctly stated, my family has a poor history of defending the Republic," Pompeius confessed. "I seek to atone for that part of my family's past. I pledge to match, denarius for denarius, the sum total of any other two Senators combined, up to the point when the estimated cost of two hundred and fifty thousand *sestercium milia* is fully subscribed." Pompeius sat abruptly. There was a pause of incredulity before the Senate erupted into more applause. Then the Senators stood as they continued the applause, the two Consuls joining them.

Silo approached yet one more town at the head of a cohort escorting the new Civil Administrators assigned to this region. An Armenian officer rode out to meet him, with an escort of four.

"My name is Parenos. I am the Governor of this district," he introduced himself curtly. "What is your business here, lord Silo?"

"I have come to set up Roman administration in this area, as agreed between Rome and Armenia ten years ago," Silo answered bluntly.

"This area was never intended to become Roman territory," Parenos asserted flatly. "You have come further than the agreement permits. I can offer you hospitality for a few days but you must turn back."

"Thank you for your offer, but I am afraid that you are the one who is mistaken," Silo met assertion with assertion. "The agreement clearly stated that Roman authority was to be recognised over all territories west of the Euphrates. This is Roman territory."

"It seems you are not familiar with this land," Parenos replied with a grin that was more grimace. "That river you crossed some twenty miles back was the Euphrates. You are now in Armenian lands, east of the River."

"You must be new to this governorship, Parenos," Silo replied with a patronising tone. "That river was not the Euphrates, but a tributary to it. The Euphrates passes some 200 miles south of here, and then turns to the north. You are in the space between the Euphrates and one of its western tributaries."

Parenos looked Silo up and down with distaste. "Consider my invitation withdrawn. You don't show proper courtesy to your host. Turn around now or you will be driven out of Armenia in disgrace. That would be a terrible way to ruin so fine a reputation!" Parenos turned his horse and trotted back towards the town.

Silo watched Parenos back with an amused smile on his face. "It would seem that Tigranes is trying his luck again," he said at last. "Oh, well! Send a squadron of riders back to Ancyra and set the legions marching this way."

"Yes, sir," the cohort commander responded. "But in the meantime, do we continue into the town?"

"No. Too many civilians with us," Silo decided. "Let Parenes think that he has us daunted for the moment. He's probably be scribbling a report back to Tigranes even as we speak, hoping against all hope that his little show of strength has us bluffed but demanding more troops in case it hasn't." Silo pulled his horse around and started plodding back towards the west.

Silo returned ten days later, at the head of twelve legions. His cavalry had already scouted ahead to Parenes' town and well beyond. Silo knew that Tigranes was approaching with almost 100,000 men, but still a few days' march away. Parenes trotted out to meet him again under the mid-day sun.

"Lord Silo," Parenes greeted him formally. "It disturbs me to see you accompanied by so many men! This could lead to a serious misunderstanding between Rome and its Friend and Ally Tigranes, King of Kings."

"That's why I have brought these men with me, Parenes," Silo responded. "Each of them is an experienced negotiator, with considerable skill in many different techniques of persuasion."

Parenes looked down the road to the legionaries standing in marching order. "They look like common soldiers to me," he opined.

"Ah, yes; but very good at persuading their enemies to surrender, or flee, or die," Silo countered.

"I was not aware of any enemies of Rome in this region," Parenes returned, deliberately ignoring the threat. "But if you would care to tell me where they are, I'll set things right with my own men as a good Friend and Ally should. Your men are not required for that purpose."

Silo walked his horse forward, menacingly. "Let me make sure that you are fully aware of all relevant details, Parenes. I have twelve legions behind me and another six legions who will be here within three days; all of them veterans of the war with Mithridates. In that war we lost less than 20,000 men, most of those when Archelaus surprised isolated garrisons. Mithridates lost over ten times as many, not to mention his Kingdom and his life. We know Tigranes is approaching with roughly the same number as I have here."

"So if you think Armenians are ten times better fighters than Pontics, then you might give yourself a fifty-fifty chance. But we are here first so we'll be able to chose the battleground and prepare our positions. Tigranes' men will be exhausted and unprepared. They'll need to be much better than ten times the Pontics!"

"King of Kings Tigranes is a Friend and Ally of Rome and has a Treaty with Rome defining our borders!" Parenes protested. "Does Rome honour her treaties and respect her Friends, or is Rome faithless?"

"Of course Rome always acts with complete honour!" Silo answered impatiently. "But Rome also demands that her Friends do the same. We will occupy the lands west of the Euphrates as set out in our Treaty. Any further attempt by you or anyone else to re-define the Treaty by re-naming rivers will be considered a hostile act." Silo turned away from Parenes and shouted an order to

Lucius Glauca, his second-in-command. “Lucius; evolve into battle formation and march forward!”

Parenes understood no Latin; but he did understand the significance of the manoeuvre he saw unfolding in front of him. His own garrison of 4,000 men were in defensive positions in front of the town. But they numbered less than the equivalent of one legion, and stood no chance if he offered battle. As he watched, some two thousand cavalry detached and set out towards the south of the town, apparently to flank or surround it. Two legions marched after them while the rest started to spread into a line of battle. “Lord Silo, let us negotiate with words rather than weapons.” He pleaded.

“Yes, let us,” Silo responded. “Rome doesn't want to harm a Friend and Ally but Rome demands that the territory allocated to it under the Treaty must be surrendered. Starting with this town.”

“Allow me and my men one day to pack up and we will march out,” Parenes suggested.

“You could have packed and marched out on any of the ten days since we first spoke,” Silo dismissed the request. “March out now. We will have this town occupied before sunset.”

“I agree. By sunset,” Parenes conceded and turned his horse back towards the town.

“And by-the-way,” Silo added. “Don't loot the town of its valuables before you go. We will search every wagon and every soldier who leaves. Anyone carrying more loot than I could reasonably expect a soldier to possess as his own property will be assumed to have stolen it. You will also be held responsible as their commander.”

Parenes didn't respond to this late warning, leaving at a canter.

Less than an hour later the separated cavalry and two legions had established a position as a blocking force east of the town and nine legions were in a line of battle more than a mile wide. They were drawn up just outside arrow range. There was one legion still in marching formation on the road, resting in front of Silo and his command staff. An officer rode forward towards the town.

“We will occupy this town by sunset,” he bellowed to the defenders. “If you are still in position two hours before sunset, we will attack. You must withdraw now!”

By mid-afternoon there was movement among the lines of defenders. They were pulling back into the town and forming themselves into units for marching. Soon they were streaming out of town, heading east. The Roman legion on the western road came to order and started marching into the town, Glauca at their head. He made directly for the temple in the centre of the town and called for the priest.

“Do you speak Greek?” Glauca demanded.

“A little,” the old man responded.

“Have the Armenian soldiers taken any treasure as they left?”

“No,” the priest answered.

“Then show me what you have,” Glauca demanded as he dismounted.

The old man guided Glauca into a small vault, with small chests piled along one wall. A table and row of record cabinets stood against the wall opposite.

"How much do you have stored here?" Glauca asked.

The old man shrugged. "Perhaps ten talents of silver in total. I can show you the accounts, but much of what we had was taken by the King last year." Glauca nodded his acknowledgement and turned on his heel. Quarter of an hour later he was back beside Silo.

"As you expected, Quintus Poppeadius, they saw us coming and have already picked the place clean," he reported to his General.

"And we can expect the same throughout the whole area," Silo conceded. "But it does tell us something I needed to know; would Tigranes fight us, or is this army just a big bluff? If they've already moved out all the treasures, then it seems he is contemplating at least the possibility that he might be forced to pull back."

"Yes," Glauca agreed. "So we can push hard, confident that he will back away rather than go to war."

Tigranes arrived three days later. He found the Romans strongly fortified, with palisades and trenchwork designed to expose any attacking forces to withering archer and artillery fire. Much to the amusement of the Roman front line a group of Armenian carpenters, completely unarmed and totally ignoring the Romans only thirty paces away, started to build a timber stage in the middle of the road. By the afternoon of the second day it was complete, a platform perhaps five paces square and six feet high, with steps on the sides facing the Roman line and another flight of steps facing the Armenians. A crimson silk cloth covering the whole top of the platform and hanging down to the ground was then placed over the timbers and weighted into place. A throne was placed near the edge closest the Armenians, facing towards the Romans. Only when all was completed did an Armenian officer approach the Roman lines.

"You may inform your General that King Tigranes invites him to meet His Majesty the King of Kings at the third hour tomorrow morning," the officer announced in clear Greek.

Unfortunately the Roman didn't understand Greek. "Wait while I get an officer," he replied in Latin.

The Armenian didn't understand Latin. With hand gestures the Roman indicated that the Armenian officer should wait where he stood. He then patted his own chest and finger-walked away and back. The Armenian nodded his understanding. It was not long before a Greek-speaker could be found in the Roman camp. The message was repeated and understood.

Silo rode out to look at the platform before sunset.

"It seems he expects you to stand before him as if a supplicant," Glauca commented.

"Yes, so it would seem," Silo agreed. "But I have plans of my own. I have my curule chair in my baggage, just in case I needed to do something ceremonial. Go, measure the height of the seat of that throne. I want to have a platform that will result in both of us sitting at the same height. And I want it wrapped in gold

cloth, silk if you can find any. So go find a carpenter to make a box for me to put under my chair so I'll sit at least as high as Tigranes."

As Glauca measured the height to the seat of the throne this didn't go unnoticed by the Armenian official standing with the guard detachment. He smiled obsequiously to Glauca in acknowledgement. Glauca smiled back.

"Quintus Poppeadius," Glauca mentioned after making his measurements, "I think these Orientals are playing us for fools. That fellow seemed very pleased with himself as I measured the throne. I suspect that they have a little surprise waiting for us tomorrow, one that will put us at a disadvantage."

"Yes, I was thinking along similar lines, Lucius," Silo replied. "For example, why put the throne out there today, so it has to be guarded? Why not wait until tomorrow?"

"That's it!" cried Glauca. "That isn't the throne that Tigranes will use!" Glauca chuckled to himself. "He has us measuring-up a small throne, and then in the morning he will have that removed and replace it with another! Probably one with a few steps up!"

"Well, two can play that game!" Silo smiled. "Don't just make one box for my chair. Get the carpenters to make half-a-dozen, each a foot high, and of different sizes so I can make a pyramid as high as I need to! And wrap each in gold cloth!"

A wagon arrived at the Roman side of the platform at dawn the next morning. It was nondescript, the type used for carrying artillery ammunition, and its load covered with a rough canvas. Silo arrived shortly before the third hour in full dress uniform and with an attendant carrying his curule chair, the preserve of consulars. The chair was set on the platform, on the Roman side opposite the throne. It looked even more spartan in the comparison than it usually did.

Silo sent Glauca to the Armenian camp opposite to inform Tigranes' staff of his arrival and to agree on protocol details such as who should appear first.

"My name is Philopator, Chief of Domestic Staff to the King of Kings," a balding and brisk man introduced himself. "And you are...?"

"Lucius Glauca, legate to Quintus Poppeadius Silo, commander of all Roman Forces in the East," Glauca replied. "I'm here to agree on the procedure to be followed at this meeting. Do you have authority to determine that?"

"Yes," the Armenian slave replied immediately, and hurried on. "This is how an audience with the King of Kings is to be conducted. "The King of Kings shall appear and be seated. When he claps twice that signifies that he is now ready to receive petitions. Lord Silo shall not delay but appear immediately on the platform and bow to the King. Because he is a man of great renown he shall be permitted to sit rather than stand as is the usual custom. He shall then make his petition to the King of Kings and the King of Kings shall respond." Philopator had apparently finished his instructions, and paused waiting for a response. Glauca waited a moment before responding.

"That's not how it's going to happen, Philopator," he said at last. "Quintus Poppeadius Silo is a Consular, which means that he has served as the supreme

Magistrate of the Roman Republic. He is at least the equal of any King. Therefore he will not await the pleasure of a king and will certainly not respond to a clap of the hands like a common slave. Our preference is to have the King and the Consul climb their steps at the same time, and to take their seats at the same time."

Philopator wore a look of horror. "That cannot be permitted! No-one may make to sit down until the King of Kings is already seated!"

Glauca thought for a moment. "For the sake of advancing this discussion, let us concede for the moment that the King may be seated first. However, the Consul will not be treated as if of lesser dignity. He will not be summoned with a clap of the hands but will enter in his own capacity. Nor will he bow to the King."

Philopator considered these words. "Very well. The King of Kings shall take his seat but make no sign other than looking straight ahead. Then the Consul shall enter and take his seat. Then the King will greet him as if equal to a king and ask the Consul to discuss the reason for this visit. The discussion can flow from there."

Glauca smiled. "I think that would be a reasonable approach to take. Shall we expect the King to be ready to move within the next few minutes?"

"Very soon," Philopator smiled back.

Glauca turned back to the Roman camp and explained the agreed procedure to Silo. By the time he had finished it was clear at a glance that Philopator was waiting for a nod to convey all was ready. Glauca nodded.

Philopator turned and spoke to someone still concealed within a gorgeous tent. Then appeared eight men, struggling under the weight of a throne much more impressive than that currently on the platform. Six other men trotted up the steps and lifted the smaller throne, taking it down the steps and into the tent. Within a few more moments the grander throne was in its place.

Tigranes appeared, flanked by finely-dressed lackeys. With a slow, measured pace he approached the base of the steps and climbed them.

He stopped at the top of the steps and slowly turned, displaying his magnificence to all in a consciously theatrical gesture. Then he mounted the three short steps at the foot of the throne and sat.

The Romans, who had been courteously motionless during this procession, sprang into action. The canvas on the wagon was thrown back to reveal a pyramid of four golden slabs. Three of these were quickly man-handled onto the stage while another two men lifted the curule chair out of the way and then placed it back on top of the three-step pyramid. Then Silo marched to the foot of the stairs and took them two at a time. Once at the top he wasted no time in mounting the steps and taking his place on the curule chair, left foot slightly in front of the right in the classic magisterial pose, with his baton tucked into the distance from his left palm to his elbow.

It was obvious to all that Tigranes was very displeased. He considered the situation carefully before speaking. He had lost the battle of seating psychology but had no intention of being goaded into anything foolish. "Welcome to

Armenia, lord Silo.” He said at last. “What brings you to this side of the Euphrates?”

“Thank you for your welcome, King Tigranes,” Silo replied courteously, but pointedly avoiding the full honorific. “I am flattered that you took the trouble of bringing your High Throne to this meeting. I felt obliged to accord you no less honour so I had these platforms made up just in case, so we could both talk as equals as Friends and Allies always should.”

“I thank you for your consideration, lord Silo.” Tigranes responded evenly, attempting to claim a draw in a ploy he had clearly lost. “But that does not explain the reason for this most welcome encounter.”

“I am here in person as a gesture of friendship towards you, King,” Silo explained. “Some ten years ago a Treaty was made between Rome and Armenia. This Treaty set the Euphrates as the boundary between the Armenian area of influence and that of Rome. Now that Rome is starting to exercise its rights under that Treaty, I thought it a matter of good neighbourly relations to supervise that extension of Roman authority myself, rather than leaving it to underlings.”

“I warmly appreciate your goodwill in this matter, lord Silo,” Tigranes answered. “However, it seems that you might have been misled. You are now east of the Euphrates. When I greeted you with the words 'Welcome to Armenia' I was being no less than entirely accurate. The Euphrates River is about twenty miles to the west of this place. It is easy for some confusion to arise on this matter; the locals call the River by their own name so you were not to know.” Tigranes smiled demurely.

“Yes, King, there is inevitably some confusion when dealing with local names,” Silo agreed. “But that river is not the Euphrates, however the locals might name it. The Euphrates branches off some distance south of here and sweeps to the east and then north again. At least, that is the route of the river named ‘Euphrates’ on every map known in the Greek world. Since the greatest geographers in history all agree on that point, I find myself with no other course but to accept their advice.”

“Lucius Cornelius did not make his Treaty with Greeks but with Armenia. What Greeks say is of no consequence,” Tigranes asserted. “We Armenians have always called that western river the Euphrates and the river to which you refer we call the 'Eastern Branch'. But look around. Consider this area here, between the Euphrates and the Eastern Branch. All the people here speak Armenian, call themselves Armenians, and have been part of the Kingdom of Armenia since before Alexander. Even if there might be some doubt about the names of rivers, this simple observation clearly demonstrates that the intention of the Treaty was that the 'Euphrates' referred to was that of Armenian usage, not Greek.”

“King Tigranes,” Silo smiled, “You and I need not resort to asking local peasants for the proper interpretation of a treaty between Armenia and Rome; that is a matter for Armenia and Rome to define. But I do indeed take your point that this agreement must be read within its context. And the context is that, at the time when the Treaty was agreed, this area was under the administration of Pontus. Your honoured predecessor had no claim over this territory but acknowledged that

of Pontus. Now that Rome has defeated and annexed Pontus, Rome has also inherited sovereignty. Thus Rome has a double claim. Even if you do not accept our interpretation of geography, you must acknowledge our claim by right of conquest.” Silo concluded with another gentle smile.

“Whether or not Pontus administered this part of Armenia at the time of the Treaty is irrelevant,” Tigranes said dismissively. “At that same time Pontus also was the effective overlord of many areas west of the Euphrates, as we call it, and indeed even this area here, west of the Euphrates as you call it. At that time, Rome made no claim either. So the fact is that there were areas on both sides under Pontic control. Just as Rome has delayed until now to establish control over the areas west of the River, so now Armenia is establishing control over the areas east of the River, in accordance with the Treaty.

“That Treaty implicitly allowed for the partition of the territory then subject to Pontus, and that is precisely what we are both doing at this time. And just as you claim right of conquest over the Pontic areas in the West, even though they are not ethnically or culturally Roman, how much greater is our claim by right of conquest over inherently Armenian areas in the East that had been wrongly alienated from our realm?”

Silo sat steady for some time, staring steadily at Tigranes. “This is very disappointing, King,” he responded at last. “You have no right of conquest whatsoever. What battles did you fight against Mithridates to regain these lands? We both know full well that you fought none. Despite being a Friend and Ally of Rome, you aided and supported Mithridates in his campaign against Rome! In exchange for which, you were permitted to occupy these lands without a battle. This would appear to be a way for Mithridates to put part of his territory beyond the reach of Rome, by entrusting it to one whom he considered his own Friend and Ally, not a friend and Ally of Rome.

“Yet, I did not desire to raise this point against you. It is possible that you had wanted to fulfil your obligations as Friend and Ally, but were daunted by Mithridates and lacked the courage to do so! If that were so then Rome would be gracious, and would forgive your actions, considering you weak rather than faithless. However, your attitude here today shows that you have no remorse for your desertion of your Friend and Ally when you were most needed. You are obdurate in your refusal to honour your obligations.

“I must therefore advise you that, unless you agree by sunset tomorrow to surrender all formerly Pontic territories to Roman administration, you will be considered no longer a Friend and Ally but a deceitful and treacherous enemy.” Silo stood abruptly and left the stage.

Tigranes was furious, but waited for a moment before he stood solemnly, turned towards the stairs, and left with decorum. The High Throne was quickly man-handled back into the tent.

“Well, Lucius; what action do your lookouts see?” Silo asked his legate late that afternoon.

"They've packed up the tents near the stage; but of course they would! Why tempt our men into trying to raid and seize that throne, which must be worth a fortune!" Glauca answered. "Apart from that, not much is happening. The main army is still at camp, and apparently not preparing for a battle. A few squadrons of cavalry have come and gone, probably with messages."

"So what do you think he'll do?"

Glauca shrugged. "What he won't do is submit to your demands. At best he'll just pull back. But I wouldn't be surprised if he just sits where he is for a few days in sullen defiance. He knows we have fortified to resist his attack, but he'll be wondering if we have the resolve to press the point by attacking him."

"Then why would he not be preparing his own fortifications?" Silo questioned.

"Perhaps to demonstrate that he doesn't fear us?" Glauca offered. "He might think that to dig in after those insults might show fear, but to simply ignore us might show that he pays no regard to you. His way of returning the insult."

"Or perhaps he's waiting for more troops to arrive. He might think that if he starts fortifying, then this will prompt us to attack him before his defences are completed. But if he sits in an open camp then we will not be so urgent in our response."

Silo nodded. "Yes, that sounds right. So he might wait there a few days, just to let my deadline expire and prove his point; or he might be stalling for time."

"So what will you do?" Glauca asked.

"I'll teach him a lesson," Silo replied simply. "This is what I want you to do." Silo started dictating orders as his amanuensis noted his instructions. "So make sure all the officers down to cohort level know their parts and are prepared."

The next morning dawned clear and still. The Armenian camp was unchanged, and the timber stage remained in the space between the two armies. The night guard was relieved in the Roman fortifications and the more casual pickets and sentries around the Armenian camp continued their circuits. Soon the watchfires between the tents, almost expired during the latter part of the night, were stoked into breakfast fires. Glauca reported to Silo at first light that nothing untoward had occurred overnight and then again at the third hour as was his routine.

"Lazy bastards, those Armenians," he commented. "There are a few wandering around the camp but most of them are still in their tents. Too fond of their warm blankets for my liking!"

"Don't tell our men that," Silo responded. "In my army, if there's nothing more important to do the men do their drills, they dig new latrines, they improve their fortifications; in fact, they do anything!"

"Maybe that's why we rule the world!" Glauca agreed. "They weren't doing drills yesterday either, but I assumed that was to let them recover from their march, get the camp in order, and so on. But there's no excuse for needing two days."

Silo shrugged. "It'll come back to bite them. Meanwhile, how are our preparations coming along?"

"All is on schedule, General. The watch roster was adjusted last night, to allow for some sleep this afternoon." Glauca chuckled to himself. "I suppose if the Armenians could see into the town, they would be commenting how Romans seem to sleep all day, too!"

Silo looked up in alarm. "Do you suppose they are doing the same as we are?"

"No chance of that, sir," Glauca assured his commander. "There was no sign of activity during the night and not even Armenians could sleep for 24 hours uninterrupted."

The day wore on. The heat in the afternoon became stifling, and many of the men assigned to sleeping were out of their quarters soon after mid-day rather than futilely chasing a nap that never came. They prepared their equipment one more time at leisure. At mid-afternoon the men were assembled by their cohorts and centuries, and their assignments explained to them. That woke them up!

The evening meal, hot and generous in its portions, was served just before sunset. The men settled down, awaiting their jump-off times. Glauca and an escort of four officers trotted out towards the Armenian line as the sun hung over the western horizon. He was halted by the sentry detachment on the road before the Armenian camp.

"We come to ask what response King Tigranes will make," he announced. "It's less than an hour before sunset."

"Wait here, sir." the captain of the guard answered. "I will send for instructions." Then a quick order in Armenian to a soldier, who set off at a jog.

The messenger returned just as the sun touched the earth to the west. He reported back to the captain, who nodded and glanced out at the half-sun on the skyline but made no move towards the Romans.

"What is the answer that I am to take back to my General?" Glauca prompted him.

The captain had another glance towards the west, and then started chatting to the soldier again. After only a few sentences, he broke off and slowly strolled to the Romans as the last limb of the sun dropped behind the ridge.

"The sun has set, Roman," he announced. "Let that be your answer."

Glauca and his fellows pulled their horses around and trotted back towards the town. It was not yet dark before he reported back to Silo.

"Then the flag is down," Silo summarised. "Set everything in motion according to the timetable."

An hour passed, each moment like a drop of water that paused before it fell. Then the word went out. Eight cohorts of cavalry moved out of the town to circle silently around the Armenian camp in the darkness and then take up a position three miles to their rear. Another three hours passed. Another four cohorts of cavalry slipped out of the town, this time to take up positions around the Armenian camp close to where the Armenian cavalry had been observed from the watchtowers. Infantrymen in their centuries trickled out to the fortifications in front of the town, each to its allocated position. Soon afterwards the moon rose above the eastern horizon, more than half-full. Two more hours passed slowly.

Then the torches on the town palisades were quenched. The signal had been given!

The infantrymen rose from their positions and marched towards the enemy camp in the pale moonlight. The surrounding cavalry quietly moved into the tents known to be housing the horses for the Armenian cavalry. The Armenian sentries didn't take long to see the approaching Romans. In terror they reached for their horns, blew the warning blasts, and immediately threw down their weapons and stripped off their armour. By the time the now-charging Roman infantry had reached the inconsequential line of stakes that served as a fortification, the Armenians were in full flight. The heavily-armoured Roman infantry had no hope of overtaking them.

The Roman cavalry heard the alarm being raised and knew that speed was now more important than stealth. They galloped into the camp, anxious to cut loose and scatter the Armenian horses before the defences could be organised. They were amazed at how poorly defended the camp proved to be. They reached their target areas unopposed and burst into the tents. Empty tents! Not an Armenian mount in sight!

“It's a trap!” shouted the commander of one such detachment of two hundred horse. “Everyone! Out into the open again, and form up! We may need to break out of a ring!” They milled around the parade paddock outside the tent, looking for an attacker. But no attack came. They saw only a thin scattering of men running through the camp towards the east. Some of them were shouting in Armenian.

The whole of the enemy camp, large enough for a hundred thousand men, had fallen within two hours. But as the sky lightened it was obvious that there were not that many enemy bodies or enough abandoned armour to account for so great a number. Even the food stores were scant. Perhaps as few as five thousand had been in the camp.

Silo rode through the camp as the sun rose, Glauca at his side. “I have to give Tigranes credit for a great deception here, Lucius!” Silo laughed. “Against most generals, this pretence would have been enough to keep us pinned down for a month!”

“But why, General?” Glauca could not see the purpose for the deception.

“If he was seen to be pulling back, then there was every chance that we would see this as a sign of weakness and we might chase and harry him,” Silo explained. “But this gives him time to prepare his main force further along the road. It might be a set-piece battle on his prepared ground, or it might be a series of ambushes, but a few days of preparation would give him the advantage.”

“He couldn't be too far away, sir. His army was definitely here the day before yesterday. Even allowing for him to pull out overnight after your ultimatum, that gives him only thirty or so hours to pack up, march, and then re-establish a defensive position. Not counting sleep, which his men would need after that march.”

“That's right, Gnaeus,” Silo agreed. “My guess is that he allowed his men to rest during the early part of the night, and then marched for only the moonlight

hours and yesterday before making camp again. That would be at most twenty miles. Then allowing last night to rest again after a march of fifteen hours, his men would only be rising now. They will have had no time to prepare any sort of set-piece. Let's see what we can learn from any captives." He turned his mount to the east and started trotting through the rest of the camp, looking for what might be a local command post. He soon spotted a tent with a dozen prisoners tied together to a tree beside it. He dismounted and entered the tent.

"Oh, sir! I was just writing up a report for you!" a centurion exclaimed. "We captured the commander and his immediate staff. They were the only ones not running so we knew they must have been officers."

"Good work, centurion," Silo approved. "I'll speak with a few of them. Please cut them apart."

The centurion rushed out of the tent, drawing his gladius. "This is the commander, sir," indicating a man starting to grey at the temples. "Him first?"

The man saw he was being indicated and the gladius in the centurion's hand. He stiffened himself to composure, thinking that he was to be executed.

"Yes, that would be good," Silo agreed. The centurion placed his gladius under the chord tying the man's neck to the tree, and sliced upwards. Silo lead him away, out of earshot.

"Tell me the truth and you will live," Silo warned him. "You must have heard how we have been generous in our terms, so take advantage of us."

The man nodded. At least he understood Greek, Silo thought to himself with satisfaction.

"What were your orders?" Silo continued.

"We were to maintain an appearance of being a full camp for three full days," the Armenian answered. "We were then to abandon the whole of the camp as soon as it became dark, and march east in light pack until we re-joined the main body."

"How much food and drink were you to take as you marched?" Silo pressed.

"Each man was to take food for marching that night and the next day, make camp, and then one more day of marching after that."

That could be up to sixty miles, Silo thought to himself. So if we move quickly, we should be able to catch the main body before they have time to prepare their ground. "I'll tell the centurion to treat you and your fellows well," Silo promised. "But if what you say is not true, you will be crucified. So do you insist that what you have told me is the truth?"

"I have told you the truth, General," the Armenian replied. "Whether or not you draw the correct conclusions, I cannot tell."

"Then you tell me plainly," Silo returned. "How far will the main body march before it sets for battle?"

"I don't know sir; only that I was told how much food to carry. It might be that I was deliberately misled in case of my capture."

Silo nodded his understanding. "That's possible, too. Now, walk back to the other prisoners." Silo called to the centurion as he approached. "Treat them well, feed them well." The centurion saluted in response.

"Lucius, an army marching four abreast and at full pace apart takes up a mile of road for every four thousand men." Silo thought out loud to his legate as their horses walked back towards the town. "So eighty thousand men would be strung out for twenty miles. But that's just not possible, Lucius! They had only four hours of moonlight for marching the night they left; that would only allow them to generate ten miles of distance, at most, even if they marched in light pack! That's only forty thousand men!"

"Perhaps only forty thousand left down the road, and the others just scattered?" Glauca suggested. "Or perhaps they only numbered forty thousand, and the big camp was meant to intimidate?"

Silo nodded. "Yes, there's that possibility. It would fit with this latest deception. Or perhaps they started before moonrise; but without moonlight they would be lucky to make a quarter of their proper speed. So maybe another ten thousand."

"I'll send some cavalry ahead as scouts, sir," Gnaeus offered

"Yes, do that," Silo ordered. "In the meantime, prepare the army for a march and the cavalry for a raid in force. I want to run them down if at all possible. At most, we're talking about fifty thousand light infantry, or perhaps half that number if they have full equipment." Silo turned back towards the centurion with the prisoners. "Let's see what more information we can gain."

He sought out the Armenian commander again. "Soldier, what is your name?"

"Bazontes, sir." The Armenian replied.

"Bazontes, how many men were in this camp yesterday evening?"

"Three thousand, sir. We were under orders to make ourselves as visible as possible; everyone was told to continually walk from one tent to another."

"And how many men were here at its peak?"

"Thirty thousand, sir."

"We had reports that Tigranes was in command of almost one hundred thousand," Silo countered.

"There are another thirty-five thousand men about forty miles east, preparing a defensive position. I believe that those who were in the camp until two nights ago are falling back to re-inforce them." Bazontes explained. "The combined force of over sixty thousand men is what I meant when I told you we were to march until we met the main body."

Silo chided himself for not being more thorough in his initial questioning. He had almost ordered his army to march into a killing field.

"What other Armenian forces do you know about?"

"I know of no others near here, sir, but it could be that the King has sent messages calling for more."

"How many infantry and cavalry in this main body? And do they have artillery, archers, other auxiliaries?" Silo pressed.

"I'm not senior enough to know in detail, sir," Bazontes qualified his answer before giving it, "but I saw no artillery. I estimate five thousand cavalry and perhaps five thousand archers."

Silo studied the man for a few moments. "Come with me!" he said at last. And then to the centurion "I'll take responsibility for this man! Get a mount for him; but load the saddle-bags with rocks so his horse will tire if he tries to escape." Silo led his captive back to his personal quarters at a trot. He dismounted and ordered Bazontes to follow him inside.

"Hieronymos!" he called as he entered the large front room of the house he had commandeered. The one-time Pontic negotiator appeared in the hallway almost immediately.

"Yes, General?" he asked.

"Tell this man your name, what you were until we met, and what you are now," Silo told him as he gestured towards Bazontes.

Hieronymos raised his eyebrows as he recognised the Armenian uniform.

"Should I speak to him in Armenian, sir?"

"Please do," Silo responded.

Hieronymos composed his thoughts for a moment. "Two years ago I was a trusted servant of King Mithridates and charged with negotiating with the Romans. The King set me an impossible task to avert a Roman attack. Rather than report back that I had failed which would have meant a very long and painful death, General Silo offered me my life as his personal slave if I assisted him instead. I accepted the General's offer. But instead of accepting me as a slave, he granted me much more! I am now a Roman citizen with considerable wealth and free to leave his staff whenever I choose to. But he is a good employer, treating me well and paying me generously. He has earned my loyalty."

When it was obvious that Hieronymos had finished, Silo broke in. "I didn't understand a word of what was said then," Silo admitted. "But I'll make you the same offer I made Hieronymos. If you help me to your full capacity, then in due time you will be granted freedom, citizenship, wealth, and a position on my personal staff. Will you help?"

"And if I do not?" Bazontes responded.

Silo smiled. "Then you will go back to being a prisoner of war, nothing worse. I know I can't terrify you into co-operation. But if you accept and I find you have not been acting in good faith, you will die."

"I will co-operate," Bazontes announced.

"Excellent!" Silo exclaimed. "But trust has to be earned gradually. My treatment of you will improve as you prove yourself. For the moment, take a bath and get into some clean clothes; linen, not armour, of course!"

A rider arrived while Bazontes was bathing.

"General, the cutoff cavalry has reported some two thousand captives. They were unarmed and surrendered when approached."

"Who told them to move out of their assigned position?" Silo demanded.

"Lucius Glauca set a message to them, but the rider encountered these Armenian soldiers fleeing on foot. They insisted on surrendering to this one man! So he told them to sit on the road and wait for an escort, and then went on to the cutoff cavalry. The prisoners were collected as they returned."

Silo considered the report. "And how many dead?"

"Only five of our casualties, sir, mostly accidental; and about two hundred Armenians killed as they fled."

"Thank you, soldier. Find Lucius Glauca and ask him to report to me," Silo dismissed the man.

Two thousand captives and a couple of hundred dead, Silo mused. Bazontes assertion that he had three thousand in camp seems about right, allowing for some Armenians who might have slipped through the lines. So far he has been telling the truth.

Bazontes reported back as the courier was leaving. He was dressed in a plain chiton and barefoot. But he carried himself well, Silo noted.

"What is your social rank?" Silo asked.

"My family are comfortably-wealthy merchants," Bazontes replied. "That is why I learnt Greek. When I was pressed into the army, a little bribery was enough to make me a junior officer."

"So you have no family tradition in the army?"

"Not at all!" Bazontes replied with some feeling. "But once forced into it, I made a point of learning as well and as much as I could."

"But you would rather be in trade?"

"Of course! Who wouldn't?" Bazontes replied.

"Well, give good and faithful service to me and that will be your life in a few years' time. I'll provide you with the starting capital to set yourself up in Asia if you want," Silo promised. "Now, start talking and start drawing," Silo urged. "I want to know everything you know about the Armenian main body, what its plans might be and how I can overcome it. Start by sketching a map." He placed a few sheets of paper on a table and motioned Bazontes to sit.

"As I said, sir, I'm only a junior officer. But the place that was being prepared was a valley, wooded on the slopes and with a cleared gap for grazing either side of the river. The road ran close to the north bank," Bazontes explained as he sketched.

"On the road side, the cleared strip was perhaps two hundred paces wide; on the other side of the stream it was much narrower, only fifty paces or so, with cliffs at the back. The earthworks were being dug here, at the extreme eastern end of the narrowing; further east, it broadened out into a plain."

"How deep and wide is the stream?" Silo asked.

"I didn't take much notice," Bazontes confessed. "It seemed to vary from place to place. In some parts it seemed to be perhaps knee-deep and ten paces wide, flowing at a good pace. In other places it seemed wider and deeper, but rather still."

"And how long is this valley before we get to the earthworks at the end?"

"I would say a bit more than a mile, perhaps two."

Glauca entered at this point.

"Ah, Lucius!" Silo greeted his subordinate in Latin, and then switched to Greek for the benefit of Bazontes. "This is Bazontes; he was an officer in Tigranes' army but now he's helping us. Bazontes, this is my second-in-command, Lucius Glauca."

"Greetings, Bazontes!" Glauca said in his clumsy Greek. "You might need to use simple words when you talk to me!" he added with a grin.

"I regret that I do not speak Latin, sir."

"To bring you up to speed," Silo summarised in Latin, "Bazontes is drawing a layout of the Armenian defensive position about forty miles east." Then he switched back to Greek. "Please continue, Bazontes."

"There's not much more I can show you, sir," Bazontes replied. "I left the area to come here almost immediately. I have no idea of the disposition of forces nor the plan of battle." Silo and Glauca stared at the sketch map for a few moments.

"The gap on this side of the river is a couple of hundred paces, with not much on the other side backed by cliffs," Silo recalled for Glauca. "The whole valley is perhaps a bit over a mile long. What would they expect us to do, and how would they defend against it?"

"Well, they're expecting us to be in hot pursuit, so we would be in marching formation, keeping to the road with cavalry scouts ranging ahead," Glauca started. "But when our scouts see the defensive works at the end of the valley, they would expect us to form up in battle order. A clearing two hundred paces wide would allow a front of four hundred men. That would be, say, two legions wide and twenty men deep per legion. I wouldn't want to put more men in there, or it would just get cluttered, so let's say another file of soldiers twenty wide along the edge of the tree-line, to protect against flank attack. That would mean two hundred paces length for each flanking legion, so four, maybe five legions to protect the flank.

"We would have to put a legion or two on the far side, to prevent a cavalry envelopment. That is nine legions deployed so far, and any more would just get in the way. So we can only use half of our force in that confined space. If they have sixty thousand then I can't see how we could expect to break through." Glauca smiled. "At least, that is what they would expect! We would either bash ourselves senseless against their defences or give up and go home."

"And how would you expect them to deploy, just in case we decide to bash ourselves senseless?" Silo questioned.

"I'd put barriers and traps backed by heavy infantry just inside the tree-line where they wouldn't be visible until our men actually entered the wood. Then I'd put all my archers and artillery on top of the cliffs just across the river, where they would have our entire force in range, but they would be protected by the cliffs. Our men would be trapped in a killing zone, unable to enter the safety of the woods and exposed to archers and artillery that we wouldn't be able to attack. And then, their cavalry could tidy up the scraps. The best part of nine legions, wiped out in an hour!" Glauca summarised.

"I agree with you, Lucius," Silo said. "That's what they would be expecting, and that is how they would deploy. But now that we know that, how do we use it against them?"

Glauca stared at the paper for a few minutes longer. "I take it that you're adopting your usual policy? Captives are preferable to corpses?" Glauca asked.

"If possible," Silo conceded.

"Then I would send one column up into the hills a couple of miles before the south bank forms those cliffs, and work around the archers and artillery.

"I would send another column through the woods, uphill of the treeline, a few miles before the valley starts, and set them behind the infantry we expect to be holding the treeline. Then, at the same time, take these two enemy forces by surprise from the rear. Offer them life in return for surrender. Once these forces are cleaned out, the main defences can be out-flanked." Glauca looked enquiringly, to see if his commander agreed with his plan.

"You're becoming quite a good tactician, Lucius," Silo said encouragingly. "So let's get the scouts out there to locate the battleground accurately and find the encirclement routes you need."

"Yes, sir. I'll call together their officers and outline what we're looking for. May I take this sketch to brief them?"

Silo nodded, and Glauca picked up the paper and strode for the door. Bazontes had been sitting in his chair as this discussion in incomprehensible Latin went on over him.

"Thank you for your help, Bazontes," Silo reassured him. "We're developing a plan that will result in as little bloodshed as possible. We prefer to invite our enemies to surrender rather than fight to the death. It means fewer casualties for us, and more profit from selling slaves."

"If I may ask a question, sir?"

"Go ahead," Silo invited.

"I have heard that when you were fighting Mithridates, you set free half of your captives. Is this true?"

"Yes, it's true," Silo confirmed. "Our intention was to encourage as many Pontic soldiers as possible to surrender."

"Yes," Bazontes went on. "I have heard stories of whole villages of Pontic men volunteering for the army, so they could surrender to the Romans as soon as possible. They considered that life as a free man in Spain was a much more attractive future than as a Pontic peasant. And even if they were unlucky in the lots and were made slaves, that was not going to be any worse."

"So those stories got back as far as Armenia?" Silo asked.

"Yes. And there are many Armenians who would feel the same way," Bazontes volunteered. "Take me as one example. I have already told you that I wasn't happy to be forced into the army."

Silo smiled. "So is that why you didn't run last night? You had it in mind from the start to surrender anyway!"

Bazontes smiled back. "It was a risk but it was worth it!"

Silo clapped him on the shoulder and chuckled. “I think we are going to get along quite well, Bazontes!”

The battle with the Armenian main body was barely worth the title. The archers and their supporting infantry surrendered immediately upon being challenged. The heavy infantry discovered in the treeline put up some resistance in places, but were generally quick to lay down their weapons. Four thousand archers and twelve thousand infantry were captured and almost a thousand infantry were killed, for Roman casualties of less than one hundred. The main body of Armenian troops moved out immediately, not even leaving a masking force to cover their retreat. The pursuit continued but cautiously. Tigranes had shown himself to be adept at deception and would have dealt a serious blow to the Roman forces had they not been fore-warned by Bazontes. Silo had no intention of falling into another trap. His long-time emphasis on good scouting became almost a neurosis.

But Tigranes had decided that one military disaster was enough. His attempted bluff had not worked and his ambush had not worked. Better to simply fall back to the River and not anger the Romans any more. He didn't feel strong enough to offer any more provocations. There were easier ways to extend his kingdom.

Silo completed the occupation of all territories west of the River by late September. He sent a small delegation to Tigranes in October to confirm that the area occupied was the full extent of the Roman claim and that Tigranes was still considered a Friend and Ally. Glauca was conducted into Tigranes' auditorium, an impressive room sumptuously decorated. He noticed immediately that Tigranes was on his High Throne, and that a simple backless stool stood in the centre of the floor before him. Glauca strode confidently to the area in front of the stool and came to attention.

“Hail, King of Kings! I bring you best wishes from Quintus Poppeius Silo, Governor of Roman Anatolia!”

“We welcome you to our court, legate Glauca,” Tigranes replied coldly. “Because of the status you hold as the personal representative of Governor Silo, you are permitted to sit in our presence.”

“Thank you, King of Kings; but I see no place to sit that is worthy of the Governor's personal envoy, so I will remain standing.”

Tigranes masked his annoyance by flapping a hand idly. “As you choose, legate Glauca. I thank the Governor for his best wishes, and would have you relay back to him my own best wishes for him. Now, what brings you here today?”

“I report to you that Rome has completed its arrangements for the proper administration of the territories west of the Euphrates, as discussed with you earlier this year. Now that these arrangements have been completed the Governor considers it proper that we re-affirm our recognition of this boundary between Rome and Armenia as set out in the treaty agreed ten years earlier.”

Tigranes paused for a moment before answering. "You may assure the Governor that we affirm our continuing commitment to the treaty to which you refer."

Thank you, King of Kings; but the Governor had in mind a more precise rehearsal of the specific articles of that treaty and an agreement that the current situation reflects those specific articles."

"I find you tedious and wearisome, legate," Tigranes replied. "But out of respect for your master the Governor I will extend my patience. I affirm that all territories west of the Euphrates are subject to Roman influence or control, as Rome sees fit. Armenia shall not interfere with Rome's will in these territories. And that all lands east of the Euphrates are properly the concern of Armenia, in which Rome shall have and exert no influence."

"Thank you again, King of Kings. There remains only one more point which remains of some concern to the Governor. He seeks your agreement that the current situation accurately reflects the intent of that Treaty."

"I am not immediately aware of the current situation in all respects. Anything might have happened within the last day or two, and news of it has not yet reached me. Therefore I am unable to confidently make such a statement. Now, since that was the only remaining point you wished to raise, and I have responded to it as fully as I am able to, you may leave." Tigranes clapped twice. "Next petitioner, Philopator!" he announced.

Glauca bowed, took three steps backwards (carefully avoiding the stool) before turning his back on the King and left.

"We are in much the same position as we were this time last year," Drusus opened the conversation. "Who can we put up as a consular candidate?"

"We have more than a dozen who have been Praetor in their time, but not many have made their names famous in the process," Sulla grumbled. "I suppose that's what comes of not being Urban Praetor, but leaving that slot to the Boni; no-one notices a good performance outside Rome."

"Not entirely true, Lucius Cornelius," Lafrenius offered. "Caius Papius is highly regarded by the Second Class for his work in Sicily, even if the Boni kept slighting him as 'that Samnite Bull'. I think he would have a good chance; and he would be favourite for Senior if we could talk Young Marius and Caesar around to supporting him. Old Marius had a lot of respect for him, which would carry a lot of weight with those two."

Sulla sat sullenly. "Perhaps," he conceded at length. "But I suggest you have no chance of talking him out of Africa right now. He is doing there what worked so well in Sicily. And by his recent letter, his progress is even better. He's talking about only three years this time, not five, to get it all bedded down."

"Well, why engage the student when we could hire the master?" Drusus suggested. "All his success is based on the Rufan System, so let's see if we can convince Quintus Pompeius Rufus to return to Rome?"

"Because the Publicani hate him for destroying their tax farming!" Sulla snapped.

Drusus was taken aback. "But Lucius Cornelius, last year you were urging that we do precisely that, as a way of putting the Equites in their place! Why do you oppose it now?"

"Because last year I thought we needed to either win or go down fighting and I intended to win," Sulla replied. "But now I see that we can work with moderate independent Senators like Lucius Valerius, and the Populares will roll over like a dog begging for a bone. So why wave a red rag by promoting someone the Equites will hate?"

"No; they hate Quintus Poppaeus and his Miletus Decree for destroying their tax farming," Lafrenius corrected him. "Rufus has introduced much better and uniform Public Administration, which has made business so much easier and smoother. These Second Class guys are no fools. They can tell the difference."

"I think Titus has a point there, Lucius Cornelius," Drusus agreed. "They're happy with the way the Rufan System works in Sicily and are full of praise for Caius Papius in Utica; they'll soon enough realise that supporting Rufus as Consul would be the best way to extend this System to all the provinces."

"In fact, Quintus Sertorius is doing the same thing himself in the Spains," Lafrenius added, "He's hoping to have a run at Consul himself in a couple of years."

"Don't talk to me about Sertorius!" Sulla slapped at the air.

"Then we'll leave Sertorius out of it," Drusus soothed what he knew to be a sensitive point. "But why not Quintus Pompeius?"

"Because much as the Equites might like the Rufan System, Rufus himself is tainted by the Miletus Decree," Sulla said bluntly.

"Well, I suggest that he isn't," Drusus replied just as bluntly. "So let's go ask a few merchants, and we'll see."

Sulla stood. "Right. Which ones do you suggest?"

"Let's start with the hardest cases; the ones who used to hold the tax licences in Asia," Drusus offered.

"Agreed," Sulla responded. "I'll consult the records and see who they were for the five years before the decree. I have those records in my office."

Much to Sulla's surprise (although he should have expected this), the most prominent names had all been clients of Publius Licinius Crassus. How strange that he had not consciously connected his friend, probably the richest man in Rome, with the hated tax-farming regime that was the most common means for the very wealthy to increase their wealth. With the death of Publius a few years ago the family fortune had passed to Marcus, the eldest surviving son. Marcus would know how the Crassus clients viewed Rufus.

"Marcus Licinius, thank you for allowing us to take your time without warning," Sulla said as Crassus lead his two guests into his triclinium. "I was a friend of your father, but I must apologise for drifting away from your family since his most regrettable death."

"That sort of thing happens, Lucius Cornelius," Crassus responded. "And you have been very busy in that time. Anyway, it's always a pleasure to be of

service to Rome's Censors," Crassus replied, "and to host the honoured Marcus Livius as well. What can I do for you?"

"We would like to hear what you and your Second Class clients think about a few people," Drusus answered for them both. "What do they think of Gaius Papius Mutilus?"

Crassus pressed his lips and tilted his head to one side for a moment. "I have investments in Sicily where he was Governor for a few years," he answered. "Over the last couple of years he made the whole business of doing business much simpler. The best part of his reforms was setting up an Advisory Council, drawing on the most prominent men on the island. This resulted in the same rules and procedures being adopted throughout the whole province. It made business so much smoother. That's why we kept asking for him to be kept there instead of being given a new Governor."

Drusus nodded his acknowledgement. "Yes; what else?"

"Towards the end of his time, he started to appoint a few bright young men as sub-governors in the main cities, with authority to act on his behalf. But he also gave them very comprehensive guidelines, so the man in one city would come to the same decision as the man in another. His emphasis was on uniformity and predictability so we businessmen knew exactly what the rules were and what was expected of us. And we could get any disputes resolved on the spot instead of having to refer everything to Syracuse."

"Do you know where he got these ideas?" Drusus pressed.

"As far as I know, the Advisory Council was his own idea," Crassus answered, "but perhaps it's how the Samnites run their own tribe, and he just applied the same principles. The bright young men were not Mutilus' invention; they came from Asia, where they'd been trained in some college set up for that purpose."

"Do you know who trained them?"

"No, sorry. But whoever it was, it was a good idea. If only it was like that in every province!"

"So much about Mutilus," Drusus went on. "What do you know about Quintus Pompeius Rufus?"

"Wasn't he the Urban Praetor some years ago? Before the war in the East?"

"That's the one," Drusus confirmed. "Urban Praetor seven years ago, when Caesar and Philippus were Consuls. Do you know what he has been doing since then?"

Crassus rolled his eyes back for a moment. "I seem to recall him in Rome shortly after that, and then he disappeared. Did he die?" then a slight pause. "No! That's right! He became the Governor of Asia! I think he's still there, actually."

"What do you think of his performance in Asia?"

"Don't talk to me about Asia!" Crassus said with some bitterness. "Cancelling the Tax contracts cost my clients tens of millions of sesterces!"

"Did they blame Rufus for their cancelled Tax contracts?"

"No, that was Silo, with that bloody Miletus Decree!" Crassus spat. "He might be a bloody Military Genius, and I suppose restoring all Roman property

so quickly was a good thing so we could start earning income again; but Silo knows nothing about running a profitable province. Things didn't get back on their feet until the new governor took over. And now that you mention Rufus, he was the man."

"So do your clients approve of Rufus as Governor of Asia?"

"Oh, yes!" Crassus said with some enthusiasm. "The Miletus Decree stops him from restoring the tax contracts, but he's doing everything else to help businesses work. He has a system of sub-governors, just like in Sicily, and I think these guys are also spreading into Bithynia and Mysia now. Having the same rules and procedures makes everything a lot easier."

"Do you have any idea why the sub-governor systems in Asia and in Sicily are so similar?" Drusus asked.

"No. Why?"

"Because this is a feature of what is called the 'Rufan System'. Rufus invented it, then Mutilus heard about it and imported it for his own province."

"Then it's about time other governors adopted it as well. It's brilliant!" Crassus responded.

Drusus looked to Sulla. "Do we need to take any more of this man's valuable time?"

"No, I don't think so," Sulla replied. Then to Crassus, "Thank you for your time today, Marcus Licinius. You've been most helpful." The two Italianists left Crassus' office.

"You've made your point, Marcus Livius; Quintus Pompeius is our man," Sulla agreed happily. "That pleases me; when I asked him to go to Asia I hinted that it would earn him a reputation that could lead to the Consulate, so I'm pleased to be able to deliver on that promise."

"We need to send a message to him immediately. We have barely two months before nominations close," Drusus said. "And winter's coming, too. We might find that he's impeded by bad weather."

"Then send for him straight away. Send direct by sea and also overland via Thrace in case the seas are closed. And in the meantime make sure all the Equites know he is coming to stand for Consul. Let his fame precede him!" Sulla agreed.

"And perhaps we should talk to Young Marius and Caesar; tell them that if they agree to support Rufus, we will co-operate with promoting as much of their agenda as we can," Sulla went on. "Rufus has already shown himself to be very supportive of business. But if they won't support him, they will only drive us back into an alliance with the Boni."

"Why not go there this evening?" Drusus suggested. "I would have said now, but writing to Rufus has first priority."

"Agreed," Sulla replied. "To your house for the letter-writing? It's closer."

Within hours there were three fast riders on the road to Ostia, and another three on the Via Appia for Brundisium and Tarentum. All were under instructions to make fastest possible speed to Ephesus but to take different ships and different routes to prevent them being caught by a common delay.

"Sextus Julius, thank you for allowing us this time," Drusus said smoothly as he entered Caesar's triclinium.

"It's always good to talk to you, Marcus Livius," Caesar responded. "And to you, Lucius Cornelius. Greetings, Titus," he concluded as Lafrenius entered. Titus Lafrenius wasn't popular with the Head Count, being the man who had 'betrayed' Caius Marius as soon as his back was turned. Although Young Marius had come around to understanding the motivation of the men who put down Sulpicius, this understanding didn't reach down into the masses, so Caesar had to be careful to not appear anything more than formally courteous to the despised Italian.

Caesar led them into his triclinium, where Young Marius was waiting. Marius stood and greeted Sulla and Drusus, and gave a curt nod to Lafrenius.

"What's on your minds, friends?" Caesar asked as they all sat.

"We were thinking of the coming consular elections," Sulla replied. "From within our own Italianist ranks, the best candidate we have is Titus here."

"No way!" Caesar said bluntly. "That would be suicide among the Head Count."

"We expected you to say that," Lafrenius replied drily. "I continue to pay the price of saving Rome from Sulpicius, and I'm prepared to continue paying it forever; so we come with a proposal for another shared arrangement."

"Yes, and we have just the candidate that we can both support," Caesar took the initiative. "Flaccus this year was your choice; so for next year we propose Gnaeus Papirius Carbo."

Drusus spread his hands to show no objection. "Yes, we can certainly consider Carbo as one option. But we also have a suggestion. Why not Quintus Pompeius Rufus?"

"Rufus?" Young Marius broke in. "He's been out of sight for years! No-one remembers him!"

"Perhaps you should talk to some of your supporters among the Equites," Drusus advised. "Talk especially to those with business in Asia. Then ask your friends from Sicily what they think of Mutilus' work, which is largely inspired by the Rufan System."

"You'll find that the Head Count might have forgotten him and the Senatorial Class have ignored him, but the Equites are begging for his approach to be extended over the whole world."

"Why won't you consider Carbo?" Young Marius asked.

"We'll consider Carbo. Why won't you consider Rufus?" Drusus replied. "Once it's known that he's a candidate the Second Class will rush to get behind him and they'll take the lower classes with them."

"Let's not become too adversarial at this stage," Caesar interposed. Then more quietly, "Marcus Livius, we'll make enquiries. If he's considered acceptable we'll support him. If he isn't we urge you to re-consider his candidacy and instead support Carbo."

"Thank you, Sextus Julius," Drusus answered. "I know enough about Carbo that I would certainly support him in some capacity; perhaps as a Republic Praetor

for his Tribe to give him a higher profile for election as Consul the following year. But that's to be confirmed closer to the event."

"And the year after that, Sextus Julius, you will be eligible yourself for re-election," Sulla noted. "We have much to look forward to, so long as we continue to co-operate."

"Lucius Cornelius, you have the floor," intoned Gnaeus Octavius, the Consul holding the fasces for October. Sulla strode to the centre of the floor with a scroll in hand.

"Conscript Fathers, my colleague will report on other matters that have concerned us since our last report. I will restrict myself to the matter of the new Houses. To date I have received many pledges for this work, pledges that I have no doubt will be honoured, of course! But thus far I have received actual payments of the following sums from Senators." He opened his scroll and read names and amounts, in descending order of total contribution.

"You will note that there are only eighty four names listed so far, although there will doubtless be others once pledges are fulfilled. You will also note that the total amount in hand at the moment is one hundred and forty seven thousand *sestertium milia*, only half of the total fund; but again, this will increase when pledges are fully paid. But I remind you all that there shall be listed in stone the names of the one hundred greatest contributors. If the fund is not fully paid by this time next month the opportunity to contribute will be extended to non-senators. The first to actually get their contributions in will be the ones whose names will appear on the stone.

"I'm certain that none of you would want the name of a non-senator to be engraved on that stone! So I need all your pledges to be paid in full within this month, plus an additional amount beyond that again to ensure that only Senators are listed on the dedicatory stone." Sulla returned to his seat.

Sextus Julius Caesar stood.

"Sextus Julius?" Octavius asked.

"A question to Lucius Cornelius, if I may; has there been any refinement of the estimated cost of the project since the first estimate? And if so, what is the most accurate estimate available at this time?"

Sulla stood to answer. "There has been considerable progress made in the design, most of this being to slightly reduce the proposed size of the building so it will fit more amenably into the space available without detracting from the temples on either side. Of course, we do not want to offend against Saturn on one side or Castor on the other! We have also reduced the depth of the building, meaning its dimensions from the front wall to the back, because of worries about changes in foundation conditions at the rear of the original proposed extent.

"The result of these revisions is to reduce the nominal capacity of the Republic Senate to four hundred members, and that of the Auditorium Gentium to 600 members. This still allows each member his personal office and is still larger than the number of members in our current Senate which has a nominal establishment of three hundred and the new Republic Comitia with 510 members.

So there is ample room for modest expansion if it is ever required. Even with these reductions in numbers, the facilities for members will be maintained; this is still a building that will serve the Republic for a thousand years.

“These alterations will provide some reductions in costs, but not as much as you might think. The primary effect is to avoid a budget over-run that would otherwise have occurred due to poor foundation conditions at the rear of the original footprint. Our latest estimate of final price is one hundred and eighty thousand *sestertium milia*. But we have retained the original Fund target of two hundred and fifty thousand for contingencies; any savings that can be made will be made, and the remaining money will be refunded to contributors on a pro-rata basis as set out in our original statement.” Sulla sat.

Caesar rose again. “Could Lucius Cornelius please inform the Senate of the amount pledged but not yet included in his report? This would give Senators a clearer understanding of the actual amount that is still required, once the pledges are paid.”

Sulla stood again. “Until the money is actually paid over, a pledge remains part of the amount still required.” He sat again.

Caesar rose a third time. “Lucius Cornelius has reported that design work and site investigations have progressed rapidly, and allowed considerably more accurate estimates of cost to be generated, an achievement for which I congratulate him and his team. Given that these more accurate cost estimates should allow the project to be undertaken with greater confidence in the final cost, why does he still require subscription to an amount of two hundred fifty thousand *sestertium milia*? When the initial, rough estimate was provided the contingency amount was an additional twenty percent; but now, with more accurate costings, the contingency represents over thirty-five percent! So will the target Fund amount be reduced to reflect a more reasonable contingency? A Fund target of two hundred thousand *sestertium milia* would still provide a contingency of well over ten per cent.”

Sulla stood again. “Lucius Porcius and I have not changed the Fund target amount. However, Sextus Julius presents a persuasive case for some reduction of the Fund Target. This is an argument which we Censors will obviously take into consideration as part of our on-going review. But until we are able to examine all the information available to us and discuss the matter, I am not authorised to vary from our currently-agreed amount.”

Sulla approached Caesar after the Senate meeting had been adjourned.

“Sextus Julius, why did you seek to have the Fund amount reduced?”

Caesar smiled weakly. “I didn't seek that, Lucius Cornelius. Quite the opposite!”

“What do you mean?” Sulla was confused.

“I feared that you and Lucius Porcius would reduce the amount anyway once you had in hand an amount even approaching the projected cost, simply to ensure that the more prosperous Equites were locked out of the project,” Caesar explained. “After all, you and Cato both have considerable contempt for the Merchant Classes! But I have a very important supporter who wants to make a

very large contribution. Large enough to put him at the head of the list to be carved into the Commemoration Stone. So he wants me to ensure that the Fund target will NOT be reduced to exclude him.

“So today my aim was to make you lock yourself into the higher target. If you were to reduce the target now, it would appear to be the result of pressure from the Populares; and that would be embarrassing for the relationship between you and the Boni.” Caesar smiled again. “So I have confidence that the higher target will remain and my supporter will be able to make his contribution.

“At a personal level, I apologise for putting you into this position; but that's politics!” Caesar said with a sympathetic shrug. “But I assure you that with only a few minor issues such as this, we Populares will continue to work co-operatively with you Italianists.”

Sulla returned the smile, despite the anger behind his eyes. This man has been Consul and Censor, but he's still the pawn of the money grubbers! How dare he manipulate me! “I understand, Sextus Julius. We all have our own requirements and constraints. And to show my support for you in this matter, I will do all in my power to persuade Lucius Porcius to maintain the current target. That should keep your client happy, and you can claim the credit for that.” Sulla dropped his right hand reassuringly onto Caesar's left shoulder. But don't think you can play those games with me and get away with it! Sulla said to himself behind his sympathetic smile. I can run rings around you!

Sulla spent the next few days going through the accounts of money received and comparing these amounts to pledges. He had three scribes with him in his large Public Room, converted to an office and scriptorium for the purpose. Each was engaged in writing out a standard letter to each of the men with unfulfilled pledges, writing in names and amounts as Sulla provided them with the information.

*Lucius Cornelius Sulla, Censor.
to Senator <insert name>*

Greetings!

I remind you of your pledge to contribute <enter pledge amount> for the building of the Great Houses in the Forum. Our records indicate that <enter amount received> has been received to date

I will send a member of my staff to collect the outstanding <enter amount outstanding> from your house on the Ides of October, unless you deliver it to my house before that date. I also advise that any senators who have not fulfilled their pledges will be listed and mentioned in my next Report to the Senate.

Live long and well!

There was also a special letter, for Gnaeus Pompeius.

*Lucius Cornelius,
to Senator Gnaeus Pompeius*

Greetings!

I remember your pledge to match the combined contribution of any other two Senators.

I respect and admire that you have been as good as your word on this matter. However, there are amounts pledged but not yet delivered which, if made good, would require a further fifteen thousand sestertium milia for you to satisfy your pledge. I expect these pledges to be made good.

Therefore I ask you to deliver this amount to me by the Ides of October if at all possible, but not as a simple contribution. I will hold it in trust, and transfer to your contribution account only so much as is required to satisfy your pledge. If not all is required to do this, then I will refund the balance to you immediately the Fund is fully subscribed.

I thank you again for your faithfulness in this matter. I also advise you that performance of this pledge will mean that your name will appear first on the Commemoration Stone as 'Gnaeus Pompeius Magnus', the greatest single contributor to the building that will house the governing assemblies of the Republic for a thousand years.

May you live long in the dignitas you have earned!

This naked threat to name and shame those who failed to perform as promised worked well. Pledges were made good, rather than risk being embarrassed in public with the elections due in December. Not all amounts were received by the Ides, but those foot-draggers were told that no delay past the twentieth day would be tolerated. Accounts had to be finalised before the Fund was opened to the Equites. By the twentieth day of October, the money received totalled one hundred and ninety three thousand sestertium milia. More than the estimated cost, but still fifty seven thousand sestertium milia short of the Fund target. The largest single donor was Pompeius; fifty five thousand sesterium milia had been raised to meet the sum of the next two largest donors combined, but had come close to destroying the fortunes of his own family as well as several close friends. He was heavily in debt and expected to take years to work his way out of it.

Yet Sulla had several tricks still up his sleeve. He called on a family friend; Marcus Licinius Crassus. "Thank you for seeing me at such short notice, Marcus Licinius, and so soon after our other meeting," Sulla said politely as he was lead into Crassus' office.

"Don't be silly; I'm a man of low rank, hardly one to refuse a Censor!" Crassus retorted. "But it is good of you to observe the courtesies, anyway."

"You need not be a man of low rank for long, Marcus Licinius. I believe you reached 31 years of age this year; old enough to be elected Quaestor and start working your way up."

"What would be the point of that?" Crassus replied. "I can't become Praetor until I'm 39; so there is plenty of time."

"Plenty of time to gain a political profile in normal times, I agree. But these are not normal times," Sulla pointed out. "These are times of change, and if you ride the changes you can gain a lift that will serve you all your life!"

Crassus looked at Sulla more intently. Sulla was more than twenty years his senior and had been much closer to Crassus' father than to the son. But there was still a comfort between the two of them. "And what change is there now that could give me such a lift?" he asked.

"Let me change the subject," Sulla waved away the question as he walked past his host into the triclinium and sat on a couch. "Do you know young Pompeius? I know you're on the Senate List, but I never see you there."

"Oh, who cares about the Senate! It's boring!" Crassus snorted. "I'll start taking an interest in a few years' time when I start my run."

"You should start taking an interest right now," Sulla advised. "The son of Pompeius the Butcher is rehabilitating the family name in one blow. A blow that will wipe out the shame of his father and make the Gens Pompeia the Gold Standard of civic duty for generations to come, perhaps forever!"

"That's a big coup!" Crassus agreed. "And how is he doing this?"

"Lucius Porcius and I have decided to build a complete new building for the new Republic Senate and Republic Comitia. I've announced that this will be paid for by subscription, and the names of the biggest contributors will be listed on a stone to be set into the facade of the building. Pompeius has pledged to contribute as much as any other two combined! This will ensure his name is at the top of the list. And it will be there for as long as Rome survives," Sulla smiled as he finished.

"I know the Pompeii are a wealthy lot," Crassus commented. "But how much is this costing him? He must be white from blood loss!"

"So far, fifty five thousand *sestertium milia*. I suspect he has not only bled himself white, but gone into debt as well."

Crassus whistled. "That's serious money!"

"Yes, very serious indeed," Sulla agreed. "Pompeius can stretch his purse no more, but if you scratch back some of the money you have lent and rummage through your accounts a bit, maybe look in your bottom drawer as well, I'm sure you can match it.

"Pompeius will have to abandon his pledge to match any other two, so he will not have that same leverage in the future," Sulla leant forward. "The question in front of you is; do you want to go past him, and have your name at the head of the list? Or will you settle for meeting him denarius-for-denarius so you two will share top place? For my part, I would counsel that you simply match him. To come over the top would look like arrogance. And having matched him, your better family name would do the rest for you. You're the son of a consul, he is the son of a traitor." Sulla smiled. "Can I count on you for fifty five thousand *sestertium milia* within the next few days? After that, I have to make my final report."

Crassus looked into the distance. He didn't need to consult his accounts to know how much he could lay his hands on, and in what time frame. He could do it. The question is whether or not he wanted to. "I'll let you know in a few days," he responded.

"No, you will let me know by tomorrow night, and deliver the cash before sunset the next night. Even if you need to arrange a bit of bridging finance while you organise the sale of some assets!" Sulla built into a hectoring tone. "Otherwise I have to go to Plan B, and that involves the Equites. Do you want to see the name Pompeius at the head of the list? Or perhaps that of a Second-Class money-grubber at the top, and the name of Crassus not even mentioned?"

"Blast! I would have liked a few more years before I got into politics!" Crassus exclaimed. "But you're right, Lucius Cornelius. This is an opportunity I have to take while it's there, and thank you for bringing it to my attention. I'll get the cash to you within a few days."

"Thank you, Marcus Licinius," Sulla smiled. "And now I'll take my leave of you." He stood and turned for the door.

Sulla's next call was to Gnaeus Pompeius. "Welcome to my home, Censor!" Pompeius said with surprise and delight as Sulla was shown into the Atrium.

"I must apologise for dropping in without warning, Gnaeus; but I thought I should speak to you as soon as possible," Sulla excused his unannounced visit.

"Speak to me about what, Lucius Cornelius?"

