

The Conversion of Lucius Caisus

by

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by Michael McKinney

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The Conversion of Lucius Caisus

Scene 1

(scene is in a café in a public bathhouse where Marcus, Antonius, and Claudius are waiting for Brutedius to join them. Wine is sipped.)

(Enter Claudius)

Antonius: Claudius, how are you?

Claudius: Well Antonius. I hope you are. Greetings Marcus.

Marcus: Claudius.

Antonius: *(to Claudius)* I didn't see you at the games yesterday.

Claudius: I was called to other business, but I hear there was great spectacle.

Antonius: Norbanus showed off some of his new fighters.

Marcus: *(to Antonius)* How about that match between Certus and that new Thracian warrior?

Antonius: That was a good match, though I lost a thousand sesterces on it.

Claudius: Norbanus has the best gladiator school in Rome.

Antonius: There's no doubt, but his champion was overmatched yesterday.

Marcus: Did you see that quivering wretch those two lions made a meal of?

Antonius: He was a pathetic sight.

Marcus: He never even raised his sword, who was he?

Antonius: A farmhand that belonged to Publius Calvus. He insulted his wife and tried to run away.

Marcus: Well, his running days are over.

Antonius: That was made sure enough.

Marcus: Claudius, when I dined at your house last week, I saw a servant girl attending your wife. She was a delicate young thing.

Claudius: Yes, my wife's new hairdresser. She's Greek and reads well with a good accent.

Marcus: I'll bet you paid dearly for her.

Claudius: Twenty thousand sesterces.

Marcus: Well, if she ever becomes displeased with her, I'll give you double that.

Claudius: That's generous, Marcus. I'll keep it in mind.

(Enter Brutedius, father of Lucius)

Marcus: Noble Brutedius, it's good to see you.

Brutedius: Thank you, Marcus. Greetings Claudius, Antonius.

Claudius: Brutedius.

Antonius: Brutedius, we hear your son is marked for advancement.

(An attendant serves Brutedius a drink)

Brutedius: It's true, Antonius. I'm happy to say he stands a good chance of becoming commander of the second Augustan Legion.

Marcus: We're all glad for you Brutedius your son is deserving. Even in the Praetorian Guard his name is respected. Caesar himself spoke well of him.

Brutedius: I thank you all. *(Slight pause with a slight smile)* I must confess the prospect of my son becoming Legion Commander is very gratifying.

Claudius: As it would be for any father Brutedius, adding as it shall *(Claudius raises his glass toward Brutedius)* to your family's venerable name.

Brutedius: Thank you, Claudius, but enough about me. What business occupies the senate these days?

Antonius: The issue of what to do with the Christians. Caius Decius wants them declared a public nuisance, and have them barred from Rome.

Brutedius: He's an influential senator and there are many in the senate who agree with him, but I doubt if Rome will ever be rid of them. As long as ignorance and superstition exists, you'll find fools to embrace it.

Claudius: What I can't understand is why they cling so stubbornly to their beliefs.

Brutedius: It's mostly guilt, Claudius. They have to take an oath not to incriminate one another. In their so called sacred rites all manner of perversion takes place: cannibalism, debauchery, unspeakable depravities, after that kind of vile participation it's easy to see why they don't break ranks.

Marcus: Their leaders say that all they want to do is to worship their God in peace.

Brutedius: If that's true Marcus, then why do they take as converts slaves, criminals, and degenerates the very scum of the Roman society: that alone should tell us what kind of people they are.

Antonius: They scorn our Roman deities and hold in contempt our sacred festival and games. They act as if they were a law unto themselves.

Claudius: Well I don't think we need concern ourselves too much about them. When they are long forgotten, Rome will yet be master of the world.

Brutedius: Let's hope so, Claudius.

Marcus: Brutedius, your son Lucius approaches.

Claudius: Hail Lucius, Rome's valiant servitor and soon to be new made Legion Commander.

Lucius: That honor is not yet mine, Claudius.

Claudius: Your name is foremost among all candidates.

Lucius: I am content to accept whatever comes.

Antonius: Lucius, you're too modest. If a man is to make his mark, he must press for advantage, and seize upon what favor fortune bestows. Humility wears well on a slave, but not on men of choice and distinction.

Brutteditius: Lucius, I've arranged an audience with several influential senators. Their endorsement could not but help you.

Lucius: I'll be ready.

Brutteditius: Good. Gentleman, our water should be good and hot by now, shall we go?

Antonius: Indeed, I'm ready for a good bath.

Marcus: I'll join you shortly.

Brutteditius: We'll see you then. (*Exit Brut., Ant., Clau.*)

Marcus: Lucius, as you know, I've known your father for many years. We grew up together, served in the army together, (*in levity*) sometimes fell in love with the same woman together, and so I hold his friendship dearly.

Lucius: Marcus, he has spoken with no less affection for you.

Marcus: I'm glad to hear it. (*Pause*) Lucius, I'm sure you know that it would mean a lot to your father for you to become Legion Commander.

Lucius: I'm well aware of it.

Marcus: And yet I sense it may not mean as much to you, Lucius.

Lucius: Marcus, I'm content to serve in whatever capacity I can. To have my name lifted above others means very little to me.

Marcus: That kind of thinking will hardly open doors for you. Don't forget, you have competitors in Rome, most of which are flushed with ambition.

Lucius: Let them thrive as they may.

Marcus: Indeed, but not at your expense. I've seen men of far less caliber than yourself acquire considerable fame and renown. For your father's sake and your family's good name-

(*Lucius cutting in*)

Lucius: Marcus, I will do what honor instructs and requires.

Marcus: I have no doubt about that Lucius, farewell.

(*Exit Marcus*)

Soliloquy

Lucius: Yes, I am ambivalent, but I couldn't expect you to understand why, Marcus. For you a man's worth is measured by his wealth, and status, the size of his house, how many slaves he owns, These things mean little to me. Any thief can gain as much. Wisdom, courage, compassion, these are the true marks of high character. I hold these qualities more

noble by far than all the rank and opulence of the equestrian order, whose bloated flatulence I look upon with more disdain than interest but for these my father's friends, and I fear my father as well, believe that a man's chief aim and purpose is to feather his own bed. These friends (*with a slight mockery*) would pour me into ambitions mold, remaking Lucius into what they believe is the perfect man, a shrewd, calculating climber, but Lucius is not so malleable as they think. If I am to become commander I will accept it, and bravely meet the face of war as I have many times. If not, that would suit me just as well, there's more to life than war and bivouac. I have been a diligent soldier and given Rome my loyal service for nearly ten years, but lately my thoughts tend to other things. Were I to decline this offer of command, I would have more time for the study of letters, of art, and music, and for these I might prove a willing subject. But, come what will, I will accept whatever role fate has in store as all of us must. (*exit Lucius*)

End scene

Scene 2

(Scene is a room at the palace where Cais Decius, Sempronius, (*friend of Cais*) and Plutonium (*professional orator*) are waiting for Caesar to plead a case for his consideration.)

Cais: Plutonium, your words must be given so that the power of your speech commends itself without undue stress. So take care that your oratory is delivered with a measure of restraint, and should he interrupt at every point, offer the humblest of courtesies.

Plutonium: Cais, I shall deliver myself with unfeigned grace and will apply my words with a zeal commensurate with the tone and demeanor of Caesar's imperial countenance.

Cais: Good, Sempronius, you're on good terms with Caesar, do you think our appeal will be favorably received?

Sempronius: I cannot say, Cais. Caesar is his own man in all things, but I do know him to be open to reason and when he's hearing a case, opinions can be freely expressed.

Cais: That's good to know. (*enter Herald*)

Herald: Imperial Caesar approaches.

(*Enter Caesar and his aide Druses. Caesar takes his chair while Druses stands aside.*)

Caesar: Cais Decius, you did petition Caesar for an audience and Caesar grants it.

Cais: Most venerable and beloved Caesar, I humbly thank you and shall attend carefully your grace's interest and counsel in these proceedings. The matter in question is, as you know, the damaging and subversive influence this Christian cult is having on the laws, customs, and venerable institutions of our great republic. Caesar, I have with me a gentleman who can- (*Caesar cut him off.*)

Caesar: No, Cais Decius! You and you alone shall state your case, not your paid professional orator, in whose presence I find grounds to suspect your case may be weak, for is your words alone would lend merit to your argument, no measure of added sophistry would be needed. (*pause, looking at Plutonium*) I do not buy smoke. Cais Decius did petition Caesar and Caesar will now hear him speak.

Cais: Then by your leave, worthy Caesar.

Caesar: You have it.

Cais: Myself and other concerned members of the senate do deem it advisable to request of your sacred person consideration of more strident measures to curb the nefarious and seditious influence this unlawful sect is exerting on Rome.

Caesar: Seditious you say, in what respect?

Cais: First in that they fail to acknowledge the divine authority of Caesar following instead the teachings of an obscure Hebrew magician who lived in the time of Tiberius. Jesus the Christ as they call him, who himself was put to death for practicing sorcery against the state. His followers hold his name above all else. They, unlike other religions, are not content to worship their Jesus along with Apollo, Jupiter, or any of our other deities, but make the claim that Jesus Christ alone is worthy of adoration and in this shameless idolatry they are completely obstinate.

Caesar: What is the nature of these teachings of Jesus Christ?

Cais: As useless as they are ridiculous, to worship their Christian God, show charity and forgiveness to all, and unreservedly love your enemies.

Caesar: (*in levity*) Hm, doesn't sound like he knows any Goths. (*subdued laughter*) Sempronius, what is your opinion on this matter, as your words aren't bought I'll hear them.

Sempronius: Royal Caesar, I must concur with Cais Decius in this. This cult which started in Judea has spread quickly. Where as its followers were once small groups of Jews and Levantines, now Greeks, and Italians are among its adherents.

Caesar: Are these Christians calling for the overthrow of the government?

Cais: Not as far as we can tell, Caesar.

Caesar: Have they committed any crimes against Roman citizens?

Sempronius: They have not.

Caesar: Then why are you so alarmed?

Cais: We humbly suggest that owing to the benevolent and paternal nature of our beloved Caesar that your grace may not fully apprehend the inflammatory possibilities of allowing these Christians to continue with their illegal activities.

Sempronius: They proselytize constantly, and take into their ranks the destitute poor, women, slaves, and criminals as converts.

Caesar: Senators, I'm well aware of their presence and their activities but yet I cannot see any imminent danger in these people. That they're deluded, I'll grant you. As far as their proselytizing goes, well, the world is full of witless dupes gullible enough to believe anything, as one fool will always follow another. The fact that men of learning and scholarly achievement give no credence to this Christian superstition tells us clearly that it has no philosophical merit. Concerning this Jesus character, I've heard the stories about him. As far as I can tell he was no more than a worthless mendicant who, after begging all his life, went to his death as meekly as a lamb. If he was so great, why couldn't he raise an army to crush his enemies? If he's the example that his followers emulate, I don't think we have much to worry about. These people are more of a nuisance than a threat. I look at them with pity rather than anger. Let them wallow as they will, in their own ignorance.