"The funding of the Great Houses project has taken an unexpected turn," Sulla replied. "A new contributor has offered to match your contributions; so of course it's mathematically impossible for both you and him to perform as pledged."

"Who has done this?" Pompeius challenged. "This must be motivated by pure spite! He's attempting to destroy the credibility of my solemn pledge!"

"I think not, Gnaeus," Sulla said soothingly. "If he were so motivated, then he could have stopped short of so great a donation. It's widely thought that your diligence in honouring your pledge has already sent you to the edge of solvency and you have precious little more to give. For which you are held in high esteem, I might add," Sulla continued quickly. "Or he might have pledged to give even more than you, even if only by a small margin, so as to displace you from top rank. But he has done neither," Sulla went on. "He tells me – and I believe him! - that he is acting out of a desire to honour you by emulation. There is no more sincere form of compliment."

Pompeius was mollified by this explanation. It offered him a way to avoid the bankruptcy which would be inevitable if he were to be stretched any further.

"So he's offering to join me in my pledge; so that each of us would contribute as much as any other two combined?" Pompeius asked, to attempt to put as good a light as possible on this situation.

"I couldn't have expressed it better myself!" Sulla exclaimed. "Such a way of presentation would honour both of you! You may yet find a very useful political alliance there, you both being inclined towards the Boni position in any case."

"Why would you be so happy to promote the Boni faction, Lucius Cornelius? It could only be at the expense of your own Italianist group?"

Sulla waved a hand dismissively. "Factions mean nothing to me, not even my own associates, except in so far as they are a useful tool for achieving my objectives. You should know by now how closely I have worked with the Boni before! My only significant difference is that I am certain that the Republic must include the Italians and thereby Romanise them, rather than excluding them and thereby create enemies on our doorstep. Apart from that I'm as conservative as Lucius Porcius himself, and he will tell you as much if you ask him."

"Who is this man, Lucius Cornelius?"

"The son of an old friend of mine. Marcus Licinius Crassus."

"Crassus!" Pompeius was taken aback. "It's said he's the wealthiest man in Rome! He could have buried me if he wanted to!" Pompeius blew out a deep breath. "But he has never shown any interest in politics. Why would he get involved?"

"He tells me that he is thinking of getting involved as he approaches his mid-thirties, and wants to be eligible for a quick trip up the cursus honorum. He sees this as a good way of putting his name in front of the public."

Pompeius nodded to himself. "Yes, I was hoping for the same when I made my offer, except that I expected almost everyone to make more reasonable contributions. Instead of a handful to come in so heavily. I miscalculated. Even if it had worked I don't have the cash to run for office now."

"Don't be down heartened, Gnaeus; you're only a young man and you have many years to re-establish your wealth. And besides which, you are only short on ready cash, but your properties are doubtless bringing in a huge income so your reserves will be re-built quickly enough. You can wait for your thirty-seventh birthday before starting your campaign and still become Consul in your own year," Sulla encouraged him. "Specially if Marcus Licinius is your friend," he added. "Don't spurn him is my advice."

Pompeius was placated. "Thank you for your kindness and your wisdom, Lucius Cornelius," he replied. "And by-the-way, that additional fifteen thousand sestertium milia to cover unreceived pledges; please give me a few more days to raise that. I'll have it to you before the next Senate meeting. I'm having difficulty but I will find it, I promise."

Sulla smiled again. "Don't worry about that, Gnaeus. That pledge hasn't been filled yet. And even if it is I won't accept it. I'll say that the fund had already been fully subscribed," he put his hand on Pompeius' shoulder. "As Sextus Julius asserted during the last Senate meeting, we already have adequate contingency and I wouldn't want to put you to any greater hardship."

Thank you, Lucius Cornelius. I won't forget your thoughtfulness towards me." Pompeius drew himself up. "And please assure Marcus Licinius of my friendship and best wishes."

"Conscript Fathers," Sulla announced triumphantly, "The Fund for the construction of the Great Houses has been fully subscribed! Marcus Licinius

Crassus has joined with Gnaeus Pompeius in his pledge. Both of them have agreed to match the sum of the next two highest contributors, and have delivered to me fifty five thousand *sestertium milia* each. Between them, these two men have contributed more than half of the estimated cost of the project, and I invite the Senate to show its appreciation. Please stand, Gnaeus and Marcus Licinius!"

This was the first time Crassus had attended the Senate as an actual member. He and Pompeius stood side by side as the Senate applauded, however unwillingly.

"The total amount of cash received totals two hundred and forty eight *sestertium milia*. Although this is just short of the nominal target amount, it still provides more than the fifty thousand *sestertium milia* contingency originally proposed. But rather than the administrative inconvenience of opening the Fund to further contributions I have added a legally-binding Banker's Undertaking to provide a further two *sestertium milia* in addition to my personal contribution, on condition that this must not be paid into the fund until required to meet actual expenses. Naturally, this will not count towards my personal contribution for the purposes of my ranking on the Commemorative Stone unless actually cashed. I don't expect that to happen."

Sulla swept his eyes around the chamber. "I also advise that there have been a total of one hundred and twelve contributors. My colleague Lucius Porcius and I have met and agreed that all names shall be shown on the Commemorative Stone. We thank all contributors and Rome will honour all contributors in this glorious work."

Caesar approached Sulla after the meeting had closed.

"That was very good work, Lucius Cornelius!" He congratulated Sulla.

"I thought you would be disappointed, Sextus Julius; your supporter has been deprived of his chance to contribute," Sulla replied apologetically.

"Oh, I'm not disappointed in the least, however much he might be!" Caesar assured him. "Personally, I don't like him a bit. He's arrogant well beyond what's fitting for anyone of the Second Class, however wealthy. But I had to prevent you from lowering the Fund limit if I were to ensure my own financial support in the future. But thanks to your diligence we both win!"

Yes, we both win, thought Sulla to himself. But you win much more than I do, you manipulative bastard! Sulla thought to himself even as he smiled. You played both sides of the game, and relied on my hard work and personal favours, and got what you wanted on both sides. But what irks me the most is that you won! That you made me your pawn in a game in which if I failed, you win, and if I succeeded, you win! I will not forget this, Caesar!

Quintus Pompeius Rufus checked the seals on the back of the letter before opening it. One was that of Drusus, to whom he owed a debt of honour for having to search his house for an allegedly stolen slave so many years ago. Drusus had been so gracious in the face of that insult that he had pledged Drusus his support, and Drusus had not abused that pledge.

The other was that of Sulla, who had praised him so highly and arranged for his appointment to Asia as governor; and even held out the hint of support for the Consulship one day.

Perhaps they had heard of the Training Program that he had instituted, and had now spread its graduates over most of Anatolia. Rufus was consciously proud of what had come to be called the Rufan System; it was nothing less than a revolution in Public Administration, and would out-live any General's Triumph!

He cracked the seals and started reading. He knew immediately that it was Sulla's hand; the dots separating the individual words was Sulla's technique to prevent mis-reading, and made the words flow so much more easily. It was a technique he had adopted himself, and had included in his College requirements.

*Lucius Cornelius and Marcus Livius,
To Quintus Pompeius, our beloved friend,*

May all the gods favour you!

Your work in Asia has become a by-word for competence, efficiency and justice. Even among the Second Class, who could be expected to be most bitter about the loss of their former revenues in the province since the Miletus Decree, you are honoured as a man who has made Asia the most attractive province for new business in the whole world!

There are many influential men here in Rome who are intent on extending your methods of administration and high standards throughout the whole Roman world. Sicily has this process well in train, it having been commenced under our friend Caius Papius and continued under Caius Vidacilius. Caius Papius is now taking the same Rufan System to Africa and it is also being initiated in the Spains.

We trust that these years since your first appointment to Asia have been sufficient to adjust your initial concepts to the harsh grind against reality and perfect your methods. Now would be a good time to display your achievements before the world and receive the rewards due to you.

We are currently in discussions with the Populares, whose main supporters in the Second Class are urging support for your election as Consul in this coming year. The iron is hot; now is the time to strike! We urge you to make all haste in returning to Rome to announce your candidacy. We have presumed upon you that you would be willing to accept the honour due to you and we are already letting it be known that you will stand for Consul. This is an election which you will win handsomely so that your much-admired Rufan System will become mandated in all provinces as soon as possible.

Make haste, lest an early winter prevent you from arriving in time!

Rufus felt elated. Sulla was honouring his hint of four years ago! He, Quintus Pompeius Rufus, would be the first of the Gens Pompeia to become Consul! And not just a one-term wonder, like so many who warm the Curile Chair

and then leave it for the next man while achieving nothing of note; this Pompeian New Man would leave a mark more enduring than that of any since the Great Marius some twenty years ago, perhaps even greater! He called for Eutyches, his Master of House as he sat quickly and reached for paper and quill to start scribbling his response. Soon the bald Greek slave, whom he had come to love for his wisdom and good humour as much as for his efficiency on the job, was standing at the door.

“Eutyches, I need to be in Rome as soon as possible. You will come with me, but the House and the Administration must continue in my absence. Please make it happen.” Eutyches nodded and moved away. Nothing more need be said. Rufus was confident everything would be handled well.

Meanwhile in Ancyra in the middle of Anatolia, Silo and Glauca were celebrating the year's successful campaign.

“It has been a good year, Lucius!” Silo announced jovially.

“Yes, General” Glauca replied, holding up a goblet of wine. “Having established your rule in Pontus the year before, you've managed to capture a quarter of Armenia as well! That will teach Tigranes not to provide succour to Rome's enemies!”

“Not quite, Lucius,” Silo cautioned his subordinate. “I think it has more likely taught him that he needs to fight or he will lose the other three-quarters as well.”

“But General,” protested Glauca, “you've informed him that you have no further claims!”

“He neither acquiesces in what we have already taken, nor believes that we will not take more,” Silo asserted. “Have no doubt; he will use this winter to prepare for an early attack in the Spring. He believes that his army will be more accustomed to fighting in sleet and slush than our men and he's probably right. He'll attempt to take advantage of poor conditions in the Spring and move against us before we can mobilise properly.”

“Oh? Then what do you intend to do about it?” Glauca asked, suddenly sobered.

“Let him come!” Silo smiled. “Because we won't be there to be defeated.”

“What? Do you intend to allow him to enter unopposed?” Glauca was perplexed.

“In this campaign we'll win by avoiding battle,” Silo explained. “Let them drive into the new areas we took last summer. There'll be no Romans there. Our troops will be crossing the Euphrates well to the south, and driving straight for Tigranocerta! While Tigranes is wading through the soggy snow and the mud in the high country we'll be on the warmer, dryer, flatter land. Then when Tigranes learns what's happening he'll have to force-march his men through those abysmal conditions back down to the lowlands. They'll be exhausted and we'll hold prepared positions. He'll have no choice but to accept our conditions,” Silo concluded.

“And what will be our conditions?” Glauca asked.

"South of the Taurus, the new boundary between Rome and Armenia will be the Tigris, not the Euphrates."

"But he'll never agree to that!" Glauca objected.

"By the time he's in any position to stop us we will already hold Tigranocerta," Silo replied. "He can either accept those terms and retain central and eastern Armenia or he can be pushed off the map."

Glauca thought for a moment. "It seems a good plan, General," he said at last. "But I can see some difficulties."

"What is the first one, Lucius?"

"The first is to get far enough south with our main body. The Taurus Mountains will still be impassable, and to attempt to follow the Euphrates downstream will be slow and hazardous."

"Well thought, Lucius! You're getting quite good at this!" Silo congratulated him. "That's why we won't be doing either. We'll send our main forces back to Ephesus, and put them onto ships. That will get them out of Tigranes' sight. He'll assume they've gone back to Rome and he has to contend only with a reduced force based in Mazaca in Cappadocia. But they won't be going to Rome. They'll land at Antioch instead."

"Are you certain the Seleucids will allow this?"

"Lucius, you know well enough that they can't even trust their own shadows in Antioch! Syria has no central rule; it's a hotch-potch of local governors who are answerable only if they want to be and can expect help from no-one!" Silo asserted. "We'll land and demand innocent passage. If they try to deny us then we will make Syria a province of Rome. I'm sure they'll decide wisely once they are given the clear choice."

The other problem I see," Glauca continued, "is that we will have already conceded the north. I don't want to have to re-capture it."

"That's a bigger problem," Silo conceded. "But I hardly expect it to be strongly garrisoned. Tigranes will have come south with as many men as he can to confront our main force. But if Tigranes wants to be difficult we simply tell him that he either withdraws from the northern territories, or our main force will keep on marching northwards to clear them for him," Silo concluded. "We'll give him the choice of conceding the north and the west or losing the whole kingdom."

"I'm assuming that I'll be with the northern force and my task will be to re-occupy the north as the Armenians turn south. How are we to communicate?"

"By early summer the floods will have dropped, and you'll be able to send couriers down the Euphrates," Silo responded. "If there's a blocking force, use your cavalry to clear it or go around it."

"Yes, General. I suggest retaining five legions in the north and the other thirteen should go with you."

"That sounds about right, Lucius," Silo agreed. "Tomorrow I'll move out. I have to reach Ephesus before the winter closes us in."

Chapter 8 – 671 Ab Urbe Condita (83 B.C.)

“Why did I have to be saddled with a dolt as a colleague?” Rufus asked in despair. “It would have been better to support any Popularis as well as me; we could have taken both places!”

“Hindsight is so clear,” Drusus sympathised.

Rufus had won an overwhelming victory at the elections. Naturally all the Italian tribes had voted for him as well as the four Urban Tribes. What was surprising was the number of Rural Romans who had also supported him. The Boni leadership had erred badly by trying to present Lucius Domitius Ahenobarbus as an anchor for the ‘old ways’ before the Italian citizenship. In fact his father’s consulship from eleven years earlier was remembered principally for his fanaticism and corruption, in stark contrast to the high ethical standards shown by Rufus.

The clincher was to see Publius Rutilius Rufus, the scion of integrity and the scourge of the Publicani, supporting the younger Rufus in the most positive terms imaginable. The old man, now in his mid-seventies, had braved an early-winter journey from Smyrna to address the Senate on ‘The Situation in Asia’, an excuse for a speech to promote the younger man. As well as the Senate speech, the Older Rufus made a point of speaking directly to the stalwarts in the Rural Tribes, visibly exhausting himself in his efforts which made them all that much more impressed.

As a result of this powerful campaigning Ahenobarbus gained the second consular place clearly by default. There was no third candidate. This poor comparison to the more progressive forces flowed over to the election of the Tribal Representatives. Almost every Roman Tribe returned a Populares majority, and at least one Popularis Republican Praetor. The Italian Tribes naturally returned all Italianists.

Sulla, on the other hand, was well satisfied with the result. Better a dunder-head Bonus who could be coerced than a Popularis with his own agenda and legitimacy! “Never mind Ahenobarbus; he knows that if he tries to obstruct you he will be risking a riot. The Auditorium Gentium is now fully-functioning and he barely has a friend in the whole chamber. They will have no compunction in calling out the Plebs if they see the need.”

“Well, just do the vigil tonight,” Drusus said to Rufus, “and hit the ground running in the morning. We’ve negotiated the College of Permanent Administrators Law with Caesar and it’s already drafted and fit to present to the first Senate meeting. That’s the first priority, to get the training codified and under way. The other matters can wait until we have agreement about the precise wording. They won’t come into effect until next year anyway.”

Ahenobarbus, although the Junior Consul, was permitted to hold the fasces this first month. He nodded reluctantly to Rufus to take the floor.

“Conscript Fathers,” Rufus began. “Most of you know from my previous times in this chamber that I don’t have much time for well-designed rhetoric. Nor do I play on the passions to sway an audience. I believe that good government springs from clear, level-headed thinking. We must think rather than feel if we

are to serve this Republic to the best of our abilities. This will be a duty on all of us from consuls down to pedarii. In that sense we are all equals, as the Mos Majorum suggests; we are all equally servants of the Republic, all with that one common and over-riding duty.

“So I call upon all of you in this coming year to fulfil that duty conscientiously and diligently. If you see a weakness in any proposal, then expose it by all means! You don't do well if you allow poorly-drafted laws to pass! But there is one duty that surpasses merely pointing out problems; that is to *solve* problems! And I call upon each and every one of you to examine critically every law that comes before you. And I say that word deliberately; you must be critical, which is a different thing altogether from being negative. Where there is a weakness, then propose an improvement! If the whole concept is so wrong that nothing can make it good, then explain why doing nothing is better!

“If I make a mistake then I welcome correction. But I don't welcome obstruction. And I say to those who might oppose anything I suggest or who support anything which I consider unwise; I invite you to hold me to this same principle. I welcome anyone to call upon me to justify my position on any question and I will attempt to do so without sarcasm, without exaggeration, without distortion. I will attempt to speak at all times temperately, rationally, and fairly. If I fail in this regard then please hold me accountable to my own standards.

“And where I am shown to be in error by one who would argue rationally and temperately, without sarcasm, without exaggeration and without distortion, I will gladly change my position and thank that speaker for imparting to me the benefit of his wisdom.” Rufus looked around the chamber.

“Now that the prologue is complete, let me move onto the first proposal I wish to place before you for consideration. This is the Law concerning the College of Permanent Administrators. It's based on my experience as Governor of Asia and has been well-tested and proven in real-life circumstances.

“The first section provides definition of the terms used throughout the Law and establishes a College of Permanent Administrators here in Rome, with provision for associated colleges to be established in major cities throughout the world. The first such associate college will be that which I have already established in Ephesus. These colleges shall be subject to a committee of this Senate. This committee shall be charged with the proper administration of these colleges, to engage competent teaching staff, and to ensure high and uniform standards of performance, so a graduate from any college will be equipped to serve anywhere throughout the Roman world.

“The second section is concerned with the recognition of qualifications bestowed by the colleges, and the revocation of qualifications for misconduct.

“The third section outlines the role of graduates in the administration of provinces or such other places as the Senate may from time to time establish. It also deals with the working relationship between Permanent Administrators and Governors or other appointed positions and mechanisms for resolving any conflicts.

“The fourth section contains a requirement for the Senate to ensure proper funding for these colleges, either by direct grants, by the charging of tutorial fees, or by some other means.

“The underlying reason for bringing this Law forward today is to ensure that the Law and regulatory procedures are applied uniformly throughout the world, that scope for corruption is minimised, and that any corrupt practices are easily recognised and confidently prosecuted. This sprang from my experience in Asia. In that place I found any number of practices which were without any foundation in law but were excused because ‘it has always been done this way’. These things which had ‘always been done this way’ included officials requiring one or other parties, or sometimes both, to use a registered advocate in court, and invariably the registered advocates paid a percentage of their fees to the corrupt official. Other problems, less corrupt but still tediously difficult and time-wasting, were differences in weights, measures, fees, and definitional matters from one city to the next.

5. “Even these innocent differences were burdensome on businesses and thus depressed investment, trade, and the general prosperity of the regions affected. And we all know that the more prosperous a region the more it contributes to the Republic as a whole, not only in taxes but also in reducing crime and restiveness under Roman authority. I can say to you, based on records of receipts, that Asia contributed more in nett taxes and fees to the Republic's treasury in the last year than it did before the Mithridatic War. And it did this being content under Roman rule according to the Miletus Decree rather than on the edge of revolt.

“I commend the Law to you and now invite detailed debate.” Rufus sat.

Ahenobarbus rose from his Curile Chair.

“I will speak on this foolish puddle of sentiment which my colleague calls a ‘Law’. First I must point out that it is not a Law at all; it is an entire textbook of law! A proposed Law that runs to twenty pages! That's even longer than the Law which set up this Republic Senate, the Auditorium Gentium, and the two houses of Rome combined! Are we to believe that a college for quill-sharpeners is more important than the governmental structures for the City of Rome, and indeed the whole Republic?” Ahenobarbus shook his head.

“But perhaps there is a reason for so lengthy and tedious a document. Perhaps the hope is that everyone will tire of it and not read it through. Because if you look at it properly you will see that the effect of this law would be to destroy the authority of the Governor.

“It provides that the Governor's hands will be tied behind his back; he will be authorised to do no more than issue policy decisions in a few carefully-limited areas and hope that these graduates do as they are told. But if they decide to do otherwise, what power does the Governor have? He can refer the matter to another graduate for a ruling! Do any of you really believe that one graduate will stand against his own colleague? Governors come and go, but for a graduate Administrator to act against one of his own could lead to loss of his qualifications! Loss of his entire reputation and future career! The pressure on

the Administrator acting as judge in this case to rule in favour of his colleague and against the Governor would be irresistible!

"So what can the Governor do next? He can appeal to the Senate Committee! Not the Senate as a whole you might notice, but only to those twelve men who have been immersed in the college system. Those who have had their hearts and minds and imaginations and souls soaked in it! They would be unable, by sheer force of habit, to think in any terms except those of the College. The Senators will not control the colleges! Rather, the colleges will capture their Senators and control them!

"So who will control the colleges, if the Senate Committee will not? It doesn't take too much thought to see the answer to that one! Who will control these colleges? None other than the Public Administrators themselves! You can guarantee that no Senatorial Class men will go into this career because it would prevent him from taking care of his own properties. And you can guarantee that none of the Second class would join because there's much more money and much more personal freedom in running their family business empires! But the sons of the Third Class will flock to it like vultures to a carcass! Here is their chance to exercise power over their betters, over the First and Second Classes! And to be paid for doing so!

"Reject this law, Conscription Fathers! Not even the Gracchi dared to propose anything so corrosive of the Mos Majorum as this!" Ahenobarbus sat abruptly, and a murmur went around the Senate.

Sulla stood, seeking the call.

"Lucius Cornelius has the floor," Ahenobarbus announced begrudgingly.

Sulla stalked to the centre of the floor. He swept his eyes around the benches, and everyone saw *that* face; the glare that would have turned Medusa into stone.

"Open the Great Doors!" he commanded angrily. "We are a Republic, and what I have to say must be heard by the Public!" The doors were swung open, and a curious crowd started to gather on the platform outside.

"Conscription Fathers," Sulla began. "Today you have heard from a Consul who is even more of a disgrace to his office than the corrupt Philippus. This piece of scum is on the same level as his idiot brother, who plotted with Strabo to destroy the Mos Majorum even as he claimed to be defending it!" There was no mistaking the equal mixture of contempt and outrage in Sulla's voice.

"His closing remark, the sentence he would have you fix on as he sat down, shows the depths of his unfitness for office. 'Not even the Gracchi proposed anything so corrosive of the Mos Majorum as this', he described this proposed law!

"I think it is only proper that I explain to him what the Mos Majorum actually is! He clearly has no idea! First, the Mos Majorum is not a raw justification of the privileges that we as senators enjoy. Nor is it an unthinking, inflexible cage that would stifle growth. And it is certainly not an iron palisade against any Roman from rising above the class of his father! The Mos Majorum is a beautifully and elegantly balanced vision for how a civilised society should

be governed. Allow me to outline and explain its main components, and you will be enthralled at the wisdom, the courage, the imagination of the founders of our Republic!

“The first and key principle animating the Mos Majorum is that there must be no King! There must be no-one who is above the Law. That's why I opposed Sulpicius, the Popularis! That's why I opposed Strabo, the Bonus! Regardless of a man's political affiliation, no-one may be King in the Roman world! That's why we have two Consuls, so that each may act as a check on the other. The veto power of a Consul, properly used, is not intended to be a threat to paralyse the Republic, but as a means of ensuring that no harm is done to it.

The second principle of the Mos Majorum is that all government is to be for the Common Good of the Republic. Not the personal enrichment or aggrandisement of those holding office from time to time, nor their personal friends, but the Common Good! That's why laws must be approved not only by this Senate but must also gain the consent of the People in the Comitia.

“Of course, Laws should not be made in the Comitia! The Plebs don't have the education, the training, the understanding of legal matters, the experience or the facilities to govern the Republic; that must be left to the Senate as we all agree. But good laws having been made by this Senate, they must be acceptable to the People to gain full legitimacy or else we are no longer a Republic. Yes, I have been exasperated by the Plebs myself from time to time. But the correct response to that is to explain clearly what is intended and how it is to be done. It's arrogance and impatience to attempt to by-pass the People, and the first step towards making a King! The People, for all their pettiness and lack of vision beyond their own needs, act as a check on such arrogance.

“And the third principle of the Mos Majorum, the golden thread that binds the other two, is that the holding of any office does not carry with it any special privilege but rather imposes a special duty. How can anyone overlook this key principle? Every time a member addresses you he starts with the words “Conscript Fathers”! You as Senators continue a heritage in which the first senators had to be conscripted to their duty! It was not for them a means of gaining power, fame or wealth! Instead it was a duty, done because the Republic needed it to be done! Every man who ever holds public office must see himself not as a man with power but as a servant of the Republic, and answerable for what he does with the authority entrusted to him for that short time in which he serves. Yes, even answerable to the Head Count, each of them a citizen no less than he is himself!

“So if this proposed Law, purely incidentally, provides a way for a son of the Third Class to better himself, then a true Consul of the Republic should rejoice! He has instituted something that is of benefit to those Romans citizens who looked to him to promote the welfare of all citizens, not just his personal friends. So I urge you all to judge this proposed law, as you should for any law, on the basis of the precious second principle of the Mos Majorum; will it promote the Common Good?

“I believe it will. It will promote the Common Good because it provides a more effective and more uniform means of providing and enforcing the Rule of Law throughout the Roman world. Pass this law, and the days are gone when a rapacious governor could line his pockets with gold and leave a province on the verge of revolt.” Sulla turned on his heels at this point.

“I tell you all with absolute conviction, as a man who had to repair the damage in Asia, that if we do not provide justice to the Provinces then we will continue the sorry cycle of private plunder, desperate revolt, bloody war, and destroyed economies. What the previous governors and their client Publicani stripped from Asia has gone into their private purses; but the cost of repairing that damage has come out of your purses, and mine, and the purse of every citizen of this Republic! And that is in addition to the blood that was shed in the process! We need to ensure that our subjects are treated justly or we will repeat that cycle generation after generation, until eventually an enemy arises that will manage to overpower us and impose the same regimen on Rome that we would have imposed on them and their ancestors. Their revenge will not be light!

“This proposed law will thus not only be good for the Provinces; it will be good for Rome. No longer will the provinces be a burden on the Treasury because of the cost of garrisons, but a contributor because of the moderate taxes made available by their prosperity. This law will indeed be for the Common Good!

“And even more so, when it is judged against the First Principle, you will see it is entirely consistent with the Mos Majorum. That first principle is that there shall be no King! There shall be no-one above the law! Our current practice of appointing a single Governor with total Imperium does, in effect, make him a kind of king. He is the sole arbiter of justice; in effect he is above the law.

“This law will still allow a governor to act as needed to ensure justice and maintain the peace, but it will require him to act lawfully. It will prevent a bad governor from exploiting his authority for personal enrichment or personal revenge. It will also protect a good governor because it will provide him with recognised and approved means of performing his duties, without fear of a trumped-up case being laid against him as we saw happen to Publius Rutilius some years back.

“So this law will hinder the wicked and protect the good. That is why I support it. It is also why Lucius Domitius Ahenobarbus opposes it.” Sulla sat.

The crowd that had gathered at the Great doors burst into applause and cheering. Ahenobarbus did not want to draw attention to this show of popular support by either asking for quiet or by trying to shout over it. Instead, he kept looking over the ranks of the Senate benches, as though seeking the next speaker. But no-one stood.

“Is there a speaker against the proposal?” he asked at length. Still no-one stood.

“Then I shall interpose my Veto,” Ahenobarbus announced. “I will not permit this proposal to proceed to a vote.”

More than half the Senate shot to their feet.

"I declare this session of the Senate closed," Ahenobarbus announced. He stood and walked to the pedestrian access door at the rear of the building, where the senators had their personal retinues waiting. The Senate erupted into chaos.

Rufus jumped to his feet and shouted for order. He gained enough of a silence for his voice to be heard. "Conscript Fathers! Control yourselves, and think before you act!" The angry scene calmed as most senators assumed that Rufus would continue the session without Ahenobarbus. "Conscript Fathers," he continued when order had been restored. "Do not act without sober reflection. Personally, I believe my colleague does have the power to prevent me from bringing this proposal to the Senate." An angry murmur started rising again. Rufus motioned with his hands for quiet, and the murmur died away.

"However, he did not exercise that veto in a timely manner. He allowed me to put this proposal. From that point on, the proposal is the Senate's, not mine, and he has no veto power over the Senate!" A tide of approval rose from the senators. "The only power he has now is to adjourn the Senate in his own month. But he can only do that for this month. So wait until next month when I hold the fasces and we will deal with the matter then. In the meantime, read through the proposal and discuss it among yourselves and with your friends. Then you will come to next month's debate that much better prepared!"

Applause broke out among the ranks of the senators and from the growing crowd at the Great Doors. Rufus strode towards the Great Doors and the cheering from the crowd grew stronger. He took his stand on the top step, consciously aware that he was emulating Drusus' action when Sulpicius had led the invasion of the Senate more than five years ago.

"Citizens of Rome!" he bellowed. He was met with a roar of approval, which quickly died to silence as the crowd waited to hear what he would say. "Do you want justice, or corruption?"

"Justice!" the crowd roared back.

"Do you want prosperity, or ruin?"

"Prosperity!" The roar came back.

"Do you want peace, or war?"

"Peace!" The crowd roared.

"Do you want a Republic, or a Kingdom?"

"Republic!" they screamed.

"So do I, fellow-citizens! So do I!" Rufus responded. "So urge your Representatives to support this law when it comes to the Comitia!"

"We support! We support! We support!" the crowd took up the chant. Rufus smiled and waved before turning his back and returning to the Senate floor. "Conscript Fathers!" he bellowed over the noise of the chant outside. "We may debate this proposed law, and we may amend any deficiencies you might find in it. But we must pass it!" He looked around the tiers of senators. "Until next meeting!" He turned for the pedestrian door and left the chamber.

Cato, Octavius and Metellus paid a friendly call on their fellow Bonus Ahenobarbus that afternoon.

“What a pleasant surprise!” Ahenobarbus smiled as his three guests entered the triclinium, lead by his Master of House.

“Tell me, Lucius Domitius; why does a dog turn and smell its own turd?” Octavius asked pleasantly.

Ahenobarbus was confused. What a strange joke! “I don't know, Gnaeus. Why?”

“Just to make sure it's not your brain; if it were, he would run under the first coach he saw!” Octavius answered with venom. His two colleagues gave no reaction, but remained stony-faced as they stared at their host.

“Hardly a polite way to greet one's host, Gnaeus,” Ahenobarbus objected weakly.

“But very apposite,” Cato entered the conversation. “Ever since the Italian citizenship vote we have shared the consulship with the Italianists, and we have built up a good working relationship with them. Even Quintus Caecilius could find common ground with Silo on everything that really mattered, including the separation of City and Republic Houses. You just threw it all into the Cloaca Maxima today,” Cato finished.

“But what else could I have done!” Ahenobarbus rejoined. “This is a bitch of a proposal! It lets the sons of tradesmen tell a Governor what he can and can't do, and how he can do it! That is totally unacceptable!”

“Let me tell you a few truths, Lucius Domitius,” Cato said with some exasperation. “First, it is not totally unacceptable to the Italianists and the Populares, and you should have known that from the start. Therefore we have to accept that it will go through in some form, eventually, however much you might try to fight it.

“Second, if you know a law has to go through in some form, then don't fight it; it will run straight over you. Instead, twist and nudge and negotiate it into the least unacceptable form possible. Sulla and Drusus in particular would much rather ally with us than with the Populares, so use this to advantage! Play along with them and they'll bend over backwards to accommodate you!

“Thirdly, get used to the fact that you have no legitimacy at all. If a black dog had nominated as a third candidate, he would have been colleague to Rufus by now. You won only because the Italianists persuaded Populares not to stand a candidate of their own. They wanted another Bonus as their colleague rather than a Popularis, because they thought they could trust us to be as reasonable as we have been in the past.

“Well, all that's gone now,” Cato continued. “The elections proved that they don't need us any more and your performance today told them that you refuse to negotiate. You have single-handedly done what the Gracchi and Marius failed to do; you have destroyed the political power of the Boni for at least a generation. Unless we can come up with some way to undo what you did today.”

Ahenobarbus looked stunned. “Are you serious?”

“I have never been more serious,” Cato replied. “Or disgusted!”

“Oh. Then what are we to do?” Ahenobarbus asked, totally demoralised.

"For a start, you mustn't oppose the Administrators Law any longer. The more you fight that battle, the more you weaken all of us for the next one. Cut your losses, call a Senate meeting as soon as decent, let the law be debated and passed, and keep your mouth shut," Cato told him bluntly.

"Meanwhile we'll go and talk to Sulla and Drusus and promise to keep you on a tighter rein. From now on you will do nothing except as we tell you to. We have to regain the trust of the Italianists or they'll go over to the Populares and we lose everything."

"Oh; and apologise to Rufus, fully and profusely, the next time you see him," Octavius added. "I would tell you to lick his arse but you're not worthy to do that."

The three guests turned and made for the front door, calling for their retinue as they went.

Well, it's pretty obvious that Octavius is not impressed, Ahenobarbus thought to himself. So stuff him; I'll talk to Cato from now on. At least he can say something sensible instead of just a stream of insults.

The three leaders of the Boni next headed for Sulla's house, sending a runner ahead as a courtesy to check that they would be accepted. Sulla welcomed them with courtesy if not warmth.

"First of all, Lucius Cornelius, we must apologise for the way Lucius Domitius behaved today," Cato bowed his head as he spoke. "It was not only unforgivable, it was downright stupid."

"You're correct on both counts, Lucius Porcius, as usual," Sulla replied. "But it wasn't entirely out-of-character for him."

"Again, you're right in saying that, Lucius Cornelius," Cato agreed. "Supporting him for Consul seemed a good way to rally our supporters at the election, but we didn't think through what sort of Consul he might make."

"Well, don't stand in the open doorway," Sulla urged them. "Come in and I'll set a snack for you." He called for Jason. "Fingerfood and watered wine in the triclinium, Jason!" He led his guests to the couches. "Well, what can be done about it, Lucius Porcius? Can you fit him with a muzzle, so he doesn't bark or bite any more?"

"I hope so, Lucius Cornelius. We've just come from his house and he seemed quite contrite," Cato answered. Sulla appeared to be taking this very well, Cato thought to himself, and is obviously prepared to help us through this mess. "We have told him to do nothing and say nothing except as he is told. And we believe that he understands that this is for his own good, after the mess he made this morning. He realises now that he's out of his depth and needs our guidance."

"That's good, my friend," Sulla approved as he poured the wine for his guests. "What guidance have you given him so far?"

"That he must allow the proposed Administrators Law to be debated without interference and accept the result of the vote. And that must apologise to Rufus," Cato added.

"That's excellent advice," Sulla agreed. "It should go a good distance towards repairing the Consulship, but I fear that it will only compound your

political damage with the Plebs, to see him so obviously back away from a position that he put in such strong terms this morning.”

“Thankfully the Great Doors were not open when he spoke. The people only heard your speech in reply, so there is no certainty about what he actually did say,” Cato said hopefully.

“Only that he imposed a veto and adjourned the Senate,” Sulla pointed out drily. “Not something that happens every day!”

“True,” Cato nodded. “And Rufus speaking from the steps left no-one in any doubt about where the battle-lines were drawn. But that didn't come from Lucius Domitius' own mouth, so it might not stick to him so much.”

Sulla shrugged as if to indicate he cared nothing for the fortunes of the Junior Consul.

“Anyway, we're here now to assure you that we have him under control, and he won't be permitted to speak again except as we provide the script for him,” Cato resumed. “We don't want to harm the good working relationship we have always enjoyed with your Italianists.”

“I'm glad to hear that, Lucius Porcius. We have all put too much work into that to throw it away. I can only hope that it's politically possible for us continue our co-operation after so public a falling-out.” Then Sulla brightened. “But time will tell!”

Silo's fleet slipped up the Orontes as soon as there was light enough to steer by. But the wind was too light so he ordered the ships to unload at the first suitable place rather than try to reach Antioch.

The first century of cavalry to be put ashore was hastily assembled and Silo led it up the road to Antioch at a trot. Gnaeus Priscus was left behind with orders to complete the unloading and form a camp. If no message was received by the following morning he was to march on Antioch.

Silo was impressed by the countryside. Well forested hills, rich river flats; even this early in the year it had the smell of fertility. He was less impressed by Antioch when he reached it. The city had once been powerful, no doubt; but everything had a sense of tiredness about it. The road was rutted, the timbers of the gates were starting to split from exposure to the weather, and the walls, although still impressive in size, had a flaky, grainy surface that told their age.

The soldiers at the gate were confused and poorly trained. Silo was within sight of the gates for ten minutes before there was any reaction to his approach, and that was a scramble. The confusion obvious to Silo at a distance. At last they tried to close the gates, but this was done so clumsily that Silo's gentle trot had him at the archway and waiting before the bar could be heard dropping into place. Then a helmeted head appeared over the parapet. “Who are you, and what's your business?” it demanded.

“I'm Quintus Poppeadius Silo, Commander of Roman forces in the East; and if my business had been to attack this city, I could have been in your basilica by now,” Silo responded. “That was the most comical effort at city defence I have ever seen!”

“Please wait, lord Silo. I have sent for the Governor.”

“Were you a City Guard worth feeding, you would have sent for someone in authority as soon as I was within sight, some half-an-hour ago. The Governor would have been here to greet me by now,” Silo complained. “But I’m a patient man; I’ll allow you a little time before my horses piss on your gate to dissolve it.”

Five minutes later another head appeared over the parapet.

“Greetings, lord Silo. My name is Paracles. What brings you here?”

“I would like to discuss that in less public circumstances, lord Paracles. May I enter, or would you prefer to come out?”

“I’ll come out to you. Please wait a moment.” Soon a small postern gate in the wall to the left of the main gate swung open and Paracles appeared on foot. Silo did him the courtesy of dismounting to meet him at the same level and removed his helmet.

“Welcome to Antioch, lord Silo,” Paracles smiled warmly. “How may we assist you?”

“I seek innocent passage through your lands,” Silo replied. “We won’t enter your cities nor do you any harm. We will pay for whatever supplies we need.”

“What, the eighty of you?” Paracles asked. “Surely there’s no need to ask permission for that!” Paracles waved his left hand dismissively. “Certainly, lord Silo, I see no problem with that!”

“Not for the eighty cavalry you see here today, lord Paracles, but for the thirteen legions I have camped at the mouth of the Orontes.”

Paracles eyes widened. “You have thirteen legions at the mouth of the Orontes?”

“If your military surveillance was as good as that of a women’s weaving club, you would have known that already,” Silo said impatiently.

Paracles gaped soundlessly for a few moments before finding his voice. “Please, lord Silo; if you would care to come inside with me? I think we might have some serious business to discuss.” Paracles gestured towards the postern.

“I don’t enter a city in that manner, lord Paracles,” Silo answered flatly. “Open the main gate and I will ride through with three staff. The other men I will send back to camp.”

Paracles looked at Silo for a brief time, and then turned to face the gate. “Open the gate!” he ordered. It took a while, but eventually the gate swung open and Paracles walked through.

Silo turned to the captain of the cavalry troop. “Caius, select two men and come with me. Order the rest to go back to Gnaeus Priscus and report events so far.”

The orders were shouted and the horses were pulled around. They trotted away as Silo and his three staff walked their horses through the gates into the city. Paracles lead them to a large public building and asked them to come inside. Paracles conducted them through the large entry hall and along two corridors and then into a large, sunlit office. Apparently it was his own. He ordered a slave to bring refreshments and directed his four guests to a group of three couches in one corner.

"You are probably aware of the sad state of the kingdom at present, lord Silo," Paracles opened the conversation. "There is some dispute about who is the rightful king."

"I understand that it's more than a dispute," Silo commented. "Royal fratricide and civil war would be my description."

"Well, yes. Eusebes and Philip are still contesting the throne," Paracles admitted.

"What has this to do with me?" Silo asked. "We don't intend to interfere on one side or the other. We only seek innocent passage, which will be granted or we will pass anyway, fighting whoever would prevent us and taking what we will."

"Please be patient with me, lord Silo, and all will become clear," Paracles asked. "Because of this dispute, this city and several others have been able to resist both claimants. Neither has been willing to devote the forces required to subdue us because it would distract from their efforts to eliminate each other. Nor have we paid taxes or other charges for ten years now. But Philip has gained the ascendancy and intends to demand payment of all arrears. And because we have not been more active in his cause, he will probably do a bit of administrative cleansing as well. I expect I would be one of the first to go."

"For these reasons, I and my associates in these other cities have discussed a proposal to invite Tigranes to occupy northern Syria, and attach it to his own kingdom. We would seek autonomy within his empire," Paracles paused, inviting a response from Silo.

"It would be unwise of you to do so," Silo answered. "Tigranes has no scruples and even less time for those seeking autonomy. He would agree with your terms and then disregard them as soon as he feels able to do so with impunity."

"And it would also be unwise of Tigranes to accept your invitation. Rome has a treaty with him that prohibits any action by him on this side of the Euphrates. If he accepted your invitation, it would amount to an act of war against Rome." Silo halted, looking for Paracles to react.

"I was unaware of the treaty with Rome, but I agree with your assessment of our proposal for autonomy," Paracles commented. "That's why your arrival here has prompted me to re-think our position." Paracles took a deep breath. "Would Rome be prepared to occupy Syria, and treat our cities on the same basis as the cities of Asia province?" Paracles asked. "That would be the best solution for us and I think it would also be in Rome's interests."

Silo thought about it for only the briefest of moments. "Yes," he replied. "So let it be done! You will send a message to each of the other cities involved in your discussions and we will move quickly to protect them from Philip, and Eusebes as well if he manages to recover his fortunes. We will make an open offer to any cities which would join them, as well." Silo stood to offer his right arm to Paracles. "Will you support the formation of a Syria Province in this way?"

Paracles took the offered arm. "Yes. I pledge my loyalty to the Roman Republic."

"Excellent!" Silo responded. "Now get out a map and show me which cities we can expect to come over to us and which ones might be more difficult."

Eusebes and Philip were both offered immunity and pardon and would be permitted to retain personal wealth up to a limit of ten thousand *sestertium milia* if they surrendered themselves to Silo. Otherwise, they would be destroyed. Eusebes, who was very much the weaker in the struggle, accepted immediately. Philip was unwilling to give up a kingdom that was almost in his palm and refused. He was killed by his officers, who then surrendered to Silo. By the end of March all of Syria up to the banks of the Euphrates was under the control of the Roman army.

Silo sent a legation to Tigranocerta, nominally to inform Tigranes that Rome was continuing to establish its administration of all lands west of the Euphrates. The real reason was to scout the region for the presence of any substantial military forces. Silo expected the land to be virtually bare, with all available forces being deployed to re-take the North.

This was a disconcerting journey for Priscus. Every few miles he could see the remains of one large military camp after another, as though the area just east of the Euphrates had just been one vast marshalling area for large armies. On an impulse he abandoned the main route to Tigranocerta and rode thirty miles up a side road; and there he found a body of infantry perhaps two legions strong. His entourage was caught in a scouting sweep by their cavalry and told by a very angry officer to move back to the main road and stay on it. They complied. At length they reached Tigranocerta.

Priscus strode into the audience hall when indicated by Philopator. He noticed that there was no chair this time; apparently even the minor courtesy shown to Glauca last time would not be extended to him. He stood to attention in the centre of the floor and saluted Tigranes.

"Hail, King of Kings! I bring you best wishes from Quintus Poppeius Silo, Governor of Roman Anatolia!"

"We welcome you to our court, legate Priscus," Tigranes replied coldly. "We are eager to hear your attempted justification for the extreme provocation Rome is committing."

"Provocation, King of Kings?" Priscus assumed a look of bafflement. "I am unaware of any provocation. I will report your complaint back to General Silo if you could give me the details."

"Silo is already fully aware of the details, as are you, legate," Tigranes growled. "The Seleucid territories have long been tacitly accepted as a buffer state between us to ensure no misunderstandings could arise. Yet Silo has invaded and seized them without any consultation with us. What am I to make of this except an act preparatory to an invasion of Armenia itself?"

Tigranes is no fool, Priscus thought to himself. "Not at all, King of Kings! The cities of Syria petitioned Rome for protection, to escape the ravages of the civil war that has so harmed their prosperity and safety for more than ten years now." Priscus tried to sound as innocent as possible. "And since the situation in

the formerly Pontic territories has now been resolved so amicably with Armenia, we had sufficient forces in the region to intervene on their behalf.

“Nor was this action without consultation with you, King of Kings.” Priscus continued. “Only four months ago, Legate Lucius Glauca stood before you to reaffirm our Treaty and to advise you that Rome was now in the process of acting upon it; and you explicitly acknowledged that all lands west of the Euphrates were subject to Roman influence or control, as Rome saw fit. Unless there's another misunderstanding here and we have different ideas of which river is the Euphrates.” Priscus allowed himself a hint of sarcasm as he said this.

“Is that all you have to say in Rome's defence?” Tigranes asked.

“Rome needs to state no defence, because Rome has done nothing wrong,” Priscus responded. “But if you would lay out a charge of which I am unaware, I will answer as best I can for the moment and refer the matter to General Silo for a more authoritative response.”

“What else does General Silo wish to tell me?” Tigranes continued, ignoring the invitation to raise an objection.

“The General required me to wish you a long and prosperous life, and to inform you that Rome will continue to set up its own administration in the lands west of the River in accordance with the Treaty. It is his intention to report regularly to you to advise you of progress in this matter. But it would seem that you are already fully aware of the latest extension of Rome's Imperium into Syria, so there is no need to take any more of your valuable time. Unless you require otherwise, I will go now.”

Tigranes flicked a hand in Priscus general direction. “Yes; go!”

Silo was fascinated to hear of the abandoned camps Priscus had observed. In early May, while Priscus had been on the road, a message had arrived from Glauca. There was no activity in the North, and he wanted to know if he should re-occupy the territory placed under administration last Fall.

This is most unexpected, Gnaeus,” Silo said with a frown. “I had expected an attack in the north, and for this area to be almost undefended.”

“Yes, General,” Priscus agreed. “It would seem that you might have daunted Tigranes more than you thought; and that he was prepared to leave you with your gains and take his compensation in the south.”

“Yes; but would this have been by taking Syria himself?” Silo asked. “Would he risk crossing the Euphrates, even if only to install Philip or some other puppet rather than as an outright conquest? Or was he intending to march against the Parthians?”

“If his plan had been to invade Parthia, then he would have done it by now,” Priscus guessed. “So I have to conclude that he knew that the Syrian cities were on the point of asking for his protection, and he was assembling his forces to respond quickly. Then he had to get them out of sight quickly once he realised that we had moved in first.”

“Which sounds reasonable to me, Gnaeus.” Silo agreed. “We should talk to the various city officials to see if any had anticipated the group decision.”

"I would talk to Eusebes as well," Priscus suggested.

"Yes, do that," Silo agreed.

Priscus decided to waste no time. He went to Eusebes' living quarters immediately. "Eusebes, I've just returned from speaking to Tigranes," he said after Eusebes greeted him and invited him to a couch.

"Oh, that must have been interesting," Eusebes said obsequiously.

"Yes it was. And I learnt a few things," Priscus agreed. "But I would like you to give me the benefit of your special insights, your wisdom and your knowledge of the situation. It seems that Tigranes was preparing to cross the Euphrates and move into Syria," Priscus stated, and raised an eyebrow to invite a response.

"I expect you are right, lord Priscus."

"Could you tell me why?" Priscus asked.

Eusebes gaped for a few moments before answering. "I have accepted lord Silo's terms and have honoured all of my obligations. I rely on lord Silo's honour to uphold his part of the agreement."

"Then you rely on a very trustworthy base, for General Silo is a man of impeccable honour," Priscus reassured him. "But part of your obligation is ongoing; you must answer all questions put to you honestly and fully. That applies to now no less than when you first surrendered yourself."

"Then I will answer," Eusebes replied. "I asked Tigranes to support my cause against Philip. In return, I would become his vassal." His eyes pleaded with Priscus. "It was either that or be eliminated by Philip before the end of the year!"

"Why did you surrender yourself to us, if you knew you had Tigranes in support?" Priscus pushed.

"Because once Roman legions had possession of the land, I knew Tigranes would abandon me," Eusebes sighed. "Everything was set to happen on the twelfth day of March; but you landed in Antioch on the last day of February. Less than half a month was the difference between being a king or merely a comfortable commoner!"

"Believe me, Eusebes," Priscus smiled and put a hand on Eusebes' shoulder. "Being a comfortable commoner in the Roman Imperium is much better than being a king under Tigranes!"

"It seems everyone except Philip was so desperate that they would be prepared to rely on the goodwill of Tigranes!" Silo laughed as Priscus reported his conversation with Eusebes. "That is desperate indeed!"

"No wonder Paracles was so eager to change tack once we turned up on his doorstep!" Priscus added, with his own chuckle.

"Seriously, though," Silo sobered quickly. "Do you know what the last few years have done to Rome's reputation as a military power?

First, we show up in the Troad just as Mithridates is about to seize the Straits; then Sulla appears as if by magic in Thessalonica to respond to Archelaus in Attica within days of the Pontic Army stepping off their boats. Then Sulla sails

for weeks to put down the Strabo coup on the very day it was launched. And now we've pinched off the Armenian takeover of Syria by landing twelve days before the army was due to march.

"Everyone in the whole world must be wondering how we know where to turn up at precisely the critical time! No wonder Tigranes is daunted! He probably thinks we're in league with Cassandra, the Fates and Delphi all at the same time."

"Yes, that's an impressive string of co-incidences, isn't it?" Priscus agreed. "I never thought about it until just now, but we seem to be able to plan one thing, get it wrong, but still be in exactly the right place and time anyway!"

"Don't rely on it continuing, though, Gnaeus," Silo warned. "That's how the gods destroy a man!" A shudder ran up his back as he thought about the time five years ago when he had himself put his own life into the hands of Neptune. Was it only five years? So much has happened since then!

"I'm not being complacent, General, but I do believe that if we plan well and honour our promises, the gods will favour us," Priscus said simply.

"True," Silo agreed, still thinking about that night in the Aegean. "So you report that Tigranes' army was down south until recently and we have every reason to expect it to stay here if Tigranes genuinely thinks we are out to provoke him," Silo continued. "Then we should tell Lucius to re-occupy the northern patch, but cautiously."

"Yes, sir. The more Tigranes feels he is being squeezed, the more likely that he will break the treaty," Priscus agreed. "Then we will have our *causus belli* and this pretence of him being a Friend and Ally will be over. We can reduce him without blame."

Silo stood abruptly. "Gnaeus, I want you take command here in Syria." he announced. "I'll take five of the legions north, through the Taurus Mountains; the passes should be clear by the time we get there. I have a feeling that our show of strength here might prompt Tigranes to think that the north has been stripped. Meanwhile I'll send orders to Glauca to be prepared to fight a defensive campaign if he is attacked. It's not good country for the aggressor."

"Yes, General," Priscus accepted his orders. "I request permission to raise a few auxiliary legions from the locals. If Tigranes comes at me, I might need them to hold positions while I use the veterans as a reserve or counter-attack force."

"Yes, do that. But use volunteers on pay, not conscripts," Silo agreed. "I want this province to prefer Roman rule to any other, including their own autonomy. Give them no reason for resentment."

"Yes sir."

Priscus made no secret of the fact that he was raising new legions. In fact, he went out of his way to make it as widely-known as possible, to ensure Tigranes would hear about it. He also sent scouting cavalry into Armenian territory regularly, while claiming them to be peaceful delegations intended to re-inforce his public stance of goodwill.

The Armenian commanders were in a quandary. Everyone knew what their real purpose was, but to capture or destroy a nominally peaceful mission without Royal orders to do so would be a dangerous show of initiative. Thus Priscus gained extensive and accurate intelligence of the Armenian dispositions while needling for an excuse to take the offensive. Yet the Armenians refused to take the bait but continued to prepare a defensive line behind the River. Their works clearly indicated that they wouldn't oppose an initial crossing but the space between their defences and the River would be tight. An invading force would be very vulnerable to a sudden attack that would give them no room to evolve into proper battle formation and no route of retreat. Tigranes was playing his own game here; attack me if you will, but beware of my teeth!

Sulla was pleased. Cato and Octavius had been as good as their word and Ahenobarbus was completely cowed.

The Administrators Law had gone through, with a few minor adjustments to satisfy the Boni and encourage their continued submission. But these adjustments were not going to inhibit the establishment of the colleges or the introduction of the Rufan Scheme. They were primarily intended to allow an appeal from the Senate Committee to the Senate as a whole. The one major amendment proposed by the Boni was flatly refused. They suggested that anyone earning income by trade should not be permitted to be employed as an Administrator in that province. This had been argued on the basis of the opportunity for corruption. But this was really no more than a cover for an attempt to restrict eligibility as Administrators to the Senatorial class, and there was no way that the Populares would support that!

The clearing of the site for the Great Houses had commenced and plans for the new structure well under way. In the meantime the Republic Senate had adopted a resolution that it shall meet on even-numbered days, and allow the Republic Comitia to use the Senate building for its meetings on odd-numbered days. It would be a tight squeeze if all 510 members of the Republic Comitia were to attend on the same day; the building had originally been designed to be ample for the original Senate of one hundred members. But the Comitia members had agreed as a short-term measure among themselves that each tribe would allow only four of its representatives to attend on any one day. This measure reduced the attendance to two hundred members.

The game of cat-and-mouse with Tigranes had continued through summer and into the fall. As the campaigning season drew towards its end without a blow being struck in anger, Silo ordered Glaucia to Syria to take control from Priscus. He had become convinced that Tigranes, necessarily keeping his main force in the south to overcome the disadvantage of the Romans' superior information, would choose that as his battleground. The rough country in the north would suit an Armenian defence. Priscus was sent home to seek election as Praetor to the Republic Senate by his tribe.

The summer months had been put to good use in what he had come to call the Northern Pocket. Winter quarters had been prepared, so no retreat back to better barracks was required. Earthworks and other fortifications had been constructed. The road back to Mazaca had been improved to permit faster communication and reinforcement. All was secure!

Silo didn't realise that the Armenians had also been conducting reconnaissance. But instead of cavalry their spies had been disguised as shepherds grazing the high-country summer pastures. They had also been organising sleeper cells of irregular forces.

For Tigranes timing was everything. He needed to strike while the conditions allowed his forces maximum mobility, but not so early that the Romans could react before winter closed the roads and the seas. Key to this strategy would be sudden strikes by small, select forces intimately familiar with their own theatre of operations to overwhelm town garrisons. Then they would call out the citizenry to form a militia to oppose the Roman response. To achieve this Tigranes ordered all of the former local garrison commanders to command the special forces deployed into their former districts. Perhaps the most important of these was Parenes; he was ordered to take that crucial first town on the road east of the Euphrates and to block any Roman relief forces sent from Mazaca until the trapped Roman garrisons could be overpowered and his own men could be reinforced

Having eliminated the Roman forces in central Anatolia in this way, the regular forces could then be force-marched over the Taurus passes and onto the coastal lands of Cilicia. Then the Roman forces in Syria would be threatened with annihilation by the large Armenian forces on the Euphrates if they attempted to withdraw from their prepared positions, so the capture of Antioch by this Cilician force was all but guaranteed. Virtually all of the Roman forces in the East would be wiped out, and then winter would prevent any response from the west. Pontus and Cappadocia would be ripe for the picking in the new year.

The blow was struck on the last day of September. Silo was taken completely by surprise. But so were the Armenian commanders as they tried to raise revolts. The leniency of Silo's policies had not been considered by Tigranes, who had assumed that the citizenry would be easily stirred to rise against their 'hated oppressors'. But most towns actively supported the Roman defenders who had abused them less than their own Armenian soldiers, rather than risk an Armenian victory that could see them pressed into military service or worse.

Captured Armenians soon gave up details of the strategy and Silo acted without delay. He immediately ordered the defenders on the frontier to fall back as rapidly as possible but only as far as the third line of prepared defences. The regular Armenian forces saw the Romans leaving their positions in haste. The insurgency must be working! They sent scouts forward to confirm the Roman position was completely abandoned and then started marching. More scouting ahead also confirmed the fall-back defences were empty. The Armenian commander, aware of the risk of an early winter closing the passes over the

Taurus, sent his cavalry ahead to secure passage through the towns on the route and ordered the infantry to march at top speed after them.

Silo saw the Armenian cavalry approaching and smiled. This will be good, he thought to himself. He had stationed himself on the western end of the long cliff running parallel to the river. This was the same ridge that had been the location for the Armenian archers in their intended ambush of the Roman advance last year. What an irony!

He looked across to the old Armenian palisade across the road still in place from last year and then to his right and saw the archers in their positions. He couldn't see the heavy infantry lurking the the forested slope opposite, but that was good. If he couldn't see them, then nor would the Armenians. The Armenian cavalry continued at a steady trot, three-abreast on the road. They were getting close now! Gallienus was in charge of the heavy infantry. How much nerve did he have? Silo asked himself.

The Armenians had seen the multiple lines of stakes across the road, a veritable thicket, long ago. But they were obviously unmanned by heavy infantry, which would be the normal defence. It appeared just one more defensive line that had been abandoned as the Romans fell back. The three-abreast formation broke as it compressed up against this barrier, threading their way through the forest of stakes at a dead-slow walk. The width of the enemy formation spread out across almost the full width of the cleared space as more cavalry from the back continued to approach at a trot while the front ranks crept through the obstruction much more slowly.

“Excellent!” Silo exclaimed to himself. The Armenian cavalry, once through the barrier, didn't continue down the road at a trot, strung out as they would be by the choke point. They waited for their colleagues before continuing, slowly re-forming their three-abreast formation. Meanwhile the mile-long clearing behind them was filling with horses waiting their turn to advance. If those closest to the tree line had any thoughts about going through the forested areas to by-pass the barrier, the sight of the old Armenian-built barrier just inside the tree-line, now overgrown with vegetation, dissuaded them. It certainly didn't cause them any alarm; this was obviously a relic from some previous time, and not a recent Roman barrier, so it presented no danger.

At last the end of the cavalry line came into sight up the road. The mass of loosely-packed horse was almost the full width of the clearing, perhaps two hundred paces wide, perhaps less; let's say one hundred and fifty paces. And the length of the queue would be at least that long, let's say two hundred paces. Allowing for each horse taking perhaps one pace wide and two paces long, that means fifteen thousand horse gathered together here! That must be almost his full cavalry strength!

In the hour since the first horse had come to the barrier a line of three abreast and a bit over a mile long had grown, waiting for the rest of the mass to clear the obstacle. How stupid are they? Silo asked himself, not to order a few to dismount and tear out a better passageway! He had been expecting that and therefore had

expected to inflict relatively light casualties on the smaller number who would have accumulated before the obstructions were removed. It appears that Armenian cavalry don't like getting their hands dirty, he mused. Anyway, that three thousand or so look like they might get away; too bad for them when they see who is waiting for them a few miles further on! Meanwhile we can clean up the fifteen thousand still in the killing ground, five times what we had even hoped for, with absolutely no risk to our own men!

The tail of the column was now spreading out across the clearing, and dropping their reins to let their horse graze. All were in place! "Sound the horn, decurion!" Silo ordered. The trumpet rang out, and within a moment a volley of arrows was raining down on the assembly from Silo's three thousand archers on top of the cliff. The air was filled with the murmur of their flights and the cries of pain and panic from the trapped cavalry. Within moments the waves of volleys had degenerated into a steady stream as the archers fell into a 'fire at will' routine instead of volleys.

The fire had been weighted towards the rear of the packed cavalry, in an attempt to block the rest of the body against the barrier. But although the ground was littered with bodies of both horses and men after the first volley, there was still an escape route that way. But by the time the average archer had let fly three rounds, the row of wounded horses, thrashing violently where they had fallen, was a barrier that few horses could be forced through. The remaining riders turned for the apparent cover of the trees.

By this time the heavy infantry had been able to advance from their hiding positions further back and were on the barrier from last year. Their formation of tightly-packed shields with protruding javelins was plainly visible behind the row of felled trees that formed the barrier. Even if a horse could be brought to jump the barrier they would be short work for those javelins, and the rider's life would not last much longer.

Those closest the barrier knew this and turned back to try to gallop for safety back the way they came, but others pressing behind them for the shelter of the trees didn't realise the danger. There was total confusion and immobility as they packed together, and all the time the rain of arrows felled more and more. Those already through the barrier broke along the road and thought they escaped. That was when their broken formation ran into the Roman cavalry, waiting in battle order. It didn't take long to resolve that situation.

Within a quarter of an hour from the trumpet-blast the battle was over. The cavalry up road had done their business and now the infantry closest the palisade moved to open the road again. Silo mounted his horse and headed back down the track that lead eventually to the river. After a delay of another half-hour as the palisade was removed, the cavalry swept eastwards to scout for following enemy and the infantry got down to the tedious business of killing the wounded enemy still on the field. Their orders were to not waste time looting; anyone found with valuables after the battle would be severely punished. One of Silo's innovations was that looting would be done at leisure by dedicated teams and all booty would be shared.

Silo ordered a messenger to find Gallienus and ask him to report to the palisade site immediately. "Well done, Piso!" Silo congratulated his top infantryman. "Excellent discipline and an excellent result!"

"Thank you, sir!" Gallienus replied. "What now?"

"Have five legions prepare to march east. I want to you get as far east as you can, ideally twenty miles if possible before the scouts tell you the Armenians are coming. Then you will pull off the road until they pass. Then re-occupy it in a defensive position. Your orders are to set up a defence in both directions. You are to stop any more coming through behind their main force, and also to take out any that might try to fall back to Armenia when they run into my force."

"I doubt you'll need to worry too much about massed cavalry, but be alert to the possibility of some small mounted component."

"Are you sure that they have no more bulk cavalry, sir?"

Silo gestured around the field. "I estimated over fifteen thousand here," he answered. "How many more could they have?"

"That many!" Gallienus was surprised. From his position in the forest he hadn't seen the mass of horse before the archers put them horizontal. "You're right sir; that would be pretty close to their entire strength. Why would they send them all in one column?"

"Remember the exercise on Rhodes, when you defeated Priscus?" Silo asked. "Tigranes has made the same mistake today as Priscus did then; he assumed the road ahead of him was empty." Silo smiled grimly. "I'll have to tell Gnaeus that! And how much a better General than Tigranes he has become since then!"

Two days later the battlefield had been cleaned up and the pyres to dispose of the bodies were still smouldering. The Armenian advance units came to the battlefield and smelt the burnt flesh. And they discovered the notice on the cross-bar of a stile set across the road. Written in Armenian by Bazontes and the outline of the letters carved into timber, it read

Men of Armenia!

This is where fifteen thousand of your cavalry died. Total Roman casualties, twenty three injured.

The march was brought to a halt and word sent back to the General. Eugenes arrived almost an hour after the advance had found the warning. With only two more hours before sunset he ordered camp to be set and called for his staff.

"I've done a quick count of the number of pyres, sir, and counted the skulls in what would seem a typical pyre," Parmines reported. "I would estimate about twelve thousand bodies have been burnt here."

"And the total count we sent forward was eighteen thousand," Eugenes stated. "So allowing for the roughness in your estimations, Parmines, it would seem that our cavalry has been wiped out. Perhaps a couple of thousand escaped,

but not enough to be an effective force even if they did manage to find their way back to us – which they haven't."

"And if they haven't by now, I doubt they ever will," commented Bolites. "Without cavalry, we are blind; we can be ambushed at any time."

Eugenies sat in silence for a few moments. "We've been marching without proper reconnaissance because we expected the road to be open. The insurgents were supposed to have either driven the Romans out, or at least diverted their forces," he summarised. "It's obvious now that the insurgents failed, at least in that regard.

"If we continue in marching order without scouts, we could be annihilated. But if we re-deploy our troops to advance in skirmish order, we'll be lucky to manage a third of our speed." He looked up to his two staff officers. "Do you have any thoughts?"

"I suggest that we must keep marching, one way or another. If we turn back, the King will not be pleased," Parmines offered.

"With respect to my colleague, sir, the King is not foolish," Bolites returned. "But if we march into an ambush and lose the army, he will think we are. This army is the only thing standing between the northern boundary of Armenia and the Romans. We mustn't risk this precious asset by blundering around like blind men," Bolites finished emphatically.

Eugenies nodded. "Thank you. I'll think about it and tell you my decision in the morning. But in the two hours of light we have left, Parmines, I want you and four other officers to ride forward a couple more miles. Keep your eyes open and your horse light; I don't want to lose you to an ambush."

Parmines returned to report shortly after dusk. "General, there were some more pyres a couple of miles up the road. I estimate about three thousand more casualties. It would appear that a detachment managed to escape the main battle but were caught by a secondary line."

"Well, there's the difference between the claimed fifteen thousand here and our total force of eighteen thousand," Eugenes commented. "Did you see any sign of the Romans?"

"Plenty of evidence that they were here, sir. But unless they were well-concealed, the road is clear for another five miles ahead of us," Parmines reported.

"We could go ahead in this way, using our officers as scouts," Eugenes mused. "But we don't have enough officers to act as a proper scouting force. We could only scout the road, and if the Romans are concealed to either side we would be doomed. And besides, I don't want my officers being picked off a handful at a time. I'd be left with no effective command structure," Eugenes finished.

"Until tomorrow, sir," Parmines took his leave.

The next morning dawned bright but crisp. There could be no mistaking that winter was on its way. Parmines and Bolites reported to Eugenes at sunrise.

"Men, I think I have no choice," Eugenes told them. "My orders were to cross the Taurus Mountains into Cilicia before winter. So far we have suffered a substantial loss, but it's by no means clear that our mission is no longer feasible; therefore we must go on. I want you to prepare a listing of all men who have

mounts to act as a scouting force as best they can. Get that list to me before the third hour."

It was almost the fourth hour before Eugenes had a list of eighty seven men on his table. "Good work, men," he complimented his two staff officers. "Now divide them into two roughly equal teams. They are to take alternate turns as an advance scout. They are to adopt a practice of trotting ahead of the first ranks for an hour, trotting back, and then walking their mounts while the other team trot forward. At the first sign of Romans they are to sound a horn as warning." He looked at them as if to invite any question. There were none.

"Very well, the first rotation leaves in half an hour. The army leaves in an hour in marching formation."

Soon after noon that day Eugenes was feeling a bit more confident. The first rotation of scouts had been some twelve miles down the road and returned with a report of no sign of Romans.

About the second hour after noon the second rotation had reported back from a point some sixteen miles beyond the site of the slaughter. Eugenes dared to hope that the Romans had been hurt in the battle much more than the boast carved into the timber would admit. Perhaps, even, many of those bodies had been Roman and some of the Armenian cavalry had actually succeeded in breaking through and clearing the way. Perhaps the stile across the road was nothing but a Roman bluff. He called a halt to the march at the fourth hour after noon. This would allow time for the tail of the march to compress up while the front ranks prepared a camp. The third rotation would be due back any moment now, and it would be pointless to send out a fourth rotation that wouldn't return before dark. By an hour before sunset the scouting party had still not returned. Dread started to creep into his bones.