Cais: But yet they do deny your divine authority.

Caesar: That's their failing. You senators of Rome rightly do you address yourselves to protecting Roman laws and morals, and in this concern your words are I know in earnest but I am the emperor of the civilized world, in whose broad scope the stamp of Roman law must at every point apply. I am responsible for the governance of the empire, responsible for its security and defense, responsible for keeping the seas free of cutthroat pirates, protecting our trade and commerce, responsible for keeping at bay the warlike Goth and barbarous Hun, who if they had their will would cut our throats and slaughter our wives and children Such is the unceasing vigil and awesome covenant that Caesar must embrace and uphold, by whose measure your case seems tedious and paltry. Rome has real enemies, not the kind that follow the milkwater teachings of an obscure Hebrew. Therefore, until these Christians give greater offense, Rome's policy in dealing with them shall remain as it is, at least for now, but as a precaution to insure the strength and purity of Roman imperial power, let it be heralded in every legion as treasonable for any man to be involved with this cult. The armies of Rome are not to be tainted with this superstitious nonsense. (*Looking to Druses*) By imperial edict let it be proclaimed. (*Druses nods*) Cais Decius, you will inform the senate of Caesar's will in this matter.

Cais: I will noble Caesar.

Caesar: Caesar has spoken. (*Exit Cais, Plutonium, and Sempronius*)(*Caesar stands, is more relaxed with Druses*)

Caesar: Well, our senators come with dire warnings of forthcoming peril. Tell me Druses, you who stand in silence and observe, what do you think of their argument?

Druses: Caesar, my opinion is that their fears are overstated, but in one thing their words I think ring true.

Caesar: What is that? Speak freely.

Druses: These people who follow Christ are very stubborn. My uncle served for three years in Bithynia as governor's aide. He told me of countless times when Christians who were told in advance what to say when a magistrate would ask of their loyalties would yet still uphold the name of Christ, and go willingly to their deaths He said in three years of duty he saw hundreds do as much He told me that one day there appeared before the magistrate a family of three, a father with his son and daughter. The young both being of an age to speak for themselves, the magistrate did set to the proof. My uncle beforehand pleaded with the father to say what he needed to save his family, but when asked, all three denied the emperor's divinity, and claimed allegiance to Jesus Christ, and even as they went to the swordman they were praising and invoking his name. My uncle says he can still picture the daughter's face so peaceful and fair, then seeing her long beautiful hair soaked with blood All three were beheaded.

Caesar: A foolish waste, lives thrown away for nothing. What is it about these people that makes them so unwieldy, Druses?

Druses: I don't know Caesar, but I have noted two distinct aspects of their nature.

Caesar: What are they?

Druses: They are unyielding in what they believe, and yet at the same time, generally peaceable in their comportment.

Caesar: Yet they do proselytize.

Druses: Mostly those of low degree. Intelligent people don't take them seriously.

Caesar: How many of your slaves are Christians?

Druses: At least thirty, probably more.

Caesar: Are they a problem?

Druses: Not at all, in fact they're well liked. They seem in a strange sense, contented.

Caesar: A contented slave, that strains credulity doesn't it?

Druses: I observe them Caesar, I don't claim to understand them.

Caesar: Hm, neither do I Druses, but I do understand the senate, though they have little understanding for my position, or what it means to wear the imperial purple. They debate at length, policy for which they have absolutely no responsibility, whose consequences the emperor alone must deal with. They trade in slaves from all over the world and then complain that Rome is filled with foreigners. They complain about taxes and yet expect munificent festivals and public games, fattening themselves at opulent banquets with easy talk of what they would do to dispel Rome's enemies, most of them have never struck a single blow in the field. Sometimes I wish they would just disappear. Most of them aren't worth the excrement they produce. But I must be attentive and at least feign interest in their affairs, for plots can be hatched in the senate, Druses.

Druses: Both the senate and the people are greatly enamored of your royal person Caesar. I cannot believe anyone would plot against you.

Caesar: Nobody believes plots exist until they're attempted or succeed. That's why I and every Caesar has had to deal with the senate on at least some level. It doesn't pay to ignore them.

Druses: You certainly can't be accused of that.

Caesar: I've been more amenable to their concerns than many of my predecessors. Most of whom had nothing but contempt for them. Valerian forced them to debate for a solid month how turbot should be cooked. I at least give them the respect of title. (*Slight pause with slight resignation*) Well, we will do what we must for the good of Rome and pray that the gods will look kindly on our efforts. Come Druses, let's go in.

(*Exit Caesar and Druses*)

End Scene

Scene 3

(Scene is street corner where a family is selling bread, father, son and daughter have just arrived and are setting up for passers by)

Father: Come Fabius, let's put up this table for your sister, daughter, you have your bread ready I'm sure?

Daughter: I do Father.

Father: Let's hope you sell a lot. *(Another table where two soldiers will soon sit; people begin passing by w/o showing any interest.)*

Father: Fabius! *(with a short, quick upward gesture with his hands as if to signify sing)*

Fabius: Bread for sale, bread for sale, we have bread for sale. *(One person buys, then another as two soldiers come and sit at the table.)*

First Soldier:*(rudely)* Wench! Bring us some bread and a bowl of wine. *(slight pause)* So Trebonius, you owe me three hundred sesterces from the races yesterday and you wager again tonight.

Trebonius: That's right Lepidus, but I'm owed twice that much from the games last week, so my debt is covered and if this night proves you a loser you'll owe me.

(Enter Lucius)

Lepidus: Lucius come and sit with us. *(Lucius sits)* Where does your gait carry you this night?

Lucius: To the theater to hear a play and then music.

Lepidus: A play and then music. *(in a slightly mocking tone)* Your enemies would laugh to hear you say it. Lucius, how dull, come with us. We know a place where the dicing is fast and there are ample numbers of willing females for ah, recreative use, hm.

Lucius: No thank you Lepidus.

Trebonius: Lucius, we hear rumors that you're marked to be Legion Commander.

Lucius: I wouldn't pay them any heed, Trebonius.

Trebonius: Would it not be a great honor for a man to achieve that?

Lucius: Yes, as there is honor in many things a man may achieve, even things other than warfare.

Lepidus: Is that what they talk about in the theater, Lucius? *(Trebonius and Lepidus with a smirky laugh)*

Lucius: Sometimes.

Lepidus: Well, where we're going, we don't have to say a word to be understood.

Lucius: I'm sure that's true, people don't do much talking in a brothel.

Trebonius: Lucius, why shouldn't we enjoy ourselves? We leave for the frontier in a few days and a soldier must take his pleasure when he can.

Lepidus: Besides not knowing if his next battle will be his last, he should live to the hilt in case it is, my father used to say to bathe, to hunt, to eat, and gamble is to live.

Lucius: The Greeks say knowledge is the key to living well and advise nothing in excess.

Trebonius: But we are Romans, not Greeks, Lucius.

Lepidus: And the Greeks never conquered the world as Rome has. Come Trebonius, to our bets. Lucius, farewell. Fellow soldiers we are and as such we leave you.

Lucius: Lepidus and Trebonius farewell.

Trebonius: Farewell Lucius, and when you become Legion Commander, don't forget your friends.

Lucius: My memory is as good as yours Trebonius.

(exit Trebonius and Lepidus, Lucius sitting alone)

Lucius: And so it is that in some men hot blood governs, leading them on to blindly hazard any vice or folly that mischief can produce. When the flame of passions fire is kindled the cold light of reason is always dimmed.

(Fabius' father approaches)

Father: Is everything alright?

Lucius: Yes, everything's fine, thank you. I'll dwell here a moment and then be on.

(Father motions for daughter to sing, daughter sings the song of the bread girl)

Lucius: You sing well maid, how did you come by that skill?

Daughter: I was taught by my mother, sir.

Lucius: No daughter was ever given a finer gift than your mother's to you. Is she still alive?

Daughter: She is not.

Lucius: *(Pointing with open hand)* But your father yet lives to protect and guide you.

Daughter: *(Gesturing to Fabius)* And a brother as well.

Lucius: Do you sing as well?

Fabius: I do.

Daughter: And plays the lyre.

Lucius: Indeed that's a skill well worth having. If I were not a soldier, I would like to study music.

Fabius: Why not study it now?

Lucius: A soldier in the imperial army of Rome does not sing or play a musical instrument, he would bring disgrace upon himself for showing such tenderness. A soldier is told to be as hard and unyielding as the iron tip of his spear, and in all ways to be warlike, and other such foolishness to pointless to mention.. But tell me, are you freedmen or slaves?

Father: Sir, we are freedmen. We are poor but we have enough and we are happy.

Lucius: How can someone be poor and happy?

Father: We are poor in those things that most others covet, but wealthy in other ways.

Lucius: How can a man who sells bread in the street be wealthy?

Father: Our wealth is not of this world but of the spirit (*brother and sister look at each other*) We are Christians.

Lucius: It must be difficult for you living in Rome where Christians are not welcome.

Father: God finds a way.

Lucius: Tell me what good is your wealth if it cannot be spent to improve your condition.

Father: It is spent on our behalf continuously and yet can never be depleted.

Lucius: What's the nature of this wealth?

Father: It is the eternal love of God eternal as taught and lived by our Savior Jesus Christ.

Lucius: And that keeps you warm in the winter and provides food when you're hungry?

Father: Those who offer true faith to God are always provided for.

Lucius: I'm curious. What is it that Jesus Christ offers that would make his followers choose death rather than renouncing his name?

Father: He is offering a new way of living, a new way of seeing the world and our place in it. His teaching represents a deeper level of human experience, an experience that transcends the limitations of any of human lifetime.

Lucius: What could be so great as that?

Father: To understand it you must experience it.

Lucius: It sounds strange.

Father: It's actually quite simple.

Lucius: How so?

Father: Christ teaches that in finding our faith we find our life, a better life, an abundant life.

Lucius: Is that all he says?

Father: He says we must love God first and above all else, then show love, mercy and forgiveness to all. His life was the model and ideal of that love.

Lucius: But how can we love our enemies who would kill our people and plunder our homeland?

Father: Jesus says to render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's and render unto God that which is God's.

Lucius: But that leaves the question open.

Father: I don't know the answer but I do not think that God would lead any of his faithful to a meaningless death, for he has the power to calm the fury of even the barbarians. His

justice will always prevail in the end.

Lucius: Your conviction seems genuine but some in Rome would have you arrested for voicing it.

Father: That would be nothing compared to what others have suffered. Two of my uncles have won the crown of martyrdom and given all.