The next morning was again clear and crisp. The scouts had still not returned. Parmines had been among them. "Bolites, this is not good!" Eugenes said to his remaining senior staff officer at the dawn meeting. "I want the army to advance, but in skirmish formation. No scouting today!"

This slowed the advance considerably. At best, the men marching across the grazing lands could manage only half of marching speed without risk of tiring too much to be able to resist a surprise attack. At worst, where the forests came down to swallow the roads, the advance was a stumble through tree roots, underbrush and fallen branches.

"The next time we break out into a clearing," Eugenes ordered Bolites at about the third hour after noon, "we will advance far enough to have enough room to camp, and then halt. The men are too tired."

Then a shout of warning came from the front ranks, some fifty paces ahead. The army froze, and weapons were drawn. A single infantryman came running back from the head of the march. "We have found the scouts, sir!" he reported breathlessly. "Slaughtered, stripped and looted."

Eugenies and Bolites walked their horses to the front ranks. Spread out over the fifty paces length of roadway visible before a bend were some two dozen bodies, left on the road. They walked cautiously to the bend, scanning both sides

of the road for more men lurking in ambush, and found the rest of the squadron in a single clump.

"It would seem that they were hit when they had reached this point. Those who survived and turned were picked off as they ran," Eugenes summarised.

"How much further to the turn towards the Taurus passes?" Bolites asked.

"About twenty miles to the junction," Eugenes replied. "Then another fifty miles climb to the passes. But that fifty miles is through narrow valleys, with little open ground."

"We'd be lucky to make fifteen miles a day, sir. That means at least five more days; and this proves that the Romans are going to try to slow us even more even if they don't have the strength to stop us outright," Bolites commented.

"What's the alternative, Bolites?" Eugenes asked. "If we turn around now it will take us just as long to get back to friendly territory. The only difference is that the Romans will be snapping at our heels as we go, instead of in front of us."

"It will take them a day or two before they realise we have turned back, sir," Bolites persisted. "Two days head start in marching order, while the Romans will have to follow in skirmish order in case we have set an ambush for them! We'll be able to outpace them, sir! Or at least lure them into a trap of our own."

Eugenies weighed the option in his mind. "I'll think about it, Bolites. In the meantime, pull back to the last clearing and set camp." Eugenes invited Bolites to eat with him that evening.

"The way I see it, the two options are more or less equally difficult militarily," he thought out loud. "But if we succeed in making a safe retreat, then what is to prevent the King from thinking that our force of over fifty thousand infantry turned and ran at the threat of a few hundred Romans waiting in ambush? The very fact that we survive would argue against us! If, on the other hand, we make it through the passes, then we will have achieved our mission."

"Now, look at the other possibility; that the Romans are still here in strength. In which case, we will be defeated whatever we do," Eugenes shrugged. "I still see that we might survive if we press on. But what will happen if we turn back? If the Romans don't get us, the King will execute us."

"I take your point, sir. This is as much politics as it is warfare," Bolites submitted. "I agree with you sir. Unless we have clear evidence that the Romans have blocked our path to the Taurus, yes, we must press on."

"Then that is what we'll do," Eugenes concluded. "We move in skirmish order and damn the delay. Otherwise the Romans will just pick off our remaining mounts and force us into skirmish formation anyway."

There was a chill wind the next morning, and the sky was mostly cloudy. "Damn!" Eugenes spat as he looked at the sky. If this is building up to rain, or even an early snowfall, then think about what it will be like high in the Taurus!"

"We can still hope, sir. Those clouds appear quite high." Bolites tried to sound positive.

"Yes, I suppose they are," grumbled Eugenes. "But let's get moving soon, and push as far as we can."

The army was on the move again a little more than an hour after first light. After a mile of forest enclosing the road they came to another length of cleared valley. A town could be seen in the distance, about a mile away. The troops fell into a line of advance formation as they cleared the forested areas. They continued until half a mile short of the town and then stopped. Eugenes rode forward to take stock.

He was dismayed by what he saw. Between his troops and the town was a well-prepared Roman defence in depth with palisades and ditches backed by artillery. This ran from the river on one flank to a bare-topped ridge behind a timbered slope on the other flank.

“Sir; I'll guarantee that there are barriers in those trees, and probably archers stationed on the back slope of that ridge, waiting to come forward,” Bolites warned.

“Yes,” Eugenes agreed. “And do you see the gap in the earthworks, just below the tree line? That has been left there for their cavalry. It's within archer's range of the ridge to prevent us from using it ourselves.”

Both men stared at the prepared battlefield a few minutes longer. About ten thousand of the Armenian troops were arrayed in assault formation in the space in front of the trees. All the others would still be invisible to the Romans.

“Bolites, order all but the front formations to drop back into the forest. Once there, force-march them back home,” Eugenes ordered. “I'll stay here with the front formations and buy you as much time as I can.”

“Yes sir,” Bolites acknowledged, in a voice which he hoped didn't sound too full of relief. Eugenes walked his horse to the front ranks, hoping to show a dignified bearing. He called the section commanders together. “Men, I don't intend to throw your lives away,” he assured them. “But there are some things we must do. Pull back another hundred paces to make sure you are out of range of their onagers. Then set up a ditch and stakes in front of your positions to protect against a surprise attack through the night.

“It's cool now, but these clouds will keep the heat in overnight; you shouldn't find it too difficult to arrange for half-watches through the night to give your men some sleep. Tell your men to eat well this evening, and again in the morning. If all goes to plan, we'll be eating in that town long before our rations are exhausted. If things don't go to plan, we wouldn't be able to carry all of our supplies anyway.”

Silo looked out over the plain from a roof in the town, “It's good to have you back again, Herius. You can serve as my second, now that I'm without Lucius Glauca,” he said warmly. “I've missed you. I trust all the business at home has been tidied up?”

Asinius had been busy back in Italy sorting out some problems within the Marrucini Tribe. Like most Italian tribes, the Marrucini were tight-lipped about their internal squabbles but this must have been serious, even approaching a noble blood-feud, to demand the attentions of Asinius for the best part of a year.

"Yes, all is sweet now," Asinius assured his commander. "And it's good to be back with you, where a man's enemies are not also his own clansmen. But I'll say no more than that." He turned to look out over the field.

"It seems the Armenians are digging in for defence." Silo commented. "Why would they be doing that? They're the ones who need to pass us; we can afford to sit here until they freeze in the snow."

"How many are they?" Asinius asked.

I'm told some fifty thousand infantry; we've already destroyed their cavalry," Silo answered.

"We have five legions here, that's twenty five thousand, and two to one is a bit weak to overpower a prepared defence," Asinius commented.

"But what choice do they have?" Silo insisted. "They have to either defeat us or retreat. To sit there means they'll freeze."

"Perhaps they're waiting for reinforcements, and protecting themselves against raids until that help arrives," Asinius suggested.

"If that's their plan, they'll be disappointed," Silo replied. "Piso Gallienus has a blocking force of five legions on the road behind him. They'll freeze before reinforcements can arrive; if any are available to them, that is."

"Perhaps they don't know that," Asinus replied. It might take a few days for them to go back and find out. Or perhaps they're trying to look as though they are waiting for reinforcements, so as to tempt us to attack before they arrive. Then, when we have advanced out of our prepared defences, they will counter-attack."

"Yes, that could be their plan," Silo conceded. "But it's a desperate plan. It could cost them days, and all the time winter is coming on and the risk of being trapped in the open increases with each day."

"So what?" Asinius asked. "If they attack they are crushed. If they don't attack and we do, they have a chance of taking us. And if they don't attack and nor do we, they sit there for a week, and then have a good excuse to turn around and go home. That way they survive."

"Yes," Silo agreed. "If their general's first consideration is survival rather than victory, that would make sense."

"So how will you react, General?" Asinius asked.

"I'll let them freeze," Silo decided. "But we won't just sit here passive. I want full scouting to see if they are up to anything else, like sneaking around the flanks. I want no surprises."

Eugenius was reasonably content as he toured the positions at last light. The ditch was sufficient to slow an infantry attack, and at least parts of it had been staked to channel any charge. The fall-back towards the trees meant that while only some seven thousand men were visible to the Romans, they would suspect many more were concealed by the trees. It was a convincing show so long as they could stop Roman scouts from looking more closely. He walked his horse back into the trees and ordered every tent to maintain seven fires each through the night. The forest must be lit up as though the entire host was lurking in there.

The next morning dawned overcast with the smell of snow on the easterly wind. Eugenes took comfort in his decision. The Taurus would be impassable by the time they could reach them so nothing would be lost by a retreat. But first he had to buy at least another day for Bolites. After that it would be his own time he'd be buying. He ordered the staking of the ditch to be improved and the rest of the army was set to sewing up spare clothing and stuffing it with twigs and leaves. He wanted an army of mannequins by nightfall. By the third hour of light he was satisfied with the ditch and the staking. He ordered the men at the front to fall back into the forest get some sleep while those who had stuffed uniforms took over the front duty. Another tour two hours after noon lead to another rotation of the guard, and the second shift was sent to bed.

"They seem pretty casual, General," Asinius reported to Silo. "They have only the one line of ditch and stakes, and have lost interest in deepening their defences. And they have only a light presence in the front line; I'd estimate only three or four thousand."

"They're trying to tempt us into an attack, Herius," Silo replied. "Who knows what's waiting in the woods behind them. They had enough campfires through the night to suggest that have a substantial force and are waiting for a chance to counter-punch."

"There's no action around the flanks either, General," Asinius continued his report. "But they do have pickets that prevent us from getting a look at their formations."

"Well, that proves it!" Silo asserted. "They're massing in their centre and waiting for me to get impatient, or at least curious." Silo mentally brushed away any doubts. "We sit tight but remain alert."

The clearing sky overhead darkened as the Armenians not on the front finished an ample meal and then relieved their colleagues. By the time the second shift had eaten and re-stoked all the myriad of surplus campfires night had fallen. They picked up the stuffed uniforms and headed out to the front.

Many mannequins were set in position and tied to a vertical stake. Then each was topped by a helmet. Others were spread around the almost-cold fire places scattered along the line and covered with blankets. A few were positioned as if sitting, again with helmets. When all was ready, the fires were built up and re-lit from the cooking fires. By the light of these fires the Roman lookouts saw exactly what they expected.

By the third hour after sunset the seven thousand Armenians were marching eastward under light pack, their way lit by the gibbous moon shining through gaps in the breaking clouds.

Asinius reported to Silo at first light. "No action through the night, sir. The Armenians remain very casual, many even appearing to sleep around their fires while supposedly on duty."

Silo raised his eyebrows. "Perhaps they really are waiting for reinforcements. They'd have no way of knowing about the blocking force behind them."

"Then we continue to watch, sir?"

"Yes, and keep sending out contact patrols. I want to make sure they're not flanking us."

Asinius saluted and left. Silo finished pulling on his armour and decided to climb the lookout tower and see the lay of the land for himself.

The lookout on duty snapped to attention when he saw the General climb the ladder to his platform. Suddenly he was glad of that chill breeze through his exposed perch had kept him awake.

"We're expecting the change of guard any time now, sir," he reported for the sake of seeming alert to the conditions. "They usually change at full light. They're running a bit late today."

"Relax, soldier," Silo said with a smile and looked towards the enemy lines.

Silo was struck immediately by the stillness. Not even one of the sentries was pacing to keep warm. There were still men sleeping past first light, which would be suicidal if the commander arrived with the change of shift. Those seated around the fire were locked into the one position... "Damn!" Silo muttered.

"Sir?" the soldier asked.

"There'll be no punishment for you this time, soldier, but let it serve as a warning. What have you been doing to stay awake and warm?"

"Why, walking around the platform, sometimes clasping my arms around my body... why, sir?"

"And how many of the Armenians are doing that to keep themselves warm?"

The soldier looked over to the enemy. "Why, none, sir."

"And why do you think that might be?" Silo asked.

"Are they dead, sir?" the soldier asked innocently.

"Well, they're certainly not alive!" Silo retorted. "Soldier, take this warning very seriously; your duty up here involves more than watching and reporting; it involves *thinking* above all else! Were you an officer I would have you charged! But if you ever hope to reach even decanus rank, you had better start thinking."

Silo quickly climbed down the ladder and called for his mount. He saw a group of cavalry preparing for the morning scouting mission and called four of them over to him. "Come with me, you four men!"

He led them to the gap in the line of defences in front of the town and into no-man's land. There was still no movement from the Armenian camp.

"What are we going to do, sir?" one man asked nervously.

"We're going to earn a corona muralis each," Silo bit out the words. "Charge!" He kicked his mount to a full gallop, the other four men following fearfully.

Silo pulled up his horse as he reached to line of stakes. From this distance the deception was obvious. "Sorry, lads; no corona this time!" He turned and trotted back to the town.

"This is the second time I've fallen for this trick, Herius!" Silo fumed. "I'm angry, so angry that I refuse to take the bait and go charging after them."

"You'll let them escape?" Asinius asked.

"They won't escape. Gallienus will stop them," Silo answered. "But last time they did this to me they had a very clever ambush set up and I would have rushed straight into it had I not been fore-warned." Silo clenched his fist. "These bloody Armenians are too clever! Intelligence is more important than courage if you want to beat them! Get the men ready to move forward, but in skirmish formation. Send out cavalry patrols but not along the road; I want them to be small detachments and to stick to the ridges and the forests. And send four fast riders to Gallienus, all by different routes through the forest, to warn that the Armenians are approaching him."

Piso Gallienus was reasonably satisfied with his chosen position some fifteen miles east of the cavalry ambush. He had found a point in the river where it wound through a bend that was almost a right-angle, with a bare ridge on the inside of the bend almost bisecting the angle of the bend. The space between the point of the ridge and the river was narrow and the terrain broken, consisting mainly of rocks that had broken away from the ridge and tumbled down the hill. Except for the road cut through this rockfall, the gap was thickly forested. On the other side of the river the land rose abruptly from the river bank to another high ridge. But away from the point of the bend the valley broadened out into more grazing country. The cleared ground by the river widened out either side of the choke point, with a band of trees along the foot of the ridge.

"This is so much like the other ambush point that I can't believe it is true!" he had exclaimed to his staff when he found it. "I'll have a concealed lookout up on each side of the ridge. I want trees felled a half-dozen paces back from the tree line to contain the victims in the killing ground and backed by two legions of infantry for a distance of a mile on either side of the bend." He did some quick mental calculations. "No, make that a mile and a half; that'll give me a two men per pace of front, and three deep. That'll be enough, and make it harder for them to turn our flanks. And one legion on the barricade at the bend. "Set up camps within the forested slopes, back far enough to be hidden. The men have got to be able to move to their positions behind the barrier quickly, before the enemy are within earshot so we maintain surprise. I want all the archers to camp at the foot of the ridge. Whichever side the enemy come from, they can climb the hidden side of the ridge to get to the crest. The infantry on the side away from the attack can serve as a reserve force."

The men had gone to work as soon as Eugenes passed by them on their way to the cavalry killing ground. In a race to get the preparations on the western side completed in case the Armenians turned around as soon as they saw the results of the cavalry slaughter, the men worked up until dark before preparing their camp and evening meals. As an extra precaution to ensure surprise, Gallienus ordered that the men cook enough biscuit to last three days; no more fires would be permitted after that evening.

By dusk the day after, as Eugenes was waiting further west for his scouts to return, the preparations were complete on both sides of the ridge. Gallienus was confident he could hold against a substantial force from either direction. The next

day was spent with lookouts on the ridge ready to raise the alarm while the men drilled their battle plan. By evening he was convinced that every man knew exactly what to do and when.

“Bring it on!” he said to Marcus, his second. “We’re as ready as we are ever going to be and any delay will just take our edge off.”

“I hope it comes soon, too, sir,” Marcus replied. “The men are not happy about having no fires.”

The fourth day dawned and the men crawled out of their tents to stamp the ground for warmth. The fortunate men on the eastern side of the ridge looked for sunny spots to absorb some heat, and were quickly slapped into the shadows of the woods by their centurions. “Keep out of sight, idiots!” they warned. “This is supposed to be an ambush, not forum entertainment!”

Gallienus had no less need to get warm. He decided a climb up to the lookouts would do the trick. There was a light mist in the valley to the east, but not enough to obscure any large bodies of men. But it was still early. If there had been men camping there last night they would have been spotted yesterday evening or by their fires overnight. And if they had camped further away it would be at least another hour before they would be on the march. There was really little chance of seeing anything new before the second hour but it was good practice to watch constantly.

There was a similar shroud of light mist to the west. Yet again Gallienus thanked the gods for this perfect ambush site; excellent visibility for at least five miles in each direction! “Keep a sharp eye, men!” He encouraged his lookouts. “By the time word gets to our infantry a mile and a half away by a runner through the trees, they will have been able to march by road at least that far. We don’t have a lot of time to spare!” He clomped down the slope again to his tent.

“Marcus!” he called to his second as soon as he reached his tent. Marcus appeared almost instantly. “Send out word to the infantry on both wings,” Gallienus said. “First order of business today is to prepare a running track through the line of tents. I want a runner to be able to get to the furthest end of the barrier at a full sprint without the risk of a twisted ankle or broken leg. And that running track has to be within the tree line to ensure he can’t be seen and it is to be as flat and straight as possible. I don’t want the runner having to go up and down slopes and turning corners on the way. He has to be able to get to the far end of the line as fast as possible. I’ll inspect their work just after noon and anything not up to standard will have to be re-aligned and re-built.”

Gallienus never did get the time to inspect the running tracks. Just before noon he heard the runner from the western lookout come clattering down the point of the ridge.

“Soldiers approaching from the west!” the runner reported breathlessly to the couriers stationed inside the treeline. The three couriers set off to the west at a run. The decanus stationed at the courier posts ran over to inform Gallienus just as he emerged from his tent. The lookout continued down the slope to the legion on duty at the roadblock.

"Yes, I heard, decanus. Thank you!" Gallienus hurried out as the man opened his mouth to report. "I'll be up on the ridge. Please inform Marcus." He turned to the three young soldiers waiting on him as messengers, dressed only in tunic and sandals for speed. "Come with me!"

He started the climb up to the lookout and heard the archers in the tents below him gathering their equipment and hurrying around to the east side of the ridge to ascend by the path they had selected and improved for that purpose over the last couple of days. Everything is going well so far!

By the time he reached the lookout the approaching soldiers were clearly visible but still far enough away to make identification difficult. "One of you," Gallienus said to the messenger trio. "Run out to the end of the infantry line. Return as soon as you can positively identify whether they are Roman or Armenian." The lad closest to bottom of the slope broke away immediately.

"You," he said to the next one up the slope. Go down to blind side of the ridge. Stay with the archers until they report that they're ready to crest the ridge, then come back," Gallienus ordered. "Keep out of sight. If you let anyone see you, you'll be lashed." The lad disappeared down the slope.

"You," he said to the third. "Get down to the commander of the eastern wing. Make sure he's moving his troops to support the western side. If he isn't doing it already, tell him I order it. Then come back."

The third messenger slipped down the gully towards the base of the ridge.

Gallienus looked back at the approaching column. They still seemed so far away and moving so slowly! But he knew this was a good thing. It allowed his men ample time to get into position before the enemy could get close enough to hear the inevitable noise of thousands of men moving through the trees. Heavy infantry don't go through steep, forested terrain quietly! He stayed at the lookout, watching the approaching troops until the original lookout runner came back up to his post.

"The blocking force is in position and ready, sir."

"Well done, soldier!" Gallienus praised the youth. All these couriers had been told repeatedly exactly what they were required to do and had drilled it half-a-dozen times yesterday. After carrying out each order they were to report to the relevant lookout post, which would become Gallienus' command post for the duration of the battle. A quarter of an hour later the first of the three couriers sent along the line of the western infantry line returned. He was distressed with the effort. "All western heavy infantry alerted and moving into position sir!" he gasped. "They should be in position by now!"

"Where are the other two runners?" Gallienus demanded.

"I outran them sir; and by the time I was half-way back, the eastern infantry were taking up the path and forced me into the rough. So the other runners will have to cover even more distance off the prepared path than I. They should be here soon."

"Good work, soldier!" Gallienus laid a hand on the boy's shoulder. Again he looked out over the valley to the west. "What's happening?" he asked incredulously. The column of soldiers had stopped, and was raggedly walking

towards the river. "It's mid-day; and they are stopping for water and a biscuit!" he realised suddenly. Right there, with their lead ranks only a mile short of the leading edge of the ambush! Only half an hour short of their front ranks running into the blocking force, fully inserted into the trap!

"Oh, Mars!" Gallienus cried, half laughing, "You have the most wicked sense of humour sometimes!"

About a mile separated the front of the column from the closest of his heavy infantry holding still in the trees and trying not to make a sound. Can they keep the discipline for the half-hour or so before the column re-formed? Once the enemy were on the move again the Armenians would be unlikely to hear anything over the tramp of their own marching noise; but while they were sitting and laying on the grass beside the road, they might yet pick up the sound of a shield clanking against body armour...

"I wouldn't worry too much, sir," Marcus volunteered as he slipped into a space beside his commander. "They're all laying close to the river and it runs over pebbles just there. That will cover any stray sounds."

"Where have you been?" Gallienus demanded roughly.

"With the archers, sir. Making sure that they knew their stop line and didn't show themselves."

"Then where's the boy I sent to report back to me about that?" Gallienus snapped.

"I told him I'd report back and that he should stay with the archers in case they needed to send a message to you."

"Good thinking, Marcus," Gallienus conceded. "Such a good idea, in fact, that we should send a couple of runners out to the western line, and one down to the blocking force." As he spoke, two more couriers arrived in the post, blowing hard.

"Confirming all western infantry were in position before we left, sir, and reserve infantry moving into position," one reported.

"Good work," Gallienus said approvingly. "Now go back. One of you place yourself under the Western Commander as a courier and the other under the Eastern Commander in reserve. Tell them that I expect you to be used to relay a report if they think it necessary."

The two youths slipped back down the slope and set off at a brisk jog.

"And you," Gallienus addressed the third courier, still waiting beside him, "Go down and report yourself at the service of the commander of the blocking force." The lad slipped away.

Gallienus looked around the lookout. He had Marcus with him, three lookouts, one of his three personal couriers and one courier attached to the Western lookout crew. He spoke to the lookout courier.

"Soldier, check with the Eastern lookout that there is nothing happening on that side of the hill. And stay out of sight as you do so. Don't try a short-cut around the point of the ridge. If all is clear, tell their courier to come back here with you. If the lookouts need to tell me anything they can do the running for themselves."

"Perhaps I should get back to the archers, sir," Marcus suggested.

"Yes, do that," Gallienus agreed. "Make sure they keep their heads down."

He glanced back towards the column of soldiers in the west. Their junior officers seemed to be rousing them onto their feet. Quite a few were taking this last chance to urinate before resuming their march. Gallienus waited for them to shoulder packs and start moving before calling for his remaining courier. "Get down to the blocking force. Tell them to expect the enemy in a bit less than half an hour. They must maintain silence until then." The lad left down the gully.

Gallienus knew the relief that must be flooding through the infantrymen waiting in the trees behind their barriers. Now they could dare to breathe! He did some quick mental arithmetic. These soldiers were marching four abreast, so that would be four thousand men per mile length of column. The trap length was notionally one and a half miles long, but the effective range of the archers would be only three hundred paces at most, even with the benefit of the ridge height. That would place only the front half-mile of the column within range. The rest would probably stop and pull back out of the trap; the length covered by his heavy infantry was designed to stop them from launching a flanking attack, not to slaughter the escaping enemy as in the first ambush.

Even allowing for a bit of compression as the following troops continue to march even as the front ranks are held up, he expected only a couple of thousand could be killed in this ambush. But that would be a huge psychological blow to an army already retreating. This could be enough to trigger panic and mass desertions. The enemy army could well scatter into individual fugitives or small groups of no military significance at all. The leading ranks were now within the length of the heavy infantry forces. Half an hour would see them up against the roadblock and the fight would be on! Just as he thought this a courier appeared at his shoulder.

"They are definitely Armenians," the youth rushed out between gasps.

"Good work, soldier. Have a rest." Then he turned to the courier from the eastern lookout. "Go down the cleft, staying out of sight, and then up the back of the ridge to the archers. Tell Marcus that they're Armenians and to ready his archers."

Well! That was the last piece in the puzzle. Now it was inevitable. He looked out over the approaching Armenians. No eagles, but that didn't in itself mean that they weren't Romans, he thought. Only a scattering of men on horseback; but that might simply mean that the cavalry is further back. Then, as they approached closer, he could make out the distinctive headgear of Armenian officers. That style could never be confused with a Roman dress helmet! Yes, they were Armenians for certain. He had confirmed identity with his own eyes and there was no need to show himself to prevent a severe case of friendly fire.

The first ranks were now so close that they disappeared under the trees that came right down to the road at the foot of the ridge. He could hear the sound of their march very clearly now, and knew that his men could as well. This is when discipline mattered. To remain silent and in position as the enemy marched into your face.

Then it happened! The oncoming Armenians saw the roadblock, and almost immediately realised that there were Roman heavies behind it. A sound rose from them as the front ranks recoiled into those following and a brief moment of panic ensued. Marching packs were shucked off and the men quickly reached for their shields to strap onto their left arms. Yet still the Romans held their positions. For a brief moment the Armenians were confused that their enemies were not taking advantage of their surprise. Their officers tried to call them into some sort of formation, and started to scan for a weak point in the roadblock. All this time more Armenian soldiers were being pushed into the space by those behind. Then the commander of the blocking force gave his first order. “Decanus, sound the trumpet!”

A long blast on the trumpet was the sign for the archers to advance to the top of the ridge and start slaughtering the exposed column on the road below. Marcus, still with the archers to ensure strictest discipline, released his men with a shout. “You heard it, men! Onto the ridge!” In less than a minute the arrows were raining down onto their targets. The confusion and concern among the Armenians about the shouting they heard from the front of the column, and then the trumpet blast, was now turned to panic. The part of the column exposed to the arrows broke.

Those near the front ran for the cover of the trees, only to find themselves trapped between the Roman barrier and the exposed killing ground. And of course they were helpless, having dropped their shields with their packs as they broke formation. Their only protection from the heavies was now laying on the open road, exposed to the archers. They dare not go back there. They raised their hands in submission, begging for their lives to be spared. The Roman heavy infantry remained behind their barriers, but a command was given in Greek, “Lay on your faces and you will live!” Those Armenians who understood Greek passed the instructions on their fellows, and laid face down on the ground. Their colleagues followed their example.

Those further back in the column realised that back up the road was the best escape, the cover of the trees being a greater distance from them than to fall back beyond the range of the archers. They turned and tried to push back up the road, the fortunate ones being able to flow around the following soldiers still on the road, others less fortunate being blocked as the head of the remaining column formed into a bulb.

Bolites himself was trapped up against the road block, having thought it best if he rode near the head of the column. He could see that there were perhaps four hundred men with him, sheltered from the archers by the overhanging trees. The road further back was empty except for the dead and dying. There was no way back, except under a hail of arrows. And there was no way forward through that prepared defence, specially so given the excellent discipline of those enemy soldiers. Not one had broken ranks, or even shouted!

“Stand your ground where you are, men!” he bellowed. Then he slowly walked his horse up the road to the roadblock.

“Does anyone here speak Greek?” he asked the defenders.

"I call lord," one blurted out in horrendous Greek, and ran for his officer. He needn't have bothered. The legion commander was already on his way, having seen Bolites approach for what he knew would be a request for terms.

"Do you ask for your lives?" the legate asked.

"Let there be no more blood spilt than need be," Bolites suggested. "We surrender ourselves here. If you spare us, I am willing to go to the rest of the army and order their surrender as well."

"I accept your surrender," the Roman replied. "Tell your men to place their weapons and armour on the low side of the road, and then approach us in single file so we can secure them. You shall dismount and tie your horse to the barrier."

Bolites turned in his saddle and shouted his orders in Armenian. There was a sigh of relief and his men started to comply. Then he dismounted and tied his horse. He then laid his own sword on the ground beside the road, and started to strip off his armour. He returned smiling at the legate. "I am the officer in charge of this entire force. Take me to your commander."

The legate nodded. "Runner; go ask the General to come to his tent!" The courier scrambled up the ridge. Then he turned back to Bolites. "If you would come with me, lord...".

The Armenian force had been able to pull back out of archer range, but was in turmoil.

"How did they get behind us?" Barax, the subcommander of the front of the column, demanded of his adjutant. "Not even cavalry could have gone cross-country as fast as we have been marching on the road!" He looked around. Perhaps he could send some men through the trees to the ridge some distance away from the road, and take the archers by advancing along the ridge line.

"You take three thousand men to go through the trees over there," he ordered. "It must be a mile from the ambush, and there's no way infantry could have gone around us even if a detachment of archers might have managed it. Then climb to the top of the ridge and advance on the archers. Clear the ridge!"

His adjutant saluted and started to call out his detachment and its leaders. After five minutes to explain the plan he set off towards the tree line through the long grass with men marching four abreast and shields fitted following behind him.

Bolites bowed as Gallienus approached. "My name is Bolites, General. I compliment you on the excellence of your ambush and the discipline of your men."

"Thank you, Bolites," Gallienus replied. "I am Piso Gallienus. What is your rank?"

"I am second in command to General Eugenes, and commander of this body of men," Bolites replied. "How did you manage to get so many men around us and into position so quickly?"

"Thank you, Bolites, but I would prefer to ask my questions rather than answer yours," Gallienus replied bluntly. Bolites bowed his head slightly in submission. "How many men do you have with you?" Gallienus asked.

"Forty thousand here," Bolites answered, "and another seven thousand outside the town two days march to the west."

"And what were your plans?" Gallienus pressed.

"Our original orders were to march through the Taurus into Cilicia and take Syria from the west. We were told that the Roman forces along our route would have been neutralised to allow us to move rapidly. But our cavalry has been destroyed and our infantry are blocked, so we were attempting to return to Armenia."

Gallienus stared at Bolites for a moment. This was all consistent with what he already knew.

"General!" There was a gasping courier at the entry to his tent. "The Armenians are marching against the western wing. About the centre of the line, perhaps towards the outside half."

"Thank you, soldier," Gallienus replied. "Now go up to the archers. Order them that they must NOT fire on anyone walking up the road from our lines towards the Armenians. Then report back that the order has been delivered and understood. If I'm not here when you return, I'll be with the blocking force."

Gallienus reached for a sheet of paper and a quill. He wrote in Greek in his neatest hand, suspecting that the officer now commanding the Armenian forces might not have the best Greek literacy levels.

Your commander Bolites commands you to surrender. When you hear the trumpet, five hundred of your men are to walk down the road towards the Romans. They shall carry no weapons or armour. Each time you hear the trumpet, you shall send another five hundred.

Your commander makes his mark here to show this letter is genuine.

Bolites, you shall make your mark at the foot of this letter," Gallienus commanded as he handed to sheet to his prisoner.

Bolites read through the letter, took the quill, and made his mark. He handed to letter back to Gallienus. "It is good to kill as few as possible," he commented.

Gallienus stood. "Wait here," he commanded Bolites. Then, in Latin, he ordered his staff to hold the prisoner in the tent. Gallienus scurried down the track to the blocking force which had almost completed securing the captives. "Who among you Armenians can speak Greek?" he called as he wandered through the holding area.

Eventually one man raised an arm. "I speak little Greek," he stuttered out.

"I am sending you back to the Armenian army. You must give this letter to the senior officer." Gallienus said slowly and carefully. "Do you understand."

The Armenian nodded. "I go to Armenians. I give letter to officer."

"Yes," Gallienus smiled. "Come." He ordered the man untied and handed him the demand for surrender when his hands were free. They walked together down to the road. The courier found them as they reached the roadblock.

"Orders received and understood, sir," the lad reported. "No-one leaving our lines and walking towards the Armenians shall be harmed."

"Thank you, soldier." Then, turning towards the Armenian captive he spoke in Greek. "You go now. Walk slowly. Do not run." The Armenian looked doubtful but disobedience was not an option. He started walking at a dead march away from the Romans.

"Allow that man to pass!" Gallienus bellowed three times as the man walked tentatively away from the Roman line. After the man had cleared the heavy infantry Gallienus turned to the legate.

"I'm going back up to the lookout if anyone is looking for me."

By the time Gallienus had reached to lookout post the letter-bearer was almost outside archers range, still walking very slowly. Here was a man who was accustomed to following orders out of fear! Gallienus thought to himself.

He could also see an Armenian body of a few thousand infantry skirting along the tree-line, heading away from him. They must have seen the heavies in the trees and are trying to assess how far our line extends. Well, let them see as many Romans as they want! It will add credibility to our surrender demand!

From his vantage point above the tree-line, he could see that the reserve legions were also spreading further west, even though there was no prepared line in that area. The commander out on that wing was thinking quickly and using initiative to ensure he was not being out-flanked. He must be commended for that!

Even as Gallienus thought these things, the Armenian scouting force turned away and started marching back towards the main body, which was now making preparations for a fortified camp. With a shock Gallienus looked towards the sun. It was only two hours to sunset.

"Couriers!" he called. "Fires shall be permitted tonight. The more fires, the better! I want the Armenians to think that we have ten legions here hiding under cover! Spread the word!" Then, pointing in turn to three of the lads, "Now, you go to the ridge and tell the archers, you to the blocking force, and you along the western line, spreading the word as you go. And when you get to the end of the western line, tell them to continue spreading further, and light cooking fires, as though our picket goes for miles further than it actually does. Off you all go, now!"

Gallienus looked down on the road again. An officer had trotted out to meet the message-bearer and was reading the note. He finished reading, turned, and trotted back to another officer. The second officer took the paper and scanned it, and then started towards the scouting force. Gallienus watched as the mounted officer approached the returning infantry force. Significantly the letter was not shown. That would imply that the mounted man was in charge.

At last the mounted officer returned to the camp being made. He sought out the man who had delivered the letter and spoke to him briefly. The message-bearer then turned and started walking slowly back towards the Roman lines. A return message, Gallienus surmised, and started back towards his tent. "If anyone is looking for me I'll be in my tent or at the roadblock," he advised the lookout watch.

This Armenian was certainly not going to risk being killed by mistake. Gallienus was waiting for him a few hundred paces in front of the roadblock so slowly did he approach with arms outstretched and shouting "Philos! Philos!" - 'Friend! Friend!' in Greek. He stopped five paces short of Gallienus, again meticulous to give no excuse for thinking that he was dangerous.

"Commander says Yes," he reported.

"Good. We start tomorrow at sunrise," Gallienus confirmed. "Do you understand?"

"Yes," the Armenian confirmed. "'Sun going up, we start."

"Then go and tell Armenians," Gallienus prompted him, pointing back down the road.

The man put his hands to his chest and pointed back towards the Armenian camp. "I go now?"

"Yes. Tell Armenian commander, we start at sunrise."

The captive turned again and started walking as slowly as ever.

"At that speed he won't get there by sunrise," Gallienus muttered to himself. "Mucius, send a Greek-speaker with him. At a proper walking pace," Galienus said to the legate as he turned back to his own lines.

The disarming and mustering of the Armenians started early and went smoothly and was completed by noon. Gallienus had ordered the wagons out to collect the abandoned weaponry while the Armenian captives were corralled in the open plain to the east of the ridge. Then the message came from the lookouts. More soldiers approaching from the west!

The wagons were quickly recalled and the ambush prepared again. But it was obvious that there would be little if any element of surprise this time. The abandoned weapons and armour made the scene too obvious.

Gallienus looked at the approaching soldiers with a sense of dread. He had forty thousand enemy captives to his rear, with only eight thousand men from the Eastern Force to guard them. That also meant that the western force had no reserve and there would be no tactical surprise this time.

How many enemy were approaching? Bolites had said seven thousand had been investing the town to the west. Was this them in retreat? Or was this an entirely new force? Not likely, Gallienus thought to himself. If Bolites had known there was a strong Armenian force nearby he would have joined up with it. So seven thousand was probably accurate. If that's so then the column should be less than two miles long.

"Runners!" he called. His three dedicated couriers attended immediately. He pointed at one. "You, go down to the blocking force and tell them to deploy only two cohorts at the block, the others are to spread themselves along the first mile of flanking barrier." He pointed to the second, "You tell the Western Force to all move westwards by one mile."

He pointed to the third. "You go to the furthest wing of the western force. They are to deploy a mile further along the forest line, but once in position wait until the end of the enemy column passes them. Then the last two cohorts are to step out of the forest and deploy in a line down to the river."

"And you," pointing at the lookout runner, "Go tell the three runners at the base of the ridge to report here, then you go to the archers. Tell them to come down and spread themselves along the western flank behind the heavy infantry. Then you come back here."

I hope there are only seven thousand, Gallienus thought to himself! I need to win this battle without letting the captives know how close they are to help. If they know what's happening they will rise up, overpower their guards, and fall on my rear!

A runner appeared from the base of the ridge. "Good!" Gallienus said. "Go down to the blocking force. Tell them to prepare to march to the west, in skirmish formation. And if their commander seems doubtful, tell him I know he has only two cohorts!"

While he was giving this order the other two runners appeared. "You! Go to the western force; tell them to prepare to advance down the slope and onto the clearing. Line abreast in battle formation. They must start to advance at a slow walk as soon as they see the blocking force marching up the road towards the enemy. Not a moment earlier, not a moment later! The archers will follow them at a ten-pace gap." Gallienus ordered. "Now repeat that back to me!"

"Western force is to advance at slow walk in battle formation as soon as they see the blocking force marching towards the enemy. Archers to follow ten paces behind," the runner summarised.

"Good! Now go!"

Gallienus looked west again. The head of the column was still more than three miles away. It would take them almost an hour to reach the remains of the Armenian camp. His own men would need every minute of that time to get into position and comprehend their orders. Below him he could hear the clanking of the heavies from the blocking force re-deploying along the western barrier and the softer scuffling of the archers moving at a jog. Further along he could make out the occasional glint as the further parts of the western line shuffled along the footpath. Getting the lads to build that pathway was one of the best things he had done in this battle, he congratulated himself. Fast communications and fast re-deployment ability will be a feature of his planning for the rest of his career, he pledged to himself!

He looked out again towards the enemy column. Could he see the rear end of it now? His heart leapt. Hard to be certain, but he thought he could see a part of the road in the far distance that wasn't moving with the mass of troops. "Soldier," he spoke to the lookout. "Let me borrow your young eyes; is that the rear end of the column, or are there more coming?"

"There's definitely clear space behind them, sir. But it might be only a gap rather than the end of the column."

Time moves so slowly before a battle. And then you are overwhelmed by how quickly things develop and you never have enough time! Gallienus knew that this part had to be timed just right. The blocking force centuries had to appear on the road just as the far western wing folded down behind the enemy rear. The enemy had to know they were surrounded, but not until they couldn't escape! He

could only hope now that the enemy column was no longer than two miles, or they would reach the camp and halt before their rear was inside the trap.

The front of the enemy column was now less than a mile from the abandoned camp, and less than a mile and a half from the blocking force. And yes, he could see clearly now that was clearly the end of the enemy column. It was still a long way past the end of the western force on its flank. Gallienus fretted as he watched. By the time the front ranks saw the abandoned camp the rear would still be beyond the end of his western flank! His encirclement was not going to work! The runners had rejoined him in the lookout by now. Were there any last-minute orders he might make that could still snatch a victory? No, any significant change now would only add confusion. All he could do is watch and hope. He had set out his pieces, now it was a matter of seeing how the enemy set out his own.

The column reached the abandoned camp and kept marching without any pause. They must have expected to come across something like this. They knew they were on the tail of one of their own armies so there was no surprise. Then the leading officer called a halt as he trotted ahead to where the Armenians had dropped their weapons and armour. That was something he didn't expect! Gallienus thought to himself. He knows we are here now! Or at least that we were.

Gallienus watched as the officer trotted back to the head of the column and waved his arm in the direction of the treeline. He knows we are there! Then something happened that Gallienus had not dared to dream; the head of the column dropped their packs and started to strap on their shields. The whole column followed suit in a ripple that ran back its full length. The column started marching again, stopping half a mile short of the block, and still out of archers range from the ridge. But the archers were no longer there! Gallienus had ordered them to back the western flank.

Then the front half-mile of the column turned and marched towards the tree line, covering a distance of perhaps twenty paces, and stopped. The rest of the column continued marching down the road until it reach the same point, and then the front half-mile turned and marched to a halt behind their leaders.

Gallienus could not believe his luck. The Armenians had started their evolution into a tight skirmish formation! The Armenian officer recognised the choke point as an ambush point. He was intending to attack the flanking forces in one tight punch, and then along the ridge behind the suspected ambush. And as he was doing this, the rear of the column continued to march forward to fill in the depth of attack behind their chosen five-hundred-pace-wide front!

His encirclement would work after all, thanks to Armenian co-operation. He saw the inevitability of it now. Soon the end of the western flank would fold down to the river behind them, and he would need to lead out the blocking force in front of them. Then, as the heavies on the uphill slope came forward and the archers behind them became visible to the Armenians, it would be over. They will see that the archers would inflict huge casualties as their infantry struggled up the steep slope and then the Roman infantry would annihilate the remaining

Armenian infantry, exhausted from the uphill charge! No, the Armenian will not be prepared to suffer that. He will surrender instead.

"Runner," he called. "I'm going down to the blocking force now. Send a message to me as soon as you see our extreme flank leaving the forest and marching down to the river behind those Armenians. Or if you see anything else, either," he added. "There are enough of you here to send me a report every five minutes if you have to!" Gallienus rushed down the hill and mounted his horse. He called to himself the two cohorts of infantry holding the block.

"Men, we're going out to persuade the enemy to surrender," he bellowed. "We have them surrounded. They will know it soon enough but too late to save themselves. They know they are as good as dead! So we will go out in battle formation just to drive home our point, and then they will beg for their lives!"

He walked his horse a few paces down the road. "As soon as we are clear of the trees, spread into battle formation covering the width of the clearing, and continue to spread as you advance. Halt when I give the order, but stay ready to resist."

A runner came sliding down the slope at the foot of the ridge as he finished speaking. "The far wing has come out of the trees, sir!" he shouted. "They are passing behind the rear of the enemy."

"Let's go, men!" Gallienus shouted to his troops as he started walking his horse along the road. "And let's sing!" The men started belting out their legion's marching song as they stepped confidently along behind him.

Within a couple of minutes they were out of the trees and into the narrow part of the clearing. Behind him the men evolved into battle formation, a line abreast half-a-dozen ranks deep. Then the sound of the singing picked up as the men on the barrier joined their flank. This inflow compensated for the wider front as they pushed deeper into the clearing. An ever-increasing width of heavy infantry presented themselves to the Armenians, advancing as they sang. Gallienus could see the consternation on the face of the Armenian commander, whose forces had just completed deploying into their attack formation.

They were now far enough around the bend and into the clearing that the rest of the barrier infantry could see them well. All along the tree-line ranks of more Roman infantrymen stepped out of the shadows and into the open, singing as they showed themselves. Gallienus gestured for the ranks behind him to halt but kept walking forward himself towards the enemy. He stopped fifty paces short of the enemy.

"General Eugenes, I presume?" Gallienus bellowed in Greek.

Eugenies turned and walked his horse towards the Roman. He didn't want to appear to be cowering among his soldiers while this Roman stood out away from his own ranks. He stopped a dozen paces away.

"I am Eugenes, Roman," he confirmed. "And what is your name?"

"I am Piso Gallienus, but that isn't important," Gallienus replied. "What is important is that of the forty thousand men under Bolites, not one escaped. Many were captured and the rest died. So I offer you a simple choice; life or death. How do you choose?" Gallienus said simply.

Eugenies looked around. He was completely hemmed in by a force that appeared twice the strength of his own, and that didn't allow for any more that might be still held in reserve in the forest. Whichever way he turned, he would be exposing his rear.

"I choose life," he replied.

"I am glad you do, General. Please go back to your men, order them to lay down their weapons and armour, and they will be treated well." Gallienus smiled. "Welcome to warfare, the way Rome does it!"

Silo was pleased to hear that the entire Armenian force had been captured, other than those killed by archers in the first ambush. He was particularly pleased that there had been no Roman battle casualties in the process. The wagons loaded with booty were also a nice bonus but it was too late in the year to convert that to cash now. He would have that shipped out in Spring and sold. His men would appreciate the extra money, all earned at no loss. The last message from Glauca in Antioch before the weather closed in was that the stalemate continued.

Drusus was hosting another meeting of the leading members of the Italianists. With Silo, Mutilus, Lafrenius, Asinius, Vidacilius and Glauca overseas, the circle had been extended to include Gnaeus Priscus, Gnaeus Pollo and Titus Herenius to provide a wider spread of opinions.

"Sextus Julius was quite definite on that point," Drusus was saying. "He says that the Populares have acquiesced to our nominees for the last two years now, on the understanding that Carbo would be qualified to be nominated for Consul this year. And I must concede that they have a point there. After all, we did impose Flaccus upon them, whom they had reason to believe to be more naturally a Bonus than one of their own," Drusus went on to explain. "But they trusted us. And this year we talked them out of standing their own man on the promise that we would support Carbo as Praetor so he could stand for Consul this year. Surely that implies that we would also support him as Consul!" Drusus spread his hands. I think we are honour-bound to support Carbo, or we will have wasted all that trust we have built up," he concluded. "Specially since our advice for them to not stand anyone last year was proved so poor a judgement by the election results."

There were murmurs of agreement from all but Sulla, who sat sullenly in his place. "I don't like it," Sulla replied. "I don't like it at all!" He dropped into thought as the others looked on. "But as you say, we are honour-bound," Sulla finally conceded. "Could you relay that we intend to promote Lucius Glauca next year when he returns from Syria? A man who has added a new province to Rome without the loss of a single drop of blood must surely be a winner!"

"Yes, that must be done," Pollo asserted. "We need to have a second Italian Consul soon, or Quintus Poppaedius will continue to be considered an exception rather than typical of us." This also brought murmurs of agreement.

"It seems we are agreed, then," Drusus summarised. Now, what else do we have in mind looking further ahead?"

"Well, I have to stand for Republican Praetor for my tribe," Priscus answered first. "Quintus Poppaedius wants me eligible just in case I could be useful further down the track."

"Yes, we should take that approach across as many Roman tribes as we can," Sulla chipped in. "We need to break the perception that only Italians and a few Roman freaks support the vision of a Greater Republic. We need Romans to let it soak into their own bones as well, and how better than for Roman tribes to elect our people to the Republic Senate and Comitia?"

"I'm not so sure of that, Lucius Cornelius," Herenius countered. "We've always had a 'hands off' approach to the Roman tribes. We don't want to provoke a reaction."

"We won't be interfering," Sulla argued. "We will stay completely out of the internal Roman Comitia and Senate. But the Romans who are members of Roman Tribes have a right to be elected as Tribal representatives to the Republic bodies!"

"They might not see it that way, though," Drusus cautioned. "Perhaps we need to reach an explicit agreement on these things. I remember that Sextus Julius put forward the criticism that the Republic Praetor position was the only way open for a Popularis candidate to reach the consulship. If we start to claim those positions it will effectively be a roadblock to them. Or at least, they might see it that way."

Sulla's impatience for negotiating with the Populares was becoming more obvious. "If the Populares can't get the numbers together to elect their own men then that shows they're not a force we need to be concerned about."

"Lucius Cornelius, what you say is true in the short term. But over a generation it will deliver Rome into the hands of the Mob again!"

"Very well, then!" Sulla replied angrily. "Let's make a division with them! Ask which golden-haired plebs they want to run in which tribes and we will make up our own list of candidates to compare with them. Then we can start taking turns, like boys picking teams in the street!"

Chapter 9 – 672 Ab Urbe Condita (82 B.C.)

The Bonus Consul was slightly surprising this year. But although Publius Servilius Vatia had no male ancestors who had been Consul and was thus technically a 'New Man', his father-in-law was Quintus Caecilius Metellus Macedonicus. Macedonicus had been an outstanding Roman of his generation and like all Caecilii Metelli a Bonus to the soles of his sandals. Vatia was effectively being grafted into his wife's family rather than his wife becoming a Vatia.

Carbo was elected as well but into a distinctly secondary position.

The Republic Praetors were also elected largely according to plan, with the election of Priscus and eight other Italianists as Republic Praetors from Roman tribes being actually welcomed by the Populares. The fact that seven of these eight were from normally conservative rural tribes was no small part in the Populares enthusiasm.

One election result was not to Sulla's liking. Quintus Sertorius, having finished a five-year term as governor of the Spains, returned to be elected as one of the Republic Praetors for his own tribe. He was seeking to have his appointment renewed.

"Lucius Cornelius, why do you hate Sertorius so much?" Drusus asked, almost in exasperation. "The man is top class in everything he does and his personal political stance is very much in line with ours. So why are you so intent on making him an enemy when he could become a great asset?"

"He is not top-class and he would be a great liability, not a great asset," Sulla snapped.

"But why do you say that, Lucius Cornelius?"

"Don't press me on this matter, Marcus Livius."

Drusus threw his hands up in a gesture of despair. "As you say, Lucius Cornelius. You won't hear me mention him again without good reason."

A few days later Drusus called on Sertorius, ostensibly to talk to him about the Rufan System and how Sertorius was already introducing it into the Spains. But the conversation soon moved on from that topic.

"Quintus, you need not answer this question," Drusus started tentatively. "But I have a very high regard for you and your position on many questions. I would like to be able to support you for Consul one day soon. But one of my closest allies has a great dislike for you. I would like to understand the basis for his dislike so I can perhaps address it and overcome it."

"You mean Lucius Cornelius, don't you?" Sertorius asked.

"Yes, I do. What has turned him against you?"

"I'm not sure," Sertorius confessed. "Lucius Cornelius doesn't give away information unless it's to his own advantage, so he has never told me of any specific fault. But he's a man who never forgets a grudge. Whatever it is, don't expect him to be reconciled to me this side of the grave," Sertorius advised.

"What happened while you were serving together under Caius Marius?" Drusus pressed.

"Almost all of that time we were together we were spying on the Germans," Sertorius answered. "We posed as a couple of deserters from Caepio's army and offered the Germans insights into how Roman soldiers trained and fought, in exchange for their acceptance. We even took wives and fathered children to make them think we were there for ever."

Lucius Cornelius has never spoken of that," Drusus commented.

"Oh, yes!" Sertorius confirmed. "Soon after we arrived in their camp one particular woman was very interested in us. But she found out that Sulla didn't mind a young boy or two in his bed so she settled on me and became my woman. Then Lucius Cornelius took another young woman, very beautiful and related to the Chief. He looked like he was set for a leadership role in our adopted tribe. Our women became pregnant, and we agreed to call our children after each other; His would be Quintus or Quinta, mine would be Lucius or Lucia.

"My woman died in childbirth, and so did the boy. But Lucius' woman lived, and so did Quinta. But a month later his daughter was found dead in the morning. A few months after that I became 'accidentally' separated from a hunting party and made my way back to Massalia to report to Caius Marius. Lucius Cornelius did the same about six months later but I was in Rome by then."

"And how did he act towards you when you did meet?" Drusus continued.

"We didn't," Sertorius replied. "I called around on his house once when I heard he had returned to Rome but he wasn't available. I left a note with his staff asking him to let me know when we could meet, but I never got a reply. All I know since then is that he had a few quiet words with some of my supporters when I was a candidate for Praetor. He told them that I was treacherous and couldn't be trusted but he gave them no reasons. After that, I tried to just keep my distance. Lucius Cornelius is a brilliant mind and I approve of how he and you and others have played your politics. I'd like to join you. But Lucius Cornelius has a long memory when it comes to imagined insults. I would rather stay out of his way."

"Surely this is only a misunderstanding and can be cleared up?" Drusus protested.

"It could be if the misunderstanding were with you, Marcus Livius; but it's my feeling that Lucius Cornelius prefers to nurse a grudge than to have it resolved," Sertorius responded. "I'm always willing to try but first I would need to know what he has against me."

"You have no idea?" Drusus couldn't believe this state of affairs. It was totally outside his own character to imagine two intelligent men locked in such a futile enmity, all for a reason that was based on nothing except itself.

Sertorius shrugged. "Perhaps it was that my woman spurned him to come to me. Perhaps it was that I had a son, and he only a daughter. Perhaps it was that I left to report to Marius first and he thought I was trying to gain favouritism by that. Who knows? We seemed to be on good terms right up to our parting and he wished me well for my escape. There was no hint of resentment. But he has always been a good actor so who can tell? He managed to fool Jugurtha!"

Sometimes I thought that he didn't know himself what he was thinking that he was so good at concealing his thoughts that not even he knew them."

Drusus was totally at a loss. "Then what do you think we should do?" he asked eventually.

Sertorius smiled. "For the moment, let's each go about our own business. I'm on the same page as you politically, so let us remain secret friends. Don't let Lucius Cornelius know that we've met and talked or he'll likely as not consider you an enemy too. In the meantime I'll ensure the Rufan System is adopted throughout the Spains. If there's the need for us to talk in more detail then let it be done discreetly."

"Yes, let it be so, Quintus," Drusus agreed. "I understand your caution; I've seen some fearful things from Lucius Cornelius and I have no doubt he would be ruthless if he perceived anyone as an enemy. In fact, over the last couple of years he has become more moody and even easily irritated than before. I wonder sometimes if he's going the same way as Caius Marius."

"Please, all the gods, let not that happen!" Sertorius said fervently. "He would be much less generous than Mad Marius, and ten times as cunning!"

"I agree, Quintus," Drusus nodded. "So let's hope that it won't happen." He offered his arm, which was accepted, and turned for the front door.

Silo started the new year by converting the previous year's booty into cash and making a distribution to the troops. After excluding those of First and Second class from the division everyone else, whether officer or mere legionary, received the same amount. For those soldiers in the Head Count category this alone was enough to entitle them to a Class in the next Census. Another successful season or two would see them rich enough to buy property in the city to let out for rent as well as their farmland entitlement under the new Retirement Law passed during the consulship of Flaccus. The rank-and-file soldiers, already loyal to the man who was so frugal with their lives, now saw him as their champion. They would march through stone walls for him.

With Priscus back in Rome as a Republic Praetor, Silo moved to Antioch. He was confident that Glauca and Asinius were more than competent to be left in control of the north. Pontius Telesinus, who had shown his mastery of cavalry in the early stages of the war against Mithridates, was now back with him as well. The flat plains of Syria would doubtless offer opportunities to exploit his skills in the field.

But Silo wanted Telesinus to be free to exploit these opportunities immediately, which would not be so convenient if Pontius were in a fixed position in the command structure. So he left him as an officer for special duties and appointed Gallienus as his chief of staff. He called Piso to his office to inform him of this responsibility and then hit him with a surprise.

"Piso, how would you like to meet Royalty?" Silo asked with a smile.

"Not all that much, sir," Gallienus answered with an offhand shrug. "I believe in the Republic."

"Well said!" Silo agreed. "But sometimes you have to work with the facts as they are. I'm sending you to Tigranes for a quiet chat."

"Yes, sir. I'll chat as with him as quietly as possible."

"Not too quietly, Piso," Silo smiled gently. "There's a certain impression I would like you to convey without so much as putting it into words." Silo outlined the message he wanted delivered in words, and also the message that was to be delivered in ways other than words. After a bit of play-acting in which Silo played the part of Tigranes making a range of different responses, he was satisfied that Gallienus would do the job just as he wanted.

The audience hall didn't seem strange to Gallienus as he entered. Although he hadn't been there before, Glauca and Priscus had both described it after their return from their own embassies and Philopator had instructed him thoroughly on the etiquette.

"Hail, King Tigranes!" he called, pointedly not relaying any friendly greetings from Silo and not addressing him by his favoured title 'King of Kings'.

"You're the third different delegate in three visits, legate," Tigranes noted. "Why can't you Romans appoint competent people to a position and then allow them to gain experience?"

"I have no instructions on how to answer that question, King. I'll refer it back to General Silo if you wish so the next legate can answer it for you."

"Don't bother, legate," Tigranes waved a hand to dismiss the matter. "Why are you here today?"

"Late last year an Armenian force invaded the Roman territories within what we call the Northern Pocket, between the Euphrates and the Western Tributary," Gallienus cut straight to the business. "Naturally those who were not killed for their foolishness were captured and enslaved. None returned to their homeland. However, responsibility for this offence against Rome doesn't stop with the individuals in that army; the responsibility goes all the way up to you, King."

Tigranes sat waiting for a few moments. "You're wasting my time, legate. If you would say more then say it. If you would ask a question then ask it. If you would do neither then go!"

"My apologies, King; I was allowing you a courtesy, the opportunity to deny that you ordered this invasion."

"It was not an invasion, legate. It was a peaceful attempt to transit territory which is properly Armenian, but temporarily occupied by our Friend and Ally, Rome," Tigranes replied. "Those troops were under orders to not attack any Roman forces but to explain their request for innocent passage."

"Innocent passage to where, King?"

"That is not for you to know," Tigranes replied.

"It is also to be noted that this purported request for innocent passage was in the immediate aftermath of an attempt to seize Roman towns by insurrection, so that these supposedly innocent regular forces could then occupy them."

"If you Romans oppress the Armenians living in that region, then you must expect spontaneous revolts. Those revolts did not involve Armenian soldiers."

"With respect, King, many of those captured were Armenian soldiers, but not wearing their uniforms at the time. We captured several who were actually Armenian officers, including two former military governors."

"I have no knowledge of that, legate," Tigranes replied. "If there were former Armenian soldiers among the ranks of the uprising, then I would know nothing about that. But it would not be unreasonable for such men, after being discharged from my service, to go back to the lands they had grown fond of. And once there, the other patriots would naturally look to them for leadership."

"I don't doubt for a moment that the King speaks the truth," Gallienus continued. "However, I must inform you that General Silo has considered precisely the circumstances you have explained to me but is persuaded that this doesn't account for all known facts. He is convinced that this uprising and the coincidental entry of your regular forces into Roman territory was a co-ordinated action, ordered by the King and intended to harm Rome. He demands an apology and an appropriate show of contrition, or your status as Friend and Ally of Rome will be forfeit."

Tigranes adopted a more menacing tone. "We do not apologise for acts we did not commit, nor have any responsibility for! Nor do we show contrition for acts of treachery committed by others. And in particular, we do not see why we should not demand an apology and restoration of our men and equipment. Our men were seeking innocent passage through their own territory, however occupied by a Friend and Ally at the time," Tigranes followed through.

"So my response to General Silo is this. Tell him that Armenia is the wronged party here and expects General Silo to immediately restore to us the men and equipment taken from us, and that compensation shall be paid for any losses, both of men and of equipment. Anything less could have substantial consequences for his career," Tigranes flapped a hand in annoyance. "Now go!" Gallienus took three steps backwards before turning his back on the King. Proper courtesies must always be observed.

"Excellent, Piso!" Silo chuckled as Gallienus finished his report. "That will do perfectly!"

"I didn't expect him to apologise, sir, no matter how forceful I was with him as you instructed. But how is a counter-demand a good thing for us?"

"Ah, Piso! You are a good soldier but you need to be a good politician to understand this one!" Silo leant forward, elbows on knees as he started to explain. "If he had apologised, even shown some remorse, then there is no way I could have done anything without the Old Wives' Club back in Rome relieving me of this command. No-body wants Silo, this bloody upstart Italian, running amok again and earning himself another Triumph! That's something only proper Romans should be allowed to do!"

"Even if Tigranes had just sent you away my hands would still be tied. But now he has made a demand on Rome! He has insulted Rome!" Silo chuckled to himself. "He's a King; he thinks only about his own advantage and he expects

Romans to do the same. So he makes a threat against this one General, hoping to put on a show of strength. He thinks he insulted only me and that Rome would consider that insult to me as my problem. But as for Rome, why risk a war for an insult to a mere General? Better to sacrifice the General!

“But Rome is a Republic! An insult to a Consular doing his duty is an insult to every consular, and everyone hoping to be a consul in the future! By insulting me, he has insulted Rome more profoundly than if Rome had only one King; he has insulted us in the plural!”

“So, my mission was not to gain an apology, but to provoke a *causus belli*?” Gallienus was starting to see the picture.

“Exactly!” Silo chuckled again.

“How do you intend to take advantage of this, sir?” Gallienus asked.

“Consider the Armenian dispositions, Piso. What do you know about them?”

“Last Fall virtually wiped out their garrison in the north, so they would be re-building that as fast as they can,” Piso commented. “Here on the Euphrates they have set up prepared defences about half-a-mile back from the river for almost the whole frontier. I expect that is so they can tempt us into a crossing, and then fall on us from both flanks once we have committed our troops.”

“Yes, I read it that way too,” Silo agreed. “But how well can they man those defences? They'll need to pull some troops out to send to the northern frontier.”

Gallienus thought for a while. “They're relying on a set defensive line but will need cavalry for any flanking attack. So I expect they would like to deploy at least two thousand infantry per mile of front to hold the killing ground. They might get away with less if their seigeworks are good but I'd expect they'd want more. And they'll want to concentrate at least five thousand cavalry every five miles, so they can fall on us on both sides, five thousand each flank. So that's at least two thousand infantry and one thousand cavalry per mile of front.”

“And how long do these defences run for, Piso?”

The light went on in Gallienus' mind. “They run for almost three hundred miles! But there's no way they have six hundred thousand infantry and three hundred thousand cavalry! If they did, then they'd be attacking us, not sitting there waiting and consuming their supplies!”

That's right, Piso,” Silo agreed. “Much of that line is hollow! We only need to find the weak points, punch through, and we'll have them trapped up against their own killing ground!”

“But how do we find those weak points, General?” Gallienus asked. “If they detect our spies, they might well re-deploy between the scouting and the attack so as to have us blunder into reinforcements.”

“We won't scout for weak points, Piso,” Silo explained. “We'll find them when we land because we will have created them for ourselves.” Silo grabbed a few sheets of paper and started sketching as he spoke.

An hour later Gallienus walked out of the office, stunned at the audacity of his General. Is this the same man who did everything within his power to ensure minimal casualties? But this scheme seemed so reckless! Still, orders are orders

and being half-hearted would only increase the risk of a disaster. Sometimes you just have to grit your teeth and charge....

The drawings for the segments had been prepared within a couple of days and rushed to the northern section of the frontier as fast as riders could take them. Soon the towns along the northern section of the Euphrates, surrounded by forested slopes, were humming with the task of timber-getting and making sections of the mighty pontoon bridge that Silo would use to invade Armenian territory east of the River. Each section was effectively a timber deck measuring twelve paces long and twenty paces wide, each supported on a pair of hulls twenty four paces long set just over two paces in from each end. These hulls were wide and flat, designed to draw only four feet of water when the section was fully laden. A carriageway twenty paces wide would allow men to march across the bridge thirty abreast and permit the heaviest artillery pieces to be drawn four abreast by horses. A huge marshalling area was constructed three miles downstream with an excellent road leading direct to a pier into the river.

Construction of these sections was in full swing by late February, and accelerated through March and April. By then the river was at peak flow, and the segments were strung along the bank and tethered to ensure they weren't washed away. This afforded the Armenians a good view of their size and number. In combination with the wharf works there was no doubt what was being planned and where the attack would come. Slowly, gradually, the Armenians drew in more men to strengthen their defensive line and concentrated their available cavalry. These reserves were not displayed to the Romans but kept a couple of miles back from the line. They could be brought up in the time it took to assemble the bridge. Brilliant engineers that the Romans were reputed to be, that assembly process would take them at least ten days, and even longer if it were to be attempted during the peak flows of April and May.

Assembly commenced in late April. The segment furthest downstream was fitted with a short mast and small sail over each hull, an anchor and a capstan. It was eased out into the current and drifted downstream, using the sail to keep close to the bank. When it was about a hundred paces short of the pier, it fixed its anchor cable to the capstan and dropped its anchor. The force of the current and the platform's momentum ensured the anchor bit deep. The crew then played out the cable until the segment was level with the pier. Using a rudder set over the downstream edge, it sidled across to the pier and clamped itself to the pile at the upstream corner of the pier. Then the capstan was wound out slowly until the downstream corner could be fixed to a similar pile at the downstream corner of the pier. The first segment was in place! The anchor cable was wedged tight where it passed through the feed ring in the deck and the capstan removed, ready for re-use on another segment.

The second segment was already on its way downstream. In less than two hours the second segment was secured to the first and its anchor cable wedged. By the end of that first day five segments had been stitched together.

The experience gained in the first day permitted a faster rate on the second day. Seven more segments were added and eight on the third day. They stretched almost half-way across the river by sunset on day three.

The Armenians were surprised that the attack was coming so early in the season, with the river still running so strongly. At mid-stream the flow was about as fast as a man could run, and must be placing a heavy load on the anchor cables. But it seemed that the Romans were impatient to get across, possibly hoping for strategic surprise so early in the season while the Armenian army might not be at full strength. And there was some truth in that. Extra reinforcements were hurriedly called in from wherever they could be found and the infantry and cavalry already in the rear were called forwards.

Mazardes, the Armenian general in charge of the Euphrates defences, had moved his command centre to the line opposite the bridge site within days of the Romans commencing their works. His original defensive plan had been based very much on necessity. He couldn't ensure sufficient strength along the entire river front to repel a crossing so he had prepared a fortified line far enough back so the Romans would not be able to ascertain his weakness and this would buy him sufficient time to deploy against the landing when it did come. Hopefully he would have time to make his response a crushing one, deterring any second attempt. But he had known for over a month now precisely where the Romans would land. Should he push forward, and deny them a toe-hold?

That could be dangerous, he decided. If he positioned his men in a forward defence, the Romans might just wheel their artillery up to the end of a three-quarters completed bridge and wipe him out. No, best to stay with the original plan. Let them land and then crush them in an overwhelming attack before they had room to deploy into battle formation. At this rate of bridge construction that will be in three or four nights' time.

The bridge was completed to just short of the eastern bank late on the sixth day of assembly, as far as could be managed without running aground. The unladen sections drew just less than three feet, so men and draft animals would be able to wade from the last section. The Armenians were intrigued to see a long gangway being rolled forward along the length of the bridge and a pair of posts being set up, obviously to lift and swing the the gangway over the shallow water at the edge of the river to reduce the wading distance as much as possible. There was no doubt that the attack would be coming in the morning and final defensive deployments were made.

The hours shortly after midnight were filled with the noise of men and horses moving, the tramp of boots and the clomp of hooves on timber unmistakeable. The Romans were filling the bridge in darkness, hoping to start at first light! But the noise, travelling so clearly over the water during the still night, had betrayed any chance of tactical surprise. Then, as the first glimmer of light spread across the eastern sky, there was a sound of panic among the Romans. Men shouted, horses responded uneasily. A few moments later there was enough light to see a vague dark outline as the centre of the Roman bridge started drifting downstream.

In an instant Mazardes guessed what had happened. The fully-laden bridge sections had sunk lower in the water under the imposed weight of tightly-packed soldiers. This had caused the river's current to pull more strongly against the hulls. Then either an anchor cable snapped or an anchor was pulled free from the bed of the river. This threw even more load on the cables and anchors of the sections to either side, which then gave way in response. In a matter of moments the whole bridge structure had peeled away, one segment pulling on the next until the entire bridge had been swept away by the current. How many men would the Romans lose? He pondered. The river was almost 500 paces wide at this point, so that would be the length of the bridge; and its width was about twenty paces. So its deck area would be ten thousand square paces! And with the infantry packed in tight for a quick landing, you could jam perhaps five men per square pace. Fifty thousand men, an entire army of ten legions, swept away in a moment!

According to his spies the total Roman strength in Syria amounted to only twelve legions. That would leave only two in all Syria, and certainly they wouldn't both be here! There would be garrison duties throughout the province so there would be at most a legion left on the far bank, perhaps less! So now would be a good time to start organising a quick counter-attack before reinforcements could arrive. By the time news gets back to Rome and new legions can be scraped together and sent to Syria, he should have at least three months. He couldn't believe how kind the gods had been to him.

It was getting lighter by the moment. Now he could see that there were horses on the bridge sections as they were carried to the south. So there had been cavalry as well! That means fewer men lost but it also means fewer cavalry on the far bank. Cavalry will be harder to replace. But he wouldn't be so foolish as to try to build a bridge vulnerable to the elements. He will use proper boats to land a bridgehead force, and then the same boats can be used to ferry the remainder of his army across. The extra time would be only a few days which he could easily afford and still have plenty of time to take Antioch.

There should be virtually no resistance, either. The bulk of the Roman force had been swallowed by the river and the Syrians had been preparing to invite the King of Kings into their land anyway, had not the Romans been so lucky as to turn up at exactly the worst time! The extra wealth and manpower of this new Armenian province would ensure that Rome would be neither willing nor able to harm Armenia again. The last section of the bridge disappeared out of sight as he finished this chain of thought.

“Mirines!” he called to his chief of staff, who immediately ran to his side and saluted. “As quickly as you can! Find as many boats as you can and get them here! We're going to exploit this stroke of good fortune and launch an attack of our own. I'm expecting you to find enough craft nearby to allow us to land five thousand men on the other side in one day, and then follow with the rest of the army within the next ten days! Now, do it!” Mirines snapped off another salute and left at a run.

It had taken excellent co-ordination and considerable expertise to complete a task made more difficult in the dark, but Silo was well pleased. The bridge had already been broken into eight segments by removing the bolts from every fifth fish-plated joint on each side; but the cutting of the anchor cables had to be co-ordinated perfectly to avoid a disaster. But it had gone well.

The central section had gone first. As soon as it had been carried fifty paces downstream, measured by a rope strung between adjacent sections, the sections on either side had been cut free. Then, the next two sections out from then went in another well-timed salvo of axe-blows. In only a couple of minutes the whole deck had become a chain of rafts, the outer sections being pulled into mid-stream by the connecting ropes as the stronger current in midstream pulled the central sections faster. The sections cut themselves free of each other once the outermost were in the main current to avoid slamming into each other.

The strong current took them ten miles downstream in half an hour, beyond the Armenian defensive front. After an hour and more than twenty miles downstream the masts and sails went up to provide better control. Their target site was thirty miles downstream from the bridge site, where a wide sweep in the river had left an extensive shallow on the eastern shore on the inside of the bend. Under the control of expert sailors all eight sections managed to beach themselves within a spread of little more than a mile.

Silo's expeditionary force consisted of only seven legions augmented with the cavalry components of two others. A quick scouting ride forward revealed what he had expected. The fortifications fronting this section of the river were empty, all available troops having been called north to crush the expected Roman bridgehead. Small scouting groups were sent in all directions to ensure there were no enemy formations within close range. By the time the legions were deployed in marching order it had been confirmed that nothing within five miles could hinder them. The men set out to the north, with small scouting parties a few miles to either side and a screen of longer-range light horse running further forward.

The legions had been marching for two hours when they came to the first village some five miles north of the landing point. A cavalry squadron had already cut off the road north to ensure no news leaked out and gathered just over a hundred people in the central market place. The first century to arrive surrounded the square. Silo walked his horse into the square and looked over the captives.

"We will not rest easy in this land if we slaughter everyone we come across," he bellowed to his men. "Just as in Anatolia, we must show mercy and generosity." The folk looked at one another anxiously. None of them understood Latin, but they knew loud speeches like this were customarily used to rouse soldiers to slaughter.

Silo saw the stirring among them. "Do any of you speak Greek?" he asked in Greek.

One middle-aged man put his had up. "I am a small merchant, sir, just passing through this place."

"Then tell these good people that they will come to no harm so long as they do as they are told. In three days' time they will be set free, unharmed. But if

even one of them disobeys, all will be punished. We will provide you with food and water until then." The merchant relayed these words; the crowd looked as though they didn't believe a word of it but had no choice but to hope.

Silo turned to the centurion, and ordered in Latin loudly enough for all to hear. "I will allow one contubernium as a guard. Centurion, appoint one. And I want no raping or pillaging; we mustn't give these people any reason to resent Rome. The rest follow the march," Silo concluded, and turned his horse away to catch up with the head of the march as the centurion pointed to the nearest decanus.

"Your men can do that job," he said bluntly.

The decanus appointed to guard duty asked his centurion to stay while he hunted for a house with an enclosed courtyard big enough to contain his captives, and then ordered his own men to go house-hunting. They all scattered at a jog. The rest of the army continued its march to the north.

The scouts returned, warning of a larger town another ten miles to the north. Silo made a quick decision. Ten miles was four hours on the march for his front ranks and provided no time to deploy against any resistance or to be confident of cutting off any escape.

"Make camp four miles short of the town," he ordered. That should be far enough away to escape detection and would take two hours march to reach, allowing enough time for a proper defence to be set. It should also leave about twenty miles march before they reach the Armenian strongpoint. They will subdue the town in the morning and then march another ten miles past that before making another camp. That will allow them to approach in battle formation for the remaining six miles just in case the Armenians are coming south. With luck they will be able to take the unsuspecting enemy on their flank that next afternoon.

Mirines had been very active all day. He realised that it would be pointless seeking boats from downstream; the peak flow would make it too difficult and time-consuming to work up to the crossing point. But fast horsemen sent to the north had demanded all craft upstream to report immediately. By afternoon they were starting to dribble in. Mirines was keen to ensure secure berthing for all of them as they arrived while his junior staff started allocating men to each vessel.

By dawn of the next day there were enough vessels to land two thousand men in one crossing. Because of the strong current they would need to embark well upstream and would return to the near bank well downstream and need to be hauled back upriver along the bank out of the main flow. But with luck he still should be able to manage a morning load and a second before sunset. He expected more to arrive through the day as well so he should be able to set up a continuous cycle of loading, unloading and hauling back into position. Five thousand men per day seemed quite achievable.

He reported his plan to Mazardes soon after first light.

"Excellent work, Mirines!" the general exclaimed. "Get moving on it right now! We just have to make sure you land on a section of the river suitable for masses of boats to land, unload and leave without getting in each other's way."

Mazardes reached for a map and started for the lookout tower he had built beside his command post. Together the two men looked at the line of the far shore as it curved south and east.

"That looks good, about a mile south of the Roman bridge abutment," Mazardes said. "Let's see what the map says." He unrolled the hide and studied it. "The map notes some shoals just off the bank along that reach, but they should be no problem with this high river level. And it's clear inland, so you'll be able to set up a bridgehead defence with your first landing force. Do it!" He handed the map to Mirines and started climbing down the stairs to ground level.

Mirines stayed in the tower a few more minutes, etching the scene into his memory and reciting to himself the landmarks he would be able to see from the river. Then he also returned to ground level, called for his mount, and trotted north. He would get the first men across there this morning and feed more into the bridgehead as fast as he could as more boats arrived.

The sun was touching the western horizon as Mirines reported back to Mazardes that evening. "I led the first landing and was satisfied with the position, sir. When I left two hours after noon, we had three thousand men in the bridgehead, well palisaded. On my return I was advised that a total of six thousand had been embarked. We have enough transport on hand to land another eight thousand tomorrow, perhaps more if additional boats arrive through the night."

"Has there been any resistance?" Mazardes asked.

"No resistance, sir, but the Romans are aware of us. It seems that they are drawing up a force to repel us," Mirines answered. "I expect an attack as soon as it's light enough, before we can land more reinforcements."

"The moon is half-full," Mazardes commented. "It won't set until almost midnight; get another load over there now. I don't want that bridgehead to be lost."

"Yes, sir. I'll send as many as time will permit," Mirines replied. Blast, he thought to himself. There might be moonlight, but that crossing is more difficult than it seems from a nice, stable watchtower! And we'll need a full shift to haul the boats back up to their start position for the first daylight transport.

Silo was well pleased with his day's progress. A quick encircling movement by cavalry had cut out the town and an officer under a flag had approached and set out terms. Romans wouldn't enter the town provided none of the townsfolk tried to sneak out and that there was no attempt to signal the Armenian army by lighting fires or similar. An investing force would surround the town and any breach of these conditions would see the town destroyed.

The chief official came out to meet the Roman officer and was embarrassingly sycophantic in his willingness to agree. Lord Roman," he wheedled in his heavily-accented Greek. "It is known throughout the world how generously you Romans treat those who accept your protection! We are most eager to see you add this land to those many others that you govern so wisely."

Silo left two cohorts surrounding the town in highly visible positions. They were backed by fifty cavalry, also made as obvious as possible. That should be enough to convince them that an attempt to escape would be unwise.

The second night's camp was made just five miles short of the Armenian strong point, with rolling, open grasslands the only terrain to be traversed. An advance in battle formation the next morning would not be difficult.

Mirines landed another five thousand men in the bridgehead before the moon set. Unfortunately the darkness closed in before all of the boats made it back. Transport for almost a thousand men was lost, either through damage during landing on the darkened bank or by craft simply missing their point and being swept too far downstream. That's over two thousand per day that he won't not be able to transport in the days to come, Mirines fretted. He hoped this loss would prove worth it when it came to defending the bridgehead.

Gallienus, in command of the base since Silo left, was quite satisfied with the situation with the Armenians. He and Silo had expected the Armenians to try to capitalise on the apparent disaster to the Roman forces but this counter-attack was substantially stronger than they had imagined. All the fewer Silo has to confront and all the more captives we will win, he mused.

His four legions were preparing the ground well. The ditches and the palisades were already an impressive barrier, almost impenetrable and sufficient to ensure no breakout from the bridgehead could occur. And the artillery were well dug in, invisible to the enemy while able to provide indirect fire using his own infantry as spotters. His biggest hope was that the Armenians would get as many men across the river as fast as possible. That would allow Silo to take the far shore quickly and force the surrender of this isolated bridgehead. Another fifty thousand captives would be rich booty when sold as slaves. And that will leave wide open the road to Edessa and beyond that Tigranocerta, with all our legions still intact!

Mirines was up before dawn the next morning, ensuring the boats were loaded with men and ready to push out into the river as soon as light permitted. Three thousand more in the first round; it could have been four except for the losses last night but he had since been told that most of those had been located in good condition further downstream. It would take most of the day to haul them back to the embarkation point but they should be available by the following day. Some might even be ready for this afternoon. When he was confident that all was ready to go he reported to Mazardes. The sky was just lightening and the first craft were easing into the river as he presented himself.

"Eleven thousand men in the bridgehead at the moment sir," he said crisply. "Three thousand more to be landed this morning and at least that many again before nightfall. The evening transport last night resulted in the loss of some boats in the darkness but we could probably put a third batch over there if you require it."

Mazardes thought to himself for a moment. "Come up to the watchtower with me," he answered at last. Together the two men looked out across the river in the dawn light.

“You were there last night, Mirines?”

“Yes, sir. I returned just before midnight, to make sure we had crews to haul the boats upstream for an early start this morning.”

“What's known about the Roman reaction?” Mazardes asked.

“They have set themselves to building a defensive line around our bridgehead. There seems no inclination to attack it.”

“So perhaps I was over-anxious,” Mazardes confessed. “But better that than being complacent. Anyway, that confirms my expectation that they are not strong enough to attack us. I'd be surprised if there's much more than a legion over there and they're hoping to contain or delay us until they get reinforcements. Perhaps they're hoping that some of the men washed away on the bridge might have survived and might be able to return in time, enough to form another legion or two.”

Mazardes turned to face his subordinate. “You've done very well, Mirines; very well indeed,” he said approvingly. “I hadn't expected to be in this position for another couple of days! But I think we would do well to put as many as we can on the bank, and break out tomorrow morning. How many do you estimate can be on the other side of the river by then?”

“I'm confident we can have seventeen thousand by sunset; perhaps another three thousand if we continue by moonlight,” Mirines answered. “But I don't think we have the space to deploy the full twenty thousand. I recommend we only work until dusk, and spend the night in preparation and deployment.”

Mazardes nodded, as if to himself, as he considered this advice. “We have no artillery over there yet; but if we attack on the full front, then we will either break through in one or more weak spots or spread them so thin that sheer weight of numbers will be enough.” Mazardes came to a decision. “Yes, seventeen thousand will be enough. We break out tomorrow morning, before the Romans can add to their numbers. I'll go across in an hour's time to take command over there. I need to plan this myself, on site.”

Silo was relieved but not surprised to wake and discover that his force had not yet been detected. He ordered extra rations for his men; there might not be a mid-day break and he wanted them in full strength. The gods were with him, he assured himself as he looked at the sky; the northerly wind was blowing the smoke of his camp fires away from the Armenians. He gave orders deploying his legions on a three-mile-wide front and ten ranks deep. The left wing was protected by the river, the right wing by half of his cavalry, and the remaining cavalry was held in reserve behind the centre. It was almost mid-morning when the battle line started moving forward. The men started chewing on dried meat and biscuit and drinking their water on the march to ensure they were in good condition should they encounter resistance.

They came across the enemy an hour before noon on the river bank. This was the landing site for the boats returning from carrying Armenian troops across to the bridgehead, and not defended at all. The lightly-clothed workman fled at the first sight of the Romans and there was no way the Roman heavy infantrymen

could run them down. Silo knew he had lost the advantage of tactical surprise, but would the enemy be able to react in time?

"Pontius, it's good to have you back at my side!" Silo said to Telesinus riding beside him. "Now for another taste of battle after all those years back in Italy. Please, get out to the cavalry on the right wing. I want you to sweep around the rear of their defensive wall, and come down on them from the north. Don't attack any prepared defences but cause as much panic as you can without risking your force." Telesinus snapped off a salute and kicked his horse to a run.

"Gnaeus, collect half our reserve cavalry, and take them out to the right wing." Silo said to Priscus at his other side. "Take with you a defensive attitude. Protect our flank and don't lose sight of that role. If you see an opportunity too good to miss then send a limited force after it and call up reserves to replace them." Just as Priscus was pulling his horse around, Silo added. "And please keep me informed of any developments. I'm relying on your judgement, Gnaeus."

A messenger galloped his horse up to Mirines and leapt from the saddle, saluting urgently. Mirines was getting in order the men for the second round of transfers to the bridgehead. "Yes, man; what's the problem?" he asked impatiently.

"Romans approaching from the south sir," he said breathlessly. "The boat retrieval crews report thousands of them approaching on foot."

"How many thousands, man?" he asked impatiently.

"I have only the reports of the sailors who ran from them, sir. They report heavy infantry moving north in line abreast, and maybe ten ranks deep. The line stretched from the river bank to the road, maybe further but they couldn't see over the road embankment from where they were at water level."

"The road is only fifty paces, maybe seventy, from the bank at that point," Mirines retorted. "So maybe a thousand men, even if they are ten deep – which I doubt. Men running from the enemy are always ready to exaggerate their numbers!"

Mirines looked to the embarkation points. Half of the men were already aboard and several of the boats had already pushed out into the river. It seemed that the local staff, having been through the process half-a-dozen times already, would be able to manage without him.

"Carry on, Harbourmaster!" he said jokingly to the subaltern barking orders. "It seems some of the Romans were washed up on our side of the River and are causing problems. I'll take some of those in reserve to sort them out."

Mirines swung onto the saddle of his mount and kicked it into a canter for the closest of the main barracks. He had almost thirty thousand men at his disposal but he didn't want to interrupt the shipping schedule. The handling of supplies and the other logistics of this crossing would be too easily thrown out by any over-reaction. Perhaps a thousand Romans actually sighted and perhaps more out of sight. But was it likely that many would survive an uncontrolled landing with the River in full flow? And even those that did would only have survived if unladen by weapons or armour. A fully-armoured heavy infantryman would sink

like a stone! And how far would they be scattered? No; to get this close to us so quickly, they could only be a small force without armour or significant weapons who had been thrown up in close proximity to each other. Mazardes had calculated that there were up to ten legions swept away by the River, but probably less. If as many as one in ten had survived, how many of them would have lost their equipment in the process?

Mirines was convinced that not even a hundred men could have survived as a proper fighting force. If the reports of ten ranks deep had any truth to them it would be that only the front rank had weapons! But he would play it safe. He decided as he reached the gate to the barracks that he would call out ten thousand of his own men, just in case.

“Soldier, call out General Assembly!” be ordered the sentry. Soon a horn was blaring and men running to join their formations in the central parade ground. The Barracks Administrator stood at their head.

“Zanerges, how many men do you have here?” He asked the Administrator.

“Just over twelve thousand, sir!”

“Excellent! I want them deployed in battle formation, stretching from the bank to a mile inland, facing south. You have half an hour to get it done!” Mirines ordered. As he did so he thought to himself, ‘How much easier it is to simply make a decision and give the orders instead of having to persuade an old woman like Mazardes! Life is so much easier with the Commander on the other side of the River!’

Blast! Where was his cavalry? Five thousand cavalry should be in their own camp just south of here, and another five thousand in another camp just to the north. Most of them were cataphracts. These were huge, heavily-armoured beasts intended for close-quarter fighting on flat ground rather than the light cavalry used for scouting or mobile warfare. But perhaps he should send out some of them unarmoured, to act as scouts.

“I’ll be back in half an hour, Zanerges; have your men deployed!”

Within minutes he had reached the southern of the two cavalry barracks. A thousand men were told to ride out south immediately, unarmed and unarmoured, line abreast over a two-mile front, and report back with information about enemy numbers, types and deployment. They were told emphatically not to try to engage the enemy. The others were told to prepare for battle.

The infantry under Zanerges was in the final phase of forming their line when the scouts came up to him with their report. “General; the Romans number some twenty to thirty thousand, and are advancing in battle line. Their front extends from the river to some three miles inland!”

Mirines was shocked. It took a moment for him to find a voice. “What types?” he gasped out eventually.

“Almost all are heavy infantry, but there are about a thousand cavalry on their right flank.”

“Right!” Mirines recovered his wits. “You! Rouse the entire southern camp, and send them against the flanking cavalry. When you have seen to them, circle around and take the infantry from the rear as we advance on their front.”

Then he turned to the second scout. "And you, go rouse the northern cavalry camp. Tell them to report here as a reserve." Then to the third. "And you go rouse the other infantry barracks. I want them here immediately, ready for battle."

Twenty to thirty thousand Romans! Mirines was stunned. Still, we have the numbers on them, and the advantage of ten thousand heavy cavalry as well.

Zanerges' men were now ready to move. But should he advance just yet? Better to wait for the men from the northern barracks to arrive. Meanwhile, he would do something about that wide Roman front. The cavalry should be able to cut it to pieces, but better to leave nothing to chance.

"Zanerges! Have your men turn left and flank march two miles inland; the men from the northern barracks can move into this part of the line." Zanerges saluted and started relaying orders to his subordinates.

That was when he heard the sound of approaching horse behind him. That was quick! he thought to himself. Whoever is in command of the northern cavalry is sharp; he deserves a reward for this!

Then Mirines turned to greet the commander and give orders. But he didn't see five thousand cataphracts approaching. Only a herd of bare horses in panic with a few desperate men clinging on bareback. In amongst them were two with proper harness and saddles. These veered across the mob and made their way to him.

"General! We were attacked by Roman cavalry, completely by surprise. Almost all the men were slaughtered and many of the horse. We released what we could before escaping."

Roman cavalry! To the north! For the first time Mirines felt a cold dread clutching at his throat.

"Did you see anything of the northern infantry and central infantry barracks?" he asked fearfully.

"No sir; they weren't on our path."

Then Mirines realised that the embarkation point was also in the north, and the men were equipped for transport, not battle. Whoever was still on shore would have been butchered. If the Romans found them, that is. Perhaps the Romans had not swept all the way to the river.

"How many Roman cavalry?" he asked.

"I couldn't tell, sir. At least two thousand but it might have been ten thousand. I had no overview of what was happening."

"Go to the bank where the boats are taking on our men. Tell them to dress for battle, and come here immediately."

"It's too late, sir. We saw the Romans had reached the river bank," the cavalryman replied.

Mirines felt overwhelmed. "Then ride to the two infantry barracks, order them to prepare for battle and report here and then you report back on their condition."

"Yes, sir!" the cavalryman saluted and turned his horse.

Mirines looked south again, and saw Roman infantry just breasting the ridge, half a mile away. His heart sank. The line was bristling with javelins!

These men were equipped from front rank to rearmost! His dream of a thin Roman front backed by men who would rely on the weapons of the fallen vanished like a mist. He also realised that his order to flank march Zanerges inland was the worst possible thing he could have done. The Romans now had an overlap on both flanks. Only the cavalry he had sent inland against the Roman flank could save him from being surrounded.

Which possibility was exercising the mind of Gnaeus Priscus at that very moment. When he saw a cataphract horde more numerous than his own light cavalry thundering towards him he sent a rider immediately to ask for all reserves to be sent to him. But even as he looked at his messenger riding away he saw those reserves swing to the left flank. He watched with understanding, even if with regret, to see them break through the Roman infantry line to wrap around the Armenian right flank. There was butchery going on over there!

But how do I stop the same treatment here? he pondered. He looked at the legionaries marching ten deep beside him. Then he saw the answer. He rode over to the legate in charge of the legion on the extreme flank, and quickly explained what he had in mind. There was no argument, just agreement. Runners started taking orders out to the commanders of cohorts and centuries. Priscus sent a rider to Silo to inform him of the plan.

Having done this, Priscus called all his cavalry to him, and ordered them to fall back behind and wide of the right flank, as though running from battle.

The Armenian cataphract commander was pleased but not entirely surprised to see the Roman cavalry flee the battle. There were only light cavalry, not armoured, and there would be barely a thousand of them against his force of four thousand! He led his force around the now-exposed flank to fall on the rear of the infantry line.

As he swept around the end of the Roman line the legionaries in the rear ranks stopped in unison and turned through a half circle. The rearmost rank jammed the butts of their javelins into the ground at an angle, and the second-last row stepped up to close the gaps in the last row and did the same. A single row of deadly stakes, at half-pace centres, were presented to his cavalry. Then he noticed that the front rows of the Roman line had also stopped their progress after a dozen more paces, and done the same manoeuvre to the front. The entire Roman wing legion had formed an elongated box half a mile long, a skilful improvisation of the classic response for heavy infantry against a cavalry attack.

What to do now? His orders were to take the infantry from the rear, not just the flanking legion. Now that this legion has stopped advancing, that has taken them out of the battle as effectively as annihilating them. He decided to continue across their rear until he found a part of the line that allowed him an attack. If they all turned and defended, then he would have immobilised them all, the perfect situation for his own infantry to take them in detail.

He called to his men to follow him, their horses already starting to blow from the gallop under full armour of more than two miles already completed. But this mission was urgent. If he could run down the entire length of the Roman rear and force them onto the defensive, the day would be won. He didn't realise that

behind him his force was being drawn into a long, thin ribbon as it rounded the choke point the end of the Roman line, like at the post at one end of a hippodrome.

He was half-way down the Roman rear within a few more minutes, and each section of the Roman line had stopped to defend against him. He was elated! Then he looked over his shoulder to see the perilously thin line behind him. Some of his forces were still not around the Roman flank, and he had two thousand horse strung out over a distance of almost two miles. That doesn't matter, he told himself. They have nothing to attack us with! If we can freeze these Romans in place the infantry will finish them off! Dropping his pace to a canter to spare his horse, he continued along the Roman rear.

There were about five hundred Armenian horse still to turn the corner when Priscus ordered the counter-attack from wide on the flank. They fell on the left flank of the enemy, the side with no weapon for the typical right-handed cavalry man, and made short work of them as the nearby ranks of infantry advanced in a solid wall to stab their javelins at their enemy from the other side. Then maintaining formation, they started to roll up the long, thin wisp of Armenians behind the Roman line. Many of the Armenian horses were blown and couldn't resist the attack. Those that could still make good speed ran after their commander to re-unite into a proper line of battle, but this cost them their last reserves of endurance.

By the time the Armenian commander was aware of the counter-attack he was already in no position to resist it. Instead he called for all his men to follow him around the western flank of the Roman forces, and back to the safety of the Armenian lines. Too late he saw that the Roman left flank was anchored on the river bank and there was no way around! "Flee to the south!" he bellowed over the din. "To the south!" and pulled his horse around to run for safety. His fellows followed him.

But Priscus saw this and cut away at an angle to intercept. His fresher horses proved the difference. The Armenian cataphracts, after thinking themselves masters of the field at one stage, were annihilated. As he cantered back from the slaughter he realised that the infantry had resumed their advance. The Armenian right had been badly mangled by Roman cavalry and once the Roman advance resumed and threatened them with envelopment the rest of their line had begged for their lives. They had heard too much about the Roman preference for live captives to fight a hopeless battle.

Priscus sought out Silo to report. He found him just before dusk.

"Gnaeus!" Silo beamed at him. "A brilliant ploy! I never knew you had so much imagination!"

"Actually I don't, General," Priscus smiled in embarrassment. "I only have a good memory. And I remember a certain exercise on Rhodes where a foolish commander was defeated because he pushed his cavalry too far and spread it too thin."

Silo gave a roar of laughter and slapped his subordinate on the shoulder. "A lesson well learnt, and brilliantly applied!" Suddenly Silo was serious. "How many casualties?"

"One hundred and eight, sir. Out of a total force of nine hundred and twelve. That is worse than decimation, and we were the victors!"

"Yes," Silo agreed sadly. "We've become too accustomed to winning without having to fight! I want to get back into that habit if I can."

"Sir, if I may make a suggestion," Priscus said tentatively. Silo nodded. "I suggest that each man killed or permanently maimed be given ten shares in the spoils, and this be sent to his family. It would be good for morale if the men know their families will be well cared-for if the worst happens."

Silo thought for a moment, his lips compressed. "An excellent idea, Gnaeus. That will be my policy from this day on. Anyone who begrudges his fallen comrades that much respect can volunteer for the front ranks himself!"

"And how did the rest of the day go, sir?"

"Pontius couldn't believe his luck!" Silo enthused. "He fell upon a cavalry barracks undetected. He slaughtered most of the men before they could get dressed after their mid-day sleep! He cut all their horses loose, just in case. Then he found an infantry barracks and did the same. Then his flank on the River found a couple of thousand more infantry, stripped and with all equipment packed for a river crossing. They didn't last long.

"Then he found a second infantry barracks; these were better prepared, having heard the panic all around them. Pontius just walked up to them and told them that the Armenian forces had been defeated, would they prefer to surrender on the spot or die when our infantry reached them? They surrendered and he left half his forces to march them north away from any weapons before they realised that they had been tricked. Then he came back south with the rest of his men and joined the attack on the Armenian right. When the enemy saw our cavalry coming in from behind their own lines they realised that they were surrounded."

"How many casualties, sir?" Priscus asked.

"Fifty three cavalry from Pontius, sixty two from the reserve I sent on the flank attack, and five infantry from the right flank as they helped you with the first stage of your battle."

"Then it has been a good day, sir. Fewer than one man lost for each one hundred enemy captured or killed. It could have been so much worse."

"Yes, it could have been," Silo agreed. "And it will be much better still, when we hear from Piso about their forces on the other bank. You probably didn't notice, spending so much of the battle inland, but there are over ten thousand more enemy on the other side of the river. Piso has them locked up tight, so they will all be more captives, more booty."

On the other side of the River, Mazardes was perplexed. It was obvious to him that Mirines had been defeated. The failure of the afternoon ferry delivery suggested that and the boats and bodies drifting down the river confirmed it. Should he attack now and break out before the Romans could strengthen their position? He had earlier decided that the breakout must happen at first light, but there would be no more reinforcements from the other side now so any delay was costing him any advantage he might still hold.

"General! There's a Roman officer presenting himself at the lines for parley." The runner at his tent flap broke into his thoughts.

"Very well, I'm coming," he responded. The runner disappeared.

"Good afternoon, General," the Roman greeted him in sweet Greek. "My name is Marcus Paulus and General Gallienus sends you his best wishes."

"What sort of best wishes does a man send an enemy?" Mazardes replied gruffly.

"Wishes that you would no longer be his enemy, sir," the officer replied. "He invites you or any of your officers to inspect our fortifications against you and to then return to your camp. He does this trusting that you would see that to live is better than to die, as you surely would die were you to attempt anything heroic."

"You would allow us to inspect your defences?" Mazardes scoffed.

"Yes, lord, and to take notes, draw sketches, whatever you want," Paulus continued cheerfully. "As I said earlier, General Gallienus wishes you well and would rather you and your men live, not die."

Mazardes contemplated the Roman for a moment. "I'll send an officer to take advantage of your offer if you would wait here for a moment. Thank you."

Mazardes walked back to his lines and called the first officer he saw. "You; the Romans are offering a free inspection of their defences! Go, take note of what you see and report back to me immediately." Two hours later the officer was back. Mazardes had his bridgehead commander with him.

"General, and sir, they have men along this entire front," the officer swept a finger across a sketch map he had produced, "about ten per pace in strength. The line is about a mile long, so that is ten thousand infantry. In addition, they have eight catapults, the ones they call onagers, with piles of clay pots beside each. These pots are full of oil, and are set alight just before being thrown. I counted over two hundred pots at each onager. As I counted them the officer in charge laughed at me. He said that the pile I was counting was only part of his store; their practice was to keep only a small store near the catapult to ensure a stray flame couldn't consume all of their ammunition.

"They also have over twenty large mechanical cross-bows, the ones they call ballistae; each can fire a heavy armour-piercing bolt, or up to twenty light arrows. These are stationed about forty paces behind the stakes and ditch, and positioned so that the earthworks protect the Romans in their ditch but the attacking soldiers would be held up by the stakes on a crest and exposed to their fire." The officer stood straight and addressed Mazardes formally.

"I must report, sir, that we have no hope of breaching that line without our own artillery and good anti-siege equipment. I suggest we not attack tomorrow, but instead set to constructing a number of wheeled vehicles that could protect our first wave against these ballistae and brush aside the stakes. I expect these would take a few days to construct, and hope that the onagers don't destroy us with those fire-bombs as we work."

"Thank you, soldier," Mazardes replied. "Please relay the word that we will not attack in the morning. Further orders will follow after we have discussed our tactics."

The next morning started with a cheery scene. One of the spare bridge sections had been floated out into the river and anchored just off the pier on the western bank. It started to drive piers into the river bed. "Excellent!" Silo applauded. "Piso is building a bridge! Something permanent! That will be handy for supply and communications, but even more effective in sending a message to Tigranes. We're coming after you!"

"Speaking of messages, sir; have you sent back to that town and the village that they can come and go as they please?"

"Good point, Gnaeus," Silo agreed. "Even if the three days hasn't expired, why not let them know. Send a rider south and tell our men to get here as soon as possible."

As they stood watching the pile-driver another bridge section slipped down the river and took up station. Piso was sending out multiple barges; he obviously intended to build this bridge quickly. Meanwhile Paulus was standing in front of the Armenian bridgehead again. Mazardes came out to meet him.

"Good morning, and compliments from General Gallienus again," he greeted Mazardes cheerily. "I hope the tour yesterday was informative?"

"Yes, thank you, lord Paulus," Mazardes replied. "We will need to think about this situation more carefully than we had expected."

"I urge you to think more carefully, General." Paulus responded with a smile. "But not for too long. General Gallienus is eager to welcome you in person, and would be both disappointed and insulted were you to persist in hoping to escape. He is of the opinion that you are a wise man and would not willingly force us to slaughter you and the men who have entrusted their lives to you. But if you haven't agreed to surrender by noon today he will be forced to conclude that he has over-estimated you." Paulus smiled apologetically. "Please don't prove my commander wrong. I'll be back at noon to accept your surrender," Paulus concluded.

"Thank you, lord Paulus. Now, if you will excuse me...?" Mazardes bowed slightly and turned back to his lines. As he did so he caught sight of the second pile-driver moving into position. Mirines had seemed such a totally competent officer! Yet there was no doubt that he had been defeated by the mere cohort or two could have been scratched together from survivors of the wash-away. How could he have let this happen?

Mazardes called together his senior staff and explained the position. He informed them that he intended to surrender. Any who didn't agree would be permitted to try his luck escaping, either by the river or by hiding until the Romans went away. All agreed to surrender with him. All had heard the stories of Rome's humane treatment of captives and they fully expected all officers to be permitted their freedom after processing. Life would not be too bad.

Back in Italy the devolution of Tribal matters to the Tribal Houses was having a major unforeseen effect. Cato rose to address the Republic Senate. “Conscript Fathers!” he exclaimed indignantly. “There is a great travesty, a great hypocrisy, being perpetrated in Italy! The Roman Republic, ever gracious and generous, has first granted citizenship to our Italian brothers. Then, we granted the Italian tribes autonomy to raise their own taxes and spend their own revenues.

“This was in response to the perpetual complaint that Italians were being taxed to subsidise Rome! That is right, Conscription Fathers; absurd as it might seem, this allegation was made without any attempt ever being made in this House to demonstrate the accuracy of this complaint! It was merely an assertion without proof. Yet, the Roman Republic, ever generous, offered to meet this groundless complaint, this false perception, in the fairest possible way; we granted that Rome would not tax Italians but raise its own finances for its own costs and that the Italian Tribes would likewise be responsible for raising the funds to pay for their own needs.

“In this way, whether the complaint had been justified or not in the past, it would henceforth be clear that there was no hint of Italians being forced to pay for Rome's expenses. What could be more just, more generous, than this?”

Cato turned, sweeping his arms theatrically. “Indeed, it was one piece of legislation that both I and my colleague Lucius Cornelius, that both Boni and Italianists, welcomed whole-heartedly. But how have we been repaid for our just, honourable and generous treatment of the Italian tribes?” he asked rhetorically. “They have imposed crushing taxes on land within their boundaries!

Whereas they once, falsely, claimed that Italians were being forced to pay for Rome's costs; they now are demanding that Roman landlords shoulder the burden of their Tribal costs!

“What breath-taking duplicity is this!” he exclaimed. “The mere, unfounded assertion that Italians were being unfairly burdened was pretext enough to completely re-shape the Republic! Yet here, the unarguable, black-and-white letter of their new laws requires Romans to pay more than half of their total Tribal income! It appears that Italians must not pay taxes to Rome, but Romans must pay more than half of the Tribal taxes to Italians!” He slowly turned to take in the whole chamber.

“This is totally unacceptable! These Tribal laws must be struck down by this Republic Senate as contrary to the Mos Majorum!” Cato returned to his seat.

Drusus stood. “You have the floor, Marcus Livius,” Vatia responded.

“Thank you, Publius Servilius,” Drusus acknowledged before turning to the tiered seats. “Conscript Fathers; you all know the deep respect I have for Lucius Porcius; a respect forged while sharing the consulship through some of the most dangerous times in our recent history,” Drusus started. Together Lucius Porcius and I as consular colleagues acted as a team to restore order after the coup by Sulpicius. We were consular colleagues during the worst years of the war against Mithridates. Together with Lucius Cornelius we averted the attempted coup by Strabo.

“We were successful in all those troubled times because we each had a profound respect for the other. Although we didn't always agree – yet we agreed much more often than either of us might have expected – yet when we didn't agree we resolved our disagreement by discussion, by reason, by assuming that the other's viewpoint had some validity, and our own viewpoints might not be the absolute truth. We were confident that there was always a way forward that would be acceptable to both.

“I think this is another such occasion. Yes, I uphold the principle that Romans should not have to pay Italian taxes, any more than Italians should pay Roman taxes!” Drusus said forcefully. “But is this simple analysis what is really happening?” he asked more quietly. Look at a typical example of such a law, that of the Marsi. Contrary to the impression some might have gained, this law does NOT tax Romans! It taxes the land, regardless of who owns it! Whether it is held by a Roman Senator as an absentee landlord, or a Marsic small farmer, the tax is the same. Is this unjust?

“Not at all, conscript Fathers; it is no different from the Roman tax levied on cloth landing in Ostia! Whether it is purchased by a Roman or by an Italian, the cloth attracts the same tax! Thus an Italian is paying a Roman tax, no less than in the case of the Marsic land tax a Roman might pay an Italian tax. The tax is not levied on the person, but upon the taxable item! So perhaps if those who complain about this Land Tax would prefer not to pay it, the answer is as simple as that for the Italian who doesn't want to pay the Linen Tax in Rome; don't own land within the boundaries of the Marsi and don't buy linen in Rome!” Drusus swung around on his feet.

“But apart from such actions taken at the individual level, there is also a response that the Roman tribes can adopt. Why don't the Roman tribes adopt a similar Land Tax, here in Rome? That way, any Italian who owns land in Rome would be required to pay the tax to Rome, just as a Roman would be required to pay tax on Italian lands. In fact, what could be better? A iugerum of land in Rome would be perhaps a hundred times the value of a iugerum of land in the hills and attract a hundred times the tax!” Drusus smiled. And as he paused, his smile was transformed into a sneer.

“But that isn't what these Land Tax complaints are about, is it? Let's speak honestly to each other about this! Let's put away pretence! The basis of this complaint is not that the tax is being paid to the Marsi; the real complaint is that it is being paid at all! Those who make these complaints have a fundamentally simple view of taxes; that taxes should be imposed on everyone except themselves! They approve of taxes on financial dealings, because Senators do not make their income from finance. But they don't approve of taxes on land, because that is the one big source of income open to Senators.

“Let taxes be imposed on everything we *don't* do; but there must be no taxes imposed that affect *my* income!” That seems to be the common thread through this complaint as for every other special-interest group. This is not an argument about justice or about fairness or about the Mos Majorum; all those lines are no more than cloaks to hide personal greed.” Drusus smiled slightly.

“Not that Lucius Porcius is a greedy man! Far from it!” he added. “But Lucius Porcius is an excellent advocate, doing his proper duty for his clients, many of whom might be affected by these Land Taxes. Lucius Porcius is an honourable man, doing his duty as a Patron. And I respect him for that.” Drusus sat.

Octavius stood.

“You have the floor, Gnaeus Octavius.”

“Thank you, Publius Servilius.” Octavius smiled and shook his head quietly. “Marcus Livius spoke well to one particular point. But he doesn't seem to understand the interactions of this law with others. Rather than embarrass any of my colleagues, I will speak of my own circumstances as an example,” Octavius started into his presentation proper.

“I don't think of myself as a greedy man. I don't begrudge paying my taxes, and I have that view primarily because I'm a dutiful man. I feel that Rome has been good to me, has shown me honour and respect, and has placed no small trust in me from time to time. Trust, honour and respect. This is the only coin that can buy the loyalty of an honourable man and Rome has thereby bought my loyalty. So I don't begrudge my taxes.” Octavius looked around the benches. “And, no doubt, nor do any of you here today.

“But there is a misfit between the different tax regimes that results in an injustice. Here in Rome I am subject to a Census. I am obliged to pay Tax on my taxable assets. It matters not whether these assets are in Rome or in the land of the Marsi or in Asia Province, I pay tax on them. But then I am obliged to pay a second tax on the land I own in the Marsic hills! I'm paying double tax on that land while a Marsic noble, living within the boundaries of his Tribe, pays only the one layer of tax.

“Why am I paying double tax? Not that I begrudge it, of course; but I would think that for many this law might create some hardship. Furthermore, such a system is not good for the Marsi, either. This liability to double tax will mean that investors are less likely to buy such land. This will depress the value of that land and tend to impoverish the very people whom this tax is meant to serve!

“Thus this Marsic tax, and similar taxes in other tribes, is both unjust to outsiders, and destructive of the prosperity of the Tribe itself! It helps no-one, harms everyone, and should be done away with for the Common Good! And that's why my colleague Lucius Porcius asserted that it is against the Mos Majorum; for what is the Mos Majorum, if not the principle that the Common Good must be maintained?”

Sulla stood.

“Lucius Cornelius, please speak.”

Sulla nodded his acknowledgement to Vatia in the Chair. “Gnaeus Octavius makes a very good point. Why should Romans be subjected to double taxes on land?” Sulla swept his eyes along the rows of seats. “But he misses a crucial point. Romans are not subjected to double taxes on land within Rome! And this is a hint of the underlying cause of what Gnaeus Octavius correctly recognises as an injustice. The injustice is this; that the Roman Houses tax a man on the land

he owns, regardless of where it is! In effect, the Roman Houses are claiming the right to tax land that is not within their jurisdiction! How would you respond if the Marsi declared a duty on all grain being landed in Ostia? Would you not be outraged? What right do they have to tax outside their boundaries? Yet you see no problem with the Roman Houses imposing taxes outside the boundaries of Rome!

“The correct resolution of this injustice is not to limit the rights of the Italian Houses to impose taxes within their own borders, but to restrict the taxes by Roman Houses to the same principle; they should revise their taxes to ensure they are not taxing what is not theirs to tax.”

Flaccus stood.

“Lucius Valerius.” Vatia recognised him.

“Thank you,” Flaccus said with a small bow to the Chair. “I find this debate most interesting. Both sides to have good grounds for their positions,” he opened. “But I must ask myself, what is to be gained by it? Other than an education for all present, that is. Because I am convinced that whatever we might decide here will have no legal power. It is simply not within our authority to set aside a revenue law imposed by a Tribe that applies to assets or activities entirely within the boundaries of that Tribe. End of Story!”

“At most, we might resolve to make a request to the various Tribes who have introduced these measures, but request is all it can be.” Flaccus smiled. “So rather than consuming more time, I suggest that we simply accept that the Praetors representing the Tribes concerned might report back to their people our concerns.”

Vatia spoke from the Chair. “I also find this debate very interesting, as Lucius Valerius says. But I agree that it's time-consuming, unlikely to reach a conclusion soon, and would not carry any authority anyway. And we have many other items to consider, not least being the events in Syria. So unless there is a motion of dissent, I rule that this debate be terminated and we move to a consideration of the Report from Gnaeus Priscus concerning the recent activity on the Syrian Question.” He looked around the chamber. No-one stood to dissent. “Thank you, Conscrip Fathers. Now, if Gnaeus Priscus could provide his Report.”

Priscus had arrived in Rome only the previous evening. He stood. “Thank you, Publius Servilius.” He turned to face the bulk of the Senate. “Conscript Fathers, I have with me a written Report from Quintus Poppeius Silo. As you will hear in the text, he has also instructed me to answer any questions that you might put to seek clarification of any part of this report.” Priscus unrolled a sheet of paper and started reading in a clear measured voice.

*Quintus Poppeius Silo, Governor of all Roman territories in Anatolia,
To Gnaeus Papirius Carbo and Publius Servilius Vatia, Consuls, and to the
Senate of the Roman Republic,*

Greetings!

As advised in previous reports, the Armenian king Tigranes attempted to seize part of our conquests from Pontus late last year. You will recall that this attempt was utterly defeated and his entire army either killed or captured.

As soon as weather permitted after winter I sent an embassy to Tigranes on this matter to ask why this action had been attempted, and to warn him that it could bring into question his status as Friend and Ally of the Roman People. Tigranes' response was disappointing. He insisted that Rome had acted improperly in opposing his advance. He further insisted that Rome apologise for its actions and that compensation be paid for all men and equipment lost by Armenia in this debacle. I considered this to be a deliberate insult to Rome and started planning a punitive raid as a way of showing him that Rome would not allow itself to be abused in this way.

This raid was overwhelmingly successful, to the point that there was no effective Armenian force between us and Tigranocerta. We advanced to the Tigris and sent an embassy demanding that all land west of the Tigris be considered appropriate restitution for the invasion of last year and the insult of this Spring. Tigranes, having no means of preventing us from marching even deeper into his lands, capitulated.

Thus Roman Syria has been extended to include Edessa and all lands north of the Parthian frontier as far as the Tigris. Administration of these lands under the Rufan System is being introduced as quickly as the supply of trained Administrators will allow.

I doubt Armenia will have the inclination to challenge Roman authority any time soon. Even if it develops the inclination I doubt it will have the resources to mount a serious campaign. The territory lost in this most recent campaign represent a significant proportion of his kingdom's pool of men of military age.

In all this, I have maintained my policy of clemency towards the populations transferred to Roman control. This is very effective in ensuring pacification of the new lands. The people actually rejoice that they are no longer under the former despot, however much they might consider themselves Armenians. The simple folk would prefer to be ruled by a benevolent and just foreigner rather than a tyrant of their own blood. I commend this approach to any other campaigns that Rome might undertake in the future.

Gnaeus Priscus, the bearer of this Report, distinguished himself in the main battle in this campaign. Despite his light cavalry being outnumbered five to one by Armenian heavy cavalry, he made good use of conditions and utterly destroyed the enemy cataphracts making a flank attack on our line. He thereby turned the battle. You may rely on him to provide any further information you require.

Priscus stopped reading and looked around the chamber. "Do you have any questions, Conscript Fathers?"

"If I may, Gnaeus Priscus," Vatia was first to speak. "By what authority did General Silo attack a Friend and Ally? I fear he is exercising somewhat more initiative than I feel comfortable with."

“There are several layers of answers to your question, Publius Servilius. The first is that he didn't attack a Friend and Ally. Tigranes attacked and invaded Roman territories last year. He thereby started a war against the Republic, forfeiting his Friend and Ally status. Piso Gallienus was sent to clarify this matter with him as soon as possible next Spring. Tigranes' response was to insult Rome and demand tribute – even though he disguised this by calling it 'compensation', there was no doubt that it was an ultimatum rather than a request. This confirmed that he was no longer a Friend and Ally.

“The second answer is that General Silo acted on his authority as Governor of Roman Anatolia. Part of his duty is to defend Roman interests in that area. His original plan for a punitive raid was intended to persuade Tigranes that further attacks would be met with a vigorous response. But the initial raid was so successful that the opportunity arose to permanently weaken this threat. It seemed foolish to let it slip.

“And the third answer is that to do anything less would have seemed a sign of weakness and thereby a betrayal of his duty.”

“And how many Roman lives were lost in this campaign?” Vatia continued coldly.

“Two hundred and twenty three cavalry and five infantry, sir. For more than forty thousand enemy captured and possession of an additional thirty million iugera of farming land, more than is under the plough in all of Italy.”

There was a gasp of disbelief from the Senators. So few lives lost, and so great a reward!

Sulla stood.

“Yes, Lucius Cornelius?” Vatia invited him to speak.

“Conscript Fathers, you might recall that when I was the Consul charged with the task of conducting the war against Mithridates I went to Rhodes to take up my command from Quintus Poppeus. When I arrived and saw how brilliantly he was training not only his men but also his officers, I realised that here was the man who could win any war. So I delegated him all of my authority and returned to Rome.

“Since then he has destroyed Mithridates, capturing all of Asia, Bithynia, Pontus and the rest of Anatolia, suffering amazingly few casualties in the process. He now has added to our possessions all of the former Seleucid kingdom and half of Armenia, again for a casualty count only a tiny fraction of what might have been expected. He is so great a soldier that his men would follow him in an assault on Hades, so confident are they that he would take them out the other side alive!

“But most importantly, the taxes now being collected from the East are many times greater than what they were before the Mithridatic War, despite the generosity of the Miletus Decree; and the entire province is at peace. Yes, there are even Greeks who formerly rebelled against Rome and joined hands with Mithridates, but who are now calling their sons 'Silon' in honour of this man!”

Sulla swept his eyes over the senators. “Make no mistake! Quintus Poppeus has made Rome honoured as a liberator rather than hated as an

oppressor! He has brought tranquillity to what had been the seething, resentful province of Asia, which no longer needs an expensive garrison to control. He has eliminated the threats from both Pontus and Armenia, two formerly powerful kingdoms that were an ever-present danger to Roman interests. And he has done this with few casualties, at great profit from booty, and greatly increasing our annual tax revenue in the process! This Report and the answers by Gnaeus Priscus don't surprise me. They confirm my opinion of Quintus Poppaeus as an extraordinary man, and I urge the Senate to extend his command in the East for another five years."

As Sulla resumed his seat the rest of the chamber rose to their feet cheering. The Italianists loved Silo, of course. He was proof that an Italian was the equal of any Roman. The Populares loved him because new conquests meant new opportunities for profit, especially when these lands were placid. And the Boni loved him because the Old Virtues dripped from every pore in his skin, more so than was the case with most Romans even from the Ancient Families. If they have to tolerate a token Italian, then better him than any other they could imagine!

Priscus met with the senior Italianists after the Senate meeting to share opinions and reactions to the day's proceedings. But this evening the talk was not about the Senate. It was about the campaign against Tigranes. The attempted rebellion and re-occupation of the Northern Pocket was old news, known from reports that had arrived before winter fell. The invitation into Syria and displacement of the Seleucids was also common knowledge. But Priscus' account of the crossing of the Euphrates was fresh news. The daring of deliberately allowing your army to be swept downriver left his listeners stunned. Silo was a general who moved entire armies with the agility of a single contubernium! Then discussion moved onto the perennial question; who should be supported for Consul in the coming year?

"Is there any choice?" Drusus asked. "Sextus Julius Caesar is eligible again next year. If the Populares nominate him, we would be bound to agree."

"Besides which, he's a good man for the job in any case," Vidacilius added.

"But he's a Popularis and that would mean two Populares in succession," Sulla objected. "We mustn't give them the impression that they are in control and we are just their allies. And didn't we put them on notice that we would be putting Lucius Glauca forward? They made no objection when that was raised with them."

"I'd like to know what the others think," Drusus mumbled. "I'll write to Quintus Poppaeus and Gaius Papius for their opinions. And Rufus, as well."

"Have you and Quintus Poppaeus spoken of these things?" Sulla asked Priscus to draw him into the conversation.

"Not at all, Lucius Cornelius," Priscus answered. "But I have no doubt that he would approve of any of his senior men. They are without doubt the finest military team ever assembled. You saw the training he put us all through on Rhodes, and they have learnt well. Any one of them would run rings around Alexander!" he finished with a joke.

"You speak of 'them', Gnaeus; why do you exclude yourself?" Sulla asked.
"The report read in the Senate said you had beaten overwhelming odds."

Priscus waved a hand dismissively. "It was a small action; I succeeded only because my opponent made a mistake. Lucius Glauca, Herius Asinius, Pontius Telesinus and Piso Gallienus are the real Military Men."

"You have discovered the secret to winning in war, Gnaeus; to draw the enemy into a mistake," Sulla assured him. "He made a mistake and you didn't."

Priscus shrugged. "Glauca is the man he tends to leave in independent command most often. He trusts him to make the right decisions by himself, as you might remember from the start of the campaign in Asia."

"Yes," Sulla recalled. "He was the man who was sent to Ephesus and then went on to Pergamum and Troas on his own initiative. An excellent commander in his own right."

"And he's a Samnite, if you think it wise to put up an Italian for the job," Priscus added. "Perhaps we should ask Quintus Poppaedius to come back with him to sing his praises. Herius Asinius will be more than capable to handling things in the meantime and he has Pontius Telesinus as a back-up."

Sulla looked over to Drusus, and then to the others listening in. All seemed in agreement.

"But what about Sextus Julius? We as much as much as pledged for him," Drusus asked.

"We suggest a double-ticket," Sulla said with an air of a decision being made. "We should have tried that when Ahenobarbus was the Boni's nominee. It was only the Metelli backing and Carbo's obscurity that gave the Boni top spot this year. With Quintus Poppaedius winning an entire province and saying how much was due to the New Man, and an ex-Censor with the dignitas of Sextus Julius on board as well... There is no way the Boni will be able to beat either of them." There was a general murmur of approval.

"Then let's see if Sextus Julius is available for a visit tonight," Drusus agreed.

It was the evening of the second day later when Sextus Julius welcomed the Italianist delegation into his atrium and then into his garden. The night was still and warm. Young Marius and Gnaeus Papirius Carbo were waiting there and stood to greet them.

"It is good to see you here tonight, Lucius Cornelius, Marcus Livius. And you too, Gnaeus and Caius," Carbo added as Priscus and Vidacilius followed the first two through the door. Carbo seemed genuinely pleased as he gave his right arm to each in turn. Young Marius was also pleasant. The old resentment towards Sulla had been completely erased.

"And how do you like Sicily, Caius?" Young Marius asked chattily. "It's good to meet with you before you return."

"Caius Papius had it set up so sweetly it governs itself!" Vidacilius answered. "This Rufan System is brilliant!"

"Yes, I've been speaking with Lucius Valerius about it," Carbo came into the conversation. Flaccus, as Head of Senate, had ensured that he had also been appointed Head of the Colleges Committee. He had expected the Boni members of the Committee to try to sabotage the Colleges and he wanted to be there to make sure it didn't happen. "He tells me that even some of the Boni have been brought around to supporting it."

Caesar poured wine for the four new arrivals and handed goblets around. "Your message said you wanted to talk about consuls for next year, Marcus Livius," Caesar took the opportunity to get to business quickly. "It was my belief that we had already agreed that you would support me when I became eligible again."

"Indeed, that was our general intention, even though we had not formally agreed to it," Drusus agreed casually. Caesar's expression hardened slightly. "There's no need to frown, Sextus Julius! We're here tonight to make that formal agreement and propose a double ticket." Drusus smiled away Caesar's concern.

"We should have done that against Ahenobarbus two years ago. But I think now is definitely the time to let the Boni know that they don't have a sacred right to one consul every year. We believe that we can take the second seat, behind you, if we play this properly."

Caesar raised an eyebrow in response to this. "Well! That would set them back on their heels, wouldn't it? Whom do you have in mind as your man?"

"Lucius Glauca," Drusus answered. "A leading Samnite, right-hand-man to Quintus Poppaedius, elected Praetor two years ago but posted back to Anatolia instead of a province."

Caesar frowned slightly as he pulled up a stool to join the others around the table. "Never held a governorship? Never actually acted as a Praetor, being called back to military duty? It might be hard to build him into a credible candidate."

"That won't be a problem by the time the elections are held," Drusus replied. "Quintus Poppaedius himself will come back to Rome to endorse his campaign. He will even ride in the Triumphal Chariot with Quintus Poppaedius to emphasise his contribution to the victory."

Caesar looked impressed, and nodded his approval. "Nothing like a Triumph to get the plebs behind a man. But are you certain that this will be allowed?"

"As far as the Boni will know, the Triumph will be for Quintus Poppaedius alone; and he's not eligible for re-election for another seven years so they won't quibble. If they do they'll only be buying themselves a great deal of popular dissatisfaction," Drusus explained. "It won't be until the Triumph has started that Lucius will make his appearance. By then it will be too late for them to do anything about it."

Caesar and Carbo looked to each other. "I think it'll work," Carbo said at last. "Specially when you look at the lack of talent from the Boni side. Last year Ahenobarbus made a complete fool of them all, and this year they had to resort

to a New Man who married into the Metelli. The Boni relying on a New Man! That shows how desperate they are!"

Caesar leant forward, brisk and businesslike. "So let me make sure I understand you. We will put out the impression that I am another compromise candidate, just like we have been doing for the last few years, and leaving them to nominate whomever they want. Then Quintus comes home in November for his Triumph and only then do we reveal our second string."

"Exactly!" Drusus agreed.

"Then let's do it!" Caesar affirmed enthusiastically. "I'd much prefer Glauca as my colleague than some Bonus bonehead!"

"We meet again, Quintus Poppaedius!" Sulla greeted the Old Warrior as he stepped through his street door and into Sulla's late autumn courtyard. "And Lucius! It's good to see you, too!" he added as Glauca followed Silo through the door.

"It is good to see you too, Lucius Cornelius," Silo beamed back as they took each other's right arm. Glauca followed suit.

"Would you care to take a warm bath?" Sulla asked. "Marcus Livius and the others won't be here until sunset."

"That would be most refreshing, thank you," Silo accepted the invitation. Sulla turned to the porters and slaves following their masters into the courtyard. "Set up in whatever rooms Jason indicates." Then to Jason "Have someone bring me a clean tunic and a warm cloak in the bathhouse."

Within a few minutes the three men were relaxing in the tepidarium. Silo felt the dust of the road being soothed out of his pores.

"All is well with the Triumph?" Sulla asked.

"Not a problem," Silo assured him. "It'll be a rather restrained affair. I want this to be a display of dignity and authority, not raw military power. Just in case some of the People are still afraid of an Italian takeover."

"A good decision there," Sulla responded. "Everyone knows you're the pre-eminent General of our generation already, so I think you do well to show a different perspective. It gives your reputation more depth." Sulla shifted on the submerged step in the pool, and slumped slightly to bring the water level up to his throat. "I've heard a few strange stories from the Italian tribes," Sulla said, changing the subject abruptly as was his long custom. "It seems that the Boni-aligned candidates are buying votes in a big way. It's costing them more than they could afford themselves, so they must be getting their cash from the Senatorial Boni."

"Why would they be doing that?" Silo asked. "The Boni have never shown any interest in Italian Tribal politics before."

"Are they trying to buy the Tribal Praetors, to lift their numbers in the Great Senate?" Glauca asked. "They might be thinking ahead, expecting Caesar to be the Senior Consul."

"I don't think so," Sulla replied. "They're only active in a few of the Tribes, not all of them; and not in the smaller ones, where it would be cheaper. They

seem to be most focused on the Tribal Houses of the Marsi, Picentines and Lucani.”

Silo thought for a moment. “Correct me if I am wrong here, Lucius Cornelius; I’ve been out of Italy for too long. But as a Marsi I know my tribe has moved to a representative Comitia rather than mass voting. That would mean that buying a representative would be more certain and effective all year, instead of having to organise the whole populace and then relying on hit-or-miss attendances. Are the other Tribes the same?”

“Good point, Quintus Poppaedius.” Sulla replied. “The Picentines, Hirpini, Vestini, Marrucini and the Lucani have also gone representative; but why are the Boni only targeting some of them?”

Silo shrugged. “Perhaps I should go home as soon as this triumph is out of the way. I could ask around.”

Sulla frowned at that. “I’m not so sure of that,” he said. “I think we need you here in Rome, to push Lucius’ candidature. He’ll be a late nomination, so we need to use every day to the fullest. We need you here, advocating him non-stop.”

“That’s what I will do, then,” Silo accepted the advice. “But I might send a letter or two to some friends.”

Silo’s second Triumph was held on a clear, still day in early winter. The chill at dawn gave way to a crisp morning. The sun, although bright, struggled to warm the streets as Rome saw a most surprising march. Only three legions had accompanied Silo back from Syria. Each of the men marching had been selected on one basis only; that they were coming home anyway. Each was either due for retirement or had requested release and been approved. All others remained on the Armenian frontier. So small an ‘army’ in a Triumph was a shock to those who had become accustomed to an endless stream of men, intended to impress the onlooker with huge numbers and create an impression of unstoppable power.

More shocking was the total absence of chained captives, inevitable as a way for a General to demonstrate what would be the fate of any who oppose him. Instead of a river of wretched humanity, there were only four men marching behind the Triumphal Chariot, and all finely dressed. They exuded poise and dignity, not grief. And most surprising was the Triumphal Chariot itself! A quadriga as tradition demanded, but wide enough in the body to allow two men to stand, both painted as Triumphantores, each with a laurel wreath held over his head by a slave standing behind.

The chariot eventually reached the Forum. When it was in front of the site of the Great Houses now well under construction the horses were pulled to a halt. Then the two Triumphantores turned in unison and saluted the walls rising from the foundations. Then it continued the hundred paces or so around the Forum to the Rostra.

Silo stepped down from the chariot and mounted the platform with a slow grace as the crowd roared his name. Glauca and the four foreigners followed him.

Silo motioned for silence to speak. After a few moments, every ear was straining to hear his words. “Fellow-citizens!” He announced. The crowd roared

again, but quickly fell back into silence. “You will have noticed that this is a most unusual Triumph,” he continued. “This day does not serve to glorify one man! No, not even two men, which I will explain later. Today is all about the Glory that is our Republic!” The crowd raised another roar.

“Which is why the first thing Lucius and I did on entering the Forum was to salute the site of the Great Houses.” Silo gestured emphatically towards the construction opposite him. “I am a servant of the Republic! Let a man's dignitas be measured by how well he serves! So now I want you to hear, not only from my lips but from the lips of foreigners, the greatness of our Republic.” Silo half-turned and gestured to one of the four dignitaries on the platform with him. I present to you Antiochus Eusebes Philopator, the last of the mighty Seleucids, whose territories once stretched from Asia to India!”

The crowd cheered again out of force of habit. But there was confusion in this response. Why is an enemy being presented so majestically? Eusebes spoke clearly but in Greek, a phrase at a time so it could be translated into Latin for the Head Count who knew no Greek.

“My ancestor was a General who fought at the side of the great Alexander! Yet never did Alexander, nor any of my forebears, enjoy such success as General Silo.” The crowd erupted. The sound died away again. “This is for two reasons,” Eusebes continued. “Not only because of brilliant leadership by the General and his officers. But also because each individual soldier played his part to perfection. A Republic that can produce men such as these must surely be the greatest nation that has ever existed.” Another roar rose from the crowd. Eusebes turned towards Silo.

“General Silo, I entrust my people to the wisdom and care of the Roman Republic. I deliver into your hands, as a representative of the Roman Republic, all lands, titles and authority to which I have ever held any claim.” Eusebes bowed deeply, and stepped backwards away from the Speaker's position.

The crowd erupted again into shouts, and a chant of “Silo! Silo! Silo!” took form.

Silo stepped forward and called for quiet again. “Please; if you must chant, then let your chant be ‘Roma! Roma! Roma!’” he demanded. “Now I introduce to you Paracles, Governor of Antioch.”

Paracles stepped forward. He also spoke in Greek, aided by a translator. “General Silo and his men move with such skill and discipline that his cavalry were at the gates of Antioch before we had even realised he had landed!” Paracles started. Cheering interrupted him. “As King Eusebes just said, this is an army that would have made Alexander weep with envy!” The cheers swelled again. “But when we saw this mighty army outside our walls, we were not distressed. Not in the least!” Paracles looked around the Forum as his words were translated.

“We were not distressed, but overjoyed! For the whole world knows that the Roman Republic rules its peoples with justice and with dignity, and brings prosperity to all who enjoy her governance. Immediately, I begged General Silo to take my city under Rome's protective wing, and urged all other cities in Syria to do likewise. The General was merciful and granted my request. Our people

are now proud to be part of the Roman World!” Paracles bowed to the crowd and stepped backwards away from the speaker's position as the crowd resumed its roar.

Silo gestured to the third foreigner, who stepped up to the rail. “My name is Eugenes. I was the commander of all Armenian forces in the north,” he started. This brought a different reaction from the crowd. A low rumble of booing rose from their throats. Eugenes waited them out. “I lost my entire army.” That got the crowd cheering!

“I have learnt one very noteworthy feature of how General Silo operates. He does not commence a battle unless he has already won it. He treasures the lives of all his men and does not risk them lightly. Instead of leaving things to chance he prepares his ground, and is prudent in all his planning. Part of this planning is that he ensures his subordinate officers are as clever, as skilful, as keen in their judgement, as he is himself! And furthermore, they are so skilful, under his training, that he trusts them to put his plans into action or to change them as they think best at the time.

“When my army was lost, it was lost almost entirely to the work of one of his subordinate officers, acting on his own initiative but within General Silo's broad instructions. And he suffered almost no casualties in doing so. He simply swallowed me up.” Eugenes turned to face Silo. “For a nation to throw up a soldier as good as you, sir, speaks much for that nation.” The crowd rose to another cheer, thinking that Eugenes had finished. But the men on the platform waited for silence to return. “For a nation to throw up a soldier as good as you, sir, speaks much for that nation,” Eugenes repeated. “But for it to produce a whole team of such men as you command is beyond the scope of any nation except the Roman Republic.” Eugenes stepped away, to make room for Mazardes, as the crowd started cheering again.

Mazardes started speaking as soon as the noise dropped sufficiently. “I am Mazardes, former Commander of all Armenian forces in the west. When I confronted General Silo, I had parity of troops with him, a fast-flowing river six hundred paces wide between us, and a well-fortified defensive line. There was absolutely no way General Silo would be able to break my line. If he tried, I would trap him on the bank of the river and crush him! I was confident that the result would be annihilation.” The crowd started cat-calling at this point.

“Well, the General did try. As a result, I lost fifty thousand men, while his army suffered some two hundred casualties. It was annihilation, as I expected; but I was the one annihilated. Even now, after General Silo has been kind enough to explain to me how he achieved this miracle, I still have difficulty believing that his plan actually worked. It could only have succeeded because of the excellent skills of the team of brilliant subordinates that he has built around himself. That attitude would never be adopted in a Kingdom. No king would tolerate subordinates who are his equals. Only a Republic can produce such men!” Mazardes stepped back, glad that his minor confession was all that would be required of him to become a comfortably-well-off citizen under the patronage of a consular.

Silo was at the rail again, motioning for quiet. At last he got it. "You have heard these men acknowledge that only Rome can produce the sort of men who had conquered them! Only Rome, where power is shared among citizens. Unlike a kingdom where power is concentrated into the hands of one man jealous of anyone else showing potential! Only a Republic such as ours is capable of such great things. Long live Rome!"

At this prompting the crowd took up a new chant. "Vivat Roma! Vivat Roma!" Long live Rome!

After a short time Silo gestured for quiet again. "You have also heard them say how much the success of this campaign depended on the quality of the members of my team. I agree with that assessment. Without my team this victory would not have happened!" More cheering rose from the Forum, and fell away again. "So I present to you Lucius Glauca, my best officer!" He threw his right hand out towards Glauca, who took it in the traditional Roman grip and stood beside his commander.

"In the very first action of the war against Mithridates, it was Lucius who successfully found the only place on the entire Asian coast that could serve as our bridgehead. And he did this of his own initiative, actually going well beyond my orders at the time. But this was not insubordination; quite the opposite! Because when he discovered that conditions were not as I had assumed, he knew I expected him to show initiative in his independent command.