Lucius: Is your faith worth dying for?

Father: We think so. But that shouldn't seem so strange to you, a soldier must be ready to give up his life in every battle as many do. But where you fight for imperial Caesar and Rome, we fight for God and the glory of his exalted son. Whereas you contend for an empire forged from the world, we seek for a conversion of the human heart.

Lucius: We fight for the stability and peace of Rome and its provinces without which you might have neither a safe life or the freedom to practice your faith.

Father: And in so far as that is true you do God's will even without knowing it. Christ teaches that if all men would find the love of God in their hearts and cherish it, it would come into the world through their lives and no man would want or need to raise his hand against another.

Lucius: Do you believe that such a day can ever come to this trouble world?

Father: If enough people believe it can then it will.

Lucius: How does the power of this God come into a man's life?

Father: Through prayer and the repentance of our sins. The life and teachings of Jesus Christ is the surest way.

Lucius: You believe he is a great sage.

Father: There never has been or ever shall be any utterance more profound than the eternal truth of his sacred words, his very touch could heal the sick and give sight to the blind. Through his life God made his presence visible to the world, calling us to choose between serving man who is corruptible, and serving God through Jesus Christ who is incorruptible.

(Lucius pauses thoughtfully)

Lucius: Well I have to go. What's your name?

Father: Do you take my words as dangerous?

Lucius: I'm not afraid of ideas or a different point of view.

Father: My name is Tylus, this is my son Fabius, and this is my daughter Livinnia.

Lucius: *(rising)* My name is Lucius, I thank you for your courtesies. Do you come to this place often to sell your bread?

Father: Yes, either here or someplace close.

Lucius: *(Turning to Livinnia)* Your singing is very pleasant so please take this gold piece *(offering it to Livinnia who is reluctant)* no, please I insist *(gives gold coin to Father)* I must be going.

Father: We too must go, Lucius perhaps we will see you again.

Fabius: Farewell Lucius. (*Gathers belongings into cart*)

Lucius: Fabius farewell.

(*Exit family*)

Lucius: (*soliloquy-pensively to himself*) A world without violence. That would indeed require a conversion of the human heart.

(*enter a slave trader with six slaves chained together one of which is a young girl who upon seeing Lucius starts pleading for help, she is distraught and crying*)

Slave Girl: Oh, sir please help me. Don't let them take me away from my mother. They said we could stay together, now they're taking her to another town. (*pause, crying*) We didn't do anything wrong. Please help me.

Slavetrader: Shut up!

Lucius: What is this girl talking about?

Slavetrader: Nothing sir. She's just a little nervous. They're all that way at first, especially the girls.

Lucius: What does she mean about her mother being sent away?

Slavetrader: A nobleman from Naples had the highest bid on her as far as I know.

Lucius: Don't you make an effort to keep families together? She may never see her mother again.

Slavetrader: If that's what a buyer wants, then it's fine with me. Otherwise it doesn't concern me.

Lucius: It doesn't concern you. I see your only concern is making a profit on the misery of others.

Slavetrader: I give people what they want and at a fair price. And those that hate me the most are always the first to see my inventory. They hate me for trading in slaves but keep buying them from me. Besides I'm doing them a favor by bringing them to Rome. They can learn to be civilized here and probably become freedmen eventually. Maybe even become rich. I was a slave myself and I'm doing pretty well.

Lucius: Your master gave you freedom but not all masters are so generous. Many slaves are treated cruelly. Doesn't that bother you?

Slavetrader: That's their master's doing not mine. If you're so worried about her why don't you see if you can buy her? As of this morning she's the property of Commodus Maxenius but he might consider selling her if he could make something on the deal.

Lucius: I don't buy and sell human beings.

Slavetrader: Well aren't you noble. I see by your crest you're of the second Augustan legion.

Lucius: That's right.

Slavetrader: Last summer your general Mitellius fought in the Rhinelands and beat back the German tribes to the Elbe.

Lucius: I was there, I fought in every battle.

Slavetrader: Well, that's where she came from. Your commander gave orders that all survivors be sold as slaves. Her father and two brothers were killed in battle. So you could say that you're part of the reason that she's here. Who knows maybe one of your men killed her father, *(with a malevolent grin)* maybe even you. So don't single me out as the source of her trouble. Your hands aren't as clean as you think.

Lucius: I fight to overcome Rome's enemies, not to enslave children.

Slavetrader: Tell that to your general, I'm sure he'll agree with you. *(to slaves)* All right, let's go, move! *(Girl cries and reaches for Lucius then is led away)*

(Enter Claudius)

Claudius: Lucius, your father would like to see you as soon as possible. He's busy trying to make things happen for you, if you know what I mean. *(Lucius distracted, slight pause)*
Lucius.

Lucius: Oh thank you, Claudius, I'll be with him shortly. *(Exit Lucius)*

Claudius: *(To himself)* Now there's a man destined for great things. *(Exit Claudius)*

End of Scene

Scene 4

(Scene is home of Brutedius Caisus, father of Lucius where he is finishing a letter thanking a senator for expressing support in the senate for Lucius)

Brutedius: Boy come here, take this letter to the house of Cais Decius and if he comes in your presence show him your best courtesies. Go. *(exit servant boy, enter second servant)*

Servant: Your son is here.