"Ever since that first action, Lucius has been my right arm. He has been the man to whom I entrusted the northern front when I took personal command of the southern, and to whom command of the southern front fell when I was personally in the north. I knew that his judgement and skill were so great that he would always make the right decisions, no matter what the enemy threw at him! I didn't give him orders, so much as meet with him for purposes of co-ordination.

"Here is a Son of the Republic, and entirely worthy of it! That is why we shared the chariot today. This victory is his no less than mine! But most of all it is Rome's victory, because only in our Republic could such a command structure be so successful!" The crowd went delirious with patriotic joy. The chant of "Vivat Roma!" started again, and continued until voices became exhausted. Silo and Glauca stood shoulder to shoulder throughout it.

"Sextus Julius, meet Lucius Glauca. He will be your consular colleague next year," Drusus said as he led Caesar into his triclinium. Glauca, Silo and Sulla all stood to greet him.

"That was a very impressive show you put on today, Quintus Poppaeus," Caesar said approvingly. "It almost made humility look like a virtue!"

"Thank you, Sextus Julius," Silo replied modestly.

"Everyone will remember it, that's for certain," Sulla contributed. "And they won't remember it for the elephants or the wagons of plunder, because there were none. They will remember the words!"

"Yes indeed!" Caesar agreed. "No-one could claim that you are not true Romans to the soles of your boots. Even the Boni would be impressed by the

old-fashioned Republicanism you showed. Such a shame they don't show it themselves! Keep pushing and we will share the fasces next year!"

"So you confirm our agreement now you have seen the man?" Drusus asked.

Caesar smiled. "I still haven't heard him say a word. No-one has in public, but all of Rome is talking about him! So we need to have a quiet chat just to make sure we don't trip over each other. But whether I like him or not, he looks set to win the election. So it's now a matter of working as a team, no matter what."

"I'll try to be likeable, Sextus Julius," Glauca said with a wry grin and offered his right arm. Caesar took it with a wry grin of his own.

"Yes, I must apologise for talking about you like that while you were present. Most insensitive of me." Caesar released the arm. "I like you already!"

Trays of finger-food were brought in, and Falernian wine poured. The men sat. "Tell me, Lucius; what are your opinions of the key issues we expect to face?" Caesar asked Glauca.

"I suppose you could call me a typical Italian, Sextus Julius," Glauca responded evenly. "I'll protect Italian interests until the Roman/Italian separation fades from memory, or at least becomes no more than the existing divisions between the Roman Tribes anyway. Beyond that, I support the principles underlying the Miletus Decree. I think you'll find most Italians do, because our Tribes have been abused in the recent past and we tend to sympathise with the provincials more than Romans. And I want the Rufan System to be introduced into as many provinces as possible as quickly as possible.

"Now I'm going to put you in a difficult position," Caesar warned with a smile. "What do you think about our recent foreign policy? In particular, do you think Quintus Poppaeus has been a bit over-aggressive in his handling of Tigranes and Nicomedes?" Caesar flicked his gaze across to Silo, sitting on the couch opposite Glauca.

Glauca gave a half-shrug. "Nothing difficult about that, Sextus Julius. Tigranes has been undermining Roman interests since the start of the Mithridatic War and I expect he'll continue to do so. Personally I'd like to take all of Armenia. But that might be seen as provocative by Parthia, so perhaps a weakened Armenia is the best option. As for Nicomedes," Glauca waved dismissively. "He was shown more consideration than he showed others. It was his greed that started the war against Mithridates. He deserved to lose his head, not just his kingdom. Besides, I'm a Republican and have a personal dislike for kings. I still haven't seen one I trust."

"What do you think about granting land to the Roman lower classes, even the Head Count?" Caesar continued.

"I'm against any kind of grants purely ex gratia. It makes people lazy. I oppose grain subsidies for the same reason. People should work to support themselves and their families," Glauca answered. "But if a man is willing to work then there should be work available to him. Having unemployed lower classes just loitering is a recipe for crime."

"How could you guarantee work for everyone?" Caesar asked in disbelief.

"That's not hard," Glauca answered. "Just look at how it operated among us Samnites years ago, before Rome subdued us. Men who had nothing else to do were drafted, either into the army or into work gangs. They were required to improve roads or irrigation or water supplies. There's always plenty of work to be done, so let it be done for wages instead of the money being wasted in subsidies for the idle."

"That might be so in Italy or the provinces; but there isn't enough work in Rome to keep all Romans employed," Caesar argued.

"Two answers to that, Sextus Julius," Glauca countered. "The first answer is that it's the task of the Roman City Senate and Comitia to administer Rome. If they want to subsidise idlers then that is their decision and let them find the money to pay for it.

"The second answer is that if there is work in the provinces, then let the idle in Rome go to the provinces to do it. For example, I would support a scheme like the old Samnite one, to enlist men into armies of road builders and canal diggers, as well as armies of soldiers. They could be paid for out of a fund set up by the Great Senate, and that fund would be maintained by special levies on those benefiting from the infrastructure to be built."

Caesar shook his head slowly. "That's just not politically possible. The Subura idlers would rather riot for cheap grain than build roads in Achaia, no matter what the wages."

"Not just for wages, Sextus Julius. A land grant as well at the end of their service, just as for soldiers."

Caesar was caught off guard by this thought. It just might work! "Not a bad idea, Lucius; it's worth thinking about that!"

Glauca smiled again. "So am I too contrary for you to tolerate? Or do you think we might work well together?"

Caesar matched his smile. "I think we might work very well together!"

Chapter 10 – 673 Ab Urbe Condita (81 B.C.)

Caesar and Glauca were elected as planned, much to the dismay of the Boni. Most of the Tribal Praetors were also Populares, except for the Italian tribes who were obviously Italianist. The Boni seem to have been comprehensively rejected by all but the smallest Tribes. The representatives to the Roman Comitia were also strongly pro-Populares. But despite this setback to their support at the Republic level, Boni-oriented candidates among three Italian tribes achieve considerable support. The Lucani and Picentines returned majorities with links to prominent Boni senators, a situation averted in the Marsi elections only because of vigorous campaigning by Silo for his own clients. The other Italian tribes provide no surprises. Silo returned to Anatolia, his appointment as Military Governor renewed.

Sulla stood as Caius Vidacilius was lead into his office. “Caius, what a pleasant surprise!” he welcomed his friend with a smile and held out his right arm.

“It might not be pleasant much longer, Lucius Cornelius,” Vidacilius replied anxiously. “I’ve just come straight from the Picentine Comitia. Bad news.”

Sulla gestured towards a chair for his guest and then sat himself. “Tell me what’s happened.”

“Now we know why the Boni were getting themselves so involved in the Picentine elections,” Vidacilius answered. “Their puppets have just abolished the Land Tax and replaced it with a Head Tax!”

“You’re joking!” Sulla exclaimed.

“I wish I were!” Vidacilius said emphatically. “And it’s imposed on all adult males belonging to the tribe, which means the Roman landlords now don’t pay a denarius in taxes while the labourers in their fields are being done over for more than a quarter of their wages! Can’t those idiots see that there’ll be blood spilled if this isn’t reversed?”

Sulla was appalled. “They really are idiots, Caius. You don’t know some of these Boni like I do; they believe themselves to be only one step below the gods, so they just assume that the common folk will obey them without question. They just can’t imagine a peasant saying ‘No!’ to them.”

“Then they must have developed at least some intelligence since you last spoke to them, Lucius Cornelius, because they have in fact taken precautions against such disobedience by the peasants. They have authorised a Tribal Militia. One of the duties of the Militia is to arrest any who have not paid the Tax by the Kalends of Quintilis, and seize assets to cover the value of the Tax. Also, all rights as citizens are forfeited if the tax is not paid.”

“Oh, by all the gods!” Sulla groaned. And then he realised that there might be more to this problem than just the Picentines. “What about the Lucani? Are they doing the same?”

“I don’t know,” Vidacilius confessed. “I came straight down the Via Salaria to here; I haven’t heard anything from the south.”

"Then let's visit Marcus; see if he knows anything about this."

Marcus Lamponius was probably the pre-eminent noble of the Lucani. He had moved to Rome when elected as Tribal Praetor two years ago so he could more conveniently attend the Great Senate. The two friends were welcomed into the courtyard where the mid-day sun held enough warmth to be pleasant.

"Caius! Lucius Cornelius!" Lamponius beamed at them. "What brings you here?"

"Is there any move among the Lucani to bring in a Head Tax?" Sulla rushed out.

"Not that I know of," Lamponius shrugged. "But I lost re-election last year, so I'm out of touch now."

"You weren't re-elected?" Vidacilius said incredulously.

"No; some middle-range types with more money than I've ever seen came in, made lots of promises and even more bribes, and I just didn't want to play that money game," Lamponius explained. "If the people are stupid enough to elect them, then let them see the promises broken and they'll be out on their ears next year."

Sulla nodded imperceptibly to Vidacilius. "Marcus; the same thing happened in the Picentine elections. I've just come from a Tribal Comitia that has abolished Land Tax and replaced it with a Head Tax."

"What's the Head Tax rate?" Lamponius asked.

"To cover the cost of the abolished Land Tax, the Head Tax had to be set at one hundred and twenty five denarii for every male over the age of sixteen."

Lamponius raised his eyebrows. "That doesn't seem much to us; but how would a labourer be able to pay that amount?"

"Exactly what I fear, too," Vidacilius responded. "It will mean debt, usury, and eventually slavery for many of our poorest. I can't see them accepting that; I fear a revolt. And what is more worrying, so does the Comitia itself. They're hiring a militia to enforce their new tax. Under pain of enslavement, like any other debtor."

"That's absurd! You can't enslave half your Tribe!" Lamponius exclaimed.

"These idiots intend to try," Vidacilius replied. "Then the absentee landlords won't even have to pay wages to their labourers. Just buy more whips."

"What can you do about it, Caius?" Lamponius was worried.

"That's why we need to talk," Vidacilius answered. "But first we need to know if this is happening in other tribes as well. Your tribe has a representative Comitia, like we Picentines, and you know yourself that there were bribes going everywhere in support of some new faces so we thought you Lucani might be having the same trick played on you."

"I think we need to get everyone together," Lamponius decided. "And I mean all of us, not just the Tribes affected. If we don't stop this, then we could find ourselves even worse off than we were before citizenship. Let's go see Marcus Livius," Lamponius said, and started for the door.

By evening the four had prevailed upon Sextus Julius Caesar and Young Marius for a meeting. Carbo also attended; he still hadn't left for his governorship of Achaia. Vidacilius quickly outlined the events in the Picentine Comitia and expressed his fear that this could lead to a civil war within his tribe.

"I understand your fears, Caius, and I think they are well-founded," Caesar said at the end of the presentation. "But I think the problem is much deeper than you realise."

"If these Boni stooges get away with this, then what is to stop them from increasing the Head Tax, year after year, forcing more and more to either leave their Tribal lands or to become slaves. And slaves don't have the right to vote! Eventually only the Nobles will be free men and they will have estates and incomes that would be able to corrupt elections in the other tribes, one after another. All Italy would be enslaved or Boni puppets; and that will give them control of the Great Houses as well." Caesar stood. "If we don't stop this, it will be the end of the Republic in all but name. We will have become a nation of slaves with only the Senatorial Class permitted to vote themselves into office, year after year."

"I think you're right, Sextus Julius," Sulla agreed.

"What can be done?" Vidacilius asked.

"These Boni puppets," Drusus asked. "I assume they are Picentines by birth, and gained citizenship only through the citizenship laws?"

"Yes; only citizens enrolled in the Tribe are permitted to stand for office and I don't know that any Picentines of note were citizens before your law," Vidacilius confirmed.

"Then let's see if they honour their oaths," Drusus said. "They pledged themselves as my clients. I'll instruct them to remove the Head Tax."

Caesar looked unconvinced. "Would that be wise, Marcus Livius? The Boni will paint it to look like you're trying to make yourself King of Italy! And they'll warn that King of Rome would be your next step."

"For ten years I've had that supposed power as well as consecutive consulships during a State of Emergency, but I've never tried to make myself King. So why would I start now?" Drusus snorted. "If anyone believes that old scare story it's because he chooses to, not because it has any credibility."

"Even so, Marcus Livius, it would not be a good precedent to set," Sulla interposed. "It's something to keep in mind, but let us think through all our options before we act."

"How much is the Head Tax?" Young Marius asked again.

"One hundred and twenty five denarii per man," Vidacilius repeated.

"And how many Picentines are liable to this tax?" Young Marius continued.

"I have the numbers from the last census in my office," Sulla answered, "That was a couple of years ago but it would still be the basis for taxation. I think it has something around three hundred thousand adult males registered."

"So that's something like ... ah... say a bit under forty million denarii in taxes for the whole population," Young Marius concluded. "That is one hundred and sixty thousand sestertium milia."

"Yes, something like that," Vidacilius agreed. "Our Tribal Budget last year when I was still a representative was a bit over one hundred and forty thousand sestertium milia."

"We could lend it to them," Young Marius suggested. "Isn't that what a good Patron should do, Marcus Livius?"

"I can't afford that much," Drusus admitted. "And how would they repay it when they'd have to borrow again next year?"

"That won't be a problem!" Sulla interjected. "First, we can pool our resources, even ask Crassus to help out for a year. He's got that much cash rolling around in his bottom drawer.

"Second, there won't be a next year of Head Taxes. We'll support candidates we have selected ourselves, all pledged to abolish the Head Tax and replace it with Land Tax. Our candidates will sweep to victory on that basis.

"Third, they will impose a levy on land, equal to twice the annual tax.

"Fourth, they will distribute out of this levy a Tribal Gift equal to one and a half times the head tax paid by each man in the previous year; the extra fifty per cent is to cover interest costs and inconvenience.

"The other fifty percent of the Land Levy is to go into the Tribal Treasury, towards the cost of enforcement measures this year. It's only right that the bastards who wasted this money should pay it back.

"Fifth; the Land Levy stays in place until all the money wasted on this Head Tax scheme and its enforcement has been made good." Sulla looked around the room.

"That way we are committing no illegality. There's no Patron instructing his clients what laws to make or un-make, only urging the voters whom they should vote for, which happens all the time. And the Comitia members, elected by the Tribe, do no more than make the Laws they pledged themselves to enact, publicly and openly, before their election."

"Lucius Cornelius," Caesar said wryly, "if you keep saying things like that, we'll have to make you an honorary Popularis!"

"No need for insults, Sextus Julius!" Sulla retorted with mock horror.

"It sounds like a plan to me!" Drusus announced. "But first we need to make sure we have the funds to back it up." He looked around the room. "How much can each of you afford? I could probably find about forty thousand sestertium milia by the end of May, which still allows a month before the deadline. Who else can scratch together some cash?"

"I can find one hundred thousand sestertium milia within the month," Young Marius said and smiled. "I didn't waste too much on donations to the Great Houses!"

"Excellent!" Drusus said, rubbing his hands together. "Might I suggest that I go on a tour of Picenum next month, and make it known that I will lend my clients up to a total of 125 denarii each, as a good Patron would. But I think it might be good for Caius Marius to go with me as well. Let everyone know that the son of the Old Warhorse is worthy of his father and under-writing my loans."

“Marcus Livius, what if the Lucani Comitia follows the same path?” Lamponius asked.

“Then we will do the same for the Lucani!” Drusus answered with a smile. “Even if I have to borrow from Crassus, we will not allow citizens to be sold into slavery!”

“Just a thought, Marcus Livius,” Caesar interrupted. “Perhaps it can be done more easily than that. Why not simply ask the Great Senate to declare that Head Tax law void?”

“It can't be done, Sextus Julius,” Drusus replied. “The law makes it clear that each Tribe can raise its own taxes however it likes. The Great Senate has no power to interfere.”

“Are you sure of that?” Caesar persisted.

“Well, I am sure of it,” Sulla broke in. “And I for one wouldn't want to change that or it sets a precedent for the future. I don't want the Great Senate telling the Tribes what laws they can or can't make in their own areas of responsibility. That's not how a Republic should operate.”

“Yes, I suppose you are right there,” Caesar concluded.

“But speaking of precedents, perhaps what you say isn't such a bad idea, Sextus Julius,” Sulla brightened suddenly. “Let's put into the record a precedent that Tribal finances are independent of the Great Senate. Let one of us argue that the Senate should void the tax but then we all vote it down. That will establish our precedent and the Tribes will be autonomous thereafter.”

Sulla and Drusus left together, the two Italians going their own way.

“Marcus Livius,” Sulla said softly through his teeth. “What madness possessed you, to permit that dolt Young Marius to be seen as a benefactor of Italians!”

Drusus stopped in his surprise. “Madness, Lucius Cornelius? It would have been madness to do otherwise!”

“How can you say that!” Sulla challenged. “You're cutting out our own support base and handing it to that fool!”

“For a few reasons,” Drusus responded evenly. “First, he's putting up most of the money. We need him in the short term unless you would rather go to Crassus.”

“I would rather go to Crassus!” Sulla retorted vehemently.

“Let me list the other reasons, Lucius Cornelius,” Drusus plodded on patiently. “Second, this will tie him to our agenda. It will not tie us to his.

“Third, it will strengthen our hand politically to have the Populares openly and visibly with us when this comes to a head; because it will! The Boni are not going to be polite about this. They'll come back at us like rabid dogs who have just had their bones taken away. Expect them to try a Tribal Coup.

“And fourth, it will bring Sextus Julius openly onto our side as well. It's always useful to have both consuls on your side.”

Drusus stopped counting off the points on the fingers of his hand as he walked beside Sulla. "Now perhaps you can see a danger that I can't. So please explain your points."

"The Populares would be with us no matter what," Sulla replied. "They would oppose anything that gave the Boni more power, so we need not make concessions to bring them with us. And if the Boni try anything nasty, we have the army," Sulla said flatly. "That is all we need."

Drusus stopped walking and turned towards Sulla. "What are you saying, Lucius Cornelius?" He looked disbelievingly at his friend. "This is a political problem, and has to be solved by political means. If you want to use the army to intervene, then you'll be creating a precedent for anyone in the future to do the same! The army must be used only for those purposes approved by the Senate and authorised by law!"

Sulla returned the examination. "Sometimes, Marcus Livius, I think that you have matured into a sophisticated politician. And then you come out with that naive, idealistic claptrap. The Populares are our allies at the moment, and they were ten years ago because Caius Marius commanded the love of the Roman Tribes. But the Boni were our allies only five years ago, and could be again in another five years," Sulla hammered home his argument. "We have no permanent friends, only permanent interests; so don't give away any more of our influence than we have to!"

Drusus took in Sulla's stare. "I'm a better politician than you think, Lucius Cornelius. Right now we have a choice. Are we to allow the Italians to be enslaved in bulk and the Italian Tribes become a voting block for the Boni, or are we going to stop it? If we allow it then the Italian Cause is lost forever. But if we stop it, the Boni will hate us for a long time and that means we will need a close partnership with the Populares. Trust me on this one!"

Sulla continued to stare back. "My aim here is to punish those idiots among the Boni whose greed is threatening a Civil War. I expect that most of the Boni will realise how dangerous this could be and leave them to their punishment. So there will be no permanent rift between us and the bulk of the Boni. But if you go about it this way, making a public alliance with Young Marius, you will drive them all together and against us!"

"But even worse, it means that Boy Wonder will have both the Mob in Rome and the poor of Italy behind him! He'll be unstoppable, even if we and the Boni *could* unite against him! But instead, you're dividing even that opposition! This can end only one way; with the Populares unchallenged!" Sulla sighed deeply. "*You can trust me on that one!*"

Drusus paused, to give at least the appearance of considering Sulla's words. But he knew that he could never agree. Sulla's distrust for a Popularist raising of the Mob was well founded; too often had this been done in the past. But those times *were* past. Now, with the new Representative Comitia, mobs no longer assembled.

"No, Lucius Cornelius," he responded at last. "The biggest threat by far to the Republic under the new system is that of oligarchy. Quite apart from the

merits of this specific case, there's a need to send a very strong message; any sort of corruption of Due Process will be punished! And it's always been those with wealth who did that, never a bunch of angry Plebs! So let's make sure the Boni understand one thing above all others; don't mess with our power base or they will get burnt big-time! Much more than they might have imagined! That's why I want the Populares visibly shoulder-to-shoulder with us. Only then, when the Boni have absorbed that lesson, can we go back to business as usual."

Now Sulla paused before replying. He decided that he had to appear conciliatory, but Drusus seemed more and more willing to court the Populares. If they were all like Sextus Julius, then it might not be a bad idea, but Sextus Julius was not going to live forever and flaky Young Marius was the natural heir. If not him, then may the gods protect us from even worse! "As you say, Marcus Livius; but just make sure that all these Italians understand that the money is from *your* hand, and not from that of Marius."

"Conscript Fathers," Drusus began his address. "There is a huge peril confronting our Republic at the moment. It threatens dire hardship, so severe that most of the citizens affected will be forced into slavery, or at least to sell a child into slavery. As you could imagine, citizens of this Republic do not sell themselves or their children as slaves readily; and the numbers affected are so great that there might well be an armed revolt, even a civil war, if this peril is not averted." Drusus pivoted on one heel to take in the terraces in a quick sweep of his gaze.

"I speak, of course, of the recent taxation measures imposed on the Picentines and the Lucani. And I say 'imposed' deliberately! The election of the Tribal Comitiae for these tribes was monstrously corrupted by bribes, by intimidation and by blackmail, all financed and controlled by certain persons who were not even members of those Tribes.

"Much has been made over recent years about avoiding or preventing undue influence of Italians over Roman matters, and of Roman influence over Italian matters. To resolve these difficulties we even went to the extent of separating the administration of Rome from that of the Republic as a whole, to ensure Roman issues would be decided by Romans and not by others. But here we see a handful of obscenely wealthy Romans attempting to enslave two entire Tribes! They have bought, intimidated and blackmailed their way into controlling entire Tribes, and have now introduced laws which will charge every Picentine a Head Tax of 125 denarii. This is an entire third of the annual income for a typical labourer; if he can find work every day, that is! And he has been given only a quarter of a year to raise it! Even if he finds work every day, and spends nothing at all, not even on food, he will not be able to afford this Tax by the time it falls payable!"

"The situation in the Lucani lands is even worse; their Head Tax has been fixed at one hundred and fifty denarii! And any man not paying the tax by the deadline is to be arrested, stripped of his citizenship, and sold into slavery!" Drusus paused deliberately to allow this to sink in.

"This is nothing other than an attempt to eliminate Italian citizenship two tribes at a time! Those behind this trick are no doubt very satisfied with themselves. In their arrogance and naivete, they image that Italians will submit to this. How little do they understand! This would reduce the status of Italians to much less than they were ten years ago, when civil war threatened. 'Ah! But these two tribes are not strong enough to resist the whole Republic!' they seem to be thinking. 'Two tribes this year; another two next year; we can take them is small, bite-sized helpings, and no one mouthful is big enough to choke us!' How clever they think they are!

"Do they really think that these two tribes will meekly go under the yoke of such an injustice? Do they really think the other Italian tribes will stand by, knowing that their turn will come shortly? Not at all! They will see this for what it is; an attempt by a handful of obscenely wealthy men to sell the Republic! An attempt to become a Club of Kings, with every other former citizen now a slave under their heels!

"I urge this Senate, for the good governance of the Republic, to set aside these loathsome laws!"

Sulla stood.

"I am sorry, Lucius Cornelius," Caesar explained. "It is the turn for someone to speak *against* the proposition put by Marcus Livius."

"That is my intention, Sextus Julius," Sulla replied. A buzz went around the chamber; is this a split in the Italianist leadership?

"Then the floor is yours," Caesar replied.

Sulla strode slowly, thoughtfully, to the focus of the chamber. "This does not come to me easily, Conscription Fathers," he commenced soberly. "Much of my political career has been to ensure that the Italians are permitted to become full partners of Rome, supporting our Republic of their own free will because they see in it a thing of beauty, a thing worthy of their total dedication and that of their descendants. To do this freely, they first had to be masters of their own fate. That's why I so strongly supported, and still support, their full citizenship of this Republic and their Tribal autonomy within it."

"The actions of the Picentine Comitia, and also that of the Lucani, are dreadful. There is no way any person can be anything but shocked at such an utter disregard for the welfare of those who have entrusted themselves and their children to these so-called 'Representatives'. I am disgusted by it! These traitors to their own Tribesmen deserve to be dragged out of their comfortable offices and beaten to a pulp by those whom they have betrayed." Sulla put his hand up, as if to forestall an objection. "Not that I am advocating that, of course, Conscription Fathers! You all know how adverse I have always been to Mob Rule! But although I don't advocate it, I still acknowledge that these scum certainly deserve it.

"But the suggestion put by Marcus Livius, whom I respect greatly, is not the answer either! This Senate does not have the legal right to interfere in the internal affairs of the Tribes. Nor does it have the moral right to do so either. The Picentines themselves elected these turds to represent them. They must now live

with that choice. They can correct this at the next elections, if they decide to do so. That is the correct and legal thing to do. But to interfere with the internal affairs of the Italian Tribes is precisely the wrong thing to do, legally, morally and in terms of the precedent it would set.

“Last year, we had a similar debate. Back then, the debate was about the Land Tax some Tribes had imposed. At that time I spoke against any interference in Tribal affairs, while many of the Boni were screaming for intervention and Marcus Livius opposed such an act. The debate was cut short because Publius Servilius wisely suggested that any intervention would be illegal. That suggestion was not opposed by the Senate before it turned to other business. I intend to be consistent on this point; I was against intervention then, and I remain against it now. Others might have opinions that swing with the breeze but I do not.

“When the proposition put by Marcus Livius is properly defeated by this Senate, I intend to put on record a declarative resolution, to formalise the suggestion by Publius Servilius last year. It is that this Senate of the Republic shall never interfere with the internal affairs of any Tribe. It must forever and for certain be put beyond the reach of this Senate or any future Senate to oppress any Tribe, because to oppress one is to make it possible to oppress all! If a Tribe, through its own stupidity, decides to oppress itself, then that is their right and also their own fault. But it must be left to its own devices to rectify that fault, and not have a solution imposed upon it by outside force.

“I firmly believe that this is essential if the Republic is to survive,” Sulla sat.

Caius Vidacilius stood.

“Caius Vidacilius?” Caesar invited.

“Thank you Sextus Julius,” Vidacilius acknowledged the chair. “I understand the position so clearly argued by Lucius Cornelius,” he addressed the terraces. “But there is one problem he has overlooked. This Head Tax law requires payment in full within a few months! Any male over the age of sixteen who does not pay it is liable to enslavement and loss of citizenship. That means that they will *not be able* to vote these scum out.” He swung around, searching the banks of senators with desperation in his eyes. “For Lucius Cornelius to argue that this wrong can be corrected next year is akin to arguing that a murder victim can take his murderer to court to get his life back! It fails to realise that the wrong being done inherently prevents later correction!

“As Marcus Livius so wisely noted, the other Italian Tribes will not tolerate this attack on their freedom. If this is not corrected there will be no other option for the poorer in my Tribe than to take up arms in revolt. This will do great damage to the Tribe, and it will also do damage to the Republic. We must avert this damage!” He sat abruptly.

Cato stood.

“Lucius Porcius, please speak.”

“I should have become accustomed to this by now,” Cato started, “but I continue to be surprised how often Lucius Cornelius and I seem to agree! Often

for completely different reasons, but we agree! However, I disagree with Caius Vidacilius. There will be no war here! Two tribes have elected a Comitia they are no longer happy with. Is that the fault of the Republic? Is that the fault of this Senate? Or is it rather the fault of those Italian Tribes themselves?

“The other Italian Tribes know where the fault lies, and will act accordingly. They will not go to war against the Republic which has given them autonomy! If there is any risk of war at all in this circumstance, it is a risk that action by this Senate to over-rule one Italian Tribal Comitia might be seen as a threat to over-rule any and all Italian Comitiae! Be assured; there is greater risk of war if we interfere than if we continue to observe Tribal autonomy. The Italian tribes once threatened war if we didn't grant them full rights; they are not going to go to war because we insist on upholding these same rights!

“And if a few malcontents resort to violence, then the Tribal Militia will be able to restore order quickly enough.” He swept the assembly with his eyes. “I agree once again with Lucius Cornelius, my colleague for so many years now. This tax, difficult as it might be for the Tribes involved, does not threaten the Republic and any action is therefore outside our jurisdiction. But to interfere with Tribal autonomy, opposing the duly elected Comitiae of these two tribes, certainly does threaten the Republic, and is certainly contrary to our duty to the Republic. We must not intervene!” Cato strode back to his seat.

“Is there a speaker in favour of the proposition?” Caesar asked. No-one stood.

“No more speakers? What about you, Caius Pullo, or Marcus Pictus? Are you not Picentine Praetors?

Pullo stood. “Our position is simple. The Tribal Comitia has voted for certain measures within its jurisdiction, and any action by this Senate to interfere with that would be illegal. We are very disappointed that Caius Vidacilius, a Picentine himself, is effectively urging that his own Tribe be subjugated.” The glare of hatred towards Vidacilius was matched only by the utter contempt Vidacilius was showing towards the Praetor. “We will report his words back to the Picentine Comitia, recommending that he be considered an enemy of the Tribe. But as for the business at hand, we call for the question to be put.”

Caesar looked around the chamber. “I have a request that the question be put. Is the Senate in agreement?” The calls of ‘yes’ were strong. “Those against?” There were no dissenting voices.

“Then I will put the Question proposed by Marcus Livius; that the Senate declare the recent Head Tax laws passed by the Picentine and Lucani Comitiae void. Those in favour?” A dozen ‘ayes’ called out. “Those against?” All the Boni, almost all the Italians, and almost all of the Populares voted against. “I think the Noes have it?” Caesar ruled. There was no call for a division.

“Then I declare the Question lost.”

Sulla sprang to his feet.

“Ah, your foreshadowed Question, Lucius Cornelius.”

"Yes, Sextus Julius. I propose that this Senate declare that it is illegal for it to interfere in the internal affairs of any Tribe or the affairs of the Roman Comitia."

"Do you wish to speak to that, Lucius Cornelius?"

"I think it has been well enough understood from the previous debate. I suggest that it might be put immediately. If the Senate does not wish it to be put immediately, then I will speak to it."

"Does the Senate wish to resolve this question immediately?" Caesar asked. There was a chorus of 'Ayes'. "Those against?" Silence. "Then I will put the Question immediately. Those in favour?"

Again, the Question was carried overwhelmingly. Drusus rose to speak. "The Question has been resolved, Marcus Livius. You are too late."

"I am not too late to remind this Senate that I once pledged to do nothing to oppose its will." Drusus looked around. "I repeat and renew that pledge now." Then he looked across to Vidacilius. "I am sorry, Caius; but I am bound by my word."

The meeting in the house of Young Marius that evening was permeated with satisfaction. "Marcus Livius, you are becoming quite a good actor as you mature!" Sulla joked.

"Perhaps so; but I am more concerned about Caius," Drusus replied. "If those Picentine puppets have their way, he could be destroyed if he sets foot back in Picenum. Those bastards are playing for keeps."

"Don't you worry about that, Marcus Livius!" Vidacilius said heartily. "I'll just stay out of their way until after the next election. Then we'll see who is declared an enemy of the Tribe!"

"Don't rejoice too loudly or too early," Caesar cautioned. "At this stage we have done no more than make our plans and deploy our troops. Who knows what to expect, except that these ever-so-respectable Boni are always prepared to fight dirty."

"Well, we have our battle plan thought through," Young Marius interjected. "What can they do?"

"One thing they can do when they realise we are stumping up the cash for the tax is to increase the tax," Sulla commented. "Try to send us bankrupt by raising the rate."

"They could try that," Young Marius agreed sanguinely. "But would they dare? Apart from those who need to borrow from us, there are many more who could scrape through but are still hurt by it. If they push the rate up again, then everyone will see that this is not merely a tax; it is a ploy to send everyone in the Tribe into slavery. Even those who feel safe at the moment will realise that they will be targeted in time."

"Yes, but will that stop them?" Drusus asked. "You can't assume that they'll act rationally. They might be arrogant enough to try that and get through on the basis of their Militia."

“And another thing to keep in mind is that the Pompeii have huge estates in Picenum. If they wanted to, they could field a dozen full-strength legions just using their slaves and labourers.” Sulla drew a deep breath. “Pompeius could set himself up as King of Picenum if he wanted to, and only the Republic as a whole would have the strength to dislodge him.”

“So what do you suggest, Lucius Cornelius?” That was Lucius Glauca. “You’re not usually caught without an option.”

“Nothing very elaborate, Lucius.” Sulla said breezily. “I intend to travel to Picenum and Lucania, to iron out a few Census discrepancies. While I’m there I’ll pay my respects to their Comitia leaders, including their augurs.” He stopped there.

“Why the augurs, Lucius Cornelius? They have no vote!” Glauca was puzzled.

“Nor are they elected, Lucius; which means they were not part of the Boni conspiracy, and therefore they were not bought. Being genuine Tribesmen, they would be as disgusted as we are with this legalised treason,” Sulla explained. “So I might just discuss with them how important it is to ensure that the Comitia enjoys the favour of the gods.” Sulla put on his most innocent face. “For example, if the gods are displeased with the actions of the Comitia thus far, it is more than likely that omens can be found to demonstrate that. Just like Philippus of fond memory found all sorts of omens in his own day.” Sulla glanced across to Drusus. “These clearly demonstrated that some decisions of the Senate at that time should be declared void. The same situation could arise in regard to the Comitia decision on taxes. And if the Comitia is minded to disregard these omens, then surely the gods would withhold good auspices from any further Comitia meetings until this wickedly impious situation was corrected.”

Drusus smiled broadly and started applauding slowly. Caesar followed his example. “I must write to Philippus and tell him how he has become our role-model!” Drusus quipped.

“I’ve never met a bastard that I haven’t learnt something from,” Sulla agreed.

“So why not do that now, before the tax deadline, and save ourselves the trouble and expense of making the payments?” Young Marius asked.

Even Caesar looked pained at this suggestion. “Caius, you are so much like your father! Not an ounce of political clue in your whole body! If the Tax is cancelled now, the Italians will thank their Comitia for coming to its senses. But if it is imposed, and we come to the rescue, their thanks will come to us!”

“Sextus Julius is right, Caius,” Sulla added. “Never stop your enemy from attacking a neutral; the neutral will think your action is just part of a war that has nothing to do with him. Instead you should let the attack happen and then come in and swear to avenge it. That way you have won an ally.”

“That sounds good,” Vidacilius was still worried. “But what happens if one of these turds holds a sword to the augur’s throat, and tells him how to read the auspices more favourably?”

“Part of my chat with the augurs will cover that possibility,” Sulla answered. “I will discuss about how an augur who becomes party to so great a sacrilege can

expect to find himself on a cross shortly afterwards, with his entire family on their own crosses to keep him company. It would be much better for him to pretend to agree, and then declaim the whole impiety in public before he heads for the safety of Rome. That should be equally effective.”

The room was shocked into silence. “You would threaten an augur with the crucifixion of his entire family if he doesn’t read the signs the way you want him to?” Young Marius was incredulous.

“To save the Republic I would do that before lunch every day of the year,” Sulla said with a casual sincerity that was frightening. The energy went out of the conversation.

“Well, that sounds like a plan,” Caesar mumbled at last. One by one, the guests started to take their leave of Marius and go home.

“Most noble lord Silo, I bring neighbourly greetings from King Gotarzes, The Mighty King, whose throne is in Ctesiphon,” The ambassador said in beautiful Greek as he bowed with a flourish. “The name of the Mighty King’s humble servant is Sanatres,” he introduced himself as a footnote.

“Lord Sanatres, please take a seat!” Silo gestured to an ornate chair with his right hand. Sanatres took the seat offered.

“I trust that the Mighty King, your Master, is in good health and prospering?” Silo inquired politely.

“He is indeed, lord Silo, and he implores that all the gods will grant you every favour.”

“And I also welcome you to our land,” Silo welcomed him. “Thank you for conveying the friendly greetings from the Mighty King, lord Sanatres. But having made that effort, would it be convenient to discuss any other matter of mutual interest?”

“There are always matters of mutual interest between neighbours, lord Silo,” Sanatres smiled. “My lord the Mighty King believes that neighbours should speak to each other often to ensure minor misunderstandings do not become landmarks of unintended offence.”

“Then the Mighty King is a very wise and prudent ruler,” Silo responded. “Being new to the lands formerly ruled by the Seleucids but now under Roman administration, I seek your assistance in delineating our respective areas of responsibility,” Silo smiled. “In particular, the region closest to your Master’s realm was particularly lawless, and the border not clearly defined.”

“I would be most eager to assist you, lord Silo,” Sanatres agreed soothingly. “How would you like this service to be provided?”

“Let us visit these areas and agree on the spot where we are to place the frontier.”

“I would be most pleased to do so, lord Silo,” Sanatres agreed. “But I am not the foremost expert in that area on knowledge. With your permission, I will send for a suitable person to assist us.”

“Please do so, lord Sanatres,” Silo agreed. “I will arrange for such documents and records as I can find, and we shall compare these with your

records and the evidence on the ground. Would it be possible for you to arrange for your assistant and his material to be here in forty days' time?"

"I should think that forty days would be sufficient time, lord Silo."

"Excellent!" Silo exclaimed. "Are there any matters that you would like to raise at this time? Or would it be better to wait on the results of the border survey?"

"There are a few matters, lord Silo," Sanatres responded. "But these are minor matters of administration. Such things as an agreement on precise relative values of our currencies, weights and measures; outstanding claims for money owed by the Seleucids to the Mighty King; continuity of treaties with the Seleucids into the new era, and so on. If I may leave my advisors with your Administrators to deal with the details and report back to us when they are agreed for our formal adoption of their recommendations?

"Yes, that would be most satisfactory," Silo agreed. "Please, introduce your advisors to Gnaeus Priscus tomorrow morning, and he will direct them to the appropriate members of my staff. Is there any matter that specifically requires my attention at this time?" Silo asked.

"Not at this stage, lord Silo," Sanatres answered. "Thank you for your time." Sanatres stood, bowed, and took three steps backward before turning his back on the Roman Governor. The first meeting had gone smoothly and he was pleased. He would leave in the morning to report back and fetch records that would show the old Seleucid-Parthian boundary as far north as possible.

It had been only thirty four days since Sanatres had stood before Silo for the first time. In six days time he was due to report back. But the minor functionaries he had left to sort out the trivial matters told a frustrating story.

No agreement had been reached on the exchange values of Roman and Parthian coins. The Romans claimed that Parthian coins in general were debased and the samples presented by Parthian officials were atypical.

Well, of course they had been specially selected! But the Romans would not admit that their coins were no less atypical! Both side played this game and each side knew the other was playing it. The correct solution was to see who would settle for what value, and how big the bribe had to be. But the Romans wouldn't offer a suitable bribe and wouldn't accept the Parthian attempts to take the initiative. It all ended with a stalemate with the Romans simply shrugging and saying that if Parthia could not use Roman currency as the medium of exchange then Rome would accept Parthian currency at their own Roman valuation rather than the Parthian valuation.

The debt question had also stalled. Parthia had provided supplies to Philip the previous year when it seemed inescapable that he would finally be able to establish himself on the Seleucid throne. At outrageous prices, of course, to be paid in two years' time when he had control of the wealth of his kingdom. But any price was more attractive to a desperate Philip than the risk of losing the civil war because he couldn't feed his army.

But the Romans did not recognise these debts as legitimate. They considered them personal debts owed by Philip to further his own ambitions, rather than debts to the former Seleucid Kingdom to serve the Public Good – whatever that phrase might mean!

The Romans had, in fact, made a few counter-claims. For the last ten years Palmyra had been required to pay tribute to Parthia and now the Romans were not only claiming the return of that tribute; they were even claiming the city itself! Couldn't they understand that when the Seleucids had fallen into civil war Palmyra had come under the Protection of the Mighty King? But rather than incorporating it into the Empire as such, Palmyra had been permitted to retain some autonomy. Nothing more sinister than that! But no, the Romans insisted that unless there was some document endorsed by an undisputed Seleucid monarch which explicitly transferred the sovereignty over the city, then Palmyra was still part of Syria. The same position was being maintained regarding dozens of other lesser cities, towns and districts across thousands of square miles of frontier territory. Wherever Parthia had exploited Seleucid weakness in order to demand tribute, Rome was demanding a refund of that amount.

Sanatres glanced at the huge chest in the corner of his suite. It was packed with records of taxes here, tithes there, all intended to show that half of Syria had accepted Parthian sovereignty. But under Roman criteria none of these documents would be accepted as evidence of overlordship. Instead they would become nothing more than grounds for a counter-claim for the return of 'unauthorised exactions'.

Sanatres had already responded to this situation in his own way. He had sent a message to Gotarzes informing him of the Roman stubbornness and suggested that a messenger be sent to Tigranes as a matter of urgency. If Tigranes could be persuaded to sign a back-dated Treaty, ceding southern Armenian territories to Parthia, then the Romans would be in for a surprise. Tigranes had already lost these territories anyway to these boorish, insulting bullies from the west so he would probably gain some satisfaction if they were under Parthian administration rather than Roman. But a bit of cash for his co-operation wouldn't go astray, either. But it would probably be another month before that documentation could be arranged, so he had to stretch out the time until it arrived.

A slave appeared at the door. "General Silo would be pleased if you could present yourself to him in his day office at the third hour." That would be in just over an hour's time. He really had no excuse not to agree.

"Thank lord Silo for his invitation. I will be there."

"Thank you for coming at such short notice, lord Sanatres," Silo greeted his guest, standing and crossing the floor of the office to meet him at the door. He gestured towards three couches by a large window, away from the work desk.

"I am at your service, lord Silo," Sanatres walked in the direction indicated but waited for Silo to sit first.

"I trust the Mighty King remains in good health? And you are well after your journey?" Silo inquired politely.

"Yes, lord Silo."

"I know that we're not due to meet formally for another six days," Silo cut to the topic. "But I understand that our officials are having trouble reaching agreement on several matters. I would be most grateful if you could discuss the problems with them and perhaps devise an approach that could resolve them." Silo waved a hand vaguely and smiled apologetically. "My power to intervene from my side is much more limited. We have a special class of Public Administrators who are supposedly subject to me but actually are obliged to follow their own Rule Book. If I try to bend them I could get into trouble myself."

"Yes, that's a problem with a Republic, I suppose," Sanatres sympathised. "When a man is given responsibility but his authority is not absolute, things can become more tedious than they need be. I'll speak to my advisors and see if an alternative approach can be found."

"Thank you for your time, lord Sanatres." Silo smiled and stood. "And thank you for your co-operative approach."

Sanatres was becoming increasingly frustrated with the lack of progress in his mission. In fact, things seemed to be going backwards. Silo had decided to personally tour the major cities in the south of the former Seleucid areas and at each he was presented with yet more records showing yet more payments had been made to Parthia in the previous ten years. And disappointingly, the wording on both demands and remits made it clear that these payments were forced tribute, not normal taxes.

"If these cities were part of the Mighty King's domain, then they would be taxes, collected by his own officers," Silo had said. "But no; these documents make plain that these were demands for payment of arbitrary amounts, to be collected by city officials, and threatening subjugation if not paid. Tell me, lord Sanatres; if the city was already part of the King's territory, how then could it be 'subjugated' again? It's clear from the text that the Mighty King was demanding tribute rather than exercising sovereignty over these cities. And of course, Rome will require that all these amounts extorted from cities now under Roman protection shall be returned. Be thankful that we don't demand interest!"

But there was some good news. A document arrived from Ctesiphon two days before their tour crossed the Euphrates. It was a Treaty between Tigranes and Gotarzes, dated in the winter before last. This was the winter before Silo attacked across the Euphrates. In it Tigranes had ceded all of Osrhoene to Gotarzes in exchange for certain areas in Media. The Treaty provided that although the sovereignty over these territories would be transferred on mid-winter's day, each ceding power would remain in occupation to provide defence and civil order until mid-summer's day for logistical and administrative reasons.

Sanatres was delighted. Between them Tigranes and Gotarzes had provided a treaty that 'explained' how Osrhoene was at the time of Silo's invasion a Parthian

Territory, but with Armenians in occupation! Sanatres tucked this document into his travelling chest.

"What do you mean, lord Sanatres, when you say that all of this is Parthian territory?" Silo asked, his exasperation showing through the formal politeness. "We have had this conversation before; I require documentary evidence for any claim of Parthian sovereignty to be provided or the claim does not even merit consideration. And all the documentation shows that all of these cities were paying taxes to Armenia, and its officials were answerable to Armenia."

"That was true up until the end of the records you have to hand, lord Silo," Sanatres returned. "But those records only go up to the year before your armies marched through it. I have here the Parthian copy of the treaty in which Tigranes and Gotarzes agreed to an exchange of territories. You will see that in the winter before your victory sovereignty over Osrhoene was transferred to Parthia. But because of your occupation of the land in the following Spring, Parthia was not able to establish its proper administration. Yet sovereignty is clearly Parthian and the Mighty King requests your withdrawal." Sanatres handed to document to Silo.

Silo scanned the text. "Why was this not shown to me earlier?" he demanded.

"I have attempted to provide you with information as it becomes relevant," Sanatres responded. "Until we crossed the River from the former Seleucid lands, this was not relevant."

"No! I mean, why was it not shown to me last year as we were establishing our administration throughout the land?" Silo clarified his question.

"I don't know the answer to that question, lord Silo. I was not the one who was making those decisions."

Silo stared at Sanatres for a full minute. "I'll tell you why I wasn't told about this Treaty last year, lord Sanatres," he announced. "I was not told about it, because it didn't exist! This document is a forgery!"

"That's an outrageous allegation, lord Silo!" Sanatres replied with passion.

"No, lord Sanatres, it's an outrageous truth!" Silo replied. "Look at the document yourself! When a Treaty is made, invariably the two signatories are both attending at the same time. For convenience they use the same quill and ink. But if you look closely, you will see that the Parthian and Armenian signatories have used different quills; see the differences in the down strokes? And the ink colour is also just a tiny bit different, too. I can see that this document was signed in one place by one party and by the other in a different place. I conclude that it was actually composed only a short time ago, probably in Ctesiphon. Then it was signed and taken by a courier to Tigranes for his signature to be added and then rushed back here. And I would guess that the time of its composition is only within the last month or two, after you became aware of my insistence upon proper documentation. That's why you have shown it to me only now. It would have taken almost that long to run it up to Tigranes and back! It probably wasn't even in your possession until recently."

Once it was clear that Silo had finished speaking, Sanatres slowly stood. “I am the personal envoy of Gotarzes, the Mighty King! And you call me a forger and a liar! I will have your apology or I will return to Ctesiphon at once.” Sanatres demanded. “There can be no peace between us if you show us so little respect!”

Silo stood. “Then I wish you a safe journey. All those matters which are currently still under discussion will be reviewed by me and my staff and we will send you word of our decisions when they have been determined.” Silo gestured towards the door. “You may go now.”

Drusus arrived in Picenum with Young Marius a month after the Senate had resolved to not intervene in the Tax Law, and two months before the tax was payable. Within days he had scribes in every major town and the word had gone out. Anyone seeking the assistance of Marcus Livius Drusus need do no more than report to his clerk and be registered.

The lines on the first day were enormous. The clerks sent out slaves to assure everyone that the registrations would continue for ten days, even longer if required, but no-one would leave his place in the line for fear that the cash would be exhausted before all had been satisfied. Slowly they shuffled into the rented office to find a series of tables attended by scribes. As a table became free the janitor would allow another man in to take that place. Caius Parminus found himself at one such table.

The clerk flicked his eyes up to his face for a moment. “Name?” the clerk asked.

“Caius Parminus.”

The clerk scratched the name onto a ruled space on the sheet of paper on the table, his uncials not very neat but entirely legible. He then copied it onto a second sheet, apparently identical to the first. And then it was repeated onto a small sheet already pre-written and looking like a certificate of some sort. “Father’s Name?”

“Lucius Parminus.”

The process of writing in triplicate was repeated, into different spaces on the same line on the three sheets. “Class?”

“Head Count.”

“Occupation?”

“Labourer.”

“Age?”

“Twenty eight.” This time the clerk flicked his eyes up again, as if to check the answer before writing.

“Distinguishing marks?”

“Missing the top joint of my left index finger.” Parminus held up his left hand to show the amputation.

“Lord Marcus Livius Drusus will pay the tax on your behalf,” The clerk said quickly, for perhaps the fiftieth time that day already. “This certificate is for you to hold as evidence of payment in case you are challenged. This number in

the bottom left-hand corner is the number by which you are registered on lord Drusus' documentation." The clerk handed over the small third paper. "You may go now."

Caius stood and walked out of the office slightly bewildered. He had expected to be given one hundred and twenty five denarii to pay for the tax. He still hadn't decided whether to actually pay it or disappear into Rome or elsewhere and pocket the money. But there was no cash involved. Only a piece of paper and a promise that the tax would be paid for him.

He shrugged. These nobles have a strange way of doing business, but so long as it got him out of paying the tax... Anyway, no point in leaving the town now; no cash to take with him. He might as well stay with the job he already had.

The Picentine Comitia was a very anxious place. This was the third consecutive time that the Chief Augur had attended the start of the meeting in person, instead of his usual delegate. Each time he had warned of the most hideous omens, and requested an adjournment until their meaning could be determined. But this time he was reporting that the cause of these baleful signs had been discerned.

"Something was done at the first Comitia Meeting in February to cause this offence. I cannot refine the omens any more precisely than that," he reported.

"Many things were done at that meeting," Caius Pullo replied. The Picentines had resolved that the two Republic Praetors would serve as the Tribal equivalent of Consuls, sharing the fasces and therefore the presidency of the Comitia on a month-about basis. "Do you have no idea of which specific action is causing the offence?"

"I'm sorry, but the omens are very adverse. This might suggest that more than one offence was committed."

"Then what are we to do?" Pullo cried in exasperation. "Are we expected to void everything we did on that day?" It had been the first meeting since the elections and many routine appointments had been made that day. "We would effectively be starting the year all over again, and it's already the eve of Quinctilis! And if we repeal all the appointments, what would be the legal standing of any decisions made by those appointees? Would they all need to be re-visited and confirmed?"

"I can't answer these questions, lord Pullo. I'm an augur, not a lawyer," The augur said solemnly. "All I can tell you is that every god has shown at least two adverse omens, and some have shown more than a dozen."

Pullo looked over to his colleague. "Can you offer any lead, Marcus?"

"I don't understand auspices," Pictus admitted. "All I know is that the signs at the start of the February meeting were good; so why are the gods now displeased?" He looked towards the Augur for an explanation.

"The opening auspices were indeed fair," the augur agreed. "But that only demonstrates that the day was suitable for making decisions. It does not automatically guarantee that the decisions would be good. Otherwise, two men might play dice, both expecting to walk away richer! No, fair auspices do not

guarantee a good outcome,” the augur shook his head. “Only that a good outcome is possible if we act with prudence, piety, fidelity and wisdom.”

“Enough of this!” Pullo exclaimed in frustration. “Are we able to start the meeting, or not?”

“If you wish, I can commence the augury for this meeting,” the Augur agreed. “But even if the augury is fair, that will only mean that the first business of the day must be to address the baleful omens. If you don’t first put right what is now wrong you are heaping impiety onto impiety. So I must advise you with all the force I can muster, don’t seek to start business unless you are already certain that you can correct what is wrong and determined to do so. Otherwise you are inviting pestilence upon yourselves and the whole Tribe.”

“And how can we be certain, short of annulling every decision made at that first meeting?” Pullo asked.

“I don’t know, sir,” the Augur replied. “It might be that the gods are deliberately withholding this information to discipline you. The offence might be only one thing but so impious that they require you to undo everything, even those things which were not objectionable in themselves, in order to humiliate you.”

Pictus rose from his seat and approached Pullo. He bent to whisper.

“It would be a good thing to be able to govern the Tribe well,” he said to his colleague. “But we have already achieved our primary goal, the Head Tax. I don’t want to repeal that now. We might never be able to re-instate it if some of our followers get anxious. We barely had the numbers first time around, and now that it has this pall cast over it as a possible cause for the gods’ disfavour...”

Pullo nodded, and turned his head to whisper in reply. “I agree. It’s a shame that Drusus prevented the enslavements we had in mind, but I have an idea about that. We’ll talk about that later. But that idea will never see the light of day so long as these omens continue. Let’s wait until the Tax is safely in the Temple, then we can repeal it and get on with business.” Pictus nodded in turn, and went back to his seat.

“Chief Augur; it has taken you less than a month to narrow down the problem to the first Comitia Meeting,” Pullo said. “I implore you to continue your work. Perhaps you will be able to refine the problem for our next meeting.” He looked around the chamber. “In ten days’ time, my lords!”

“My lord Consul!” The Chief Augur seemed most upset as he grasped at Pictus’ sleeve in the middle of the forum.

“Yes, Chief Augur?” Pictus asked politely.

“Consul, I am terrified!”

“Terrified of what?” Pictus asked.

“Destruction! Desolation! Annihilation! Perdition!” the Augur cried aloud, his hands quivering. The nearby crowd gathered around around, perturbed by such fear in the voice of their most sacred man.

"Yes, any sane man would be terrified of those things," Pictus replied, wondering if the old Augur had finally cracked. Thinking about the gods and their Delphic omens all your life must play havoc with a man's sanity.

"You don't understand! I'm not terrified of them in the abstract, as a mere possibility; I see them hanging over all of Picenum, a present curse!"

"Then how may they be avoided?" Pictus was tiring of this old man and his dreads.

"I don't know," the Augur answered. "But I'll immediately order every temple to make every sacrifice in its liturgy. I'll immediately order every public building to be fumigated and cleansed."

"Well you had better hurry!" Pictus commented. "Today is the Kalends of Quinctilis, and we have another Comitia Meeting scheduled for tomorrow!"

"I'll ensure that the Comitia Chamber is finished in time!" the Augur promised, and hurried away.

It was almost midnight the following day by the time all the public buildings had been fumigated and cleansed. The last one of all would be the Comitia Chamber itself. The Chief Augur had pledged to do this in person. He approached the door, his two assistants carrying the chest with all the paraphernalia required for a ritual cleansing. The guard recognised them and permitted entry. For the next hour the sounds of ritual chanting and scrubbing of floors and walls could be heard. The aroma of incense could be smelt, and under that the more mundane smell of a floor cleaner. Inside the building the three augurs were going through their rituals. When they had finished the Chief Augur took two items out of the bottom of the chest and laid them carefully on the floor. All three looked at each other knowingly, and re-packed their ritual equipment into the chest.

The Chief Augur spoke to the guard as he left. "Make sure nothing enters the building between now and when the proper entry rites for the Comitia are done," he warned the guard earnestly. "This has been a baleful day and we must allow no chance for any evil to enter. No, not even by opening a door, lest a wicked spirit sneak through!"

A meeting of the Comitia didn't always attract such pomp. Processions were usually staged only for the first meeting of a newly-elected Comitia or for feast days. But the Chief Augur insisted that the evil omens of the last month and his more recent black visions were significant. Although he had purified the chamber the previous evening, that would mean nothing if the opening of the doors allowed evil into the place before the meeting. So he insisted that there be a formal opening procession with him personally cleansing the way. Both Praetors agreed. Anything to resolve the evil omens would be helpful.

So the Chief Augur headed the procession, his staff held out ahead of him and his two closest assistants, one behind each shoulder, swinging the censers. He solemnly climbed the steps and stopped before the great doors. His assistants stepped forward, took one door each, and walked backwards in an arc to pull the

doors wide open. The Chief Augur stepped forward over the threshold and paused as he looked into the building. Then he made a strange gurgling noise in his throat and slowly turned to face the procession. His face was a rictus of shock. He took a couple of feeble steps and a stain spread down the front of his gown as he wet himself. Then he collapsed, first to his knees and then sideways, only the quick action of an assistant preventing his head from striking the pavement of the portico.

The two Praetors at the head of the procession rushed up the steps. Pictus looked through the doors but coming from bright sunlight he couldn't see into the comparative gloom inside the chamber very clearly. Then he saw the shapes on the floor and went weak at the knees himself.

"What... what are they?" he asked one of the assistants as he pointed through the doors.

The young augur took his attention away from his master and peered into the building. Then he rose to his feet, and walked in hesitantly. Pictus heard the gasp and the young man backed out again, panic in his eyes.

"We cleaned ... this chamber last night!" he stuttered out.

"What are they?" Pictus demanded.

"A crow and a black dog," the assistant gulped. "It looks like the dog has been strangled; I couldn't see the bird well enough."

"How did they get in there?" Pictus demanded.

"Don't... I don't know!" the young augur said, his face a mask of terror. "We purified this chamber last night, and it's been locked ever since!" Then a pause before exclaiming "Oh, gods! What have we done that you curse us so?" He cried at the top of his voice.

Pullo was still staring into the building. He found his voice. "Can you remove them?"

"This is a very powerful sign of the gods' displeasure," the young augur replied shakily. "I dare not do anything that might seem disrespectful of this sign. I think we should wait for the Chief Augur to handle this."

"Very well," Pictus said. Then he turned back to the procession. "This is my month with the fasces; the meeting is adjourned until I can be advised by the Chief Augur."

The Chief Augur had been barely conscious during this time, lolling his head in his assistant's hands, and murmuring incoherently. At last he seemed to be able to focus his eyes.

"Master!" the assistant demanded, "Are you with us again?"

"Oh," the Chief Augur sighed. "Oh! Let me regain my wits and my strength." He allowed his head to flop back into the care of his assistant.

Pullo walked to the edge of the portico, to the top step. "There shall be no meeting today!" he proclaimed again. "The Comitia is adjourned, to meet in ten days!" The procession started to dissolve, and men crowded to ascend the steps to see what had caused this dismay.

"No!" Pullo commanded. "No-one is to enter! Go home, all of you!"

"No! Come, all who will!" shouted the young augur in defiance. "See the gravity of the gods' displeasure!"

Pullo turned in anger towards the young augur. He reached for a sword that wasn't there, he being in full toga for this ceremonial procession. It would have made no difference. The young pup stood glaring at him, daring him to do something. All around him he felt the press of men ascending the stairs to look in and heard the gasps of shock as they made out the shapes on the floor.

The days following these disastrous omens were filled with desperate gossip and fevered plotting. The opinion soon arose that the gods were not offended by any one action, but by the Comitia as a whole. That was why the Chief Augur couldn't find a single cause! Because there *was* no single cause! This pressure and anxiety was affecting all the Comitia members, the Boni puppets more than any others. After all, they were the members who had supported the program put out by the Comitia while the opposition members could feel that their objections had been vindicated. This increasing wave of despair culminated on the evening before the next meeting, when Pontius Pellius stood on the portico of the Comitia House and called to the crowd in the forum. At his right hand stood the Chief Augur himself.

"Fellow citizens, my brothers!" he called. "A great curse is upon this Comitia. This Comitia has offended every god! It has become a by-word for impiety! It has become a text-book in the arts of betrayal!"

"What has it done, to sink so low?" he asked rhetorically, pausing long enough to make sure the attention of the crowd was focused on the answers he was about to provide. "What has it done to cause so great a repulse from the gods, upon whom we depend for every good thing?"

"Our Chief Augur has discovered that this was no recent act of turpitude; indeed he has assured us that this heinous offence was committed in the very first meeting! I will tell you, my brothers! The betrayal is that the majority of this Comitia had sold themselves to Roman landlords! In doing so, they had agreed to sell you, their brothers and sisters, into slavery with this appalling Head Tax!"

"There is no other way to interpret these signs! For what greater responsibility can there be than to be entrusted with the welfare of your entire Tribe? And what greater impiety can there be but to betray this trust and sell them into slavery, into the hands of those whose ancestors usurped our lands? And who now refuse to even pay tax on their blood-stained holdings? Thanks be to the gods that lord Drusus, as pious a man as has ever lived, has saved us this year!" The crowd cheered the mention of their benefactor.

"But what about next year? Not even a man like lord Drusus can continue paying the tax for a whole Tribe, year after year!" He paused to let this thought linger on their ears. "But not even that greatest of impieties was enough for this Comitia! They went even further! They have purchased for themselves, at the expense of the freedom of their brothers, a band of rogues, misfits and slaves to enforce this abominable Tax! Yes, they have had the arrogance to use your own taxes to oppress and subjugate you, their own blood!"

“There is only one way to expunge this curse. This Comitia, when it meets tomorrow, must repeal every decision it has ever made. Every one of them, whether for good or for ill as a man might see them, because who knows how the gods view these decisions? It is better to confess that all they have done has come from improper motives and is therefore stained, regardless of how each item might appear in isolation. And the Comitia must then dissolve itself, and call for the election of a new Comitia. The gods have made known their displeasure; we must remove that which displeases them and install a new Comitia, one consciously determined to the strictest piety.”

The crowd erupted in a cheer. What everyone had feared in the back of their hearts had been said at last. The truth had been proclaimed. Pellius motioned for quiet. “But although that is what must happen, you must not believe that it will happen without a struggle. Those who rule this wicked Comitia will not give up their power readily. Remember the Militia they have hired! They will have no compunction in slaughtering any who oppose them. They have already resolved to enslave their own tribe; what is to stop them from shedding a little blood on the way?

“I ask you, my brothers; be here yourselves tomorrow, and bring all your friends and neighbours! Come in peace, but prepared for attack! Only your numbers, and the determination you show to preserve your freedom and your heritage, will be enough to deter these brutes from their evil course. Will you be here, brothers?”

“We will be here!” some shouted back. “We will be here! We will be here! We will be here!” The chant grew. After a couple of minutes Pellius motioned for calm again.

“Then I will see you all here tomorrow, and many more as well. Remember, come in peace! We must not compound the scandal that these evil men have committed. But be prepared to resist further evil from them.”

Word of this speech spread quickly. The guard outside the Comitia building reported it to Pullo as soon as the crowd had dispersed. Pullo called for Pictus to meet with him immediately to make plans for the morning. The guard then went back to the barracks and word spread through the Militia.

“I expect there will be thousands of them there tomorrow,” the guard told his fellows. “They were really stirred up. And besides, I think Pellius is right. How else do you explain all these omens?”

“Whether he's right or not doesn't matter,” one of his listeners countered. “They're a rabble, and we are trained. If they give any trouble, we cut them down. That's what we get paid for, and I like the pay.”

“Unless the gods intervene!” said another. “And even if they don't, they could curse the flesh to fall off your bones if you oppose them. Best not to mess with the gods, I say.” There was a murmur of agreement to this view.

“So what are you going to do tomorrow if you're ordered to put down a riot?” the first listener countered. “Are you going to stand there and let the mob cut you to pieces? Or will you fight back?”

"I got a better idea than either of those choices," another said. "I say, if there's going to be trouble then I'd rather be somewhere else."

"You mean, desert?"

"I prefer to think of it as a sudden change of occupation," the prospective deserter answered. The other listeners murmured their appreciation for this option.

"You'll be hunted down and crucified!"

"By whom? Here's what I suggest. How about we all get into our gear as if we are about to go on a patrol or something. Then we go knock on the next hut, explain what's going to happen tomorrow, and invite them to join us. They won't be stupid enough to take us on, if we're all geared up and ready to fight. I expect they will join us anyway, but even if they don't they won't cause any problems. And we work our way along all the huts this way. The more that come with us, the fewer there'll be to chase us. And the more strength we have to fight them off if they do, but they won't. However many stay here will be needed for crowd-control tomorrow, so they won't bother to chase us."

"But what about the sentries at the gates?"

"They can come too," the deserter offered.

The five contubernia of men sharing this hut looked at each other. "I'm in," said one. The others, now no longer afraid of being the first to agree to a mutiny, quickly joined in.

"Well, what about you?" the now-leader of the mutiny asked the objector. "Would you rather come with us, or will you be the only man to confront five thousand angry rioters?"

The objector smiled. "I think a sudden change of occupation would be a good thing!"

Pullo and Pictus had met and agreed that the entire Militia should be deployed on crowd control. The more present, the less likely that anyone would dare get out of hand. They would rely on intimidation to avoid a riot rather than force to quell one. They called for the captain of the Militia to discuss the program for the next morning and how best to deploy their men from start to finish.

It was midnight by the time this had been worked through, notes taken and the various stations allocated to the contubernia available. But all would be in place tomorrow at first light so the civilians would be intimidated even as they arrived. The captain took his leave and Pictus decided to stay the night with his colleague rather than go home.

It was less than an hour later when the captain was back at the street door, banging on it with some urgency. The Master of House, annoyed at this interruption to what would be a short night's sleep anyway, answered the racket.

"Gnaeus Tullius here!" the captain answered the challenge. "I must speak to the Praetor!"

The Master of House reluctantly admitted him, and bolted the door again. "Go to the triclinium. You know where it is. I'll tell lord Pullo you are back."

Mind your manners with me, slave!" Tullius snapped back at this lack of respect. "If I didn't have more important matters to discuss I would have your master whip you!"

The Master of House padded away to Pullo's sleeping room.

"Consul we have a problem," Tullius said as Pullo entered the triclinium. "The Militia has deserted."

"How many?" Pullo asked.

"All of it."

"Oh, shit!" Pullo dropped onto a couch. "Oh, well. Only one thing for it now. Philon!" he called the Master of House. "Rouse lord Pictus and tell him to prepare immediately for a ride to the estate of lord Gnaeus Pompeius. Then go and rouse the stables. We will have four mounts prepared, please."

"What will you do?" Tullius asked.

"What do you expect me to do?" Pullo replied impatiently. "I'm running for safety. You should too. Now I've got to get dressed, so if you will excuse me..." Pullo turned and left the room.

The Comitia members arrived in small groups, using their combined escorts for enhanced safety. Eventually the appointed time came but neither Praetor was present to open proceedings. Half an hour after the scheduled start of the meeting the Chief Augur took the initiative. He approached Pellius.

"Pontius, the crowd outside is getting restless. If progress is not made soon we might well have a riot."

Pellius looked out the doors, still wide open, and saw the expressions on the front ranks of the crowd. "I agree." He walked to the plinth on which the Praetors chairs were placed, and called for attention. "Lords, it is well past time for this meeting to start and we have neither Praetor here to manage proceedings. I call upon you to elect a chairman so we can get under way." He threw an obvious glance towards the doors. "The People expect us to act on their behalf and not behave like children waiting for Daddy."

"We can't act without a Praetor present," Marcus Rufus objected.

"Oh, yes we can!" contradicted Quintus Parco. Like Pellius, he was one of the few who had been elected on merit and not because of the purse of the Pompeius family. "It happened all the time last year, when we weren't under the thumb of the House of Pompeius!"

"But this year we passed a Standing Order that only a Praetor could chair a Comitia Meeting! And we can't change Standing Orders until a Meeting has been convened to change them," Rufus shot back.

"Yes, that was one of the acts passed at the first Comitia Meeting this year; the Meeting that all the gods have cursed!" Parco retorted.

"My lords!" Pellius roared over the rising exchanges. "MY LORDS!" When some measure of peace had returned, "I suggest that if you want to be able to leave this Chamber alive, you consider electing an Acting Chairman."

"I nominate Pontius Pellius as Acting Chairman!" Quintus Parco called out.

"I accept that nomination," Pellius responded, "Do I have any other nominations?"

The Boni puppets looked at each other. None were willing to nominate a fellow, lest they be judged by their masters to have broken their instructions to do nothing except as instructed by the Praetors.

"For a second time, do I have another nomination?" Then after a pause, "For a third and final time, do I have another nomination?"

"We have only one nomination. I call upon Quintus Parco to manage the process of election."

Parco made his way to the focus of the floor. Comitia members were still standing around in clumps, and being a short man Parco could be not be seen by many. But his voice had authority. "There being no other nomination, I ask members if Pontius Pellius is elected Acting Chair until such time as a Praetor is present. Those in favour?" A scattering of 'ayes' rose over the conversations. "Those against?" A few 'noes' were heard.

"I think the 'ayes' have it. Is there a call for a division?"

"Division!" Rufus cried, attempting to marshal his fellows.

"Very well!" Parco cried. "All those in favour to the right of the chamber; all those against to the left."

Two clusters formed, with Rufus bullying his reluctant peers to join him on the left. Eventually the reluctant made their way to the left side of the chamber. They were clearly the larger group.

"Don't form pairs just yet, brothers!" Parco called out. He then walked over to the open doors. "Fellow Picentines," he bellowed into the crowd standing outside. "This is how a Comitia reaches a decision. It is called a 'division'. All those on the right side of the chamber, which is on your left as you enter through the doors, are voting in favour of electing a Chairman so we can resolve our problems. Those on the left side of the chamber, which is on your right side as you enter through the doors, don't want the meeting to start. Remember that; those on your right hand side as you enter do NOT want this meeting to start!"

The front rows of the crowd surged towards the open doors. Some of those on the "No" side took fright and ran across the chamber to the obvious safety of the "Ayes". Others followed, and soon everyone was on the "Ayes" side, including Rufus.

"There being no-one on the 'No' side, I declare the vote carried," Parco announced. "Pontius Pellius, please take the chair." And then he turned to the forty-something men who had entered the chamber. "Thank you, citizens of Picenum, for your enthusiasm to see democracy in action. But if you would now leave the chamber so we can get on with our business..."

The invaders cheered their first victory, and pushed against the pressure of the crowd behind them to leave. "Back up! Back up!" The word went through the crowd, and eventually space had been made for them outside the doors.

Pellius looked around the Chamber. "Lords, the Chief Augur would like to address us before we go any further."

The Chief Augur stepped to the focus of the chamber. "Lords, as Pontius Pellius said on the front steps yesterday with my support, I now say to you. This entire Comitia is a gross impiety, and has been since it first met. That is not to say that each and every member of it is guilty; only that as a collected body this Comitia meets with the total disapproval of the gods. I urge you to repeal every decision this Comitia has made, and then to abolish it so it can be replaced by a more auspicious body. That is all."

"Chief Augur, is it appropriate that we attend to signs for a meeting today? And if auspicious, should we proceed?" Pellius asked.

"You may take the signs if you wish," The Chief Augur agreed, "But I warn you; don't do so unless you are prepared to correct your earlier impieties. Otherwise, the consequences will be too horrible to describe. The gods will not restrain their wrath much longer."

Pellius looked around the chamber. "Brothers, the Tribe demands that the gods be placated. Is there anyone here who does not agree with me? If so, then let him rise from his seat now, and stand to the left of the chamber. If there is as much as one such man, I will call a division, and the Tribe will know who is with them, and who is not." Pellius stared pointedly at Rufus, who glanced at the mob in front of the open doors before affecting a casual pose. Pellius turned back to the Chief Augur. "Please, carry on, Chief Augur."

"Yes, Chairman. Please allow me perhaps more time than usual; I must be meticulous today, more than any other. I have already observed the flight of the birds, and it appears good; but on so important occasion I believe we should also inspect a liver."

Every eye was fixed on the procedure. The bird was killed, bled, and flayed. The liver was removed, and inspected in the greatest detail. The chief Augur then placed the liver on a board and took it to the door, to allow better light. He called the young augur to his side and pointed out to him special features, as his assistant held the board. Then he returned to the focus of the floor.

"Chairman, the liver was entirely good in every one of its indications. I don't recall seeing one so good. Be confident that if this Comitia acts with true fidelity and piety today, it will please the gods."

"Thank you, Chief Augur," Pellius called the meeting to attention. "The auspices are good. Let the business commence."

Parco stood.

"Yes, Quintus Parco?"

"I move that all decisions of this Comitia and all of its appointments before today be declared null and void. Only those decisions and appointments since sunrise this morning shall stand."

Pellius looked around the chamber. "Is there a speaker against that proposal?" A murmur rose in the crowd. No-one in the Comitia Chamber stood. "There being no speaker against the proposal, I presume it is carried. Does anyone require a vote?" Another low murmur from the open doors dissuaded any objection. "Then I declare it carried. Is there any other matter the Comitia would consider?"

Parco stood again.

“Yes, Quintus Parco?”

“I propose that this Comitia dissolve itself, to permit new elections at the soonest possible time.”

“Is there a speaker against the proposal?” No-one stood. Then Pellius stood himself.

“I must speak against the proposal in its current wording, and suggest a minor amendment for the consideration of the mover.” A murmur of confusion and fear rose from the door. This could be dangerous!

“I agree totally with the intent of the proposition,” he assured everyone as quickly as he could. “But it needs to be done in a slightly different way. I suggest, for the mover’s consideration, that we must first appoint an interrex, so that new elections can be conducted. That interrex shall have no power or authority other than as required to conduct the elections in an honest and proper way. However, his authority in conducting those elections honestly and fairly shall be absolute. We want no more corruption. Then, when the interrex is put in place, the proposal as put by Quintus Parco can be adopted.” Pellius sat, and Parco rose again.

“With the permission of the Chamber, I would like my proposal to be held over until all other matters are dealt with,” Parco agreed with the correction.

“Is there any objection to holding over the Question until the last item of business?” Pellius looked around the chamber. “There being no objection, is there any other business?”

Parco stood again.

“Yes, Quintus Parco?”

“I move that the Chamber appoint an interrex, with authority extending as far as required to conduct new and honest elections for a new Comitia but no further.”

“Is there any speaker against that Question?” No-one moved. “There being no speaker against, I presume it is carried. Is there an objection? There being no objection, I declare it carried. Do I have a nomination for Interrex?”

Quintus Parco rose again. “I nominate Pontius Pellius.”

Pellius stood. “I accept the nomination. I hand the process of this election over to Caius Millo.” Pellius stepped away from the chair. Millo, caught by surprise, took a moment to rise and take the chair.

“I have the nomination of Pontius Pellius. I call again for further nominations.”

Pellius was watching Rufus. He saw him dig a colleague in the ribs, and whisper to him. The colleague stood.

“I nominate Marcus Rufus.”

Rufus stood. “I accept the nomination.”

“I have the nominations of Marcus Rufus and Pontius Pellius. Are there any further nominations?” Millo called. Then after a short pause, “For the final time, I have the nominations of Marcus Rufus and Pontius Pellius. Are there any further nominations?” There was silence. “Then I put the question to the vote. Those in favour of Pontius Pellius?”

There were quite a few “ayes” from the Comitia; more than Pellius expected. Some of the Boni puppets have already been cowed so much that they were forgetting to follow the plot.

“Now those in favour of Marcus Rufus?” A much stronger chorus of “Ayes” rose.

Pellius stood immediately and called for a division. That saved Millo from having to declare a contrary result, which could have been the trigger for a riot.

“There has been a call for a division. Those in favour of Marcus Rufus to the left, and all those in favour of Pontius Pellius to my right.”

As the members sorted themselves into their proper places, Parco wandered to the doors again. He looked over his shoulder, and saw that Rufus had restored some discipline among the puppets. “Citizens! You have seen how the Comitia decides how to resolve questions; much the same process is involved in elections. Those on the left side of the camber as you enter are supporting Marcus Rufus, who has been a leader of the majority in this evil Comitia. Those on the right as you enter are supporting Pontius Pellius, who has opposed most of their major decisions.”

Even as he spoke Parco could hear the scuffing of feet as members backing Rufus realised what was happening and rapidly changed sides. He turned back to stand on the side for Pellius just as the the dribble became a stampede.

By the time Parco had taken his place all members were on the side supporting Pellius, even Rufus himself.

“Every member of the Comitia being on the side supporting Pontius Pellius, I declare Pontius Pellius to be the Interrex under the terms of the proposal. I now return the chair to Pontius Pellius.” Millo was relieved that nothing have gone wrong during his five minutes of glory. The crowd outside the door cheered their approval.

Pellius took the seat and called “Is there any other business to put before the Comitia, other than the question held over?” No-one stood. “There being no other new business, I revert back to the Question held over. The question is that this Comitia dissolve itself, so that a new Comitia can be elected as soon as possible. Is there a speaker against that Question?”

“There being no speaker against the Question, I presume it is carried. Is there any objection?” He looked meaningfully towards Rufus, who affected to not be interested. “The Question is declared carried. This Comitia is now dissolved. Thank you, Brothers.” Pellius stood and walked towards the doors. Pushing his way through the mass of well-wishers, he took his stance on the top of the steps, and motioned for silence.

“My brothers!” he called exuberantly. The crowd roared back its approval. As the roar died down, he spoke again. “My brothers; the wrath of the gods has been averted!” Another roar forced him to wait. “And it has been averted only because you, the beating heart of Picenum, have shown the courage to be here today despite the risk of a Militia slaughter. You have been so courageous that you have even scared the Militia away!”

Again Pellius had to wait for quiet before he could continue. “I will hold the new elections as soon as possible. But first I need to make sure that the corruption that gave us this wicked Comitia can never happen again. I expect it might be months before everything can be put in place. I ask you to be patient with me. A delay is nothing, compared to the peril that can spring from another corrupt election.”

Things were progressing more slowly in the lands of the Lucani. Their Chief Augur lacked the imagination and daring of his Picentine counterpart and restricted himself to reporting inauspicious omens. He was assassinated and his replacement was told in no uncertain terms that obstruction would not be tolerated. The Boni seemed to have things under control.

“It was a bit of a disappointment when Drusus made good on those tax pledges,” Atius said to his colleagues as he leant back in his chair under the shade of his vine-laden trellis. “It means we miss out on cutting down the numbers of voters next time around. So how are we going to ensure our re-election next year?”

“Why not just raise another tax?” his colleague Lucius suggested. “And this time make it a big one; enough to send Drusus and Marius to the wall if they try to pay it, and discredits them if they give up.”

“No, that's a bit too obvious. We would end up with a revolt on our hands, one that the other Tribes might join out of fear that they might be next. That could be bigger than we could handle.”

“Why not put a property qualification on the right to vote?” that was Piso.

“No; every citizen has a right to vote; that principle applies throughout the Republic. Even the Boni accept that the Head Count has voting rights.”

“Well, if not a property qualification, then why not a solvency qualification? Any one in debt can't vote; and all these whose taxes have been paid by borrowing from Drusus are in debt!” Piso persisted.

“Forget it!” Lucius dismissed the suggestion. “I'm in debt. Half the nobility are, too.”

“Yes but you have assets to cover those debts. What about those who are in nett debt; insolvent!”

Atius looked carefully at Piso. For a man usually short on ideas, this seemed to be one of his better ones. “Yes; I like that!” he responded at last. “But no need to rush; if we go that way, it can be brought in at the last Comitia meeting before the vote. And in the meantime, we might come up with a better plan.”

Silo's occupation of all of Osrhoene was unopposed by the Parthians other than for a formal protest.

The shortage of trained Administrators meant that only the larger towns were under the direct control of these professionals, but the centurions in charge of districts and decani in charge of smaller settlements were left in no doubt that they were under the constraints of civil law. Rape, pillage and intimidation would not be tolerated. The locals reacted well to this. After the first few months of

doubt and confusion they welcomed the Roman administration's light hand on their lives, and some genuine fraternisation replaced the initial obsequiousness. Confidence in the new management soared after a few cases of petty crime were resolved on the basis of justice rather than competing bribes.

Not that a comparison with the rule of Tigranes is a high standard to match, Silo thought to himself; but it certainly makes it easier to maintain the peace. All of Osrhoene held in peace by only five centuries! Sophene, including the Northern Pocket further north, was held by three legions, but only a cohort was actually on pacification duty. The others were there to dissuade Armenian revauchism. Thank all the gods for inspiring me to write the New Standing Orders and the Miletus Decree!

Yet there were still some problems in the north where the status and exact extent of Colchis was still being contested. This should be settled soon and Silo was prepared to be less aggressive against Tigranes this time. Now Armenia was too weak to be a threat Silo would be content with acquiescence rather than conquest. He decided to send Telesinus to Tigranocerta to reach an agreement. He would like a few years of peace to settle the new province into the Roman way of doing things.

"Hail, King of Kings!" Telesinus cried out as he saluted Tigranes. "General Silo sends you his best wishes!"

"What is his complaint this time?" Tigranes asked warily. "We have been scrupulous in honouring our agreement with him."

"Apart from conspiring with Gotarzes to produce a fraudulent Treaty, yes you have," Telesinus conceded cheerily. "But let's not dwell on that; we have much more significant points to discuss."

Tigranes ignored the reference to the Treaty. To argue the issue would gain nothing. "Then please open the discussion, legate."

"There remains some confusion about the precise extent of our territories around Colchis and the north. General Silo would like these matters resolved definitively and finally."

"The General's forces already occupy all of the lands formerly occupied by Pontus, and even more that has been seized for the sake of 'administrative convenience'. Yet no reductions are ever offered for the sake of 'administrative convenience'! It would appear that the General's grasp continues to grow."

"I come with a proposal that involves precisely some of the reductions you seek. The General seeks natural frontiers, where the land itself provides rational boundary markers."

"And your proposal is...?" Tigranes asked.

"A simple formula, King of Kings. Instead of lines on a map, let us accept the features that the land itself provides. We propose that all land draining to the Euxine Sea is to be Roman, and all land draining to the Eastern Sea is to be Armenian. Thus, the boundary between us shall be the watershed; high land which is worthless in itself, and therefore no grounds for war. Further south, our current agreement is to be confirmed; all land draining to the Euphrates is Roman,

and also the right bank of the main channel of the Tigris. The left bank of the Tigris is Armenian."

Tigranes paused for a moment as he pictured this in his mind. "And this is to be the final, definitive boundary?"

"That is our proposal, King of Kings, provided there is no further provocation such as your invasion of the Northern Pocket last year."

"You continue to bait me with these false accusations, legate; which makes me suspect that you are tempting me to provide you with something that can be twisted to look like an excuse for further aggression by Rome. I don't intend to provide you with any satisfaction on that count and refuse to respond to your taunts. So let us concentrate on the proposal at hand. I don't reject your proposal immediately, but would like to consult more closely with my servants on the implications it holds before I agree. If you please return to me in two days I will be able to discuss this in more detail."

The advice Tigranes received that evening caused him some concern. A year ago the boundary had been the old formula, 'the Euphrates River shall be the boundary between our areas of influence', with dispute being whether the Eastern or Western Euphrates applied in the upper reaches. The settlement after the last campaign had set their boundary as 'the main channel of the Tigris', but had left the upper reaches of the Eastern Euphrates unaffected. So this part of the Roman proposal amounted to another land grab by the Romans by including the whole Euphrates catchment. But this didn't amount to much; now that the de facto boundary was the Eastern Euphrates, the sliver of land left to Armenia was both small and poor, and inaccessible by road except through Roman held territory.

On the other hand, the concession to Armenia of 'all land draining to the Eastern Sea' would give him a free hand in Iberia and Albania, and into Samartia if he wanted it. And apart from anything else, allocating territory on the basis of whole valleys made sense in the uplands, where ridges were natural barriers and rivers were easily bridged, while in the lowlands the rivers were the barriers and the flat lands between were easily traversed.

Yes, the Roman proposal made sense. If they could be trusted to stick to it! And on the other hand, if he refused the Romans would be able to take the Euphrates lands at their convenience, retain the Iberian lands they were offering to cede, and in the process he would lose any claim as a 'Friend and Ally'. Nothing could be gained by resistance but much could be lost.

Telesinus stood before Tigranes again after two days.

"Lord Telesinus, let me clarify a detail in your proposal," Tigranes said after the formalities were completed. "I take it that agreement with this proposal would give Armenia a free hand in the lands of the Iberians and Albanians, and that Rome would not permit any hindrance of our actions there?"

"Any lands that drain to the Eastern Sea or to the left bank of the Tigris, are yours to claim or to leave unclaimed, as you chose," Telesinus confirmed. "If you chose to claim them, then neither Rome nor any Friend and Ally of Rome would be permitted to hinder your actions."

“That wording would imply that we would also have a free hand in Media and Adiabene, and you would not aid the Parthians?”

“That's true, King of Kings. We would provide no aid or support to any power in those areas this Treaty allocates as your area of influence, except as you permit,” Telesinus agreed.

“In which case, I see that this proposal is eminently sensible and just,” Tigranes smiled. “Even though it requires us to surrender a considerable value in land and revenue in the Upper Euphrates, we are prepared to make that sacrifice to achieve a stable and harmonious frontier with our Friend and Ally.”

Pontius Pellius was welcomed into Drusus' courtyard by Cratippus, who clapped his hands and ordered finger-food and wine to be brought. “Lord Drusus will be with you soon; he is speaking with a client at the moment.” He gestured towards the courtyard. “Would you like to wait in the garden? It's very pleasant today.” Pellius smiled and thanked Cratippus as he walked into the cool and shade next to the water fountain. Refreshments arrived within minutes and Drusus was not far behind them.

“Lord Drusus!” Pellius stood as his host walked into the garden.

Drusus waved the formalities away. “Please, Pontius! Call me Marcus Livius! If you deem me worthy of your friendship, that is. I admire your courage and wisdom as shown in how you handled the Picentine crisis.”

“Made possible only by your generosity,” Pellius replied. “And the wise advice from lord Sulla.”

“There were many players involved, Pontius. You mustn't underestimate the courage and skill of the Augurs, either.”

“Yes, Marcus Livius.” Pellius agreed. “The Augurs did well; I didn't understand their part until after the victory had been won.”

“It hasn't been won yet, Pontius.” Drusus cautioned him. “Don't think for a moment that the Pompeii are sitting in their estates and crying into their cups. Young Gnaeus puts on a very expensive show of honouring the law, but he has a heart as ambitious as his father's. He won't hesitate to resort to butchery if he thinks that's his best option.”

Pellius shrugged. “Let us face that problem if and when it arises. But I've come to Rome to ask you; how did you reproduce all those certificates for your clients when you lent them the tax money? Did you have them all written individually?”

“Lucius Cornelius arranged for them,” Drusus answered. “He tells me that he made a plate made up, like the seal on a signet ring, and stamped them out. He said he could make hundreds per hour.”

“Excellent!” Pellius exclaimed. “And how long did it take him to have the stamp made?”

“I don't know that,” Drusus admitted. “Why do you ask?”

“Because I think it might help me arrange for an election to be run without the risk of corruption or intimidation,” Pellius answered.

“What do you mean?” Drusus was intrigued.

“Well, as you would know, lor... Marcus Livius,” Pellius started, with an earnest look on his face. “The two biggest problems are the buying of votes with bribes and intimidation. But if no-one knows how a particular person voted, then a bribe is a waste of money. If a voter can take the money and vote the opposite way in a way that prevents the briber from finding out, then bribery will be pointless. And the same with intimidation.”

“Yes. But if you don't know how people vote, then how do you know who wins the election?”

“Let me explain,” Pellius pressed on. “Imagine that each man who comes to vote is given one piece of paper, like your certificates. Each certificate has a list of candidates on it. He takes this into a private space, where he can't be observed, and while in there he marks on the paper which candidate he prefers. Then he folds the paper, so it can't be read. Then he comes out of the room and puts the paper into the same box as everyone else. When everyone has voted the box is emptied and the marks on the paper are counted as votes; but because there's no way of knowing which person marked which paper, there's also no way of knowing who voted for which candidate! Bribes and intimidation will be impossible to enforce!”

Drusus was impressed by this. He nodded his head in appreciation. “But you will be electing – what – is it twenty men? And I expect there'll be many more candidates than places for election. If you have to go through this process twenty times you'll need more paper than you could possibly manage!”

“No, I've thought of a short cut,” Pellius answered. “Once we have the votes counted, we divide the total number of votes by the number of places to be filled. Any candidate who has more than enough votes can then give away his excess to whichever other candidates he chooses, until he has no more votes to spare. Every candidate who has enough votes after this distribution of excess votes is elected. This process is done for every candidate who has excess votes.

“But that will not fill all the places,” Pellius continued. “What happens next is that the candidate with the least votes is required to give his votes to other candidates still not elected. If this is enough to lift one or more to the required number of votes, they are elected. If not, then the next candidate with the fewest votes has to give away his votes; and so it goes until there are only as many candidates left as are required to fill the places left. They are then considered elected.”

“That seems to be a very complicated way of doing things.” Drusus commented. “Why go to that much trouble?”

“Think about how things might go in real life, Marcus Livius,” Pellius urged. “What if there is a group of, say, ten men who have the support of most voters. If we elect them one after another, all ten will be elected, and they will be a majority in the Comitia. But if we want to have only one turn through the elections, then it's possible that almost everyone votes for their leader, and the other nine are outvoted by the bits-and-pieces candidates. This would mean that the team that most voters support will be a minority in the Comitia. The only way we can have only one round of voting but still reflect what the people really want,

is to introduce a 'vote-sharing' arrangement like this. It means that if there are fifteen places for election, anyone with a fifteenth of the vote will be elected. If a man is so popular that he has three times as many votes as he needs, he can assist two like-minded colleagues to be elected as well. In short, it means that the men elected to the Comitia end up being a much closer representation of the opinions of the voters," Pellius concluded.

Drusus was still unconvinced. "But how do you elect a man to a single position?" he asked. "If there is only one position, and there are, say, a thousand votes, a thousand divided by one is still a thousand; and that means a candidate can only be elected if he gets every vote."

"That might seem true," conceded Pellius; "but remember; if no-one is elected in the first count, the man with the fewest votes is eliminated, and so the process goes on. Once you eliminate everyone except the last man standing, then that last is the only candidate left, so he is elected. Anyway, I don't pretend it's perfect and maybe some genius can improve it; but I think it's the best idea I have seen so far."

"I still think electing men one at a time is better," Drusus decided. "But as you say, that would take too long if you want to do it your secret way."

"I think the secret way is essential if we are to stamp out corruption," Pellius asserted. "And if that means a more complicated way of counting, then that will have to be done. But what I want is to know how to produce thousands of lists of candidates, all looking exactly the same, to keep the secrecy aspect. I'll have to talk to lord Sulla about that."

"I'd also like to run your idea about counting votes also past Lucius Cornelius, if you don't mind," Drusus said. "Would you mind if I invited him around, to talk it over? He can be very insightful about the implications of seemingly small changes."

"I would be honoured to meet lord Sulla again," Pellius replied. Drusus called for a runner.

Sulla was not impressed by the idea. "The way I see it, your idea runs completely against the Mos Majorum," he said bluntly.

"Please, Lucius Cornelius, explain how that's so," Pellius asked anxiously. Sulla had urged him to not call him 'lord Sulla', and he had been thrilled by that. But now so flat a rejection of his idea by a man he so much admired was causing him an almost physical pain.

"Isn't it obvious?" Sulla asked back. "Your idea allows one man to choose his colleagues in government, instead of the voters choosing them. What you are proposing is a King! An elected one, perhaps, but a King nonetheless," Sulla continued, "Now look; what if the voters would have liked this man as Senior Consul, but someone with different views as his colleague, to keep him in check? But your scheme would allow him to appoint his horse as his co-consul!" Sulla shook his head. "No! You must not allow any man to control the votes of other citizens! This paper-voting idea to eradicate corruption is brilliant, but is there any way you can adjust it so voters retain control of their votes?"

"I have an idea, Lucius Cornelius!" Drusus exclaimed. "Instead of just voting for the preferred candidate, what if the voter could mark as many candidates as he wanted, but in order of preference?

"Let him put the letter 'A' next to his favourite, and whichever candidate gets the most 'A' marks is the first elected. Then, to elect the second man, you count all the votes again; but this time, because one man is already elected, any votes with 'A' against his name are given to whichever candidate has 'B' next to his name. This is effectively the same as giving everyone a new vote for the second round of the election. The candidates already elected have no say in where the vote goes; or as you might say, no-one is King."

Sulla thought about this for a minute. "It's better; but it still has a problem. It means the voter has to vote for the second candidate before he knows who the first winner is."

"That would make no difference, Lucius Cornelius," Drusus returned. "He knows when he is voting that his 'B' choice will only matter if his 'A' choice is elected, so he can make the 'B' choice on the assumption that his favourite is already in. But if not, wouldn't he want to vote for his first choice again?"

"Yes, that makes sense," Sulla conceded. "Would you be happy with that, Pontius?" Sulla asked. "It keeps your secret vote and it saves the time of having to vote many times. But it allows elections to progress in the usual way, one man after another.

"I had another thought, Lucius Cornelius," Pellius replied. "If we do it as Marcus Livius suggests, we wouldn't have to count all the votes again. All but those of the winner would still stay in the same pile and we need only distribute and re-count those for the winner, but looking to see who was marked 'B' on each paper. When these are added to the piles of 'A' votes for other candidates, whoever has the biggest pile is elected second, and his pile then gets re-distributed again. That would save a lot of time."

"Yes! Brilliant!" Sulla said. "So all the way down the process, a voter can work on the basis that each choice will only be significant once all his previous choices are elected. But until then, his favourite still gets his vote. I like it!"

"Now, Lucius Cornelius; will you tell me the secret of your stamps so I can produce thousands of candidate lists?"

"My stamps?"

"Yes, like the certificates you produced for Marcus Livius when he lent the money."

"Oh, of course," Sulla said with a wave of the hand. "I had a man carve one of each of the letters in the alphabet, with a flat face like a signet ring. Then, I put its face on an ink cloth, and then pressed it to a piece of polished timber, the same size as the paper. In this way, one letter at a time, I spelt out the text I wanted. But of course, I had to spell everything backwards, because the letters were reversed. Then, I had a carpenter take out all the wood that was not inked. This gave me a single, super-size stamp with the whole text on it. Then, I just put the large stamp onto an inked cloth, and onto the paper, one sheet at a time. In an hour you can produce maybe a thousand prints."

"That's so simple, but so brilliant!" Pellius exclaimed. "Why has no-one ever done this before?"

"No need for it," Sulla said with a wave. "How often do you need to produce thousands of copies of any document? If you only need four or five, or even a few dozen, it is quicker to simply copy them."

"True, I suppose," Pellius agreed. "But when the need arises, it's so clever. Anyway, how long did it take you to produce the stamp, starting with the individual letters?"

"I think the carpenter took almost a day to produce the first stamp. He made about a dozen, all told; the water in the ink made the timber swell after a time, so we needed to replace them after a few thousand copies each."

"Could we make them out of bronze instead?" Pellius asked.

"That would be more difficult," Drusus commented. "It's much harder to scrape out the metal between the letters than working with wood."

"What if we use a wooden stamp to make an impression in potter's clay, and then pour bronze onto the impression?" Pellius asked. Then we just need to grind the face of the bronze to a fresh surface, and that should last a lot longer."

"Yes, that would work," Sulla agreed. "And in fact, you could make dozens of clay impressions with the timber prototype and make dozens of bronze stamps to be used simultaneously, all for the time to make one timber prototype."

Pellius looked into the distance. "You know, I think we might be onto something here."

The sound of someone hammering on the street door came through the house. Cratippus moved quickly to attend to it. Through the open flap he could see a small sweat-stained and dusty man standing in the last light of dusk.

"Is Pontius Pellius here, please? I was told to look for him with lord Drusus!"

"I will ask lord Drusus if he knows where lord Pellius is," Cratippus replied evenly. "Please wait here, lord....?"

"My name is Quintus Parco."

Cratippus entered the triclinium. "Excuse me, sirs, but a man giving his name as Quintus Parco is asking for lord Pellius."

"What's Quintus doing here?" Pellius exclaimed. "I must see him." Pellius ran to the door and looked at the man through the door flap. "Quintus! Come in!"

Parco had barely made it through the door before he started speaking quickly. His first sentence was finished before the door closed behind him. "The Pompeii have taken Ancona! They sent almost a thousand men armed as legionaries and occupied all of the public places. They have also seized all of the old Comitia members who opposed Rufus," he rushed out. "And they accused the Chief Augur of misreading the auspices and of profaning the Comitia Chamber! They publicly beheaded him for impiety!" The last words hit the three listeners like a ballista bolt. Beheading a Chief Augur without trial!

"How did you escape, Quintus? Are your family safe?"

“One of the Militia warned me. Caius Maniculus also got away. I don't know how our families fare.”

“Speaking of the Militia; why didn't they resist?” Pellius asked.

“The Pompeians moved in two hours before dawn and captured the Militia in their barracks. The fellow who warned me was a sentry who fled when he saw so many armed men coming. Caius and I hid in the forest outside Ancona for most of the day. But when our informants told us about what was happening in the city and the death of the Chief Augur, we decided we had to get to you as fast as possible. We begged horses from the villa of a friend and started riding.”

“Where's Caius now?” Pellius asked.

“With the Marsi. His horse stumbled and he was injured.”

The three listeners looked to each other.

“Like father, like son,” Sulla said. “So much for Gnaeus Pompeius honouring the Republic!”

“I think we need to pay a visit to Lucius and Sextus Julius straight away,” Drusus offered. “This is an insurrection and the Consuls have the authority to take control of the legions to put it down.”

“Agreed,” Sulla bit off the word. “Let's go!”

The four men made their way to the house of Sextus Julius, the closer of the two Consuls. Caesar admitted them immediately.

“You look worried. What's the problem?”

Sulla looked to Parco, and gestured for him to answer. After repeating his story he fell silent, pleading with his eyes for the Senior Consul to do something.

“Bloody Pompeii!” Caesar swore. “They own most of Picenum and act like it's their private kingdom! Now it seems they have started to believe it!” He stood abruptly. “Let's drop in on Lucius. He's Italian so he should be the one to handle this. And besides, he's a Military Man with a reputation to scare the shit out of even the Gens Pompeia!”

When Glauca was told of the events he was furious. “This is typical of these Boni bastards! They still seem to think they are living a hundred years ago, when Italians were worth less than cattle! Well, I happen to know a few legions' worth of veterans in the Marsic lands alone! I'll collect them on the way and tidy up this prick in short time!”

“Don't be too hasty, Lucius,” Caesar warned him calmly. “We know of a thousand under Pompeius but we don't know how many more he has in reserve. Remember that old Strabo had four legions' worth kitted out when he tried his coup.”

“I'll take all the veterans I can find and they'll be all I need,” Glauca said through his teeth. “Sergius!” he called to his Master of House. “Get a quill and paper, and tell a rider to ready himself to leave for the Marsi immediately. No! Make that three riders! And another three for the Samnium; the Samnites can follow and catch up as best they can.”

“Conscript Fathers!” Caesar opened the Senate meeting. “You might ask why am I in the chair for this meeting when it is properly the month for my

colleague Lucius to have the fasces. I do this because Lucius is doing his duty as Consul to protect the Republic. He's on his way to Picenum to put down an insurrection and dispense justice." Caesar swung around, radiating aggression. "Some of you already know that the Republic is under attack. Some of you might know because you have heard rumours and others of you might know because you have been involved in planning this attack. But for those who have not heard or who might have heard garbled rumours, let me set the record straight.

"During the Tribal elections in Picenum last year, a rich blend of corruption, bribery, blackmail and intimidation resulted in a Comitia majority that was controlled by the Gens Pompeia. This Comitia was so ill-omened that it was forced to recognise its own illegitimacy. Yes, even so corrupt a Comitia as it was, it could not stand the stench of its own corruption! It voted to appoint an interrex to hold fresh elections, and then dissolved itself. But even though this Comitia had enough residual decency to recognise its own flaws and make way for a proper Comitia, the Gens Pompeia has far fewer scruples.

"Four days ago they sent armed thugs into Ancona and the other major towns in Picenum, and seized control. They have hunted down all who opposed their corruption. They have even slaughtered the Chief Augur, for no reason other than that he warned the corrupt Comitia of the wrath of the gods hovering over them! A sacred man doing his sacred duty with all courage; and they treat him like a recalcitrant slave! Surely these Pompeians have no shame, no respect for the Republic, no dignitas; and to think they could get away with this treason, this monstrous impiety, they obviously have no wits either!"

"As we speak my colleague Lucius Glauca is leading five legions of veterans to bring order back to Picenum. Men who followed him through the War against Mithridates and then into Syria and then against Tigranes; men who know their business very well indeed and also know that Lucius Glauca knows his business very well indeed; they will soon put things aright!" Caesar deliberately took a spread stance, hands on hips, directly in front of and staring at the space where Gnaeus Pompeius usually sat.

"I now invite Gnaeus Pompeius to refute my allegations." He paused and cocked his head, hand cupped to an ear, as though trying to hear some faint sound. "What! You mean he's not here today? I wonder why not!" He returned to his chair and sat.

Several men stood to speak.

"Lucius Porcius, you are the most senior. The floor is yours."

"Sextus Julius; I am very concerned about this action," Cato started. He looked around the chamber. "You accuse not just a single person but an entire family of treason! In the absence of their Head to give a defence, and without any evidence whatsoever! And you tell us that five legions are marching against them; doubtless to slaughter them without trial or due process!" Cato held his hands out in a gesture of bafflement as he swung around to sweep the terraces. "Is this how we uphold the Mos Majorum? A man twice Consul and once Censor declares war on one of our own Great Families! Is this what happens when the Populares gain control?"

“Conscript fathers! Resist this action by our Consuls! See it for what it is! I move that anyone who attacks a Senator without consent of the Senate, or who harms a Senator without due process, should be declared an Enemy of the Republic! Punishment shall be the immediate and automatic loss of all offices, confiscation of all assets, and banishment from Italy! We cannot permit such men to take the law into their own hands!”

Sulla was one of many who stood as soon as Cato sat.

“Lucius Cornelius, you have seniority.”

“I have served as consular colleague to Lucius Porcius on two occasions and am his colleague as Censor in this lustrum. I think we have worked well together. We have not always agreed, but we respected each other's strengths.

“I remember the year before we were elected Censors. It was a rather eventful year, which saw the attempt by Gnaeus Pompeius Strabo to take the city of Rome by force. Four legions, more or less, if you can call that armoured rabble 'legions'! Even young Gnaeus has acknowledged that his family have form when it comes to undermining the Republic. Didn't you hear him say so himself when he tried to buy his redemption by donating generously to the fund for the Great Houses? Donating money which he obtained by squeezing every last denarius of value out of Picenum!

“Now he has continued in that form. He stacked the Picentine Comitia to abolish taxes on his obscenely vast land holdings. His public generosity towards the Republic Houses had to clawed back somehow! And you might recall that my colleague Lucius Porcius, speaking in this house only a few months ago, defended that impiety! Then, when the gods made it clear that they hated that corrupt Comitia, Gnaeus Pompeius ordered the slaughter of the Chief Augur.

“The Chief Augur, Conscript Fathers! Gnaeus is under the curse of the gods for his impiety, and he responds by killing the man best equipped to help him make atonement! Is this not arrogance unmatched in history? Is this not hubris loathsome to behold? And is it not the first duty of our Consuls to ensure that this Republic is protected from the just wrath of the gods? What better could a pious Consul do, than demonstrate that the Republic is opposed to such impiety? What better can Lucius Glauca do than separate us from those who commit such acts of turpitude? For surely, if this Republic does not punish the evil-doers, then our failure to act with true piety is an admission that we are partners in it. We must act against such impiety, even if the culprits are from one of our foremost families!

“I urge against the motion by my colleague and instead I move a vote of thanks by acclamation to our Consuls. They have done well by so promptly dissociating us from these abominations committed by Gnaeus Pompeius and his ilk. In so doing, our Consuls have saved the Republic from the fury of the gods!” Sulla stood facing the Consul's chair and started applauding. All the Italianists and Populares stood to applaud, and the unaligned senators soon joined them.

“Gnaeus Pompeius, you should consider yourself under arrest, a prisoner,” Lucius Glauca informed the man brought before him.

“By what authority and on what charge do you dare to restrain my free movement?” Pompeius was at his indignant best. “I’m a Roman citizen, and a member of the Roman Senate! I will demand your head if you persist in this farce!”

“My authority is that of my office as a Consul of the Republic, and I have the support of my colleague in my actions,” Glauca said with a wave of his hand, refusing to accord Pompeius the honour of standing. “And the charge I would like to bring against you is Insurrection against the Republic. But I will have to wait my turn for that; the Picentine Tribal Prosecutor has demanded that I release you to him on charges of murder and impiety, in that he accuses you of ordering the murder of the Chief Augur.”

“What?” Pompeius was incredulous. “Are you going to hand me, a Roman Senator, over to an Italian Tribe? I am a Roman; I have my rights!”

“Indeed you are a Roman citizen, at least for the moment,” Glauca responded. “And your right to a trial before a court will be respected.”

“But I am a Roman!” Pompeius insisted.

“I believe you have already told me that,” Glauca responded, enjoying this conversation immensely.

“Then you will understand this. If I am to be tried then I should be tried in Rome, not in some Italian village!”

“You are not yet charged with any offence in Rome; that will come later, if you survive the more immediate charges. At present the allegations against you are Murder and Impiety in Ancona, which are offences against the laws of Picenum, and punishable by death. If you are acquitted, you will then be handed back to me to face Republic charges of High Treason and Insurrection against the Republic. These are offences against the Republic, not against Rome, and will be tried by a Senatorial court,” Glauca responded. “So what relevance does Rome have?”

“But I am a Roman! You cannot hand me over to these Italians!” Pompeius insisted.

“It seems you don’t understand the allegations against you, Senator. Or perhaps you don’t understand that Italians are now citizens no less than you. So before you say any more against ‘these Italians’, you should remember that I am a Samnite, and a Consul of the Republic of which Rome is only a part.” Glauca slowly stood and approached Pompeius with a cold menace in his face and voice. “I’m old enough to remember how men such as you could murder Italians with impunity. It seems you still live in those days.” Glauca smiled chillingly. “But not for much longer, you little prick! Your public execution is exactly what we need to demonstrate that Italians are citizens now, and your type are a dying breed! Literally!” Glauca spat in Pompeius’ face. “Now, get him out of here!” he barked at the guards. “Keep him as tight and as uncomfortable as possible. Feed him on the leftovers from the slaves’ table, and if he escapes you will pay with your heads!”

The five veteran legions remained in Picenum as a security detachment while Pompeius was tried. The prosecution had offered Rufus and several other major members of the Pompeian camp their lives for their testimony and they complied willingly. It was soon established that the earlier election had been completely corrupt and that the death of the Chief Augur had been personally ordered by Pompeius himself. The disappearances of three other Comitia opposition members after being arrested by Pompeius' thugs was also a mystery solved; their bodies were located and cremated properly.

The Prosecution demanded the penalty of crucifixion for Pompeius and five other men in his household, but the defence claimed that citizens could not be crucified. Much to his own displeasure, Glauca himself was called as a witness and was bound to agree that this was the case. Moves to disqualify him from citizenship would require another court trial under the authority of the Great Senate and this could cause delays; so the sentence of beheading was pronounced for the charge of Murder. He was also found guilty of Gross Impiety, for which the penalty was forfeiture of all assets to the Tribe of Picenum. Several other members of the Gens Pompeia were also found guilty of Gross Impiety as well; most of the assets of the Gens Pompeia were seized. Only those estates of the cadet branches not involved in the plot were spared. Quintus Pompeius Rufus, the consular who had devised the Rufan System, was one of these notable exceptions. He had been in Africa, the Spains and Achaia over the last two years setting up his beloved colleges and therefore totally unconnected with the plot. So Quintus Pompeius Rufus retained his property. Several other prominent Romans, not of the Gens Pompeia but close associates with Gnaeus Pompeius, were also implicated and found guilty.

But the Picentine court had one last gesture for Pompeius before he left this world. The widow of the Chief Augur was awarded the right to carry out the sentence. Pompeius sprang to his feet and protested the dishonour of being killed by an old woman but he was soon slapped down. A stout table was soon found and Pompeius lashed to it face down, with his head projecting over one end.

She was a small, frail-looking woman but she had a fire in her eyes as she accepted the sword from the Prosecutor. "Hello, lord Pompeius!" she sneered sweetly as she stood in front of her victim. "I've been told that I mustn't torture you. What a pity!" she called out loudly, followed by a theatrical sigh. "I would so much like to cut your balls off first and put them on the ground under your face, so you could say good-bye to them!" The crowd laughed and hooted.

"But then, they're probably so small that you wouldn't be able to see them at that distance!" she added, and another burst of laughter rose from the crowd. "Ah! But no torture! What a shame!" she repeated. "I'm allowed to strike the blade to your neck, but anywhere else is considered torture. I must be careful where I put this blade, eh?" She rested the blade gently on the nape of Pompeius' neck, applying no force except the weight of the blade itself. Then she slowly, gently drew the blade towards herself.

Pompeius cried out as the blade cut into the sinews. "Shut up and strike, you Italian bitch!" he demanded. The crowd voiced its disapproval in a low roar.

"Italian bitch, is it?" she asked loudly. "But then, don't you think of all Italian women as bitches? It's so sweet of you to think no worse of me than of all the others." She lifted the blade off the neck. Blood streamed down Pompeius' face. With some of the tendons cut, he could only lift his head with great difficulty. He allowed his head to flop down again, and the blood ran into his nose and eyes.

The advocate who had attempted the defence leapt to his feet. "This is not the sentence of the court! It is torture, and this woman must be held to account!"

"Sit down, advocate!" the magistrate warned him. "If you speak out of turn you might well be the next! And besides," he continued in a softer voice, "she is permitted to strike the neck as often as is required to carry out the sentence."

The old widow walked around to the front of the table, and put the point of the gladius to the nape of Pompeius' neck. With a little wiggle backwards and forwards, she worked the point of the blade in until it hit bone. Pompeius roared with the pain. Then she went back to her original position, blade across the back of the neck, and slowly sliced upwards, toward the base of the skull. The tendons holding the head up were severed from the bone. She walked around to the front of the table again. "Look at me, lord Pompeius," she invited with mock gentleness. "Look at me, and I will strike cleanly."

But she knew as well as anyone that he couldn't lift his head now. The tendons that would make this movement possible had been cut clean through. "Oh, you silly, stubborn man!" she scolded him. "Perhaps you need a few more gentle caresses from me." She went back to the side of the table, and continued to slice away near the base of the skull. Pompeius refused to give her the satisfaction of hearing him howl. He clenched his teeth and kept his silence.

"You really should have accepted crucifixion, little man," she commented. "Not the humiliation of being killed by an old woman – oh, Italian bitch, wasn't it? And really, the view from a cross is much better, too!" The crowd laughed at these taunts. "Who wants to stare at his own blood, pooling under his face? It gets so boring after a while!" She made one more gentle, sawing cut into the neck at the base of the skull, and the muscles at the back of the neck were completely removed. She let these drop to the ground, and ground her foot on them. She laid the gladius on the ground under Pompeius' drooping head, and walked away. Then the old widow turned to the Defence Advocate.

"This Italian bitch is much more merciful than your client. I give him back his life! You may untie him now, and treat his wounds," she offered.

Then the judge spoke. "I understand that the new Chief Augur has pressed a charge of Capital Impiety. When this man has recovered he will stand trial on that count," he announced. "And then, if he survives that case, he should be returned to the custody of the Consul to be tried for the Republic charges the Consul intends to lay."

The crowd erupted in cheering. Pompeius was not going to get out of this as easily as it seemed! Now he would be cared for; the wounds he had suffered should not be life-threatening, but with the muscles at the back of his neck severed

he would never be able to hold his head up again. How fitting a punishment for so arrogant a prick!

“Defence, you have permission to care for the prisoner,” the judge intoned, and smiled.

It was now only two days before the election in Picenum. Pellius had spent each of the last eight days on the portico of the Comitia Chamber explaining how the new paper voting system would work. The first two or three days had been very difficult, but by now most people seemed to understand what would be required. He had started to use a question-and-answer approach, confident that some in the crowd would be able to walk him through the process by now. That made it seem much less daunting for the others, to see that even some of their own understood how it would work.

“Fellow citizens! For the last eight days I have been talking about the way the paper vote will work,” he bellowed. “In this time, I have been using a simple example, where we have only six candidates to fill three places. You have seen how the first man is elected, and he will become the Senior Praetor. You have seen how his votes have been distributed among the remaining candidates, each paper according to how the voter marked it, to decide who will be elected as the Junior Praetor. And then another distribution, again exactly as the voters marked their papers, to see who is elected third,” he looked over the crowd.

“On the day of the actual election, exactly the same process will be followed. The only difference is that we will be electing twenty men, not just three. That means that there will be nineteen re-distributions, not just two. But in each of these nineteen distributions, exactly the same principle will be used. That means that you will not be marking your papers with only 'A', 'B' and 'C', but will be marking them with letters down to 'V'. Now, don't worry if you don't write very well, and can't remember the order of all the letters. We will have signs up at the voting places, showing them all in correct order. And if you can't read the names, then we will have literate slaves to read them for you. Everyone is entitled to a vote, not only the educated! So if you want a slave to help you, just ask!”

He stepped down from the portico. One of his slaves said quietly “Lord Drusus is waiting at your house, master.” Pellius hurried home to meet his guest. He had been starting to worry if the timetable would be met.

“Greetings, Marcus Livius! Do you have the voting papers with you?” Pellius asked anxiously.

“Yes, Pontius; I have ten thousand, which should be more than enough. I'm told you usually get only a couple of thousand voters here, but I expect a bigger turn-out after the troubles of last year.”

“Excellent!” Pellius replied. “It will be interesting to see how well the people will understand the process. I'm hoping that most will have no trouble.”

“I also have something else with me,” Drusus said, enticingly.

“Oh? What would that be?”

“Another few thousand papers, the same length as the ballot, but with letters written down the side. All a voter has to do is copy the letters from our paper onto the voting paper and he will be making a completely legal vote for exactly the candidates we support.”

“Excellent!” Pellius cried again. “Did you think of that, or is it another idea from Lucius Cornelius?”

“Actually, it came from the pedagogue I employed to teach my children.” Drusus admitted. “Trust a teacher to come up with an idea so even the illiterate could cast a proper vote! I intend to have my slaves distribute these to the voters as they line up. But to make sure they know it is from me, I want to speak to the forum tomorrow morning, at the Candidates' speeches.”

“Strictly speaking, you have no right to speak. That's for the candidates only.”

“If a candidate invites me to use some of his allotted time, is it legal then?”

“I suppose so; the candidate has the time and he is permitted to have others commend him. So if you can find candidates who will give you some of their time, then feel free.”

Each candidate's time was measured with a water-clock. As each speaker stood, the upper reservoir was filled to a marked line and the stop-cock opened. When the lower cup started to overflow, 'Time!' was called, the stop-cock closed, the cup emptied back into the upper reservoir, and any top-up water added. The flow rate allowed for 20 cups to be filled in an hour, in an order chosen by lot. With forty five candidates, the meeting should last almost three hours.

All twenty of the team endorsed by Drusus agreed to give up their time so Drusus could speak for them if he wished to. He explained that he would like to speak at intervals through the meeting to cover as many voters as possible as they come and go, but he wouldn't want all their time. Perhaps one as early as possible and others at about hourly intervals.

The meeting started and the third candidate out of the lot was one of the Drusus team. He addressed the crowd by simply saying “Fellow Picentines! Why would you listen to me when you can listen to Marcus Livius Drusus instead?” and then stepping away from the front of the platform. The crowd cheered its approval. Drusus lost valuable time trying to gain quiet.

“I have investigated the candidates for election tomorrow and I have found twenty whom I would trust. If you trust me and if you trust my judgement, I suggest you vote for these twenty, and in a particular order. As you line up to vote in this election tomorrow you will be offered a piece of paper like this,” he held up one of his voting guides. “It has letters written down it, one under another, and sometimes it just has a dot instead of a letter.

“I urge you to line up the top letter against the top name on the voting paper and the bottom letter with the last name, and copy these letters across onto the voting paper. If you do that then you will be voting for these twenty trustworthy men. Just remember to make sure the top letter is always in line with the top name, and the bottom letter with the last name.”

The crowd buzzed with confusion as Drusus stepped away from the front of the platform and went down the steps to ground level. They had expected a rousing speech, but instead they were given instructions they couldn't understand, about a process they had never seen. Drusus could only hope they would be able to figure it out.

The next speaker was also one of the Drusus team. He sensed the confusion as he approached the edge. "Fellow-citizens! We must never allow the evil of this last Comitia to be repeated! We must never again elect men who would sacrifice their brothers to slavery so the rich landlords can live in even greater luxury!" He paused and looked around the crowd.

"My name is Lucius Gordo. I am one of the men recommended to you by lord Drusus. I urge you to follow the voting guide that will be offered to you tomorrow and you will then elect honest men; men who will put your welfare first. Never again should there be a Head Tax in Picenum!" The crowd roared its approval. This is something they understood and agreed with! Gordo motioned for silence.

"And you can only make sure of that if you follow the advice of lord Drusus. So if you didn't understand what he said the first time, then wait a little while and he will explain it again, more clearly." Gordo stepped back to make way for the next man, and was relieved to see that Pellius was approaching Drusus with the large sample voting paper he had used in his own education campaign over the last nine days. In his other hand was a strip of paper as long as his arm. Behind him walked one of his slaves, with more scrolls, a pot of paint and a couple of brushes. Gordo descended the steps down to the ground to meet them.

"Marcus Livius," Pellius said. "They have never seen this way of voting before and they can't imagine what you mean. Next time, you will need to show them, not just talk. You can use the equipment I used in my instruction talks. Let's get it ready."

Less than half an hour later Drusus was ready to try again. He caught the eyes of his team of candidates and motioned to them that he wanted to speak in the place of the next of his team to be called. The next man called to the platform was one of his own. Drusus carried the easel and board up the steps, with Gordo behind him carrying the sample voting guide. The crowd started a cheer when they recognised their benefactor on the steps.

"My friends!" Drusus called out, and there was a cheer in reply as he set the board on the easel. "This is what it is like to vote the new way. But Pontius Pellius has already explained the principles to you. What I am going to explain is how you can vote for men who are trustworthy. I have examined all the candidates, and I have found twenty of them that will serve you honourably.

"Tomorrow, as you line up to vote, you will be given a strip of paper," he turned to Gordo. "Lucius, is that piece of paper for me?" The crowd chuckled at the play-acting as Gordo handed over a length of paper with a large 'A' at the top, a dot under that, then 'B' and 'C' and another dot down the page. Drusus pretended to be perplexed. "What is this for?" he asked.

Gordo held it up beside the sample voting paper. "Hold this against the names of the candidates, lord Drusus. Make sure the top letter is level with the first name, and then copy the letters onto the voting paper." While Gordo held the voting guide in position, Drusus quickly copied the top letter across onto the voting paper, against the top name. "Now, be careful with the next one, lord Drusus," Gordo warned him. "That dot means that you should NOT put a letter beside that name. So now go down to the third name."

Drusus indicated the third name on the list. Gordo continued with the instructions. "There's a letter in the third place going down the voting guide. So that means you put a letter against the third name. This time, the letter 'B'." Drusus painted in a 'B' against the third name.

"Now do I go to the fourth name?" Drusus asked.

"Yes," Gordo replied. "And the fourth space going down the guide shows a letter 'C', so you put a letter 'C' against the fourth name."

"Hey!" Drusus said with pleasure. "I think I've got this sorted out! And the next one is just a dot, so no letter against the fifth name?"

"That's right!" Gordo agreed. "Now, tomorrow the list of candidates will be much longer, and the guide paper will be longer too. But just work your way down the list and you will be voting for the best twenty candidates."

"Thank you, Lucius," Drusus replied. "This new way of voting isn't that hard once you get accustomed to it." There were more chuckles from the crowd as the two packed up the easel and board and left the platform.

"That was much better, Marcus Livius." Pellius assured him warmly. "Well done, Lucius. Let's do the same in an hour's time."

Lucius Cornelius would have been proud of us!" Drusus joked. "This acting business is so easy!"

Atius, Lucius and Piso, the effective leaders of the dominant Boni faction in the Lucani Comitia, had gathered to discuss the events in Picenum. "Stupid bastards, the Pompeii!" Atius summarised. "These things have got to be done legally! You don't just march in with a private army and expect an Italian Consul to look the other way!"

"Yes, but that's typical of the Pompeian way of doing things. Arrogant buggers, all of them!" Piso commented.

"So if these Lucani are going to get any ideas, then we should let them be the first to riot," Lucius suggested. "Then we can ask for Republic troops to restore order. We need to have the law on our side no matter what, or we're dead meat."

"Agreed," Atius nodded. "Which means that we need to pick up on the only idea that fits. We'll remove voting rights from any man whose debts exceed his assets. That should wipe out all the Head Count and many of the lower classes. We don't have to worry about the higher classes because the Head Tax is less than the old Property Tax was for them anyway. And those in the middle can be persuaded."

"You mean persuaded by someone with a few big, strong friends behind their left shoulder and looking at how everyone votes?" Piso wanted clarification.

Lucius rolled his eyes in exasperation. "Yes, Piso; that's exactly what he means!"

"Right. Now the final Comitia meeting is in five days' time, and then it's a month before the election in December." Atius was down to business again. "That means that we have to have the Debtors' Decree passed this next meeting. I've already settled on the wording of it and lord Cato has been over it. He agrees it's watertight, so all we need to do is make sure the Comitia votes the right way. No amendments are to be accepted!"

Drusus had set out for the lands of the Lucani as soon as he had heard about this so-called 'Debtors' Decree'. It had been cleverly phrased; it didn't attempt to revoke citizenship, which was a Republic matter and under the jurisdiction of the Great Houses. But it did restrict some of the rights of citizens whose debts exceeded their assets, on the reasoning that such people were vulnerable to coercion under the threat of enslavement. Such people should not be permitted to pervert an election.

But now he was in the central square of Venusia and most of the poor in Lucania were looking to him, hoping that somehow he would be able to fix this problem like he did the threat of enslavement under the Head Tax law. He held his hands up, appealing for silence.

"Men of Lucania!" he addressed them. "I know of the difficulties you have suffered during this last year. I know of the Head Tax, as bad a piece of law as has ever been enacted and how it drove many to desperation. I'm glad that I was able to help so many of you at that time. I now know of this accursed Debtors' Decree."

Drusus paused a moment, to re-steady the concentration of the hearers. "As you know, I could do nothing about the Head Tax. It was a law within the power of the Comitia to pass, however ruinous it was. Also, there is nothing I can do about the Debtors' Decree; that is also a law within the power of the Comitia. But there are some things that are within my power.

"One of these was to lend to you enough to pay the Head Tax and avoid slavery, on trust that you would be able to repay it some way, some day. Unfortunately, this debt is now being used as an excuse to deprive you of your voting rights." He paused a moment, for dramatic effect. In that moment he was acutely aware and thankful of his debt to Sulla for his growing skill in these techniques.

"Another thing that is within my power is to forgive that debt. And I do that right now. I formally and finally forgive the Head Tax debt of anyone for whom I paid the Lucani Head Tax. You are no longer in debt! You can now participate in the elections."

The crowd erupted. They could not believe that this burden was being lifted from their shoulders. Forgiving this debt was the equivalent of giving every one

of them one third of his annual income. The roars went on for several minutes, despite the urging of Drusus for quiet. Eventually they were ready to hear more.

"Make no mistake, friends. This Comitia and the majority of those men elected to it have betrayed your Tribe. But you must not react to that by doing anything illegal! Act legally and the law will support you! And if the Law supports you then so will the legions, just as they supported the Picentines in their hour of trouble. So I urge you to stay calm and stay courageous! And make sure you attend the elections and vote for men who will restore your freedoms. Vote for men who will do away with the wicked laws that have been forced upon you by this current band of rogues."

"I'll be back to speak to you before the election. And on that day I will suggest to you which men can be trusted. Until then, stay firm and stay disciplined! Better days are coming." The crowd sensed that was the end and erupted in another roar of approval.

"Drusus! Drusus! Drusus!" The chant started up, and filled the square for five minutes, long after Drusus had tired of trying to quieten them.

Meanwhile, Glauca transferred three legions to the barracks at Venusia. He didn't want the Boni to have any doubts about the consequences of another insurrection.

"Bugger Drusus!" Atius said to open the meeting.

"What can we do now?" Piso asked. "Every Head Count will vote now, not just the few that usually turn up. Do you think intimidation will work against thousands?"

"We have to do something, Atius," Lucius echoed his friend's thoughts. "If we lose this election, then be sure that prosecution will come next!"

"Can we call another Comitia meeting and bring in some other disqualification?"

"Piso, you dope!" Atius showed his exasperation. "The Comitia was dissolved at the end of its last meeting! It doesn't legally exist any more! If we want to pass a new law, the only way it can be done is through a Tribal Assembly. Do you think they will vote to disqualify themselves?"

"Well, you come up with something better, if you're so much smarter than me!" Piso reacted.

"Has lord Cato made any suggestions?" Lucius asked, as much to defuse the argument between his colleagues as for any hope of an answer.

"He probably hasn't heard about it yet. It'll take a day or two for news to get back to Rome, and then another day or two for him to send instructions even if he writes straight away."

"Well, he'd better hurry. The election is only eight days away!" Lucius grumbled. "Have you sent to him asking for instructions?"

"I did that within an hour of Drusus making his announcement," Atius snapped back. "That is why I was chosen to be a Praetor, ahead of you!"

"Could we arrange for Drusus to have an accident?" Piso asked.

"We could try," Atius agreed. "But if it fails and the assassin is tortured, where would that leave us? And if he succeeds and is captured, even worse! And

even if he gets away with it, what will that achieve? These Head Count will still be voting and they won't be voting for us! I guarantee that Drusus' friends already know what his plan is and will announce it for him. So killing Drusus is too risky for not enough certainty of the right result."

"So it looks like a few big men watching the voting and taking notes?" Lucius asked.

"Do you think they haven't thought of that already?" Atius exasperation was in full vigour. "They could do all sorts of things to counter that tactic. The simplest would be for some of Glauca's soldiers to march in and tell our bully-boys to clear out. And there's no-one more cowardly than someone who makes his living from intimidation. They know exactly how it works and when they are on the losing side."

"So what do you intend to do about it? Just sit here?" Piso was genuinely worried now. Not even Atius seemed to have an answer.

"For the next four or five days, yes!" Atius replied. "By then we should have some word from lord Cato. If we don't, then Tarentum is just down the road, and a boat to Dyrrhachium."

"I have a suggestion, Atius." Lucius said soberly. "Why don't we make our travel arrangements now, just to be sure?"

Five days later Drusus made another appearance in Venusia. The first member of the Lamponius-led Lucani Team to come out of the lot yielded his place so Drusus could speak.

"Citizens of Lucania," Drusus started. "Please don't cheer; time is limited," he waved down the shouts of the crowd. "I have taken great care to investigate the candidates at this election. I have found that eighteen of them are totally trustworthy and deserve your votes. You will be offered a piece of paper tomorrow as you enter the forum to vote," he waved a paper over his shoulder. "If you don't get one, then go to another entrance until you find one of lord Lamponius' supporters and ask for one. This piece of paper will have names of these eighteen worthy candidates. A candidate not on this list is not one of my recommendations.

"If you choose to accept my judgement, then I ask you vote for the man on top of the list in the first round. If he is elected, then I suggest that you vote for the next name in the second round. Whenever a new round of voting is called I ask you to always vote for the highest name on the list until he is elected, and then support the next man going down the list one after another.

"Many of you are formally my clients. But I am not instructing any of you how you must vote. It is your right as citizens to vote for whomever you will. I only suggest these candidates as men you can trust to look after your own interests instead of being the puppets of the absentee landlords. If you all do this, then you will elect a Comitia worthy of this great Tribe. I thank you."

There had been silence throughout his address, as he had asked. But as soon as he stepped back from the platform edge, the crowd broke out into a chant. "Drusus! Drusus! Drusus!" He gestured for silence so the next candidate could

speak, but in vain. After more than a minute of trying to regain order he walked over to the chairman of the meeting.

"I'm sorry about this. I can continue to call for order, or would you prefer me to leave the platform?"

"Let us both try to call for order," the chairman suggested. "If that doesn't work, then please step down."

Together they waved for silence. Eventually the chanting died away. The chairman called for the next speaker. This happened to be another of the Drusus team.

"My name is Titus Decumius," he proclaimed loudly. "And I need say no more than this to commend myself to you; that when you receive your piece of paper tomorrow you will see that I have the approval of our beloved Marcus Livius Drusus!"

Decumius held his hands aloft as in victory as the crowd roared again, and then stepped back. The crowd's interest had been gained. The roar died away rapidly and the chairman called the name of the next candidate to speak.

"Caius Nonus!" he declared. Nonus stepped forward.

"Fellow citizens!" he commenced. "My name is Caius Nonus, and I'm a farmer. The good earth of Lucania is in my blood, and has been as far back as my family can trace its roots!"

"Does lord Drusus approve of you?" came a call from the front of the crowd as Nonus paused to draw breath.

"We Lucani were a great Tribe once, and we will be again if you elect wise leadership tomorrow."

"But are you approved by lord Drusus?" came another call. This gathered more calls of the same intent, forcing Nonus to acknowledge the questions and call for quiet.

"Marcus Livius Drusus is indeed a great man, and a great benefactor of the Lucani," Nonus proclaimed. "But tomorrow I will seek *your* approval, not *his*."

The crowd growled its dislike for this answer. Nonus attempted to call for silence in vain. The chairman stood and joined him in gesturing for quiet, but the chant of "Drusus!" started up again.

Drusus walked to the chairman as discreetly as possible, and asked "Please, let me impress upon them the need to be orderly. I will ask them to hear every candidate in silence." The chairman had no choice but to agree. Drusus walked to the front of the platform, and the crowd fell silent.

"When I was here some days ago, I emphasised that all things must be done lawfully," he admonished the crowd. "That requirement has not changed. If you deprive any candidate of his right to speak publicly or if you intimidate or threaten anyone; then there is the risk that all that we have achieved together could be contested in a court. I don't want you to lose all that we have worked for. So I beg of you to let each man speak freely. If you don't like what you hear, then you will not have to wait too long for that candidate to finish. After all, it is not what candidates say today that really matters; it is what you say tomorrow! So be patient, because he who is patient and disciplined will succeed." Drusus stepped

back to speak to the chairman. “I suggest that this man who has been interrupted should be permitted another chance. That should let the crowd know that they must be orderly.”

The chairman stepped forward to the edge of the platform.

“I rule that a candidate who is subjected to excessive harassment shall be permitted an additional opportunity to speak later. So please be orderly as lord Drusus suggests, or this meeting could become riotous and call into question the validity of the election tomorrow.” He looked out over the crowd.

“The token for Caius Nonus will go back into the lot, for another opportunity later.” Then he drew another token. “The next speaker is Sextus Mallius.”

CHAPTER 11 – 674 Ab Urbe Condita (80 B.C.)

The election results went much as expected. The Lucani and Picentine Comitia were controlled by the Drusan teams, and the Marsi, aware of the vulnerability of the Representative system as exposed by their neighbours, returned a team publicly supported by Silo. All the Italian Tribes were careful to elect men approved by their own respected nobles instead of turning to apparent populists. This was not difficult; the Boni had learnt their lessons and stayed well clear of any serious interference.

Gaius Julius Caesar Strabo Vopiscus, a surprise choice by the Populares leadership, came in as senior Consul. He was aided to a large extent by his entertaining wit as a public speaker and his reputation as a playwright of considerable quality. Herius Asinius gained election as Junior Consul, again blocking out a Bonus candidate.

Sulla's term as Censor drew to a close, but because the Great Houses were still under construction he sought re-election. This involved suspending the *Lex Marcia*, a statute from more than 150 years earlier, which prohibited anyone serving a second term as Censor. Cato supported this request for Sulla even as he refused it for himself to make way for Quintus Caecilius Metellus Pius. Metellus Pius was eager to complete the cursus honorum and retaining Sulla as his colleague seemed a better chance of providing a conservative balance to the two new Consuls than risking the election of a Populares Censor. Metellus was content to take over the routine work formerly carried by Cato; his scrupulous diligence combined with his notorious lack of imagination well suited him to this role and Sulla was left to manage the construction works.

However there was one point in the building programme that Sulla thought should be referred to his colleague, if only as a courtesy. “Quintus Caecilius, there is a matter of stated policy that I think we need to review.”

“I am always hesitant to change a settled policy without good reason, Lucius Cornelius,” Metellus replied. “For example, I am still to be convinced that the separation of the Republic Senate was a good move.”

“I understand that, Quintus Caecilius; that's why I am raising it with you, instead of presuming your agreement.” Once again, for perhaps the thousandth time, Sulla thanked Silo in his heart. How patient the Old Warrior had been when hobbled to this old woman as a consular colleague! “You will recall that the donors to the Great Houses Fund were told that their names would be engraved on the commemoration stone? Well, I am of the opinion that a donor who had been found guilty of Treason should not be included. It doesn't seem appropriate that a traitor should be honoured as a benefactor of the Republic.”

“You mean Gnaeus Pompeius, don't you?” Metellus asked.

“Indeed,” Sulla answered. “I'm not aware of any others.”

“Nor am I,” Metellus concurred. “But do you expect any more to be unearthed?”

"No, I don't," Sulla replied. "But I don't want to make any announcement specifically excluding only Pompeius by name; it might seem a deliberate and targeted attack. I would rather state it as a general policy."

Metellus thought for a moment. "Let me think about it, Lucius Cornelius; we're in no rush."

Naturally, Metellus took this to Cato. "I wonder if Sulla is trying to get at me as well," Cato answered.

"How could that be?" Metellus was shocked. "Have you done anything that could be construed as treason? You're one of the most respected men in living memory!"

"No, I've done nothing wrong," Cato asserted. "But I and a few others with land in Lucania were behind the election of last year's tribal Comitia. Nothing illegal, but who is to say that it won't be misrepresented?"

"Then should we refuse the suggestion?" Metellus asked.

"No, that might be exactly what he's hoping for," Cato objected. "He might be trying to paint us as the friends of traitors. It might be better to suggest that each case seeking to exclude a name should be argued on its merits. After all, sometimes courts make mistakes. Or even manipulated for political ends such as in the case of Publius Rutilius Rufus being condemned to exile."