Brutedius: Give admittance. *(pause, enter Lucius)* Lucius come and sit. *(Lucius sits)* I've been talking to some senators on your behalf and I think things are tending to our favor. I have at least a dozen who will staunchly support you and at least as many more who will acquiesce. Add to that Cais Decius in the senate yesterday spoke in favor of your candidacy. His words will buy many votes.

Lucius: He's held in considerable respect by the senate I'm told.

Brutedius: And is one of the richest men in Rome. He is creditor to many even in the senate, so his is more than the voice of one man. I just wrote him a letter of appreciation for his support. But we must press to persuade others, and so to that end you must see at noon tomorrow Commodus Maxenius. He's well like in the senate for his decorum and civility and he gives excellent oration. It cannot but help our cause if you win him.

Lucius: I came upon some slaves in the street that were sold to his house.

Brutedius: I don't doubt it. He has over three hundred.

Lucius: Among them was a young girl pleading with me to help find her mother.

Brutteditius: So, (*pause*) Lucius try to concentrate on the matter at hand. You look distracted, is there something on your mind?

Lucius: I was thinking.

Brutteditius: About what?

Lucius: About my life actually.

Brutteditius: That's what I'm thinking about too, about improving it. This appointment could help carry you to better things. You may even become a senator someday. Think what that would add to our family name. But fortune, Lucius, favors those who reach for it. You might show a little more fervor, a little more ambition. Things would go much better for you. They say you've been reading a lot lately. Is that true?

Lucius: There's little to do at the frontier other than that and battle.

Brutteditius: Too much reading is bad for a man, Lucius. Men will talk and write about everything under the sun and at the end of the day what good has it done them? They're no richer and their stomachs no fuller. These philosophers who speak in the market square are lucky so many fools come to listen. If they didn't have them to rely on for charity they wouldn't have any place to eat or sleep. They read a lot too and look what it's done for them. That's why I wanted you in the army. A man can rise and become something there. (*enter servant*) Yes?

Servant: Claudius Dentinius and Marcus Gaius are here.

Brutteditius: Show them in. (*exit servant*) Lucius, Marcus and Claudius are going to dine with me tonight. Will you join us?

Lucius: I cannot stay for dinner father, but I will linger a while.

Brutteditius: Good, and tomorrow you will see Commodus.

Lucius: I will. (*enter Marcus and Claudius*)

Brutteditius: Marcus, Claudius welcome, please sit with us. Lucius and I just finished talking.

Marcus: Lucius, how are you?

Lucius: Fine. I hope you are.

Marcus: I am.

Lucius: Claudius welcome.

Claudius: Thank you Lucius.

Brutteditius: Gentlemen, a glass of port before dinner?

Marcus: Indeed yes.

Brutteditius: Lucius?

Lucius: Thank you no.

Brutteditius: (*Motions to servant to serve wine*) What news in the senate today?

Claudius: Mostly talk about raising taxes in the provinces to recruit more armies for the north.

Bruttedius: The barbarians have to be beaten back somehow, how else but with force?

Marcus: I don't know Bruttedius. Rome wins most of her battles but still seems to be losing the war. Every year they encroach further.

Lucius: Maybe a military solution is not the answer.

Marcus: That's all the savages understand Lucius. I don't have to tell you that. If they could be trusted to maintain agreements, we might be able to deal with them.

(enter servant)

Bruttedius: Yes

Servant: Calpurnius Piso is here.

Bruttedius: Excellent! Show his grace in. *(exit servant)* This is fortunate Lucius. Calpurnius is undecided in your case, so we may win a convert.

Claudius: If you do you'll gain more than one vote. Calpurnius has friends in the senate who usually follow his lead.

Bruttedius: I have no doubts about that. *(Enter Calpurnius)* Calpurnius welcome, you do us all much honor. You know Marcus and Claudius.

Calpurnius: Gentlemen.

Marcus: Calpurnius.

Claudius: You do us grace.

Calpurnius: Thank you Claudius.

Bruttedius: And my son Lucius.

Calpurnius: Ah Lucius, how are you?

Lucius: Find sir, and I hope you're well.

Calpurnius: I am, thank you.

Bruttedius: We're having dinner soon. I hope you can join us.

Calpurnius: Thank you Bruttedius, I will.

Bruttedius: *(to servant)* A glass for Calpurnius.

Calpurnius: Ah, yes.

Bruttedius: We were just talking politics Calpurnius, a subject whose very theme is your life's work.

Calpurnius: Well, I've been in the senate for nearly thirty years and I think I can say I've tried to always act in Rome's best interest.

Marcus: Calpurnius Piso shall be remembered as a diligent and faithful servant of Rome.

Calpurnius: Thank you, Marcus.

Brutedius: And we all second that, but tell me Calpurnius, what does the senate think regarding our northern problem.

Calpurnius: Well, we think that's certainly where Rome's greatest threat lies and that they need to be pushed back at all cost, but we're dealing with a tough enemy. Germans have never been civilized. They live in the woods like animals. They're accustomed to spartan conditions, and so they fight like the savages that they are.

Brutedius: They've been raiding our provinces for years. It's high time they were given a bloody nose.

Calpurnius: I agree but that takes at least five more legions permanently deployed. That means money and men. Both of which Rome does not have an abundance of.

Marcus: Let the provinces pay more in taxes since the money is for their benefit anyway.

Calpurnius: They're griping at the prospect already.

Claudius: They always complain about taxes but then come running to Rome for protection.

Calpurnius: Money's only half the problem. Where are you going to find the men? They're not in Rome and people in the provinces don't want to fight in the Roman army.

Marcus: There are too many foreigners in the army as it is.