"So what do I say about Pompeius?" Metellus asked, desperate for a clear answer.

"Oh, agree to take Pompeius off the list!" Cato waved the question away as obvious. "These rural hayseeds aren't genuine Romans, anyway! Old Strabo should never have been admitted to the Senate in the first place and two successive generations of Pompeians have both shown why."

"Hail, Caius!" Drusus greeted his Picentine friend as he came through the street door.

"Hail, Marcus Livius!" Vidacilius embraced Drusus. "I was hoping I'd be able to stay with you for a few days."

"It would be my honour, Caius. What do you have in mind?"

"In short, I propose to add another Tribe to the Republic," Vidacilius answered.

"Wow! And you don't even have a grandson yet!" Drusus quipped.

Vidacilius slapped Drusus on the shoulder in appreciation. "But first, Marcus Livius, I must confess that I'm frozen to the bone. The winter passage from Sicily is perhaps not as dangerous as the deep sea, there always being coast in sight; but it's cold and wet and miserable. Please tell me you have your hypocaust all fired up!"

"I'll see to it, Caius. The tepidarium at least would be warm, if you want to soak there while I order that calidarium be brought up to standard. Should I send for anyone else you want to include in the discussion?"

A short time later the two men were sitting contentedly on the ledge in the bath. "Oh, this calidarium was exactly what I need!" Vidacilius said with a deep satisfaction. "To be civilised again! And now to just relax and enjoy!"

“What's this missing Tribe you've found, Caius. You have me intrigued.”

“Not missing at all; just forgotten.” Vidacilius swam three strokes over to the opposite side of the pool, and then returned. “Do you know how many Roman citizens there are in Sicily?”

“Well, no; but I would imagine there would be quite a few,” Drusus answered.

“Close on half a million, actually,” Vidacilius told him. “Retired soldiers and their descendants, mostly, but quite a few of the Third and Fourth Classes as well.

“And very few have ever voted,” Vidacilius went on. “Over the last couple of years they've started to resent that every Italian Tribe can elect its own Comitia, set its own laws and taxes and spend its own budget; but Sicily is still a province under a Governor, and the locals are largely at his mercy.”

“Have you been that hard on them, Caius?”

Vidacilius splashed his friend playfully. “Oh, don't be flippant, Marcus Livius! But the risk is always there. That's why they fought so hard to keep Mutilus as Governor; he treated them with respect. And of course, the Rufan System has improved things dramatically quite apart from the personalities involved. But you don't have to look too far back in history to see how governors have raped the place. After Asia, it was the most abused province in the Roman world. What the Romans citizens of Sicily want is to be considered a Tribe in their own right rather than disenfranchised members of Roman Tribes that have meant nothing to them for generations.”

“What? So they would give up their current Tribal affiliation, and become part of a new tribe called ‘Sicilia’?” Drusus picked up the direction of Vidacilius' thoughts.

“Exactly!” Vidacilius said with emphasis.

“Hmmm,” Drusus mused. “How would that work in the real world?” he asked. “Specially in regard to taxes and so on.”

“That's the key question,” Vidacilius agreed. “At present Sicily is under the terms of the Miletus Decree; as governor I can impose any tax which either Rome or any of the Italian Tribes has. Which means that they can be hit for a combination of all the heaviest tax rates in each of several different categories; like a Land Tax as heavy as in Lucania, an asset tax like in Rome, a slave tax as in Picenum, and import/export duties like in Ostia; so their total Republic tax burden could be several times greater than might apply to any single Roman citizen. And then they're liable for the Sicilian Provincial Tax as well.

“But have you imposed those tax burdens?” Drusus asked.

“Of course not! I don't want to have to put down a revolt!” Vidacilius brushed the question aside. “But what if the next Governor threatens to impose that level of taxation, unless of course he is 'persuaded' otherwise; and that this 'persuasion' will involve a lot of very valuable gifts? The Miletus Decree was a huge step forward in its time; but since then the Separation has made it a recipe for corruption.”

“Yes, I see your point. How have you set your tax rates?” Drusus asked.

“When Gaius Papius was Governor, he set up a hierarchy of local and regional councils, with a peak Advisory Council at the top. I kept that system, told them that I wanted the Tax due to Rome to be at least what Rome raised itself on a per capita basis, and listened very carefully to what measures they suggested themselves to reach this target. In this way the Republic Tax virtually amounted to an annual Tribute and I left them to raise it themselves pretty much however they choose to. I only interfered where I thought their proposals might create social unrest; for example the Councils seemed to like Head Taxes, because this was cheapest for the higher Classes; but I didn't want peasant revolts so I limited any Head Tax to 12 denarii per annum to avoid discontent.”

“So why not keep the same system?” Drusus asked. “Let them agree to an annual Tribute, in exchange for which they could become autonomous, electing their own Comitia?”

“But then they would be the only Tribe in the Republic paying Tribute. That would be effectively a double tax.”

“That's what they are paying now,” Drusus pointed out, “except they don't get autonomy with it. Which would they prefer?”

“They would consider it unjust,” Vidacilius replied solidly.

“Then let them stay a Province,” Drusus responded with a shrug. “Autonomy doesn't come cheap.”

Vidacilius looked at his friend. “I'm disappointed. I was hoping for more from you. Under your leadership we Italians gained full citizenship and autonomy without having a Tribute. But now you require Roman veterans and their children to pay an annual tribute for the same status.”

“That would be a very good argument to make in the Senate, Caius. It has force,” Drusus conceded. “But at the end of the day, money conquers all. The Republic needs money.”

Vidacilius sat in thought. “I apologise, Marcus Livius; I shouldn't be disappointed with what you say. You're doing me the courtesy of fore-warning me of what many others will say.”

“If you can find a way of making good the lost income, then I expect the Populares would support you. I'd be inclined to think most Italians would, too.” Then Drusus recalled what Sulla had once said about extending the Mos Majorum to all civilised lands. “In fact, I'd be dead certain that Lucius Cornelius would be one of your strongest supporters. Talk to him about this as soon as you can.”

Drusus was right. Sulla was indeed enthusiastic about Sicily being awarded Tribal status. “But Marcus Livius is right, as usual. The Senate won't give up the income it receives from Sicily. I think a tribute will be demanded, or you might as well dress up like an elephant and start dancing for all the good it will do you.”

“So you can see no way forward, either?” Vidacilius asked.

“Of course I can!” Sulla said, with just an edge of impatience. “The way forward is to accept that you'll have to pay tribute! The next step is to work out a way to ensure that the tribute is paid by your enemies instead of your friends.”

“And how do we go about doing that?” Vidacilius asked doubtfully.

“Remember, Caius; once Sicily is a Tribe in its own right it can make its own tax laws. For example, they can place a tax on grain exports; that way Rome will end up paying the tribute for them. Or they might decide to place a tax on agricultural slaves; that way the large land-owners will pay, but not the small farmer. They just have to design a tax that targets the right people. I’m sure the Sicilians will find ways of doing that!”

“It might not be that easy, Lucius Cornelius. There are many in Sicily who are very wealthy, and who own large tracts of land, and who in every way are indistinguishable from Romans.”

Sulla shrugged. “Then let them pay the tax like Romans. The question they have to ask themselves is simple. Do they want autonomy or are they prepared to take their chances on the next Governor after you?”

“Yes, it is that simple, isn’t it,” Vidacilius agreed reluctantly. “I think I’ll go back to Sicily and talk this through with my Council before we go any further.”

“And you might even talk to Caius Papius as well,” Sulla added. “Africa has almost as many retired soldiers as Sicily.”

“Yes, I’ll do that,” Vidacilius accepted the advice.

“And when you have a plan that looks like it might work, let me know. I’ll support you one hundred percent,” Sulla promised. “But only if it looks like it might work.”

Tigranes expected that Gotarzes might be interested in the terms offered to Armenia by Rome. He had a copy of the Treaty and the explanatory notes shown to the Parthian Mighty King in Ctesiphon by the hand of one of his own ambassadors.

“King Tigranes sends his best wishes to his friend Gotarzes, Mighty King!” Kaphthon exclaimed as he stood before Gotarzes in his audience hall.

“I thank King of Kings Tigranes for his greetings, and ask that when you return to him you would assure him of our friendship,” Gotarzes returned the formalities.

“It is precisely that friendship between my lord and the Mighty King which those foul Romans are attempting to undermine,” Kaphthon announced. “The Romans have attempted to divide King Tigranes from the Mighty King, whom he loves. Listen to the terms of a Treaty proposed to my lord by the Roman Silo.” Kaphthon then read the Treaty and the explanatory notes. “As the Mighty King would realise, this Treaty explicitly invites my lord King Tigranes to invade Gordyene, Adiabene, Media and Atropene; even Ecbatana and Ctesiphon itself!

“Not, of course that my lord would even consider so great a betrayal of the Mighty King, whom he loves and in whose friendship he rejoices daily; but the evil, divisive intent of the Romans cannot be doubted! Indeed, the Roman rejection of our Treaty, in which Osrhoene was transferred into the control of the Mighty King, and their arrogance in occupying those lands in defiance of this Treaty, has well shown you how they treat both the Mighty King and the King of Kings with a high hand.

"King Tigranes, understanding well the devious mind of Silo the Roman, has agreed to this Treaty on its face; but only to deceive the Romans into believing that they have succeeded in their infamy. We have bought time in which my lord Tigranes can rebuild his army to full strength under pretence of preparing to invade your lands, while you build up your army to counter this apparent threat. Then, together, we will strike at these western barbarians. My lord King Tigranes asks you to agree to this plan against our common enemy. In two years' time we will be able to push them back into the Sea from which they came."

Gotarzes sat silent for a moment. He was still stinging that Silo had not accepted the validity of the Treaty with Armenia which had awarded to Parthia the disputed territories. That fact that it had been a fiction and spotted for one increased his chagrin. Why is it that these Romans casually call everyone else's bluff while remaining serenely confident that no-one will call them out when they make such claims themselves? Yes, this proposal from Armenia might be just what is needed to slap them back to where they belong! Let them think that their plan is working, and only too late realise that all the time they had been witnessing the development of the alliance that will break their thrust into the east! How fitting!

"Any proposal from the King of Kings Tigranes always has merit," Gotarzes replied eventually. "Please discuss this more fully with my military staff, and develop a credible detailed plan. If I approve, I will then invite the King of Kings to comment upon it."

Picenum was still slightly bemused that it had pulled together the courage to face down what had become known as the Corrupt Comitia. But it was certainly enjoying the fruits of its victory. All of the lands owned by Gnaeus Pompeius and some of his closest relatives and friends had been confiscated by Picenum for a long list of charges, starting with Corruption in obtaining the majority in the Corrupt Comitia and finishing with Impiety for slaughtering the Chief Augur. Many others in the Gens Pompeia had also been implicated by witnesses who were offered impunity for any crimes they confessed to and turned witness. As a result the Tribe was now the largest landowner in Italy, including many estates within the jurisdiction of other Tribes. This created its own problems. The new and very heavy Land Tax did not bring in nearly as much income as had been expected, because so much of the taxable land was now their own. But to attempt to sell so much land was not a practical solution either; with so much supply and so little demand in the face of the Land Tax, prices would have been abysmally low.

"There's no other course open to us, brothers," Lucius Gordo told the Picentine Comitia. "We must become farmers, at least for a little while. Rather than selling the land for a pittance, let us put it to productive use! Let us continue operations as they were when the Pompeii owned it, and certainly we will gain more by selling the produce than Pompeius ever would have paid in taxes! Then, in future years when we can attract a good price, we might start selling those lands one estate at a time. But until then let us put those assets to good use."

Caius Alesius had been elected First Praetor, and controlled this meeting of the Comitia. "Publius Marius, you have the floor," he said as he recognised the first man to stand.

"When Lucius suggests that 'the Pompeian Estates should continue to be managed by its current managers to produce income for the Tribal Treasury', brother Lucius is confusing two different questions into one." Marius started. "The first question should be whether or not we retain these estates and work them for their income. Now, I have no problem with agreeing to that question! As has been pointed out to us, this is not a good time to sell farmland. The second question is less obvious. Who is to manage these estates? The Question as it stands assumes that the existing management should do the job.

"But I object most strenuously to this! The existing management were clients of the Pompeii, and have contacts with many others who are of the Pompeius ilk. They have every reason to hate us and to sabotage the management of these estates. They would doubtless deliberately divert money to friends of the Pompeii by corruptly paying too high a price for goods they buy, and selling the produce at ridiculously low prices! And no doubt pocket a generous share of this corruption themselves! I say that we retain these estates by all means; but let them be managed by men we trust!" Cheers of agreement rose as Marius sat. Gordo stood again.

"Caius Alesius, I am prepared to separate the two questions, as brother Publius suggests," Gordo offered. "Let us settle the first question first, that the properties should be retained. If this is agreed, then we can discuss appointing the management team."

Alesius looked around the chamber. "Is there any objection to considering these two questions separately?" He saw no movement. "Then we are now considering only the first Question, 'That the properties be retained and operated for the profit of the Tribe'. Is there a speaker against the question?"

There was no movement. "Then I declare it resolved. Next question, please, brother Lucius?"

Gordo stood. "I propose that a committee be appointed, consisting of the two Praetors, myself, and Publius Marius, to consider the management of these estates and make recommendations to the next meeting of this Comitia."

"Is there a speaker against the proposal?" Alesius asked. "There being no speaker against, I presume it is agreed." Still no movement.

"I declare it agreed," Alesius announced. "Next item of business is to determine the Tax Types and Rates for the coming year. I believe Caius Montanus has a costed proposal?"

Montanus stood. "Thank you, Caius. I put before the Chamber the following proposal. "First, there shall be no Head Tax. Second, tax shall be levied on all land at a rate of ten percent of its value, as assessed in the Census. This is to include all land, whether pastoral or cropland or land in the towns used for residential or trade purposes. Third, that the first two hundred sesterces of each man's tax due be forgiven. This means that anyone owning less than two thousand sesterces total value of land will pay no tax. The principle reason is that

collection of such small sums is not really worth the effort to enforce collection; and a secondary reason is to dissociate this Comitia as much as possible from the Corrupt Comitia last year.

“If this tax rate is adopted, then the total income from taxes will be just over one hundred and ten thousand sestertium milia, approximately three quarters of the estimated Tribal expenses, on the assumption that the Pompeian Estates are not sold but remain in Tribal possession. Since we have just agreed to that, this estimate remains reliable. Had the Pompeian Estate been in private hands, the total tax income would have been almost twice as much.

“In addition to this tax income, our search through the records seized as part of the Pompeian Estate shows that their total income last year amounted to just over one hundred and fifty thousand sestertium milia, and costs of approximately twenty five thousand sestertium milia. If this income and expense pattern is repeated, this will mean the Pompeian Estate will earn a profit of one hundred and twenty five sestertium milia, giving a total Tribal income of approximately two hundred and thirty five thousand sestertium milia. Assuming Tribal expenses of just over one hundred and forty thousand sestertium milia, this results in a surplus just short of one hundred thousand sestertium milia.

“I propose that this surplus will allow us to refund a large part of the iniquitous Head Tax extorted from our people last year. I propose that for every 125 denarii paid as Head Tax last year, seventy-five denarii be refunded, with the aim of refunding a further seventy-five denarii next year. In this way, we will have paid back all of this impious tax, with an additional twenty-five denarii as compensation for the hardship imposed by the Corrupt Comitia. We must clear the Tribe of this impiety if we are to enjoy the favour of the gods!”

The Comitia erupted as one to applaud this proposal. As the enthusiasm waned, Clodius Paretus stood. “Yes, brother Clodius? You wish to speak on this proposal?” Alesius asked.

“Yes, Caius Alesius.” Paretus paused for the silence to become total.

“I am perhaps the largest landowner among us. Not in the whole Tribe, but among us here today. This tax rate will be a heavy burden for me. But provided the gods favour us with good weather, I will be able to pay it and still make a small profit. But I am also aware that I was subject to no Land Tax at all last year. My profits were huge! And I expect every member of this Comitia will be in the same position as me, proportionate to his holdings.

“So I don't want to hear any man speak against this proposal. Even if you barely break even, then you can make do with the fat you put on last year! So I fully support the tax rate as suggested for this year, and if I am re-elected I will support the same rate for the next year, until we expunge the guilt of the Corrupt Comitia. Perhaps we can relax it slightly in the third year, when that guilt has been atoned for. In the meantime I am prepared to live off the fat of my tax-free year and I urge all other members to do likewise.”

Again the Comitia erupted in applause. The citizens standing at the open doors were left in no doubt that this Comitia cared for them. It was fine theatre!

Gordo and Marius met at the house of Alesius the following evening. Plautus, the Junior Praetor, was already there when they arrived. "Let me start by acknowledging the full force of your comments yesterday, Publius," Gordo jumped in first as the men sat. "We need men we can trust, and you are right in saying we can't trust the old Pompeian management."

"Thank you, Lucius." Marius said with good grace. "The big problem is, where can we get enough of the right men in time for this next season. Spring will be upon us soon, and I don't want to lose a season's produce."

"I don't think that the lower levels will be a problem," Marcus Plautus contributed. "If we have the top and middle ranks on our side, the rest will submit if only out of fear."

"That might be true, Marcus," Marius responded. "But then again, it might not. Repeated low level-sabotage by only a few disaffected slaves can do a lot of damage."

"Well, I think Marcus is on the right track, at least," Alesius broke in. "The top ranks are the most important, and we should fill as many slots as possible from the top down. But I also take your point, Publius; we should replace them as far down the pecking order as possible. Any ideas where to look first?"

"Why not to our own estates?" Publius suggested. "I don't just mean us four," he went on hurriedly, "but any of our Comitia. After all, we did take every spot in the elections. We're all one team here."

"That would be a good start, depending on how many are prepared to release their own top staff for the job," Alesius agreed. "And we could also approach others whom we know to be reliable; they might be able to lend us a few good men, too. Pontius Pellius is the first to spring to mind. Why not Caius Vidacilius, even? He hasn't been around much over the last couple of years, but he has tried to stay in touch. Remember, he was the one who alerted Marcus Livius to the Head Tax. He might appreciate being invited to help out, and it keeps his name in front of the voters."

"That's all good," Marius said. "But for the sake of being totally and obviously honest, and not giving our enemies the chance to smear us, I think we need a totally independent person overseeing the whole of the Pompeian estate. I suggest we ask Marcus Livius to provide us with a General Manager from his own staff, to take overall control." This met with approval all round.

"In fact, if he could provide individual managers for as many of the larger estates as possible under this General Manager, that would be all the better," Marius pushed his idea another step further.

"I think we're all on the same path here, brothers," Alesius tried to pull things together. "I suggest we send a message to Marcus Livius asking him to provide as many men as he can spare for this task and also ask his trusted friends to contribute as well. We'll pay a fair hire for all who can be spared. We should also ask for his comments on our plan overall; he might be able to improve upon it. Perhaps Lucius Cornelius too, who always seems to be quick to see opportunities or problems."

“And then, depending on the response we get, we will put our plans in front of the Comitia and start letting it be known that we are hiring. That will tell us how many men our own estate holders can spare and if there are any other competent middle-managers around. Any Pompeian freemen will be the first to be displaced, and then any excess slaves will be sold. Over the next couple of years the management can decide which are trustworthy enough to retain and which ones should be sold.” He looked around the other three for their agreement.

“That didn't take much time!” Gordo exclaimed.

“It was quick, because brother Publius already had the answer in his hand. Thank you, Publius,” Alesius said.

“Yes, well done, Publius,” the other two agreed.

Drusus and Young Marius were disappointed at first with this outcome when they heard about it back in Rome.

“Now that the lands formerly owned by Pompeius belong to the Tribe, the base for their Land Tax has been cut back a huge amount,” Sulla explained to them. “If they had tried to repay you all in one year it would have meant a rate so high that no-one would have had any income at all. So be content with being paid back over two years. You still get an extra 20% for your efforts, and that's not too bad.”

Young Marius was slightly mollified. This worked out at an effective return of about 13% per annum compound on the investment, which was better than anyone could get anywhere else with comparable security. But he also saw an opportunity for political advantage. “I agree, Lucius Cornelius,” he accepted the explanation. “And I would have provided the funds regardless of the profit in any case. My father's memory demanded it of me, for the sake of his Italian friends. But I would ask one thing of the Comitia, if it sees fit. I would like it to make public exactly who put up the money to pay the Head Tax. I want them to know that the Caius Marius still supports them, even from the grave.”

Sulla looked across to Drusus, with a placid face, but Drusus had known him long enough to see the thunder in his eyes. Behind the casually raised eyebrow he could see Sulla screaming 'I told you not to share this glory!' But that was Sulla's problem! What Lucius Cornelius saw as giving advantage to the Populares was in fact capturing them into the Italianist agenda. The more publicly they linked themselves to the Italianist cause, the more the Popularist base would be vulnerable to a takeover.

“I see no problem with that, Caius,” he responded eventually. “But that's not my decision to make. It's for the Comitia to decide and I will not abuse my position as Patron to pervert their duty to their own Tribe. But I will assure them at a purely personal level that I think a public show of gratitude would be in order.”

Sulla picked up a goblet of watered wine, to hide his facial reaction to this concession.

"And what news do we have from the Lucani?" Marius continued brightly. He had not even flicked a glance towards Sulla.

"Our team swept that Comitia too, as you might have heard," Drusus replied. "They had no huge confiscations, and there is more land in absentee hands there than in Picenum. But they didn't want to harm the Lucani landowners, who are generally small-scale and don't have the reserves of the larger Roman latifundiae; that would only force them to sell, and this would mean even more land falling into Roman hands at bargain prices."

"It's not legal to impose a different tax rate on Roman-held land as opposed to native-held land. So they came up with a clever combination that will repay the Head Tax in one year, and with another 25 denarii bonus, which is a return of almost 17%. There is a Land Tax set at ten percent, and also a Slave tax has been adopted. A slave owner must pay three hundred denarii for every slave above a tax-free threshold of ten slaves in any one household. And to prevent the large estate holders from moving slaves out of Lucania at tax time, the Tax is to be based on the peak number of slaves employed in Lucania in the previous year."

"There are a few Lucani who are adversely affected by this slave Tax, but they've been re-assured that they will be compensated in other ways."

"What other ways?" Sulla asked.

"Contracts for public works, principally," Drusus replied. "Preference for Lucani Tribesmen *per se* is illegal, but preference for businesses based in Lucania, employing Lucanians or sourcing their materials in Lucania is permitted. Or even just a proven record of being able to do the work on time and on budget is a fair basis for preference. There will always be one or more valid excuses able to be found."

"In other words, corruption," Sulla said flatly.

"In other words, compensation for more than two hundred years of rape and extortion," Drusus replied no less definitely.

"Do you think that the Boni won't drag this into the Senate and expose it for the corruption it is?" Sulla exclaimed harshly. "Why, there would be plenty of the Second and Third Class, supporters of the Populares, who will be hurt by being locked out of public contracts who will support them, too!"

"For one year, Lucius Cornelius!" Drusus responded heavily. "Then, when the Head Tax has been refunded, everything will drop back to lower rates, and local preference can be forgotten."

"The whole idea is to give the Boni a punitive slap, to warn them not to interfere again, and then we could get back to integrating Roman and Italian on a more equal basis. Is that not what you want, Lucius Cornelius?"

"But none of the Lucani we had supported in the Lucani elections were among these few comparatively wealthy Tribesmen!" Sulla snapped back. "All these men crying poor mouth now had been strangely silent when the Head Tax had been brought in! They cared nothing for their Tribesmen's enslavement a year ago, so why should their Tribesmen care about the profits of these few now? They're nothing more than parasites with Lucani addresses!" Then Sulla turned to Young Marius. "And what about your supporters, Caius?" he charged

forcefully. “Since the Miletus Decree locked the Publicani out of tax-farming, they've lifted their game and turned to more honest public contracts. How do you think they will like being locked out of Lucania?” “One Tribe for one year!” Young Marius waved a hand. “They'll hardly notice, and I want my money back.”

“Perhaps you're right about these wealthier Lucani, Lucius Cornelius,” Drusus conceded. “But do we want to heal that division within the Tribe, or do we want to magnify it and split the Tribe into warring camps?”

Sulla restrained himself. “Well, so long as this preference disappears after one year,” he grumbled.

“It will,” Drusus promised him. “Or I will publicly support other candidates in subsequent elections.”

“All right, then. It's agreed,” Sulla conceded with his lips. But his heart and mind was far away. He knew that he had done many things outside the law himself in his time. In fact, his current wealth was gained by murdering two women who had trusted him too much. He knew he had even suggested intimidation of Augurs, which would be a gross impiety. But that was him acting as a private person. To use the institutions of the State to break the law was horrific to even him. The State itself, and those acting in its name, should never use authority illegally! Even his contortions to ensure Silo continued in command of the Mithridatic War had been within the legal scope of his public authority, however transparent and contrived the details.

But what hope was there that the Mos Majorum, this great guiding principle of the Republic, could be spread to all civilised peoples if a man as apparently scrupulous as Marcus Livius Drusus felt free to pervert it? Several times now Drusus had shown too much willingness to provide comfort and support to the Populares, the cutting edge of Mob Rule however much they dress it up! And his former diligence in following due process seems to have faded over the years. Sulla had been on the cusp of reaching this conclusion several times over the last few years, but had backed off at the last moment. But now he felt committed to it. Drusus could no longer be trusted. So what could Sulla do about it? That was not an easy question. But Lucius Cornelius Sulla would find a way. He always did.

Philopator was definitely a man worth having around, Tigranes thought to himself. Although quite competent himself when it came to the cut and thrust of court intrigue, betrayal and concealed ambition, he recognised that this half-Greek slave was a master in his own specialised area. Perhaps, even, he was too clever by half. Perhaps he should be killed, just to be on the safe side. He promised himself to think more about that option later. “So let me go over this one more time, Philopator,” Tigranes pulled the scheme together in his own mind. “Gotarzes and I will appear to be building up our armies, distrustful of each other. Gotarzes is already familiar with that part. But the new ingredient is that you will whisper to the next Roman emissary that you have information, in exchange for

which you seek your freedom and a new life in Syria with plenty of cash to set up a comfortable life. That will seem credible to a Roman.

“Then, when he agrees, you will tell him what he already suspects; that I am claiming the territories of Gordyene and Media in accordance with the Treaty shown to Silo last year, but Gotarzes is refusing to withdraw because Romans took Osrhoene before he could occupy it. That I am building an army to take it by force but you have heard that Gotarzes is also preparing to defend it. So far you will be telling him nothing that he can't find out by more conventional spying; but what you say will add a flavour of confirmation to his spy reports. You then suggest that this would be an excellent time for Rome to launch one of its famous lightning marches and claim the land west of the Tigris, all the way down to the Southern Sea.

“If he asks why you're telling him this, you will say it's because you're hoping that this will distract the Parthian army in the lands east of the Tigris, and allow Armenia to take the eastern lands more easily. If he asks why I don't approach the Romans with this idea myself, you will tell him that Tigranes doesn't trust Rome and that you are risking your own life to confide in him. Tell him that Tigranes would rather fight the whole Parthian army himself than have a treacherous ally like Rome on his flank. And finally, if he asks what do you have to gain for so great a risk, then tell him that you fear a Parthian victory if Tigranes is so rash as to attack; and if that happens, you want the safety of a Roman force nearby to flee to, complete with your freedom and reward guaranteed. But if Rome joins the attack on Parthia, allowing Tigranes also to prosper, then that will also provide an opportunity to escape to Roman territory at some time.” Tigranes paused in his recital of the scheme. “Do I understand you aright?”

“Perfectly, King of Kings!” Philopator beamed.

Tigranes pondered this briefly, a scowl on his face. “But what is the point of this complication to our plan? How do we benefit?”

“Our aim is to surprise the Romans and eliminate them,” Philopator explained. “It will be much easier to do so if we can entice their forces into the south-east corner of their lands, where they can be more rapidly surrounded and annihilated. Then we can march to Antioch unopposed.”

“In which case how do I know that you will not betray me, advising the Romans to fall on my territory in the high country while I am thus engaged on the lowlands?”

“If the Romans want to do that, then they will do it regardless of anything I might say or not say,” Philopator conceded. “But Romans tend to prefer the low country, with its broad farmlands, rather than the high country. Given a choice, they will prefer to seize the land between the Rivers. This would be specially so if they wish to repair their relationship with you; and the terms of their last Treaty would seem to suggest that they have no further taste for Armenian lands and are trying to buy your support, or at least your neutrality. So they must intend to target Mesopotamia. And here I am, offering them inside information on how to achieve that.”

Tigranes looked at him uncertainly. "You realise, of course, that you will be very carefully watched."

"Of course, Master," Philopator smiled. "But why would I flee to exile, into the hands of untrustworthy barbarians, when I enjoy such a good life here in the service of the King I love?"

This embellishment to the plan was sent to Gotarzes for his assent. Tigranes had to agree that it would serve to draw the Roman forces closer to the Parthian frontier, making it much easier and quicker to surround and annihilate them before they realised what was happening.

And once that was achieved, there would be negligible resistance to a Parthian march to the Western Sea, while Armenia could swallow at least Pontus and Cappadocia. Then Bithynia and Asia all the rest of Anatolia would welcome their liberators, just as they had welcomed Mithridates before he over-extended himself by crossing the Aegean. That last step into Thracia and Achaia was a mistake that Tigranes did not intend to repeat.

Flaccus was still Head of Senate and tenaciously holding onto the chair of the Colleges Committee. He and Rufus had spent the last two years setting up new Colleges in Africa, the Spains and Achaia as well as in Rome and expanding the original college in Ephesus. The most enthusiastic supporters of the Rufan system were Vidacilius, in Sicily, Mutilus in Africa, Sertorius in Spain, Silo in Anatolia and Lafrenius in Asia. It didn't escape the attention of the Boni that they were all Italians except Sertorius; and even then the Sertorii were Sabine in origin, not of ancient Roman stock. The prime force behind the colleges, Gnaeus Pompeius Rufus, was also suspect because his roots in the Gens Pompeia in Picenum were not ancient Roman. And Flaccus, the head of the Senate Committee charged with overseeing the system, was himself of a family which, although ancient Roman, had plebeian roots.

The whole system was seen by the embattled Boni as a conspiracy between the Italians and the Populares to snatch government from the hands of the Senatorial class. And now, having missed out on a consul two years in a row and after the crushing reaction of the Italian Tribes against the mostly Roman large landholders, the Boni were becoming more paranoid than ever.

Aurelia smiled to see her son so happy. Ever since Caius Marius had forced him into the position of High Priest to Jupiter he had been always dutiful to his sacred obligations, including breaking off his engagement to a highly-regarded Plebeian woman. The Mos Majorum demanded that not only the High Priest be of noble descent, but his wife as well. But had made no secret that he resented the restrictions it imposed upon him. But now, as the family gathered to celebrate his twentieth birthday, he seemed joyful. What was the good news that had brought this about?

Caesar stood and the table fell into a hush. "Thank you, all of you, for being here today you honour my birthday." He beamed down the wide table. There were far too many here for the more stately triclinium. But that didn't worry

Caesar; the informality of his Subura upbringing meant that he was more comfortable in this setting. “I must also thank you for the gifts you have brought today. But I must also advise you that these gifts, however dear to me for the sake of the givers, are as nothing to me today.

“Because the greatest gift is a word from Cornelia, the love of my life,” he held out a hand and gestured her to rise. “She told me this morning that she is pregnant again; and she has been assured by the soothsayers that this time it is a son.” The whole family cried out their joy. Little Julia was a delight, but a man needed a son! Cornelia smiled modestly as the women around the table rose and flocked to her with their congratulations. Only fourteen years old, and carrying her second child! Many who fall pregnant at the age of twelve, as she had with Julia, died in that first birth or are so damaged by it that subsequent pregnancies were impossible. Here was a young woman worthy of congratulations.

Caesar looked around as if bemused. “Well, I suppose I didn’t want to say any more, anyway,” and stepped away from his seat. The men followed him into the courtyard to slap him on the back and offer their good wishes.

Silo was not convinced by these reports spread over his table. “Pontius! A word with you, please.”

Telesinus entered the main office, leaving his desk in the annexe. “Yes, Quintus Poppaeius?”

“These reports,” Silo gestured towards his desk. “They just don’t make sense!”

“What do you mean, sir?”

“That Philopater in Armenia; I just don’t believe him.”

Telesinus frowned. “But everything he tells us has been checked out. If he says that there are over seventy thousand men just south of Tigranocerta, I don’t just take him at his word; I check. And our scouts confirm what he says. And the reports he says he received about Parthians massing near Arbela; I had that checked out, too.”

“Oh, I have no doubt that he is being absolutely factual with everything we can check on,” Silo waved away the explanation. “What I don’t believe is what we can’t check out. Like, why is he telling us anything at all?”

“He has two reasons for that,” Telesinus answered. “He wants us to pull off as much of the Parthian force as possible, and he wants a safe bolthole in case it goes pear-shaped.”

“Rubbish!” Silo spat. “If Tigranes wanted our help he would ask for it. And given the size of the Parthian forces, he’d be a fool to not ask.”

“Which adds credibility to Philopater’s reasons,” Telesinus replied. “He has seen that Tigranes is taking a huge risk, out of his impatience and frustration. He doesn’t want anything to go wrong, and if it does he wants to be able to get away.”

Silo stared at the papers for a minute. “I think it’s more likely that he is up to no good in the north, and wants our main force out of the way,” Silo concluded. “And if he can provoke us into attacking Parthia, or make the Parthians think we

are about to and launch their own pre-emptive attack, then so much the better. It will give him a free hand in the Northern Pocket."

"So how should we respond, sir?" Telesinus saw no point in arguing.

"Send eight legions to Osrhoene," Silo decided. "And keep four more a hundred miles back, out of sight, to protect our rear. And I want secret scouting of what else is happening in Armenia, not just checking up on what Philopater is telling us. What he's not telling us is much more important."

"Conscript Fathers," Vidacilius addressed the Republic Senate, "I am proud to be a member of the Tribe Picenum, and thereby a citizen of this great Republic. I am proud that I can vote for my Tribal Comitia. My rights as a citizen are dearer to me than my life and my family. And I am sure that every one of you, regardless of your politics, shares that pride and treasures his citizenship no less than I do.

"So imagine how indignant you would be, how rightly indignant you would be, if you were deprived of that most precious of all rights enjoyed by even the Head Count. Further, imagine that this right was denied you, even though you had spent your adult life in the service of the Republic, risking your life in battle against its enemies; and then, when you are old and your service no longer valued, you are deprived of those very rights which your courage, your endurance, your piety had secured for everyone else." Vidacilius looked around the terraces.

"Would you not feel that you had been denied those rights which even the most undeserving can exercise at whim? Would you not feel that there is a grave injustice being perpetrated here? Would you not feel betrayed by the Republic to which you had dedicated your life?" Vidacilius paused, and paced slowly, solemnly. "And would you not be shocked to know that this has not happened to just one or two unfortunates, whom the gods have overlooked. This is the lot of more than eight hundred thousand Roman citizens," and raising his voice to a shout of anger, "men whose ancestors go back to a camp in a swamp where now stands the Roman Forum!"

He paused and paced again. "You name one Tribe of Rome," he continued after a break. "You name any Tribe of ancient times, and there are men of that Tribe who know the name, the heritage, the stories passed down through an unbroken chain of ancestors, but who are deprived their right to participate in the most sacred right that goes with membership of that Tribe. They are deprived of their right to vote in that Tribe. Why is this so?" Vidacilius asked. "Because they served this Republic as soldiers, and were granted land to farm in recognition of their service. But this land is not in the lands of their Tribes. No! That land is in Sicily. It is a recognition of the merits of these men, but it is also a sentence of exile.

"Conscript Fathers, there is a way to remedy this injustice. It will cost nothing out of the treasury, it will deprive no man of any property or rights, and it will not do any violence to the Mos Majorum. Indeed, it will fulfil the spirit of the Mos Majorum, which is being injured daily by this scandalous deprivation of rights! I propose that any citizens now resident in Sicily, enrolled in any Tribe of the Republic, should be permitted to change his Tribal enrolment at the next

Census. Instead being enrolled in the Tribe of his father, he should be permitted to enrol instead as a member of the Tribe ‘Sicilia’!

“And that the province of Sicily be accepted as a Tribe in its own right, no less than the Fabia or Arnensis or the Marsi, or any other Tribe within this Republic that grants every one of its citizens the right to elect who is to hold authority over his life!”

Vidacilius heard the rising murmur as he sat, but could not gauge whether it was one of approval or rejection. Probably neither, so new would be the thought to these men. It was something they would have to taste to know if they liked it or not.

Metellus was first to his feet. Only to be expected, Vidacilius thought to himself. Not that he thinks faster than anyone else; far from it! He just stops thinking earlier.

“I gather that you would speak against the proposal, Quintus Caecilius?” Asinius asked.

“Yes, Herius.”

“Then please speak.”

“The proposal by Caius Vidacilius might have sounded like a simple remedy for what is an unfortunate circumstance,” Metellus started. “But think carefully! This proposal is a significant departure from the Mos Majorum! He is proposing that Roman citizens should be encouraged to disown the tribes of their ancestors! As a man who proudly bears the cognomen ‘Pius’, I am shocked by the impiety implicit in this proposal. Perhaps this might seem a minor thing to an Italian such as Caius Vidacilius, who has no grounds for boasting in a Roman heritage, but any true Roman should feel nothing but revulsion. This proposal should not be supported.”

Several men jumped to their feet, most of them Italians who wanted to object to the slur that Italians had no grounds for boasting in their heritage. But Sextus Julius Caesar was also on his feet, and as ex-censor the most senior.

“Please speak, Sextus Julius.”

Caesar smiled gently. “Quintus Caecilius is now a Censor. It is part of his duty as Censor to determine the Class of every citizen, whether Roman or Italian. I am sure that he will perform this task diligently and honestly. I have never heard anyone seriously suggest that Quintus Caecilius is anything less than scrupulous in doing his duty. The cognomen 'Pius' fits well on his shoulders, and that is not restricted only to familial piety.

“No, I have never heard anyone suggest that Quintus Caecilius is dishonest. Nor have I ever heard anyone suggest that he is imaginative. He cannot conceive of anything he doesn't already understand. Were he a General, he would doubtless fight every battle exactly the same way. He would form up a front with his heavies, and have cavalry on each wing. He would do this, even if the battlefield were a swamp and his heavies drowned, and if the flanks were sheer cliffs and the cavalry fell to their deaths.” There was gentle laughter around the chamber.

“It was fortunate indeed that when he was Consul, his colleague was Quintus Poppeius Silo, just in case a Military Man was needed!” More

chuckles which Caesar waved away. “Nor has Quintus Caecilius ever been acclaimed as a deep thinker. But he does know what's right or wrong as soon as he hears it. This isn't difficult for him; he knows that anything he hasn't heard before is wrong. In this case, those advocating Tribal status for Sicily are impious, lacking in their commitment to do what is right.” Caesar's eyes swept the terraces.

“I have personal knowledge of many of the men supporting this proposal. I have also seen a list of some of the more prominent men whom I don't know personally. Let me tell you about a few of them.

“Over one hundred thousand of them are men who have served for more than fifteen years each in Rome's legions, and been awarded honourable discharges and land grants for their service; or they are the sons of such men. Yet Quintus Caecilius waves them away as 'not dutiful'. What were the exact words you used, Quintus Caecilius? Something like 'no grounds for boasting in a Roman heritage'? Are you saying that these hundred thousand veterans are unfit to be Romans? Your colleague as Censor might like some clarification of that position when next the rolls are made up.

“Among them there are eighty men who have won the Corona Muralis. Yes, the award for being the first over the wall in an attack on a fortified position. Yes, the most dangerous thing any man can be called upon to do. And Quintus Caecilius would have you believe that they have no sense of duty!” He looked to Metellus. “I know you have served in the Army, Quintus Caecilius. I know that you served well! But would you tell me that these men did not?” Caesar paced the floor for a moment. “Please, Quintus Caecilius; you have rightly earned the cognomen 'Pius'. Why do you deny that description to these others who have served Rome so well? Even worse, why would you deny them that most basic right of citizenship, the right to vote?”

Caesar sat. The Italianists applauded, as did the Populares. Cato stood.

“Lucius Porcius, you have the floor.”

“I think we need to be crystal clear in what is being proposed here, Conscription Fathers.” Cato paced solemnly. “These men that Sextus Julius speaks of, these veteran soldiers, are beyond doubt worthy of Rome. He is correct when he asserts that. But he is incorrect when he asserts that they are being deprived of their rights, even the right to vote. They are under the same constraints as any other citizen; if they wish to vote, they need do no more than attend the Comitia elections. And furthermore, the recent changes to a Representative Comitia has made this easier for them! Instead of having to attend day after day, throughout the year, as was the case in the old mass Comitia system, they now need appear only once, at election time.

“So why is there this push for adding another Tribe to the Republic?” Cato swung slowly around. “I suggest you look at the composition of those who would renounce their old Tribes to form this new one.

“About half of them are Italians, who gained citizenship by their service, or are the descendants of such men. How they vote in their Italian tribes would change nothing; the Italian tribes always elect Italianists. Most of the

remainder are veterans of Caius Marius; 'Marius' Mules', they call themselves, because they are Head Count from the four Urban Tribes, who always elect Populares." Cato turned suddenly to face Asinius holding the fasces and Caesar Vopiscus beside him.

"This is nothing more than an attempt to ensure more Italians and Populares in the Republic Comitia, and to funnel more Italian and Popularis Republican Praetors into this Senate! For more than ten years you have had at least one Consul from your camp. But that was not enough for you, to share power with the Nobles! For two years now you have had one Italian Consul and one Popularis Consul! Only total power, shutting the nobles out altogether, will satisfy your cravings! You are worse than both the Gracchi rolled together!"

"And even that is not sufficient, in that you now start to further tighten your grip on both Republican Houses by stacking them with members from a new Tribe which is no Tribe at all! It is no more than a mechanism to gain more power." Cato swung back to the body of the Senate as a whole. "Conscript Fathers! Do not allow the Republic to be white-anted like this! Do not throw away those very constraints that have made this Republic what it is today! We are not only the greatest nation on earth; we are also the most moderate, the most just, and the most prosperous. It is no accident that this has happened; it is the result of our enlightened form of government. But to create another Tribe in this way is nothing more than to amplify the voice of the Mob; the Mob that will destroy everything our ancestors have built up and entrusted to us to pass on to our children, entire and functioning. Oppose this measure with every breath you have!"

Sulla was among those who stood.

"Lucius Cornelius, please speak."

"If you analyse what Lucius Porcius just said; and I always pay close attention to the words of this man who has been my colleague several times, as well as a personal friend; if you analyse his words you will see that he gives two reasons why this measure should be opposed. The first is that these men are not being deprived of their voting rights at all. They need only to attend Rome on the day of the elections; or their tribe if they are Italians." Sulla paced the floor, nodding to himself. "In other words, they need only make a winter crossing of the Tyrrhenian Sea, leaving behind their place of work and at an expense that no member of the Fifth Class could afford to pay year after year – never mind those who are even poorer! And then, after the election, to cross back home again, not only at an expense beyond the range of most of them but also at some considerable danger in the winter. If they can find a ship willing to take them, that is; Lucius Porcius didn't mention how many ship movements would be required for some eight hundred thousand citizens, and more if any personal slaves are to accompany the wealthier citizens."

Sulla looked around the terraces. "I think you would agree that they have the legal right to do this. Just as sparrows have the legal right to swoop on elephants and carry them off to feed their young!" A chuckle rose from the terraces. "But having the legal right does not make it physically possible. So,

who would actually be able to vote, if the advice of Lucius Porcius were to be followed? I would suggest that very few would be able to do so; and why would they anyway, given that they would be too few to influence the elections in any case. Unless, of course, some wealthy benefactor decided to pay for them! And this is the danger in the position taken by Lucius Porcius. It will result in the wealthy being able to stack a Tribal election.

“We have already seen what happened to Picenum and Lucania when precisely this tactic was tried. It was a disaster for the victims and it soon became a disaster for the culprits as the victims struck back. In the end, everyone loses. So the first reason put forward by Lucius Porcius is found to be unrealistic. In so far as it could have any strength at all, it is to strengthen the risk of corruption and violence. That is not a good reason to oppose this proposal, but actually is a reason why the proposal should be supported!

“Then there is the second reason put forward by Lucius Porcius. It boils down to this one complaint; ‘If we let them vote, then I expect them to vote against me!’” Sulla shrugged. “In other words, citizens that support him should be permitted to vote, but citizens with a different opinion should be deprived of voting rights.” Sulla shrugged again. “I can only hope that I misunderstood his point. Because if Lucius Porcius genuinely thinks that this selective right to vote would be an arrangement that supports the foundations of this Republic, then I must confess that I have misjudged the man.” Sulla sat, and others rose.

“Publius Servilius has the floor,” Asinius called as more men stood.

“Conscript Fathers, let me divert you to the substantive issues of this proposal, rather than the politics of it,” Vatia began.

“At present, Sicily pays taxes to the Republic. I am not sure of the exact amount – perhaps Caius Vidacilius, being Governor, could help me out here – but I expect it would be something in the order of eight or nine hundred thousand sestertium milia. Now, I personally don’t understand why it isn’t a lot more; it used to be more than double that ten years ago! But even so, that’s a lot of money! I would like to know how the Republic can survive if it loses that income. Until I am convinced that these funds are no longer required or the loss can be made good in some other way, I will oppose this proposal purely on the basis of financial necessity.”

As Vatia sat, Asinius looked towards Vidacilius.

“Without making a full speech, Caius, could you tell the Senate what the tax amount is, and why this income can be surrendered?”

“Yes, Herius; the tax raised last year was nine hundred and sixty three thousand sestertium milia, and expenses were eighty seven thousand sestertium milia, leaving a nett income of eight hundred and seventy six thousand sestertium milia.

“And for the second part of your question, I point out the work of another Italian who has no Roman heritage to boast about, namely Quintus Poppeadius Silo. In the last three years he has increased the tax receipts from Asia and Anatolia to much more than was the case even before the Miletus Decree took effect, and in the last two years added enough rich territory in Syria and

Mesopotamia to replace the Sicilian taxes ten times over. Let the Eastern territories pay their taxes, but let not Roman citizens be subject to double-taxation!"

"Thank you, Caius, but I thought I had asked you to answer the question without making a speech about it," Asinius said drily as more would-be speakers stood. "Gnaeus Octavius, you have the floor."

"I would like this proposal to be left on the table for three months, which will give all senators time to consider the implications more fully," Octavius proposed. "In particular, I would like to know the exact extent of this citizenry; will it be granted to all Sicilians, or only those already possessing Republican citizenship, or some other formula? So I would be most grateful if Caius Vidacilius could leave a full written proposal for our consideration."

Asinius looked towards Vidacilius again. "This time, Caius, please restrict yourself to answering the question."

"I have in mind that only those currently enrolled as citizens would be permitted to change their Tribe of enrolment, and no extension of citizenship is contemplated. The granting or forfeiture of citizenship is to remain within the jurisdiction of the Republic Senate. And yes, I will be pleased to have a written proposal made available to the Senators. I thank all senators for their consideration."

The remainder of the Senate business went without controversy after that. There was in hand a suggestion from Lafrenius, currently governor of Asia, that the province of Asia should be formally extended to take in Cilicia, Galatia, Bithynia and all lands to their west, leaving only Pontus, occupied Armenia and Syria under the authority of Silo. There was an accompanying letter from Silo endorsing this proposal as an administrative commonsense, effectively separating the administration of formerly hostile territories from those which had not been actively hostile. It was approved unopposed.

Philopater had been told that the Romans were probably aware of the boats he had marshalled for the crossing of the Tigris. This could be disastrous! These craft had been slipped fifty miles up a minor tributary of the Tigris almost due west from Tigranocerta, ready to be rushed out for a lightning crossing of the Tigris and a strike to Edessa to cut across the Roman rear. Then to catch them between the Armenian forces to the north and the Parthians to the south!

But now it was suspected that Roman spies had found them. Something must be done to avoid disaster! Philopater could only hope that Telesinus would pay another visit to Tigranes soon. Philopater was correct. The Romans had discovered this flotilla. But what Philopater didn't know was that Telesinus also knew about the twenty thousand cavalry and eighty thousand infantry stationed another thirty miles away, supposedly hidden away from all passing eyes. The cost of equipping this force as well as the decoy force apparently confronting the Parthians was stretching the kingdom's resources to the limits; but it would be worth it to reclaim the lost ground and draw a line in the sand against the Romans ever returning again.

"I expect they'll take no chances, sir," Telesinus offered his opinion. He had learnt that Silo liked to hear his subordinates thinking for themselves. "That means that they'll wait until the spring floods in the Tigris will drop and the overflow plains are dry so they'll be able to move swiftly. That will also give us less of the campaigning season to react and call for reinforcements. So I don't expect any move until Sextilis at the earliest."

"I have to agree with you there, Pontius. Quite apart from Tigranes' habit of moving at the fringes of the campaigning season as he has shown us before. And don't forget that down here in the lowlands, armies can still move effectively right into December, so even September-October might be on his mind." The two men stared at the map a bit longer.

"Perhaps I should pay another visit some time soon; ask him when he intends to jump off, and what he would prefer us to do. I should look keen to make this a co-ordinated operation, rather than each of us having a separate war," Telesinus suggested.

"Yes, do that," Silo agreed. "How he responds to the idea of closer co-operation will tell us how serious he is about keeping our knowledge of this a secret from Tigranes. My bet is that he will drop that pretence if that looks like a way of sucking us in deeper. That way he'll need to provide more details of his own deployments. The reasons he gives will be totally fabricated, of course, but the shape of the fabrication will provide some constraints on his options."

"Then I should be packing my chest again." Telesinus smiled.

Six days later Philopator intercepted Telesinus as he entered Tigranocerta. "It's good to see you again, lord Telesinus," Philopater said in his slightly fawning manner. "Our preparations have come a long way."

"That's good, Philopater," Telesinus smiled back. "It's almost past the time to start if we are to ensure we have enough time to finish the job before winter."

"That would be the case if we were to attempt a frontal attack, lord Telesinus," Philopater agreed. But we have decided on a bold new approach, inspired by your success on the Euphrates. As you would probably know from your own informants, the Parthians have set their defences on the southern bank of the river. It would be a risky and expensive task to assault them directly. So we have gathered together a fleet of boats, as the Parthians would expect us to do for a frontal attack. These are being kept out of sight, upstream of the front. When the time comes we will embark our men not on the tributary to ferry them across but at the junction with the Tigris. Then we will float them down beyond the Parthian flank defences and then fall on them from the rear. But of course, we will wait until the river is lower and flowing more gently first. We don't have the daring that your General Silo showed."

"That sounds a good ploy, Philopater!" Telesinus said approvingly. "Do you want us to attack across the Tigris, to support you?"

"Oh, no!" Philopater seemed horrified. "That might suggest to the King that you have been kept informed! You mustn't move until it's clear that the Parthians are already engaged, and seriously enough for the King to believe that

you are taking advantage of an opportunity rather than acting as a partner in a plan. Also, there's the risk that if the Parthians see any Roman activity on your side of the river they might decide to place some defences there, which would only make our landing that much more difficult."

"If that is how you want it, Philopater, then so be it," Telesinus accepted the advice. "So that means that your boats will be passing down the Tigris for some distance south of the Parthian front to gain an uncontested landing and cut them from the rear. But you need none of our forces in the area to assist, and in fact you would like our forces to stay well clear."

"Absolutely, lord Telesinus," Philopater said fervently. "The more Romans in the area in the time leading up to our action, the more difficult it will be for us. Please send all your forces as far south as possible, to draw their defences away from us. Then when we attack and land behind their main defences they will need to react to our Armenian forces having a clear march to Arbela, where Gotarzes has set up his throne to be closer to the front. They will try to split their southern forces to defend against you as well as protect Arbela against us. In the confusion, they will be slaughtered within a month. Then we will both be able to dip our swords in the Southern Sea."

Telesinus stood back and nodded approvingly. "You are really very good at this, Philopater. If ever Tigranes tires of you, be assured that you will be welcome with us."

"Thank you," Philopater nodded modestly. "Now, what are you going to tell the king to justify your visit here?"

"Nothing significant; only that we have information that the Parthians are building up their army, and we suspect that an attack might be coming soon. We will seek assurances that if we are attacked then we can rely on our Friend and Ally to assist us, just as we will assist you if you are attacked."

Philopater nodded. "That's good. It will show that you are aware and prepared for action, and thus explain how you were able to respond so quickly. I like it."

The Armenians crossed the Tigris started on the first day of October. The river was low and slow and the crossing was unopposed, so a substantial force was deployed onto the west bank within only a couple of days. By the time the initial landings were complete the first ranks of the cavalry were already one hundred miles into Roman Sophene, and scouting on a wide front. Tigranes had no certain idea of how his cavalry had been destroyed in the recent Northern Pocket campaign, but he suspected ambush as his forces pushed too quickly at the expense of good intelligence. He was not going to make that mistake again.

But speed was still important. His men travelled with only a few days' supply to lighten their load, there being plenty of food for the foraging this late in the season. Even a large force could live off the land if they moved at a reasonable rate.

And so went the March on Edessa, which was to become a legend in days to come. Forty thousand light cavalry advancing in skirmish deployment over a

front twenty-five miles wide, clearing the way for a strike force of ten thousand cataphracts and thirty thousand heavy infantry on forced march, dropping off along the way a ribbon of infantry digging in progressively to protect its southern flank. More men were being marched from the dummy front against the Parthians to strengthen this cordon as it grew to trap the Roman forces to the south. The fastest movement of an army this size the world had ever seen, enough to make Alexander weep with envy, was under way.

Silo was sent news of the crossing and was stunned by the scale of the effort. He had expected the invading forces to turn south in an attempt to fall on his rear while the Parthians pressed up from the south. He had stocked for a siege and had the artillery to counter it. But this force was twice as big as he thought Armenia could have possibly mustered. And because of the speed of its advance his intelligence was always days behind the events. But of one thing he was sure; if he tried to move north to relieve Edessa, he would be doing exactly what the enemy expected. He would have to trust Gallienus in Edessa to handle the invasion while he would wait for an opportunity to show itself in the south. In the meantime he would sit tight and prepare his defences while showing as little strength as possible. Let them come to him!

Piso Gallienus had orders from Silo to hold Edessa until any enemy intentions became obvious and then intervene as he thought fit. Silo was becoming looser and looser in his orders, Gallienus thought; he might as well have given none at all, these were so vague! But on the other hand, take that as a sign that you have your commander's total confidence, he told himself. He scanned the reports on his table and sent for his next-in-command. A few moments later there was a knock on the door, and it swung open. "Ah, Gnaeus; your wisdom here please," he beckoned Priscus over to the table and arranged the reports in order for him to read.

"I think the enemy's intentions are obvious by now," Gallienus said. "He's coming straight for Edessa to take us before the Northern Pocket garrison can get here. In the process he's cutting out the main force with the General from any chance of helping us. He's attacking the city while investing the army in the field! How's that for a novel approach?"

Priscus nodded his agreement. "Tigranes has always been one to surprise. With a bit more luck he could have made mincemeat out of us several times."

"What do you think should be done?" Gallienus asked.

"Piso; for some reason my mind goes back ten years, to those first exercises on Rhodes. Do you remember how we two were the pick of the worst?" Priscus smiled.

"Yes. By the gods, haven't we been through a bit since then!" Gallienus smiled. "Now is when we find out if we have learnt anything in the meantime."

"Well, Tigranes doesn't seem to be making the obvious mistakes. His spearhead is his cavalry, so he will be able to detect any defences we put in his way and skirt around them. He isn't pushing his cavalry too far ahead of the main force, just far enough to gather good intelligence. And he's putting up a good picket to the south to screen his flank," Priscus summarised. "The obvious

answer for us is to dig in for a siege, and wait for the Northern Pocket to arrive and relieve us.”

“Yes; and by the time they arrive, Tigranes will have enough time to have built defensive positions against them,” Gallienus added.

“How long will we be able to stand a siege?” Gallienus asked.

“I’m no expert on sieges, Piso. Cavalry is my strongest suit,” Priscus answered. “But I don’t think Tigranes is interested in a siege. That would give the General time to get back. I expect he’ll try to storm us.”

“But the reports make no mention of artillery or siege towers. How can he hope to break through with only infantry and cavalry?”

“By travelling without artillery he’s not only giving us misleading information. He’s also travelling faster so he has time when he gets here to build whatever he needs,” Priscus suggested.

“Yes, maybe,” Gallienus tapped his teeth as he stared at the map. “Twelve legions, trapped in that southern pocket! And we have only three legions here. The best estimate is that Tigranes will have forty thousand cavalry and thirty thousand infantry. So if we come out to meet him, he has twice the infantry we can put out and enough cavalry to surround and annihilate us; but if we stay back, he will have time to build artillery and crush us in our own walls.” Gallienus did not like the choices.

“Piso; I think I have an idea,” Priscus offered. “How do you think this would work?” Priscus explained his plan.

Gallienus stared at his subordinate for a moment longer. “You’re right, Gnaeus. We have no other option. Do it!”

It was three hours after sunrise the next morning when Gallienus addressed a meeting in the Edessa Market Square. “Soldiers of the Republic! Citizens of Edessa! I have good news for you all! Tigranes of Armenia is marching on us. Our best estimates are that he has forty thousand cavalry and his infantry will number about thirty thousand. Those are impressive numbers, but remember that they will be tired after their forced march.

“We have fifteen thousand infantry here as our garrison; but we also have another twenty five thousand infantry on their way from Syria and more than enough cavalry to neutralise Tigranes forces. And our men will be fresh! And then there is also the Northern Force, which has recently been strengthened to eight legions, with twenty thousand cavalry. Another thing to remember; all our men are veterans, experienced in combat and steady under pressure. All of Tigranes men are fresh recruits. The only Armenians with battle experience have been captured and are now serving as slaves.

“I don’t intend to go out to meet Tigranes just yet. I’ll wait for these additional forces to arrive while Tigranes’ men exhaust themselves on one day of forced march after another. And when he finally gets here, facing our rested veterans, he will have another surprise. In his haste to arrive, he has left behind all his artillery and siege engines. He will need time to build this equipment, and

all that time he will be out in the open, exposed to raids and vulnerable to our own artillery!

“This is going to be a glorious month for Rome! Three times in the last five years, Tigranes has proven himself to be a deceitful and treacherous so-called Ally! This fourth time will be his last! Within a month, Tigranes will be no more, and Armenia will become part of the Roman world!” Gallienus smiled and gave a victorious wave from the podium, and then stepped down and marched business-like to his office. There has to be at least one spy in that crowd, he thought to himself. Word should get to Tigranes faster than if I sent a message myself!

Two days later Priscus was with the commanders of the three legions of the Northern Force in Karkathiocerta. “Caius, Marcus, Lucius,” he acknowledged each commander around the table with him. “As of now, you each command three legions. Caius, you assume overall command of the three here in the city, and prepare them to march tomorrow. They'll be going towards Tigranocerta; see that they are supplied with enough to maintain them in the field for two months.

“Marcus and Lucius, your commands are already on the march. Your immediate role is to organise supplies for them. Get out into the city and start waving your purses around; I want you to put in place logistics similar to those I ask of Caius. Organise enough supplies, each of you, to keep three legions in the field for two months.”

“Where have these legions come from, General?” Marcus asked, perplexed. “And where are they? Are they veterans or new recruits? I need to see them as soon as I can if I'm to use them in battle!”

“Don't worry about that for the moment, Marcus,” Priscus said soothingly. “The immediate task is to secure supplies.”

“That won't be easy, sir.” Caius said soberly. “It's getting late in the year and much of the grain has already been shipped out to the coast. We have on hand only enough to feed our current three legions over the winter.”

“So you have only enough for three legions for four months?” Priscus asked.

“About that, sir.” Marcus confirmed.

“Then you'll have to start buying grain in from wherever you can find it,” Priscus answered. “I'm giving you an order here; within two days each of you will already have in hand enough grain to feed three legions for a month and will have secured some means of getting another month's supply before that's exhausted, and also the means to transport all of this to the legions as they march on Tigranocerta. Buy whatever you have to where ever you can to make sure this happens. General Silo will honour the contracts.”

“Excuse me sir; but even if we do that, how do we feed these men into the new year?” Marcus asked.

“Don't worry about that, Marcus,” Priscus smiled. “By then they will be eating from the stores in Tigranocerta.”

By evening the next day everyone in Karkathiocerta knew it was going to be a hungry winter. Roman quartermasters were buying up the private stores of grain to make up the shortfall in the army's reserves. Word was also getting out

that draught horses were being bought and orders placed for wagons. The hitherto unsuspected presence of massive Roman forces concealed nearby was now an open secret and they could be intended for only one purpose. The relief of Edessa wouldn't need so much by way of supplies, the cities of Syria being well stocked; so these men must be marching into Armenia. And where else but to Tigranocerta. Tigranes' eyes and ears in Karkathiocerta rushed to get this information back to their king.

Another meeting was called to report progress. All was going well, even if expensively. "Marcus, Lucius; I want you to leave your quartermaster staff behind to make sure the supply system is properly organised while you come with me to inspect your new commands. We leave tomorrow morning." Priscus looked around the table. "Does anyone have any questions?"

"Yes, sir," Marcus took the invitation. "Where are all of these supplies to be sent? We still have no idea of where our legions are."

"Tell your staff that the supplies are to move out with Caius as protection. Caius will meet up with your commands on the way to Tigranocerta," Priscus answered. "Caius, I want you ready to leave tomorrow morning, while we ride ahead."

Kaphthon stood before Gotarzes in the Audience Room. "Hail, Mighty King Gotarzes, beloved of my master King of Kings Tigranes!"

"And my best wishes to King of Kings Tigranes, as well," Gotarzes responded.

"My Master King Tigranes has cut Roman Syria in halves! Even as we speak he is subduing Edessa, their base, and the bulk of the Roman Army is trapped in Mesopotamia."

"I would hardly say 'trapped', Kaphthon," Gotarzes corrected him. "At this time of year they have supplies to last for many months."

"They are cut off from their base, Mighty King. My master King Tigranes has put a wall of steel between them and their homes. We await the hammer blow from your army that would crush them against this wall of steel."

"As I agreed with you before; the plan is to wait for the Romans to try to move against the Armenian army to relieve Edessa. Then we will take them from the rear. It was never part of the plan that we would launch a frontal assault."

"Now is the opportunity, Mighty King! King Tigranes has cut through them like a knife! They are a broken force and will shatter at the first contact."

"Kaphthon, I am sure your beloved master didn't command you to treat me like a fool," Gotarzes snapped back. "Your master has advanced deep into Roman territory. If my memory serves me correctly, he has done this before. Every time he has done so, he has lost his army. So I will move when the Romans present their backs to me. If you want me to move earlier then you will need to win a major battle against these Romans and not just trample their crops!"

"Then I will tell my master that you will move when Edessa falls," Kaphthon persisted.

"I will move *if* Edessa falls," Gotarzes corrected him. "But at present, I see no sign that the Romans expect to lose Edessa. Their southern forces are not falling back to relieve the city and my spies tell me that their northern force is eight legions strong and marching on Tigranocerta. They seem rather certain of themselves, when you consider that you claim to have cut any communication between them. That leads me to suspect that they anticipated this Armenian attack and had already decided how to react to it. I wouldn't be surprised if this is yet another example of your master sticking his spear into the lion's cage, only to have it bitten off." Gotarzes smiled wanly. "If you get my meaning."

Gotarzes resumed a more businesslike manner. "Please, Kaphthon; tell your master that I would urge caution. Remember what happened to Archelaus in Achaia; he thought he had destroyed Roman power in one lightning thrust as well. But where is his master Mithridates now?"

These same fears were haunting Tigranes as his men marched west towards Edessa. Why were the Romans making it so easy? His wide cavalry front assured him that he was not marching into an ambush; but that only meant that there would not be a local ambush; what if this ambush was on a scale of hundreds of miles, rather than hundreds of paces?

News from the north was not re-assuring either. He had stripped Armenia bare to concentrate on this one big offensive, and had little more than watch houses left in the north. News from there was that the Roman legions were advancing towards Tigranocerta. Only three legions had been seen, but these had been placed under one of the three local commanders, and the other two had been seen leaving the city with their general to take up command of other legions concealed further east. And the supply train following them was huge, enough to feed more than twice as many men for months; so it seemed likely that there were at least six legions, confirming the rumour that they were actually eight legions strong. Where else could they be going except to Tigranocerta?

"Philopater, I have made a decision," Tigranes said at last. "We are going back home."

It was impossible to keep this quiet. Preparations in Tigranocerta to receive the returning army were obvious, and the logistics to deploy it to the north were unmistakable. In haste to halt the Roman advance as soon as possible, small units were dribbling into the city and being re-directed northwards in a piecemeal fashion, to be organised properly and deployed once they arrive at the chosen line of defence. Morale was plummeting and desertions were commonplace. Word of this reached Ctesiphon quickly.

Gotarzes still had his decoy force stationed along the now-empty Armenian front in Gordyene, only two day's march from Tigranocerta. "Call Kaphthon to me!" he commanded. The Armenian ambassador was in the audience hall within minutes.

"Kaphthon, it is clear that Armenia is in desperate circumstances," Gotarzes announced. "I cannot allow these western barbarians to harm my beloved friend, your master King of Kings Tigranes. I have commanded my eastern army to advance through Tigranocerta and assist your defence."

"Mighty King; that will not be necessary. Of course, your kindness and concern will be reported to my master, but King Tigranes has ample resources to dismiss this threat without troubling you."

"It is clear from developments that the Romans deceived us into thinking they had deployed their main strength in the south. It is clear now that most of their legions are in the north, and the strength of the southern force has been grossly over-estimated. Parthia can well afford to assist its ally and I will hear no more of your reluctance. This is an certainly embarrassment for your master, but we are friends and we do not need to pretend to each other," Gotarzes said with a gentle smile. "What is important is the defeat of these Romans. My orders are already on horseback! So go, let your master know that Parthia loves Armenia."

Kaphthon saw that the decision had been made. He bowed, took three steps backwards and left. He wasted no time once out of the audience hall. He changed quickly into riding gear and called for the three strongest mount in his stables. This was too urgent to allow the luxury of a carriage journey.

The next morning, after riding through the day and night and three changes of mount, he arrived in Tigranocerta just in time to meet with Tigranes as he passed through heading north. "King of Kings! Thank all the gods that I have found you so quickly! We must speak privately."

Tigranes wasn't accustomed to his servants telling him what he must do, but he could see from the man's combination of desperation and exhaustion that this would be a good time to make an exception. "Come with me to my private rooms," he ordered.

"Well?" Tigranes asked as soon as the door was closed.