Calpurnius: That's true Marcus. That's the problem. Nothing is Roman anymore. It used to be that none but Italians served in the imperial legions, but now the army like Rome itself has become a mongrel.

Brutedius: Unchecked manumission of slaves has been the undoing of Rome, I've been saying that for years.

Calpurnius: In my twenty-eight years in the senate, I've always strongly opposed any measures that would enable slaves to gain their freedom and my record proves it. (*The song of the bread girl begins but only Lucius hears it.*) I've written in my will a stipulation that when I die all of my slaves are property of my heirs in perpetuity and those that they don't want are to be sold. They know better than to think they'll be set free when I die.

Claudius: It's a shame everyone else doesn't do that. Then Rome might not be a breeding ground for beggars and degenerates.

Calpurnius: Rome has lost its best blood. I remember when I was a boy, my grandfather telling me what it was like in the time of Vespasian and Titus. There was no doubt who was master of the world in those days. Rome's enemies were hunted down and crushed without mercy. The barbarians knew better than to cause trouble anywhere in the empire. The savages knew it would mean total annihilation for them.

Claudius: But those days are gone forever.

Calpurnius: I know it only too well Claudius. Rome was a better place then. Nearly every house had a shrine for the divine Augustus in it. The gods protected Rome for her fealty. Now every form of craven atheism is preached in the street.

Marcus: Well it's my opinion that the streets should be swept clean of such miserable scum.

Brutedius: There's no doubt that Rome is far too permissive.

Calpurnius: We're too lenient with our enemies and too generous with our friends. But what does Lucius say? (*Lucius is unresponsive*)

Bruttedius: (*louder*) Lucius? (*Music stops*)

Lucius: Can't you hear it?

Calpurnius: Hear what?

Lucius: That music it's beautiful.

Calpurnius: What are you talking about? (*pause*)

Bruttedius: (*defensively*) Ah, Lucius is very fond of the arts. I've tried to instill that interest in him from an early age. I think it makes for a more complete personality. (*To Calpurnius*) Don't you think?

Calpurnius: Oh no doubt Bruttedius, some of my house slaves are musicians, I enjoy it immensely.

Bruttedius: Well I think it's time to start our dinner. Lucius you will join us.

Lucius: I thank you father, but I cannot stay.

Bruttedius: Lucius, we have an unexpected guest in Calpurnius, let's not be niggardly with our hospitality.

Calpurnius: Oh Bruttedius, it's alright. I know what it's like to be young and active in the prime of life. There's always someplace to go. When I was his age I couldn't sit still either. Lucius, we will see you soon perhaps within the week.

Lucius: I thank you sir and all for your courtesy and bid you good evening.

Claudius: Good night Lucius.

Marcus: Lucius. (*exit Lucius*)

Calpurnius: That's a fine son you have there, Bruttedius. He shows great promise, a credit to your family name.

Bruttedius: It's gratifying to hear you say that senator, and I couldn't agree more with you, but gentleman, to our dinner?

Marcus: (*to Calpurnius*) Bruttedius has a new cook and tonight we will take his measure.

Calpurnius: Well I'm sure he's excellent otherwise you wouldn't have chosen him. (*all exiting*)

Bruttedius: Thank you, I think we're in for a very pleasant evening. (*all exit*)

End of Scene

Scene 5

(*Scene is the home of Commodus Maxenius where he is going over his books, enter slave*)

Commodus: Palis, I have a shipment of marble coming from Ostia tomorrow so I want you to go to the emporium in the morning and wait for it. It's very expensive so make sure that it's handled very carefully.

Slave: I will.

(exit slave)

(Commodus continues mulling over his books, enter servant)

Servant: Lucius Caisus is here.

Commodus: Show him in. *(enter Lucius)* Lucius come in. Please sit down.

Lucius: Commodus.

Commodus: Can I get you something to drink?

Lucius: No thank you, I'm fine.

Commodus: I hope your father is well.

Lucius: He is thank you.

Commodus: Well Lucius, we know why you're here. *(enter servant, to servant)* Yes?

Servant: A new shipment of slaves just arrived at the Via Lattia this morning.

Commodus: Excellent. Lucius, if you'll give me just five minutes I can dispatch this business and be right with you.

Lucius: Of course.

Commodus: *(to servant)* Tell my son to come here. *(exit servant, to Lucius)* I have an arrangement with some dealers who for a fee will let me look at their new stock before they're taken to market. I much prefer it that way. I never cared for the din and bustle of the auction, people shouting and waving about trying to outbid each other, a total lack of civility. *(enter son Sicinius)* Ah Sicinius, you know Lucius.

Sicinius: Yes, greetings Lucius.

Lucius: Sicinius.

Commodus: Sicinius, I want you to go to the emporium with my steward and purchase some slaves. All you have to do is watch and listen. He'll do all the talking. But soon enough this will be your responsibility so I want you to learn all you can. Remember, make sure they're healthy with good teeth. Hear them speak, if they can speak good Italian then they're worth more. Always get at least three of the prettiest females, the younger the better. If one catches the eye of a senator or nobleman you can sometimes make a fivefold profit. If not they can always be used for breeding, and if any of them have fancy oriental names that means he's overpriced. So be alert.

Sicinius: Father, I will be diligent.

Commodus: Good. *(exit Sicinius with a nod of respect to Lucius)* Again, Lucius, I apologize for the interruption as you know it's a very competitive market so we have to take the advantage when we can, but now to return to our business which I think I can say is likely to be favorable.