"Gotarzes is ordering his decoy force to cross the river and move on Tigranocerta." Kaphthon blurted out. "He says they will move through Tigranocerta and to the north, to assist in your defences; but he has been very unwilling to attack the Romans so I suspect he intends to seize as much territory as possible before the Romans do. He will then paint himself as an ally against their mutual enemy Armenia."

"The bastard!" Tigranes spat. "But I think you're right. But we are in no position to resist right now. We will have to play along and hope. Once his men move through to the north, I will pull our men back into Tigranocerta and leave his to try to hold their ground against the Romans. Our men will be kept as a reserve."

Silo's scouts told him that the Armenian picket line to his north was falling back to the Tigris. He also knew that the Parthian forces to the south were moving out, leaving only a relatively weak screening force. Then he received his first report from Gallienus since the invasion had started. 'Syrian Army of eight legions and thirty thousand cavalry moving into place. Nine legions in the Northern Pocket marching on Tigranocerta! Just as had been discussed in our planning,' Gallienus had written!

Silo smiled to himself. Another message written in the expectation that it might be intercepted by the Armenians! In fact, who is to say that Gallienus had not

sent several copies out, some by routes virtually suicidal, to ensure at least one fell into Tigranes' hands!

Well, that clever ploy with the northern force explained why the Armenians were pulling back; but why were the Parthians fading away as well? Why are they not attacking? He needed information! He grabbed his quill and some paper and started writing orders for scouting patrols to cross the Tigris into the Parthian territory of Adiabene, as well as shadowing the withdrawal of the Armenian pickets. Then another, congratulating Gallienus and Priscus on their brilliant strategem but ordering that the Northern Force should pull back now that it's aim had been achieved. Now his only problem was in making sure that the second letter fell into Armenian hands.

"So the Roman northern force has turned back? Are you certain of that?" Tigranes asked again.

"Yes, King of Kings," General Antruces replied.

"And what of their other forces?" Tigranes pressed.

"No major movements have been detected, King of Kings."

Tigranes turned to Gotarzes sitting beside him. "It would seem that the Romans are genuinely satisfied with the current borders, my brother. The march of the northern force was not intended to be an invasion so much as a warning to withdraw from Syria. Therefore I thank you for your help in this time of crisis, and greatly appreciate your courage in standing by me. But as you can see, your assistance is no longer required. Let your men get back to their families." Tigranes smiled his warmest smile.

Gotarzes returned the smile. "It is good to know that Armenia is safe! I can leave now with a light heart!" Gotarzes stood to leave, and Tigranes stood with him as a courtesy. He didn't sit again until Gotarzes was out of the audience hall.

"Philopater! I want you, the General and Kaphthon in my private rooms immediately." Tigranes stood and left the hall.

"How do you explain this, Philopater?" Tigranes asked severely. "We make a pretence of preparing to attack Parthia, and then launch straight for the Roman heart! It must be clear to them by now that we are their enemies and were in league with Parthia to deceive and defeat them. So why do they take no action?"

"I have no way of knowing for certain, King of Kings; but perhaps they still fear the combined force of Parthia and Armenia. They might consider themselves lucky to have survived, and are content to leave well enough alone."

Tigranes looked at Philopater with tightly pursed lips for a moment and then turned suddenly to Kaphthon. "And you, Kaphthon. You were certain that Gotarzes was entering Armenia on a pretext, and would betray me! What do you say now?"

Kaphthon appeared cool. "I say that he and his soldiers are still here, King of Kings."

Tigranes looked scornfully at his ambassador to Parthia. "And what will you say in a few days' time, when they are here no longer?"

"That will depend on where they are in a few days' time, King of Kings. I can do no more than provide you with the best advice I can. Your humble slave will not lie to you for his own convenience."

"And you, Antruces; what do you say?" Tigranes worked to the next man.

"I say to beware of any army in your territory which you do not personally control, King of Kings. But we have this in our favour; that Rome did not attack us when they had good reason and good position. This reinforces their claim that they are happy with our existing boundaries. But can we be as certain of Parthia? If not, and if they rise against us, then we can be reasonably confident that Rome will at least remain neutral. They might actually help us as the lesser of two evils."

Tigranes made a face. "I doubt that after our attack on Edessa they will be inclined to help us," he commented. "But I think you're right about their neutrality. If they wanted more territory, they certainly had every opportunity to take our far north; even if we had been able to defend Tigranocerta, everything north of the Araxes was wide open to them."

Tigranes made a decision. "Antruces, I want every unit in the army to be prepared for an attempted takeover by the Parthians. Prepare for treachery! And if they're not making positive moves to return home within three days, I want you to launch an attack of our own. So make your plans but report back to me before you do anything. I will give the signal and no other."

"Yes, King of Kings," Antruces bowed slightly.

"Philopater! How do you think the Romans will view you now, after your poor information?" Tigranes moved on to the next man.

"I will be extremely embarrassed, King of Kings," Philopater replied. "But this recent turn of events will answer one very awkward question that was troubling the Romans; why you did not ask for their assistance in your purported attack on Parthia. Now it's known that you were never planning an attack on Parthia at all, so the mystery is solved. And I will explain that you feared there was a Roman spy in your inner circle, which is why you used the Parthian deception even on me. So in a way it has given me increased credibility, by proving that I was indeed acting outside your instructions."

Tigranes didn't look convinced. "Hmm! Information, false information, and false false information! It's a wonder you can remember anything without suspecting it's only a story to fool yourself!"

"At least you have done nothing apparently false, Kaphthon." Tigranes said to the last of the three. "You reported back to me immediately, just as a good ambassador should. Keep me in touch with anything you overhear."

At last Silo found out where the missing Parthian Army had gone. Reports arrived from Gallienus explaining that the Parthians had moved into Armenia. Whether this was as invaders or allies was not yet clear. Telesinus had formed the opinion that Tigranes saw Rome as his enemy and Parthia as a reluctant ally, and not above betrayal if circumstances suggested it.

Regardless of intentions, one thing was very clear. There were at least as many Parthian soldiers defending Tigranocerta as there were Armenians. Apparently both sides had convinced themselves that Rome felt over-extended already, and didn't want to risk war against their combined strength. But once they had convinced themselves that Rome had been deterred their ancient rivalries were likely to come to the surface soon.

Silo decided to re-inforce this perception of Roman reluctance. As well as the defences-in-depth he had already built on the Parthian frontier between the Tigris and Euphrates, he started constructing strongpoints along the west bank of the Tigris opposite Parthian Adiabene. He also ordered Gallienus to do the same in Sophene, opposite Armenia. There's nothing like major static defences to make the enemy think you have abandoned the strategic offensive! Five days later Gallienus sent a further report. Parthian troops had attempted to seize Tigranocerta and other major towns in southern Armenia, with mixed success. Tigranes was either hiding, dead or captive, and Tigranocerta was held precariously by Parthian forces but being subjected to a vigorous counter-attack by the Armenian army.

"Continue constructing static defences along the frontier!" Silo wrote back urgently. "Adopt a defensive posture and let the whole world know it! We want no part in their private war!"

Gallienus had set up a chain of courier stations that allowed messages to be carried by fast rider, with replacement mounts every twenty miles. This allowed him to send reports daily, arriving at Silo's camp within a day of him sending them from Edessa. His experience in the northern Pocket had taught him the benefits of rapid communication. Over the next couple of days he moved his own camp to the west, just across the river from Armenian territory, and set up another series of staging posts. This allowed any news to be assessed and sent from the banks of the Tigris, avoiding the extra day in travel to Edessa. Silo's information was arriving little more than a day after it had been gathered from Tigranocerta and its surrounding country. Meanwhile, Silo's own scouts were reporting that only modest Parthian forces remained in the south and a steady stream of reinforcements were heading north through Adiabene towards Tigranocerta.

Eight days after the attempted Parthian coup the stream of reinforcements stopped and Gallienus reported that the Armenian counter-attacks had ground to a halt through exhaustion and casualties. The Parthians still held the Royal Quarter and had some reserves outside the city ready to harry the Armenians from behind. Both sides had fought themselves to a standstill but with the Parthians in effective possession. Silo decided that the time had come.

*Quintus Poppeadius Silo, governor of Roman Syria and Anatolia,
to Piso Gallienus, Commander of the Edessa Sector,*

Greetings!

I command you to maintain an adequate defensive capability along the frontier with Armenia, in case the trouble across the border spills into our lands.

Subject to that requirement, I command you to consolidate so much force is available from the Edessa Sector and the Northern Pocket into a mobile reserve, to be able to respond rapidly to contingencies. I would expect this mobile reserve to include most of your available cavalry. This force shall include ample supplies of all kinds, to ensure they are able to fight with minimum notice. This force shall be stationed on the main route between Tigranocerta and Edessa, as close to the river as possible without the risk of being surrounded by a surprise attack.

You shall continue to send reports to me at least daily. I will inform you of events from this area as they unfold.

Gallienus showed the orders to Priscus, and the two men looked at each other. "It's written to look like a defensive fast-reaction reserve," Gallienus said, "but I think that was just in case of interception. I think the General has somewhat greater ambitions."

"I agree," Priscus said. "Otherwise he would have also asked for a similar force to be stationed in the Pocket. I think he's telling us to prepare for a lightning thrust, and that can only be towards Tigranocerta."

Gallienus nodded. "And the reference to 'events unfolding' in the south suggests that he is going to run his own diversion there. Perhaps he'll cross the Tigris to pull the Parthians away from us."

The punch through the Parthian defensive line and into Hatra had been stunningly simple. The thin line of Parthian infantry had simply scattered when they saw the Roman heavies coming at them ten ranks deep, and the Roman cavalry had exploited the gap to fan out behind the defenders to either side. For twenty miles in each direction the gap had been secured, with only three thousand prisoners taken. Only one hundred and fifty men per mile of front! Silo snorted in contempt. And no reserves! They had obviously swallowed our passivity as a sign that we were not prepared to intervene!

Hatra offered no resistance. The Magistrate came out to greet the Romans with a full grin and a skin of wine, sweating profusely as he welcomed the Great General. He offered everything his town could provide by way of entertainment if only the Great General would refrain from wanton destruction.

Marcus Paulus, who was in charge of the cavalry charged with capturing the town, thanked him with utmost courtesy and announced that a Roman Superintendent would be appointed, but otherwise the town would enjoy peace and govern itself. One century was allocated this duty. Everyone knew that Standing Orders would be enforced; that meant free use and priority service of all facilities, including the brothels; but that goods had to be paid for and persons could not be harmed so long as everyone remained obedient.

The town Magistrate beamed with delight as he thanked the General for his mercy, confident in his own mind that these gentle words would be totally ignored once the General was out of sight. But nothing would be gained by calling the

conqueror a liar so he resigned himself to the rape, plunder and slaughter that invariably followed a capture.

Paulus told the cavalry centurion not to make himself too comfortable. He was to hand over control as soon as an infantry century arrived to relieve him, and then catch up with the advance.

Silo was personally leading another breakthrough just west of the river. By sunset that first day the lead units had crossed the Tigris unopposed some twenty miles south of the frontier. Arbela, Gotarzes current administrative centre, was only fifty miles to the north-east, with only flat road between the Romans and the prize. The chances were that Gotarzes would not even have heard of the Roman attack yet! He ordered tents to be set as the last of the infantry arrived on the east bank. No camp preparation this time with ditches and palisades. The men had marched all day and were tired, and would be marching all day again tomorrow; let them sleep long and well with the cavalry taking the guard duty!

Paulus had arrived in the early evening and presented himself to Silo at first light. "I confirm that Hatra is in our hands and compliant; there's no sign of significant Parthian forces in the area," he reported briskly.

"Excellent!" Silo smiled. "Did you encounter any resistance?"

"No,sir; they all surrendered or ran as soon as we came within sight."

I don't think we can expect the same at Arbela," Silo said almost wistfully. "I want you to lead the column while I do a bit of logistics work back here. I'll catch up by evening."

"Yes, General."

It was just after noon by the time Paulus stood outside the gates of Arbela, calling in his sweet Greek for a city official. Gotarzes and his court were still in Tigranocerta. The town Administrator stood on the wall over the gate, trying to look calm and dangerous at the same time.

"General Silo sends you his best wishes!" Paulus called up to the walls. "He prefers you all to live well and prosper! So he is pleased to offer you these terms. If you surrender the city without resistance, then you will be accorded all the benefits of the Miletus Decree. Any soldiers within your walls will be disarmed, and then set free. There shall be no rape or slaughter of your people, except those which resist or threaten our men. Your own City Officials will continue in the administration of the city, subject to a Roman Governor. You have until sunset to accept this offer. If you do not accept, then General Silo has authorised me to take whatever action I consider appropriate. I will send a man back here just before sunset. Any answer other than unconditional acceptance of this offer will be considered a refusal." Paulus ran his eyes along the top of the wall, noting only a few archers.

"Citizens of Arbela! Accept, and live long and prosperous lives! Refuse at your peril!" Paulus steeled himself to turn his back, the most nerve-racking part of any embassy. His cloak concealed considerable armour-plating for both himself and his mount's hind quarters but a bodkin arrow still had a good chance

of getting through. He pulled his horse around and walked the first few paces before raising it to a canter.

Silo arrived just before sunset. "The demand for surrender was delivered at mid-day, sir. I have just sent a rider out for their response."

"And what do you intend to do if it's refused?" Silo asked with a smile.

"Whatever you tell me to do, sir," Paulus said bluntly.

"And if I tell you to take control of the situation while I go to Edessa?" Silo asked with an edge to his voice.

"I would arrange for deep scouting further north while the main body waits here for the infantry to arrive. Then, when the infantry are here and the threat of immediate assault is more credible, I would make the offer again, but this time without the promise of no plunder. They will have to pay for delaying me."

"And if they refuse that?" Silo persisted.

"That would depend on the situation," Paulus replied. "It's not wise to be too rigid in planning; there must always be room for adaption."

"I think you're trying to avoid the issue, Marcus," Silo chided him.

Paulus realised he would have to commit himself to an answer. "The primary aim of this campaign is to take Armenia. Nothing should distract from that. If the capture of Arbela is conveniently fitted into that, then it should be done to provide protection from Parthian interference from further south. But Arbela is not an objective in its own right. Therefore, if it refuses to surrender and I don't have the time or forces to spare, I would prefer to screen and by-pass."

"Then why are we demanding its surrender?" Silo pressed.

"For the psychology of it," Paulus answered. "If it does surrender, then it increases the reputation of Rome and will discourage opposition in the future. But even if it doesn't, then I would come back after the north is secured. That's when Arbela pays for its stubbornness and the rest of the world learns that it's not smart to refuse terms when Rome offers them."

Silo nodded thoughtfully. "It's comforting to know that we are on the same page, Marcus."

An officer stood at the opening of the tent. "Yes, legate?" Paulus asked.

"The response from the city, sir. They promised to not oppose our passage, but will not open their gates to us."

"Thank you, legate." Paulus held his hands palm upwards. "As expected, sir."

"Then carry on as discussed," Silo ordered. "Build a by-pass road around the city for the infantry and artillery and send out scouts. I'll detail a few cohorts of heavies and one of cavalry to keep them within their walls until their time comes."

Four days later Silo was staring across a river at a small but desperate Parthian force. "There's something dream-like in this situation," Silo said. "Here we sit, in fortifications built by Parthians, about to attack Parthians sitting in fortifications prepared against them." He looked around then and across the river

again. "Not that there's much science to either set," he sniffed. "These were only for show, and never meant to be used in a battle."

"The report from Piso Gallienus has arrived, sir," Paulus interrupted his line of thought. "He was only a day away from the agreed crossing point yesterday evening. The five legions you detached also report that they are ready to cross."

Gallienus had crossed the Tigris with three legions three days earlier, after finding a point that was not defended. Since then he had been marching downstream on the eastern bank, aiming to link up with some of Silo's men. Meanwhile five of Silo's legions had crossed back to the western bank to march around the confluence with this defended tributary, combine with Gallienus, and take this defensive position from the rear.

After that, Tigranocerta would be wide open. Even now the small garrison cohorts in Pontus and Colchis were moving through the undefended northern spaces of Armenia to converge on Artashat. The Armenian army, after a courageous struggle to evict the Parthians, had finally broken when faced with the fresh troops of the legions. To a man they had deserted to go home; let the two invading armies fight among themselves, but they had lives and families to worry about.

So Gallienus should be at the crossing point by now. They would probably camp the night and march at first light to punch through the Parthian lines on a mile-wide front so the main southern force could cross in safety.

Silo looked out again and saw a rowboat on the river. "Marcus! It looks like some-one wants to parley! Have him brought here."

Kaphthon was wearing his most enthusiastic grin as he was guided into Silo's tent. "It is a wonderful honour to meet you, lord Silo," he effused. "My lord, Mighty King Gotarzes, prays to all the gods for your health and safety. Behold how he smote Tigranes for his unfaithfulness towards you!"

"How wonderful to know that the Mighty King is my friend," Silo said with an edge of irony.

"Indeed he is!" Kaphthon clapped his hands together. "And now, having subdued the one who betrayed you, he advises that there is now no need for you to take such action yourself. Be assured that Tigranes will never again harm you or Rome. You may now go back to Syria with a light heart."

"Tell me, honoured..." Silo raised an eyebrow.

"Your servant's name is Kaphthon, sir."

"Then tell me, Kaphthon; what settlement has my friend Mighty King Gotarzes in mind for Armenia?"

"The Mighty King has already subdued Tigranocerta and the surrounding districts and will extend this pacification measure throughout all of Armenia to prevent any lingering spark of anti-Roman malice to gain a foothold," Kaphthon smiled reassuringly.

Silo smiled back, spreading his hands wide. "Who am I, that the Mighty King should care so much for me?" he exclaimed. "Such trivial matters are undeserving of his attention. Please thank your master for his generous disposition towards me. And then, to ensure he has peace of mind, inform him

that Roman forces have already occupied all the Armenian lands north of the Araxes. Some areas south of the Araxes have also been pacified, and I expect all of Armenia will be under Roman administration within a month."

Kaphthon knew better than to argue the point. Much better to change the subject. "My master also asked me to discuss with you the most convenient way for him to return to his own lands. Now that Armenia is no longer a threat to Parthia, there is no need for you to so gallantly interpose your forces between Tigranes and Parthia. He invites your army to cross back into Osrhoene."

"I fear that the Mighty King has misunderstood the purpose of our expedition," Silo replied. "We were most disappointed by the treachery of Tigranes, and resolved to put an end to his duplicity. It is for this reason that we have crossed the Tigris, to occupy Gordyene and Adiabene as well as the other Armenian lands."

"But, lord Silo; Gordyene and Adiabene are Parthian lands," Kaphthon replied with a seriously puzzled expression.

"So it was once thought," Silo explained. "But I have been made aware of a Treaty, signed by the Mighty King and Tigranes two years ago. In this Treaty, the Mighty King ceded Gordyene and Adiabene to Tigranes. Are you not aware of that treaty?"

Kaphthon felt his heart sink. That accursed forged treaty was designed at the time to gain Osrhoene for Parthia. Now it looks that it might be used against them!

"It was my understanding that you did not recognise that Treaty, lord Silo," he stumbled out.

"When I was first told about it, I had my doubts. But I can see now that the Mighty King is an honourable man, and would not be party to such a deceit. I am persuaded that the treaty should be accepted. Therefore, Adiabene and Gordyene are Armenian lands, and now become Roman lands."

"Then that means that Osrhoene will be returned to Parthian control?" Kaphthon asked hopefully.

"I will speak to the City Councils in Osrhoene. If they prefer the just and gentle authority of the Mighty King, then they will surely be permitted to transfer their allegiance. But if they are content to remain under Roman administration, then I would not want to burden the Mighty King with territories that could give him problems in the future."

Kaphthon continued smiling as he thought to himself 'In other words, No!'

"Then I will return to my master now and inform him of the continuing friendship he enjoys with you. I presume that there will be no difficulty in our men crossing the river tomorrow to make their way back home?"

"There will be no problem with that at all, Kaphthon," Silo smiled. "Let them cross unarmed, and my men will escort them through Roman Adiabene, back to Parthia. I will personally guarantee that those who submit will not be harmed in any way, but returned safe and free." Kaphthon nodded that he understood, but made no reply. "And you can also inform my Friend the Mighty King," Silo continued, "that any reluctance to avail himself of this opportunity

first thing in the morning will be perceived as an insult. And there is nothing between my army and Ctesiphon.” A final charming smile left no doubt about Silo's meaning.

The transport of the Parthian troops across the river was a slow affair. Neither side had intended to attack so neither side had bothered to arrange for boats to carry their men. But once the word reached Gallienus he sent his boats down the river and the rate increased. But in the meantime Silo decided to have a meeting with Gotarzes.

Gotarzes was uncertain what to expect, but assumed it would involve some degree of humiliation. He was guided into Silo's makeshift office in the fortifications. To his surprise Silo stood as he entered and greeted him with a smile.

“Here take a seat,” Silo gestured towards a common chair for the Mighty King and at the same time sat on a similar chair himself. This was certainly not a demonstration of Silo's power compared to his guest's humiliation; but nor did it seem respectful. Why was Silo apparently aiming to deny any significant status to himself as well as his visitor?

“Your man Kaphthon tells me that you consider me a dear friend, and went to war against Armenia purely out of a desire to demonstrate this friendship!”

“That is indeed true,” Gotarzes replied.

Silo looked at him admiringly for a moment. “I wish I could lie as glibly as you, old friend!” he said at last.

Gotarzes was shocked. He is bluntly calling me a liar to my face, in the presence of his staff officer and Kaphthon with me! Yet his manner is friendly, as though we are genuinely allies and swapping jokes.

“I am sorry, but I fail to understand you,” Gotarzes replied at last, as the silence hung heavy between them.

“Friend, we don't have to play these silly diplomatic games! We are friends and can speak plainly to each other!” Silo bantered warmly. “For example, we both know that you were happy to see Tigranes attack me. Your idea was to sit on the sidelines until you could see who was going to win, and then come into the war on the winning side! You're not a fool who would risk backing the wrong side!” Silo continued. “And we both know that your treaty with Tigranes was a complete fraud; what really mattered was which of us could stare the other down. It just happened that I can stare better than you. So I take both the disputed territories, not just one of them! And I include Arbela in my territories as I say that.

“And we both know that I am more than happy for you to return to Ctesiphon as Mighty King. We both know that you control only the Mesopotamian parts of the empire and I much prefer Parthia to be divided between you and Orodes, rather than unified under one man who might be able to cause me some discomfort. So this is just a friendly chat, old friend, without any pretences. Don't try any double-dealing or undermining of my position and your position will be safe. I like the idea of a friend between me and Orodes, and I'll let Orodes know that you're under Roman protection. But if you give me

any trouble, then I might decide that I would be happier without your friendship.” Silo smiled again. “Do you have any questions?”

Gotarzes had recovered his composure by now. “I have no questions, old friend,” he replied, deliberately taking his lead from Silo’s terminology. “I think we understand each other perfectly. Henceforth we will have genuine peace.”

Then, to Gotarzes’ shock, Silo stood and held out his right arm. Gotarzes stood and took it in the Roman style.

“May you live long and well, old friend,” Silo said, and then released his arm. “I have longed for the day when I have a frontier at peace, and not had to face yet another enemy across yet another river. Thank you very much for making that happen.”

Pontius Pellius had been busy through the year. Being Interrex to conduct the elections had disqualified him from actually standing for election himself.

So although he was a central figure in the informal Drusus-backed group, he was not consumed with Comitia business. Instead he had set his mind to the stamps that Sulla had invented to mass-produce ballots and voting guides.

Sulla had made one copy of each letter in the alphabet, used these to mark up a timber mirror-image blank, which was then used to stamp potters clay as a master for a heavy-duty brass plate showing the whole page. This was a reasonable approach for large volumes of papers on infrequent occasions because it minimised the amount of detailed engraving required; one of each letter and one new timber plate. But if there arose a need to produce a large number of different sheets, the amount of time spent on the timber cuts grew proportionately.

Pellius had in mind printing whole books, where there might be a hundred or more different pages. Rather than wood-cutting a hundred different timber masters, why not use the potter’s clay to produce many copies of each of the different letters and then hold the individual letters in a rack to form words? Then, when the full run of the first page had been completed, release the letters from the rack and re-arrange them to form the second page, and so on for the whole book? Then stitch the pages together to form thousands of books in the time a scribe would take to produce a single copy!

He decided to give it a try. He arranged for a full alphabet to be wood-cut onto a single timber master, and produced a hundred brass copies from this imprint. Then the lines of letters were carefully cut apart and each letter carefully filed down to a standard uniform size, with the depth of each precisely shaved down to a uniform depth. Thus, letters could be placed in trays with separator bars and clamped tight. He quickly composed his first ever press tray.

At last he was set for his trial run, and stamped out a sheet. Bursting with excitement, he lifted the press tray to read his sheet. It was written backwards! He burst into howls of laughter at his now-obvious error. His first instinct was to destroy all of the brass letters that had been made for him at such trouble, time and expense, but then he thought better of it. Let him keep them as a warning that not every plan goes smoothly. And besides, they might come in handy if he ever wanted to sell books to Jews, he thought with a snort of amusement.

He went back to his woodworker and coppersmith to start again, only this time the letters would need to be carved backwards. And this time it worked! This called for a celebration! He sent a message to Drusus and Sulla, asking when they might be able to visit. The message arrived at Drusus' house as Caius Vidacilius was meeting with Drusus, Sulla and Sextus Julius Caesar.

Vidacilius had expected the Populares to be enthusiastically behind him, since the new Tribe would be almost entirely retired soldiers and their children.

"That might be true, Caius," Caesar explained patiently for the third time. "But I cannot support a measure that will send the Republic bankrupt! Yes, I know that the extra income from the new territories in the East is more than enough to make up the loss. But what will happen in five years' time when Africa asks for the same status? And what in twenty years' time, when Silo's men have retired to Asia or Pontus? You might think that you are only talking about Sicily, but in time we could face the same demand from every province!" Caesar emphasised. "And what do we say to them then?"

Sulla's ears pricked up to hear that. Caesar had unknowingly put his finger on the issue that was key to Sulla's long-term thinking; to integrate all civilised peoples into the Mos Majorum. If Caesar could see the consequences of this initiative so clearly, then it would not be lost on the Boni either.

"Sextus Julius," Sulla broke in. "Perhaps we are confusing two separate issues here." He shifted on his seat. "We seem to be assuming that a Tribe and its territory are the same thing. Perhaps it might be better to think of the new Tribe of 'Sicilia' as being those citizens who live in Sicily, while the territory of Sicily itself remains a Province, subject to Republic taxation."

Caesar blinked in confusion. "Please explain, Lucius Cornelius. I don't understand how such a system would work."

"Think about this as a possible way forward." Sulla pulled his thoughts together. "All citizens in Sicily have the option to be enrolled in the Tribe 'Sicilia'; but that is only as a Tribal enrolment, no different from their current enrolment as citizens. Sicily remains a province, subject to Republic taxes, even though many of its people are citizens. So far, you can see there is no difference except the census details."

"Yes, I see that," Caesar agreed.

"Next step; instead of Republic taxes being levied however the Governor decides, which is a system that begs to be corrupted anyway, we impose on the province a set amount, to remain the same year after year," Sulla progressed his argument.

"Yes. Call it an annual Tribute rather than a tax, but it is still income," Caesar agreed.

"Next, leave it up to the Comitia of the Tribe Sicilia to determine how this tribute is to be paid; let it be just one more expense that the Tribe has to pay," Sulla concluded his line of thought. "After all, that's how Silo set up his territories in the east; each city was responsible for gathering its own taxes. The only difference here is that we are doing it on a province-wide basis."

Caesar did not look convinced. "No, Lucius Cornelius, there's a big difference. You are talking about a Tribe paying tribute, not a province."

"Not if the Tribal Comitia raises that money by way of a special tax that applies only to non-citizens!" Vidacilius exclaimed. "It's illegal for a Tribal tax to discriminate between citizens of their own tribe compared to other citizens; but that doesn't apply to non-citizens!"

The light went on behind Caesar's eyes. "Yes! I see your point, Caius! That would put citizens in Sicilia on exactly the same footing as citizens of any other Tribe, while non-citizens would be required to pay a Republic Tax just like in any other Province." Caesar glanced across to Sulla.

"That's legal, isn't it?" he asked Sulla.

Sulla nodded. "Yes; but how might that tax be raised? If the Tribe imposes a tax on land held by non-citizens, then the land would be more profitable to citizens than to non-citizens. So the non-citizen landowners will tend to sell to citizens and the tax base will shrink. And the same will apply to every other tax base you might think of. Even if you reduce it to a non-citizen Head Tax, the non-citizens will simply move to another province."

Vidacilius shrugged. "Perhaps. But that sort of shift will take many years, perhaps even many generations. Problems that far ahead can be solved as we come to them. Who is to say that the Republic won't have its own land, or gold mines, or some other source of income by then? Up in Picenum, the profits from the old Pompeian Estates are almost covering the Tribal budget without the need for taxes, and the same thing could happen to the Republic if acquires enough conquered or confiscated land."

"A good point, Caius," Sulla agreed. "Perhaps the Republic Tax imposed on Sicily could be paid for by a Fishing Tax, because no-one owns the sea."

"Whatever is the final answer, Sextus Julius, you can see that there's no reason why it can't work," Vidacilius said as he turned back to Caesar. "So do we have your support?"

Caesar held out his hands, palms upwards. "It'll work, so yes. I'll support it. An arrangement like that will certainly be in the interests of my supporters in the Second Class who have large holdings in Sicily; they keep complaining to me about the higher taxes paid in the provinces."

"The big question is what level of Tribute should be set." Sulla wanted to tidy up the details. "What was the nett tax income last year, Caius?"

"Eight hundred and seventy six thousand sestertium milia, Lucius Cornelius."

"Then let that be the level of the Tribute," Sulla suggested.

Chapter 12 – 675 Ab Urbe Condita (79 B.C.)

“All hail Caius Marius!” Drusus cried as he raised his goblet. The mass of Italianists and Populares filling the huge courtyard of Young Marius shouted their approval and took a long slurp. “Learn well as a Quaestor, Caius, and you'll be well equipped for an illustrious career, as befits a man of your heritage!” Another roar of agreement followed.

“And all hail the Samnite Bull!” Young Marius saluted the Senior Consul for the coming year. And again the crowd cheered but for some it was a forced bonhomie. The Populares and Italianists had attempted to take both consulships again, but this had fallen flat. The Populares had chosen as their candidate Quintus Sertorius, a man of great fame as both an advocate and a soldier. There had seemed nothing that could stop a third successive year of Italianist/Populares Consuls.

At the elections the Populares and Italianists combined to ensure the election of Mutilus as Senior Consul but when the vote came for the Junior Consul several of the Italian tribes broke discipline. They couldn't bring themselves to vote against Sertorius, but instead they simply declined to vote at all. Because of this, Lucius Julius Caesar of the Boni had narrowly won election as Junior Consul.

The Populares felt betrayed. They wanted to know why their candidate had been abandoned after they had honoured their word by supporting Mutilus. Drusus knew what he had to look forward to in the days ahead and was no less angered about this turn of events than they.

“Marcus Livius; I imagine that you already know that we need to talk,” Sextus Julius Caesar muttered to him.

“Indeed, Sextus Julius,” he replied. “But first, I need to talk to a few of my Italian friends to discover why they acted so dishonourably. Please allow me a few days to do that so I can talk to you on the basis of knowledge rather than speculation.”

“Very well, Marcus Livius,” Caesar agreed. “Let me know when you're ready; but please be ready as soon as possible so we can get things back under control. Otherwise someone might do something regrettable if this is allowed to fester.”

Drusus searched the gathering for any members of the Italian tribes in question but it was soon clear that none of the Paeligni, Frentani, Pompeiani or Lapygii had attended. Very wise of them, Drusus thought to himself, lips compressed. At length he found Sextus Julius again. “I don't want to intrude upon Caius and his close friends, Sextus Julius; so please convey to Caius my personal congratulations to him again. But right now I think I should take my leave through you and have a quiet word with Publius Praesentius and the others before they slip out of Rome and back to their Tribes.”

“Good idea, Marcus Livius,” Caesar agreed. “I expect they might not want to be in town over the next few days.”

Drusus and his escort stepped into the streets as the last light of day faded. It was only a hundred paces to the house Publius Praesentius had bought for himself and the Frentani delegation when in Rome. They were admitted into the small courtyard. Praesentius was with them a few minutes later. "Marcus Livius! I thought you would be at the celebrations!" Praesentius said with perhaps too much cheer in his voice.

"I was," Drusus replied. "But I felt out of place there. In fact, I think I felt shame. I'm not accustomed to shame."

All of Praesentius' joviality dropped away at this remark. "Marcus Livius Drusus never does anything shameful!"

Drusus stared solemnly at the Italian. "Tell me why, Publius," he asked flatly. "For twelve years, ever since the citizenship law, we have always dealt honourably with friends and opponents alike. If we agree, we keep our agreements. If there is ever a reason why we can't, we inform the other party and try to work out how to overcome our objections. But we do NOT just slip away like dogs when our allies are depending on us!" Drusus finished harshly.

"Marcus Livius, it was only at the last minute that we decided we couldn't support Sertorius," Praesentius defended himself. "We had been worried for the last few days, but it was only this morning that he lost the support of the majority of us. That was when we were told that if Sertorius were elected, then the documents would be made public. But rather than voting for Caesar, I urged them to do no more than abstain."

"But why? On what basis?" Drusus asked with exasperation. "What evidence was there? And now, your refusal to strand by him sends a very loud message across the whole Roman world; even his so-called friends will not defend him!"

"We didn't decide on the basis of whispers, Marcus Livius; solid proof was put before our eyes." Praesentius shook his head as he spoke. "Solid proof."

"What proof?" Drusus demanded.

"Documents. Reports." Praesentius answered.

"Show me!" Drusus demanded.

"I can't show you. I don't have them. But they were shown to us on the strict understanding that their contents and the identity of those who showed them to us should remain confidential."

"Why didn't you come to me when you were shown these documents?" Drusus demanded.

"As I said, Marcus Livius; we were bound to secrecy."

Drusus snorted. "Do you know why you were bound to secrecy?"

"Yes; it was because those who had these documents didn't want Sertorius to be prosecuted. They said that they wished him no ill, but in the light of these past faults didn't think he should become Consul."

Drusus stood silent for a short time. Then he spoke again. "Publius, I didn't think you could be so foolish! Perhaps they wanted to keep it secret so their so-called 'evidence' couldn't be examined and tested! Perhaps they wanted 'secrecy' so the accused man was not even aware he was on trial, much less able to state a

defence! Tell me what these documents actually said!" he glared at his friend. "And don't give me any bullshit about 'secrecy', either! Secrecy is the weapon of choice for cowards."

Praesentius gestured towards the small ornamental pool. The two men walked over and sat on the coping. "The first was a report after Arausio. It showed that while the army was wiped out almost to a man, Sertorius survived by cowardice. He ran at the first sign of trouble, before the Germans could complete their encirclement."

"Who wrote this report?" Drusus asked.

"I don't know; I was shown only the relevant page, not the full document. But it was written as though it was by one of his staff."

"So, you have one page by a person unknown, and no way of knowing its reliability," Drusus summarised. "And this page says that the youngest man ever to win a Grass Crown is actually a coward, so how credible is it? What else?"

"Another paper from one of his staff, addressed to Titus Didius while Sertorius was serving in Spain. This officer is telling Didius that Sertorius is deliberately ignoring orders. He warns that Sertorius is plotting mutiny."

"And do you know who wrote this letter?" Drusus asked.

"I saw the name, but I can't recall it."

"So; what orders were being ignored?" Drusus asked. "And did Sertorius raise a mutiny?"

"The letter didn't say what the orders were; it only referred to them as 'your latest orders'. And no, apparently Sertorius was persuaded not to mutiny."

"I think I know what orders Sertorius ignored, Publius," Drusus offered. "During that campaign Didius was a complete butcher, slaughtering thousands. It was probably orders like this which Sertorius ignored. I also see another connection here. Didius tried to veto the prosecution of Caepio for his incompetence at Arausio, so it seems there is a conspiracy here by Didius and others to discredit a man who has succeeded in pacifying the Spains where Didius himself could do nothing except slaughter and provoke unrest. And tell me this; if Sertorius is such a coward, as suggested in the first report, then how could he suddenly develop the courage to deliberately offend his superior officer? The two accusations contradict each other." Drusus shook his head. "Any more?"

"Yes," Praesentius answered. "A third letter, sent by Lucius Cornelius Sulla to Caius Marius. In this, Sulla reports that he had sneaked into Gaul pretending to be a Celt. He had found Sertorius giving a German tribe instructions in how Romans fight so they would be at an advantage when confronting the legions. That's simple treason, Marcus Livius! And this was no forgery, either. I'm familiar with how Lucius Cornelius writes, and this was unmistakeably his writing."

"I know about that," Drusus said mildly.

"Then, how can you defend him?" Praesentius asked in surprise.

"Because Caius Marius sent him on that mission," Drusus answered. "He and Lucius Cornelius were partners in this mission to gather information about the strengths and intentions of the German tribes. And so as to gain their

confidence they were ordered by Caius Marius to pretend they were deserters and train the Germans in only one particular battle formation. That way, when they met the legions, Marius would know exactly what he was facing and what their battle plan would be. Both Quintus and Lucius Cornelius even married German women and had children by them.” Drusus paused while Praesentius gaped. “You have been played for a fool, Publius,” Drusus told him. “Did the other tribes, the Paeligni, Pompeiani and Lapygii fall for the same trick?”

“I don't know, Marcus Livius. We were told to discuss this with no-one.”

“Then send a runner to each of their delegation houses, asking them to come here immediately. Marcus Livius Drusus, their Patron, is demanding their attendance. It's about time I played that card.”

Praesentius bowed his head in humiliation and then clapped for the Master of House. The runners were sent.

“And now one last runner. This one to Quintus Sertorius. I'll write the letter myself.”

Drusus walked into the house and crossed to the one of the desks lining the wall of the main room, used as a common office by the Frentani delegation.

*Marcus Livius Drusus.
To Quintus Sertorius,*

Greetings!

Dear Quintus, I have already expressed my dismay about the election result today. I have now found out how such a terrible thing has come to pass. Please allow me to visit you tomorrow, about the third hour, and talk to you about it. I will have four others with me.

“Publius, I would like to stay the night here with you and the others. We have a solemn duty to perform tomorrow. Please get your runner to deliver this to Quintus Sertorius immediately.”

It was a cold, wet and windy morning the following day.

“Let's use the litters,” Praesentius said. “Those conditions are not fit for cattle!”

“No!” Drusus objected emphatically. “We will all walk, with heads uncovered. We need to show our remorse for your idiocy and faithlessness.”

And so it was a concerned Quintus Sertorius who admitted them into his main room. “Python!” he called to his Master of House. “Put more wood on the fire! Bring towels! And five dry tunics as well!”

“Thank you for your kindness, Quintus,” Drusus said. “These four men are the leaders of the four Italian Tribes who abstained yesterday. They have come to confess their error and beg your forgiveness.”

Sertorius looked sharply towards the four Italians. "I'm sure they thought they were doing the right thing," Sertorius conceded graciously. "But I would be fascinated to hear their reasons."

"That's why they are here, Quintus," Drusus explained, "to apologise for their idiocy in being fooled, and also to pledge their support for you in the future." Drusus glared at the four Italians, who had now stripped out of their wet clothing and were starting to towel themselves dry.

"I can wait until they are properly clothed and comfortable," Sertorius replied. That didn't take long. Soon the five visitors were dry and warming themselves by the fire. Sertorius ordered three couches to be brought in by the fire, and invited his guests to sit with their backs to the warmth.

"But Quintus, these men have wronged you. They should stand and confess their fault while you sit," Drusus chided him.

"No, Marcus Livius; I'm sure they acted out of the best possible motives. I'm sure this was simply a misunderstanding," Sertorius waved Drusus away.

"Lucius," Sertorius addressed Cluentius, the leader of the Pompeiani, "Please tell me what I have done for you to not vote for me."

"It is not what you have done, lord Sertorius..." Cluentius was cut off as Sertorius immediately held up both hands.

"Please, Lucius, are we not still friends? Will you not still address me as 'Quintus'?"

"Thank you Quintus, for allowing me that privilege," Cluentius continued. "Our failure to vote for you was based on three documents we were shown. The first was a report from one of your staff at Arausio. This told a story of you surviving that battle only by running for your life at the first sign of trouble. The sec..." Again he was halted by a sudden hand in the air.

"Which of my staff wrote this?" Sertorius demanded. "Only fifteen men of my command survived with me, and only two were officers."

"I don't know, Quintus. I was shown only one page, with no sign of the author."

"Then did you check with Marcus Probatus or Sextus Canto? They're still alive, and still my friends. I suspect that page was a forgery."

"We were shown these documents on a pledge that we would discuss them with no-one. We were foolish to make such a rash pledge."

"Yes, foolish indeed, to make a promise that would prevent you from checking the accuracy of this story," Sertorius said sternly. "And you were saying there was a second?"

"Yes," Cluentius continued. "This was a letter written by one of your staff in Spain to Titus Didius, saying you were refusing to obey orders and planning a mutiny."

"That letter might be legitimate," Sertorius conceded. "I certainly did ignore many orders from Didius. That man wasn't stopping the rebellions; his provocations were the cause of them! Just ask Flaccus, who had to tidy up the mess afterwards. And technically, this could be called mutiny. But I say that only a coward obeys such counter-productive orders from a madman. I leave you to

judge whether I was guilty of mutiny, or Didius guilty of incompetence deserving correction.”

“There was a third document, too,” Cluentius continued when it was clear that Sertorius had finished. “This was a report that you were training Germans about Roman battle tactics. This would be treason.”

“Well, I *did* train Germans some Roman tactics,” Sertorius explained. “Lucius Cornelius and I were under orders from Caius Marius to win their confidence so we could report their strength and lead them into a trap.”

“The letter was written in a way that implied Lucius Cornelius discovered that you were doing this covertly,” Cluentius added.

Sertorius shrugged. “Then why not come to me and ask me to explain myself?”

“As we said, we were sworn to secrecy.”

“Yes; you were sworn to not let the accused man defend himself!” Sertorius sneered. Then he corrected himself. “I’m sorry, but I have to ask you what sort of ‘honour’ demands that you act so dishonourably?”

“Yes, Quintus. We acted very foolishly, disgracing ourselves,” Cluentius agreed, ashamed. “But that last letter from Lucius Cornelius was so persuasive! It was written as if to say that he had discovered what you were doing and that you were unaware of his presence. There was no hint of you being partners in that mission. Now that you have explained to us your mission that letter could be read more innocently; but at face value it was very damning.”

“Just a moment!” Sertorius frowned. “Did you say the letter was from Lucius Cornelius?”

“Yes, Quintus. I’m sure of it. I recognised the handwriting.”

“But I wrote all the reports back to Caius!” Sertorius exclaimed. Lucius Cornelius, with his red mane and all, pretended to be a Celt who had escaped forced service as a common soldier. He was supposed to be illiterate! So he made a point of never having any writing equipment with him. I did all the writing for their Chief as an excuse for having the equipment myself.”

“I can only believe that what you say is true, Quintus. But if this was not written by Lucius Cornelius, then I can’t imagine who did write it. It even had dots between words, like he was doing even before Rufus set up his Colleges.”

“Did you say dots between the words?” Sertorius asked. “Lucius Cornelius didn’t start doing that until the Germans were repulsed. I remember the first time he ever did it was in reporting from the staff of Catulus; I remarked at the time how much less confusing it was when messages had to be read and understood quickly. So if Lucius Cornelius did write that letter, then he must have written it after Vercellae.” Sertorius was obviously angry, although he kept an even voice.

“Marcus Livius,” he said as he looked to Drusus. “Tell me that I must allow Lucius Cornelius the right to explain himself. Otherwise I’m simply repeating the error of these men who misjudged me.” Then he turned back to Cluentius. “Lucius; who showed you these papers?”

“I don’t know that the names they gave me are true or false, Quintus. One called himself Caius Fabius, the other Marcus Petronius.”

"If you see either of them again, let me know. I'd like to find out who is behind this," Sertorius said. "I don't think Caesar himself would stoop so low, but very few of the other Boni have his integrity. We'll find out one day!"

Sertorius stood and held out his right arm to Cluentius. "Thank you for telling me all this, old friend," he smiled. "And I thank all of you for your renewed friendship." He offered his arm to each in turn. "Please, allow me to have you taken home in my litters. It's too miserable out there for you to walk back."

Then to Drusus "If you could please stay with me for a short chat, Marcus Livius?"

When the other men had left, Sertorius gestured that Drusus should sit beside him. "I don't know whether or not Lucius Cornelius is the main character behind this plot, but there is no doubt that he is at least complicit," Sertorius said.

"I don't doubt it for a moment, Quintus." Drusus agreed. "But what do you intend to do about it?"

"For one thing, I don't intend to confront him with the story and ask for an explanation!" Sertorius exclaimed. "No-one should ever let Lucius Cornelius Sulla know that he is an enemy; it is much safer to just kill him before he kills you."

"Then how have you lived this long?" Drusus argued.

"A fortunate combination of circumstances," Sertorius answered. "First, I was out of sight; second, I was in the past, and his murder of my German wife and child were revenge enough for the insult he felt when she preferred me over him as a husband."

"You told me your wife died in childbirth!" Drusus exclaimed.

"So she did; but the midwife told me that the cause was a drug that causes miscarriage and bleeding to death," Sertorius explained. "Now cast your mind back to the circumstances whereby a penniless Lucius Cornelius gained his fortune; bequests by two wealthy women who were charmed by him and met their deaths by poison."

Drusus felt chilled. "But now you're back in sight; and you have made yourself a target."

"Yes," Sertorius agreed. "It seems for the moment he was content to keep me in Spain, well away from any chance to win fame or wealth. But as soon as I put my hand up for Consul, that was something he couldn't stomach. But rather than kill me, he preferred to disgrace me; or at least, as a first step. But he isn't one for half-measures; I wouldn't be surprised if a Terrible Accident happened to me some time soon."

Drusus shuddered again. Sertorius didn't know the truth behind the 'Terrible Accident' that had killed Caius Marius, but that Sulla had been the first to propose it was too much a co-incidence to escape his mind.

"So, we get back to the question; what are you going to do?" Drusus repeated.

Sertorius smiled. "Well, after the election yesterday, everyone in Rome knows that not even the impeccable Marcus Livius Drusus can convince four

Italian tribes to vote for me. I'm in total disgrace. What else is there for me, except to return to the Spains?"

"Do you think that will be enough to keep Sulla happy?" Drusus asked.

"I notice you referred to him as 'Sulla' just then." Sertorius observed. "Don't do that again, or you could be on his list of enemies too and not even know it."

"We've had quite a few disagreements over the last few years," Drusus confided. "I wonder if I'm on it already."

Sertorius shrugged. "Most people don't find out until they wake up one morning very cold and still."

"But that doesn't answer my question; will you be safe in the Spains?"

"Oh, yes," Sertorius lied confidently. "He has humiliated me, and as far as he knows I still don't know that he is behind it. That's how Lucius Cornelius likes to take his revenge; anonymously and if possible slowly."

"But revealing himself in one of the letters seems a bit clumsy."

"Ah!" Sertorius waved him away. "First, he relied on those rural lunkheads to keep quiet, as per their pledge. Don't get me wrong, by the way. I like those men and I understand how they were pressured, so I hold no grudge. But even if they did talk, the letter would appear to be exactly what it pretended to be; a report from over twenty years ago that had an innocent explanation once all the context was filled in. The only clue that it isn't a genuine report is the word separation, and very few people would see that as anything except proof that it's a genuine Sulla document. He probably doesn't even remember himself when he started to separate his words, and probably thinks he's always done it."

"So he wasn't clumsy, and he wasn't foolish; he just got one tiny detail wrong," Sertorius finished. "So I'll get back to Spain and let him savour his victory."

"So you're sure you will be safe?" Drusus insisted.

"Absolutely!" Sertorius lied.

"Then I wish you well and I'll find time to visit you in Nova Cartago some day." Drusus stood as he spoke, readying himself to leave. "And it was very gracious of you to provide litters for the others. They'll never desert you again, be sure of that! But I'll walk, thank you. I intend to have a hot bath when I get home anyway."

As soon as Drusus was out the door Sertorius started thinking very carefully about Terrible Accidents. He had one big advantage here; Sulla didn't know it was a race, and would probably want to enjoy this humiliation for some considerable length of time before he decided that Quintus Sertorius should finally be disposed of. That gave him some time.

Sulla had been very impressed by what he called the Pellius Stamp. With enthusiastic thanks from Pellius he had spent considerable time in the rooms Pellius had dedicated as his development room, working together to refine the system to produce prints more uniformly and with less effort. One of the first suggestions Sulla had made was to make the tray curved, like the outside of a drum, so that as it rocked over the paper the actual contact area was subjected to

greater pressures. This ensured a better transfer of ink. This was then linked by a rack and pinion gearing system to a print bed that slid from side to side. On each pass a sheet was printed, lifted from the bed, and another sheet put in place. But this made it more awkward to apply ink to the tray.

The next step was to make the print tray much smaller in radius, eventually three-quarters of a cylinder. The paper was placed in the centre of the print bed, and an ink-impregnated pad was placed in trays either side. As the bed moved from one side of extreme travel to the other, it first picked up ink from the impregnated cloth, then applied it to the paper, and then rolled onto the ink-impregnated cloth on the other side. The printed sheet was taken out, and a blank sheet placed before the bed was moved to the other extreme of its travel.

With this self-inking arrangement the stamp could produce over five hundred copies an hour, with only three workers. One, standing on one side of the bed, would lift the printed sheet out and hang it to dry on a long wire between walls, while another would advance the drying wire one step and place a new sheet on the print bed. The third was at the other end of the drying wire, unclipping the sheets and stacking them into bundles. Pellius calculated that one stacker could easily handle two wires, so it was really only two and a half workers per stamp if they wanted to produce multi-page publications.

“You'll make a fortune out of this, Pontius!” Sulla enthused.

“We will make a fortune, Lucius Cornelius; the initial idea was yours, and most of the improvements have sprung from your mind. I consider myself to be only a plodder, fortunate to have your imagination at my service.”

“No, I have wealth enough, Pontius; and a good idea is worth nothing until someone like you finds a use for it. And what a great use it will be!”

“I think we're ready to start serious business now, Lucius Cornelius. The Senate is always asking proponents of new laws to provide everyone with a summary of their proposal, and then a copy of the exact wording so it can be studied. Using a room full of scribes is not the answer, because different scribes write different sizes and spacing of letters, so a sentence on one copy is in a different place to every other copy. This gets confusing. But with this, a Senator can refer to the tenth line down and the third word, and it's the same on everyone's copy! I can make big money just servicing the Senate!”

“Excellent idea, Pontius. And that makes me think; perhaps you should have larger gaps after every fifth line, to make it easier to count down.”

“Another good idea, Lucius Cornelius!” Pellius clapped his friend on the shoulder.

Aurelia had grown accustomed to her son's iron will over the years, but this was beyond the limits. She knew that Caius had come to genuinely love Cornelia, specially since the birth of Julia; and she knew that he, like every Roman, found nothing more precious than a son. But now Caius had lost his first son at birth, and Cornelia with him. Yet he showed no grief at all.

"It's disappointing, mother," he said calmly. "But I'm young. There will be other women and I have plenty of time to father more children. I'll miss Cornelia, but I'm not the first man to lose a wife and I will not be the last."

"She was such a lovely girl," Aurelia said.

"Yes," Caesar agreed. "I will observe the full period of mourning before I re-marry."

"You are thinking of marriage already?" Aurelia asked, shocked.

"Of course, mother. It's never too early to plan ahead. And this time I'll marry a Plebeian girl."

"You can't," Aurelia told him. "The High Priest of Jupiter must be a Patrician, and so must his wife."

"That should disqualify me from the Priesthood, then," Caesar said bluntly. "I can get out from under that silly ivory hat and all these bothersome restrictions. I can serve in the Army and go into politics. I can get my life back." He leant back in his chair.

"I'll have to talk to Uncle Sextus," he continued. "I'll see if he can have me placed on the staff of some General somewhere, preferably where I can get some experience. Perhaps Silo over in Syria would be a good place to start."

The new Great Houses were almost complete. Only the final hanging of doors, the placement of balustrades around the galleries and the painting remained. And it was still on budget. Sulla had developed a routine of inspecting the work on the first, eleventh and twenty-first day of each month, and now knew the layout as well as his own home. He smiled as he greeted the Project Manager as an old friend.

"What progress, Jason?" he asked.

The Greek architect smiled as he gestured towards the main doorway. "The office fit-out is almost complete now, Lucius Cornelius. But I'd like you to look at some of the timberwork; I'm not happy with its appearance in the areas where we have direct light through the dome."

The domes over the main chambers were Sulla's favourite feature. Openings were placed all around the base of the dome to permit fresh air and sunlight to penetrate the Main Chamber below, making it appear that the roof was floating on a ring of light. Timber shutters could be used to close these openings in cold or wet weather, but on a pleasant sunny day the chamber was bathed in light.

"What do you mean by that?" Sulla asked.

"We chose light-coloured timber, as is usual for interior spaces because darker timbers make the building feel gloomy. But we have so much light in there that we don't need to worry about that. Instead, where the direct sunlight through the openings hits the timber, it's too bright and produces glare. It's tiring on the eyes, specially from the viewing gallery," Jason explained. "Come, it's a bright morning and you can see for yourself."

Unlike the old Senate building, the new houses didn't have Great Doors that could be swung open to allow the people outside to hear the debates. Sulla was

terrified of The Mob, and didn't want the risk of an invasion such as Sulpicius had led. Instead, any observers would need to sit in a gallery around the front half of the building, set twenty feet above the level of the marble floor. There was no direct access from the Gallery to the floor, which meant that the Senators and Comitia Representatives were safe from assault.

Jason led the way to the stairs up to the gallery. One of the carpenters following at the rear. Just as they reached to top landing, the carpenter raised his mallet and clubbed Sulla from behind. Sulla collapsed like a sack.

"Is he dead?" Jason asked furtively.

The carpenter felt for a pulse. "Not yet, but when he falls head-first onto the floor below that will make sure of him."

"No, break his neck here and now," Jason insisted. "I don't want to take any chance at all."

The carpenter raised his eyebrows, but complied. He rolled Sulla onto his face, reached around to cup his victim's chin in his right hand, and placed his left palm just above Sulla's right ear. Then, with a sudden jerk, he pulled the chin around and up. A satisfying snap was heard.

"Right. That's done!" The carpenter said as he started to lift the body.

"No! I'll check for a pulse again!" Jason demanded, and then reached for Sulla's wrist to satisfy himself. He took his time, making sure that he was feeling the right place, before he nodded. "Good! Now let's drop him."

Jason poked his head around the corner from the landing to look at the doors to the Senators' lobby in the far wall, the only access into this chamber at ground level for security's sake. They were still closed. The carpenter lifted the body by the arms and Jason took the legs. Down four steps to the edge of the gallery, where Sulla's body was draped over the temporary safety rail, and then he was left hanging by the ankles for a moment before being dropped. They heard the thud onto the marble below and then ran for the stairwell, shouting as if in a panic.

"Lord Sulla has fallen! Lord Sulla has fallen!" Jason cried as he rushed down the stairs and into the lobby area. Then down the corridor leading to the Senators' ante-room connecting the back of the Main Chamber to the Senators' offices, and into the Main Chamber itself. By now he was followed by a dozen men. The body of Sulla was where it had fallen, the top of the head oozing blood and the neck at an absurd angle. Jason rushed over to it, wailing his grief.

"Romans! Citizens!" Drusus began his funeral oration. "Today we mourn the loss of a man whose name will never die! Caius Marius was rightly called the Third Founder of Rome. Lucius Cornelius Sulla was his right hand!"

"Even that would be honour enough for any great man. But Lucius Cornelius surpassed that. Twice he saved the Republic from tyranny, once from Sulpicius and once from Pompeius. Between these brilliant and bloodless victories at home he commanded the forces that defeated Mithridates, the most powerful King in the east, whom even the Great Marius described as a more serious threat than the Germans.

“But even more important than that; even more important than his military triumphs; his greatest victories were his victories of the mind! Lucius Porcius Cato, twice Sulla’s co-consul and later his co-Censor, would be the first to tell you that it was Sulla who inspired the new Catonian Constitution of this Republic. Twice Consul, and twice Censor! There has never been a statesman of his quality in all of our history!

“Lucius Cornelius was a genius. There is no-one who will deny that his was the finest mind in his generation. But it was not a jealous genius. He sponsored many other top-quality men, and pressed for their promotion as strongly as he pressed for his own ambitions. It was Lucius Cornelius Sulla whose alertness and command of the situation saved me from the blade of an assassin on the eve of the enfranchisement vote. This has never been made public before, but I say it now so that all may know their debt to this man. It was he who also discovered the hands behind this assassination attempt, with evidence so convincing that the three villains went into voluntary exile when they were told that they would be prosecuted otherwise. I will not name them; but I will not interfere with your right to speculate.

“It was Lucius Cornelius Sulla who urged Quintus Pompeius Rufus to take up the governorship of Asia and develop the Rufan System. The Rufan system has revolutionised the administration of the provinces, bringing peace, prosperity and security to what had been a hotbed of discontent and rebellion. No longer will precious Roman and Italian blood and treasure be poured out to maintain peace in the Roman world, but instead these provinces now support the Republic with their own wealth. This would not have been possible, in fact it would not have even been imaginable, except for Lucius Cornelius Sulla.

“It was Lucius Cornelius Sulla who demanded that Quintus Popphaeus Silo be given command of the War in the East. Silo has since proven himself to be the greatest general in history; but he would not have had his chance except for the insight and insistence of Lucius Cornelius Sulla.

“And finally, Lucius Cornelius Sulla advised and encouraged those who successfully achieved Tribal status for citizens on Sicily. These veteran soldiers had dedicated their lives to the protection of the Republic, and had been rightly recognised and rewarded with their own land to farm. But they were finding it impossible to exercise their rights as citizens, and were still vulnerable to the whim of any unjust Governors. These men are now permitted to do what every other citizen takes as a given; the right to elect those who would hold authority over them.

“This man, who did more than any other to create not only our New Republic, but also the buildings that symbolise it, died on the floor of the Great Senate! There could be no more fitting end for the man who dedicated his life to upholding the Republic that he not only loved, but nurtured and strengthened and built up with every fibre of his being. If Caius Marius is to be hailed as the Third Founder of Rome, then Lucius Cornelius Sulla must be accorded the esteem of being the Fourth!

"Vale, Lucius Cornelius Sulla! Will the Republic ever have another servant like you? You will never be forgotten!"

Drusus nodded to the young lad standing beside him. "It's time, Faustus Cornelius," he said gently. The lad took a burning torch from the hand of a slave standing behind him and walked to the pyre.

"Good-bye, Father," the only surviving son of Lucius Cornelius Sulla said as he touched the flame to the oil-soaked cloth at the base of the piled firewood. As he stood watching the smoke spiral into the clear sky, Drusus thought to himself. 'Now I am the only one left out of the four who brought in Italian Citizenship. How much has happened in barely ten years!' Suddenly he felt very alone.

Silo was also attending a funeral, but in Ctesiphon. Gotarzes had died. There goes my safe, quiet frontier, Silo thought to himself as he watched the formalities, presided over by the new Mighty King Baltruces. What a rise to the top, Silo thought. This little-known upstart had killed Orodes to take the throne in the eastern half of the Empire, and less than a year later he had the opportunity to replace Gotarzes in the west. How quickly he had managed to re-unify the Parthian Empire!

Perhaps he could move so quickly to take advantage of this circumstance because he had arranged for it to happen, Silo thought cynically. These eastern despots had no compunction about the deaths of thousands of their loyal subjects; so why should they think twice about assassinating a rival? Silo continued sizing up this new Parthian King. Will he move against me quickly, to assert his power? Or will he turn his attention inwards for the first few years, to consolidate at home? There must be any number of others who have their own ambitions, or whom this new man has offended; he might need to do a bit of thinning of the nobility first, Silo decided. I'll speak peace to him, while making it clear that this is an offer, not a request. I expect he will take it.

There was no State Funeral in Nova Cartago, but Sertorius was full of thoughts about that which he knew would be taking place in Rome. As well as the official reports and letters from friends, he had also received a letter from one of his clients; a man who had considerable influence in one of the Colleges which served as both vigilantes and organised crime gangs within the city.

He took a quill and a fresh sheet of paper from the shelves above his desk, and thought for a moment before starting to write.

*From Quintus, your friend.
To Claudius, my friend,*

Greetings!

Thank you for your advice that you have managed to solve my little problem back home. Your account of how your delegates handled the matter seems most satisfactory, and I commend them for their careful planning and precise performance. You may now deal with them prudently, as you suggested in your recent letter.

I am sending a separate letter to my Master of House in Rome, authorising the release of the money promised to you. Take this letter to him to identify yourself as the one to whom this fee is due.

I am confident that you will remain eager to please me in all things, and thus continue to enjoy my confidence and favour.

Live long and well!

AUTHOR'S NOTES TO THE FIRST VOLUME

I must admit that when I first read reputable histories of this period in your timeline, I was greatly discomfited.

What had always seemed a natural progression of my version of history, even an inevitable one, was thrown into total disarray. In my time at Malitora as undergraduate, post-graduate and eventually Head of History, I have read and almost memorised the memoirs of so many of the major actors in this period of history. I have come to know Drusus, Sulla, Silo, and a dozen others better than I know some of my own family. Yet when I research what is known of them in your time line I feel as though I am looking at strangers.

But even more appalling is the senseless and pointless waste of life of the Social War, or the Italian War or Marsic War as it is sometimes called. I am stunned that so many great men, from the cream of both Rome and Italy, were killed in this exercise of arrogance and futility.

It is no wonder that Rome descended into the chaos of repeated civil wars in the fifty years after this bloodbath, considering that so many of the men who were stalwarts of the Republic (in my history) had been eliminated. This allowed the few remaining men of substance to tussle for a primacy that would never have been tolerated previously. When the bulk of the quality is removed, the opportunists arise!

Yet even among those who survived, there seems to have been a desperation brought on by the times. The greatest example of this is Lucius Cornelius Sulla. He had always been (and in my timeline continued to be) brilliant, ruthless, and totally focussed on upholding his interpretation of the Mos Majorum. In my timeline, he does this in what I have always considered to be a consistent pattern. So why, in your history, does he become a dictator, in effect a 'King', the very symbol of everything which he had always opposed?

I can only think that it was a measure of his desperation. After the Social War had wiped out so many excellent leaders that would have kept the Republic in good balance, and even more fearful than ever of the Mob after seeing the apparent success of the Marian Party (including their proscriptions), I suspect that he felt that he had no choice but to adopt radical measures. But even so, he resigned his dictatorship when he thought his work was done. He was not to know that the Populares which he dreaded, hardened to civil strife during the Marian Wars, would eventually make one final and successful push. In some ways, it could be said that his Dictatorship had not been ruthless enough, if he were to preserve the Republic.

The rest, as you so quaintly say, is history. But I will long treasure the memory of what Sulla really was in my timeline. And the brilliance of Silo's full life, so tragically cut short in your history, must remain a beacon of humanity. All soldiers and all politicians would do well to learn from him.

OUTLINE of significant events, dated by Western Convention (years B.C.)

BOOK 1

90 Consuls Lucius Julius Caesar
 Publius Rutilius Lupus

Censors Sextus Julius Caesar
 Publius Licinius Crassus

Italians enrolled as citizens of the Republic in their native tribes.

89 Praetors Quintus Poppaeus Silo
 Gaius Papius Mutilus -
 Quintus Caecilius Metellus Pius

Consuls Lucius Cornelius Sulla / Caius Marius (suffect)
 Lucius Porcius Cato

Mutilus sent to govern Sicily
Sulpicius' Coup
Caius Julius Caesar the Younger made High Priest of Jupiter
Marius goes to fight Mithridates
Sulla's First March on Rome

88 Praetors Marcus Livius Drusus
 Marius Egnatius

Consuls Caius Marius / Lucius Porcius Cato (suffect)
 Lucius Cornelius Sulla

Marius dies at sea.
Sulla in Consular command of the War, delegates actual control to Silo

87 Praetors Quintus Sertorius
 Two Italians

Consuls Lucius Porcius Cato
 Marcus Livius Drusus

Quintus Pompeius Rufus sent to govern Asia
Quintus Sertorius to sent govern the Spains

86 Praetors Quintus Caecilius Metellus Pius
Pontius Telesinus

Consuls Lucius Porcius Cato
Marcus Livius Drusus

Strabo's Coup
Sulla's Second March on Rome
Pontus defeated, Armenia confronted.
Silo's First Triumph.

85 Praetors Caius Vidacilius

Consuls Quintus Caecilius Metellus Pius
Quintus Poppeius Silo

Censors Lucius Cornelius Sulla
Lucius Porcius Cato

Nicomedes of Bithynia deposed
Legislation to separate Republic Senate from Roman Senate

84 Praetors Lucius Glauca
Caius Papius Mutilus

Consuls Lucius Valerius Flaccus
Gnaeus Octavius

Caius Vidacilius sent to govern Sicily
Quintus Poppeius Silo sent as Military Governor for Anatolia Frontier.
Sulla invites contributions for the new Great Houses
Caius Papius Mutilus sent to govern Africa

83 Rep. Praetors Gnaeus Papirius Carbo
Herius Asinius
Caius Vidacilius
Titus Lafrenius

Consuls Lucius Domitius Ahenobarbus
Quintus Pompeius Rufus

Titus Lafrenius sent to govern Asia in place of Rufus.
Republican and City Separation takes effect.
Silo occupies Syria

82	Rep. Praetor	Gnaeus Priscus Quintus Sertorius Caius Vidacilius
	Consuls	Gnaeus Papirius Carbo Publius Servilius Vatia
<i>Sertorius returns to the Spains Silo takes a substantial section of Armenia; Second Triumph.</i>		
81	Consuls	Sextus Julius Caesar Lucius Glauca
<i>Boni puppets take control of Picentine and Lucani Tribal Houses Death of Gnaeus Pompeius</i>		
80	Consuls	Caius Julius Caesar Strabo Vopiscus Herius Asinius
	Censors	Lucius Cornelius Sulla Quintus Caecilius Metellus Pius
<i>Caius Vidacilius proposes Tribal Status for Sicily. Julia Caesaris born Silo occupies all of Armenia and stabilises the frontier with Parthia</i>		
79	Consuls	Gaius Papius Mutilus Lucius Julius Caesar
<i>Sulla dies, after thwarting Sertorius' run for Consul. Caius Marius the Younger elected Republic Quaestor by his rural Tribe. Gnaeus Papirius Carbo to govern of Africa. Caius Julius Caesar widowed.</i>		