Lucius: Two nights ago I came upon some slaves in the street that were coming to your house. There was a German girl among them crying for her mother.

Commodus: Yes, I know the one. She's been sobbing since she arrived.

Lucius: What are you going to do with her?

Commodus: I don't know. My wife wanted to use her in the kitchen but I don't think she's suited for our household. She's far too common. I'll probably breed her.

Lucius: Breed her?

Commodus: Yes, she's young and strong. She could bear ten or twelve offspring. These Germans are stout and produce excellent stock.

Lucius: You sound well practiced in this.

Commodus: Good slaves are not easy to find these days so I manage my stock very carefully.

Lucius: And will no doubt teach your son to do the same.

Commodus: Of course. Doesn't every father want the best for his children?

Lucius: (pause) Commodus Maxenius you have all the graces of polite Roman society. Indeed you are quintessentially Roman. Impeccable manners and outward courtesies of every kind, at least to those who are wealthy and have power, but to others, like Rome you deal with a callous hand. In your show of modesty and decorum you try skillfully to hide your corruption, but being so native to your character it can't be hidden. Rome you are, whose trappings of wealth and pomp mask an inner decay and squalor.

Commodus: Your words are very strange Lucius. Perhaps you'd better come back when you're thinking more clearly.

Lucius: Doesn't it bother you treating human beings as if they were no more than animals, to be bred and kept like so many head of cattle?

Commodus: I thought you came here to discuss your chances of becoming Legion Commander.

Lucius: Do you know what that means to me? That and all the rank and privilege that proud Rome could bestow I wouldn't buy if it cost a grain of sand.

Commodus: I wouldn't speak like that too freely if I were you, some might misconstrue your words as being dangerous.

Lucius: My service to Rome is over. Any political compact that deals so unjustly with people isn't worth serving.

Commodus: I don't think you know what you're saying Lucius. Go home. Have a good night's rest and tomorrow when your head is a little clearer come and see me again.

Lucius: Things are becoming clear (pause getting up to leave) for the first time in my life.

(Lucius exits)

Commodus: (to himself) Fool.

End of scene

Scene 6

(Scene is the home of Druses Mincenius, Caesar's chief aid. Present are Valeria, wife of Druses, and Lydia her attendant. Lydia is playing music on an open hole flute, recorder may be substituted.)

Valeria: (playing stops) Thank you Lydia that was lovely.

(Enter servant girl, Valeria looks at her)

Servant Girl: She is here Madam.

Valeria: Oh good, please bring her in. (servant with slight bow leaves) Lydia we have a new member to our household. We must make her feel welcome. She's probably very nervous. Just like you were when you first came here. Do you remember that day?

Lydia: Yes madam and have been grateful for it.

Valeria: I'm glad you're happy. (enter servant with girl, girl is tense unsure offers bow to Valeria.) Come in, sit down. Prisca some water for her. (girl sits, water served) My name is Valeria wife of Druses Mincenius. I manage this estate. You'll be staying here from now on so I want you to be content as possible. Did you get my last letter?

Girl: Yes madam, I still have it, thank you.

Valeria: Good. I would have written more but it is not wise to be too open. This is Lydia and Prisca.

Girl: I am Celeria.

Valeria: I know you've been through a lot, but I want you to try and forget what's happened. God has a purpose in everything. Do you believe that?

Celeria: Yes, Madam I do.

Valeria: You're among friends now Celeria, friends of the faith.

(embracing)

Celeria: I thought as much but couldn't be sure.

Valeria: We have to be careful. Rome is not persecuting Christians now, but that could easily change. But with faith in our lord Jesus Christ we are given the courage to accept whatever comes. But for now I want you to rest. Prisca will show you your room and so for now farewell.

Celeria: I thank you, Madam.

Valeria: (as Celeria is leaving) Celeria (slight pause) be at ease. (exit Celeria) We must do what we can for her Lydia, she's had a very difficult time.

Lydia: She's the one you spoke of Madam.

Valeria: Yes, she's from a province in Eastern Macedonia. Much cruelty was practised on

the Christians there. Thousands were scourged. About two years ago during the worst days she lost her parents. Some friends wrote to me about her and what she'd been through. It wasn't easy to find her at first but God finds a way and now she's here. (Pause) Lydia, there's something about Celeria that I want you to know, but not retell. When her mother and father were killed she had to undergo a terrible ordeal. The governor of Macedonia was intent upon having family members watch the suffering of his victims hoping this would dissuade them from their faith. Celeria's parents were unwavering in their love of Christ and would not recant. She was made to watch as they were burned alive so her's is a scar that will take time to heal.

Lydia: God's grace attend her.

Valeria: May it be so.

Lydia: Madam, why do they hate us?

Valeria: I don't know Lydia why people are cruel to one another. It's not what the master taught is it?

Lydia: No, Madam. It frightens me sometimes.

Valeria: We must be steadfast in these troubling times and hold to our faith. If this world is ever to become a better place it will happen because the power of love and forgiveness overcame hatred and cruelty, but it's only through our lives that his love is brought into the world, and it must be shown to both friend and foe, to the just and the wicked, even to those that would do us injury, as Jesus loved even those who scourged him.

Lydia: It's hard to love someone who wants to hurt you.

Valeria: And yet that is exactly what Christ is asking of us, so that the love of God might come into the world pure and unalloyed, embracing all, only that will insure concord and peace for all mankind.

Lydia: But that might be a long time in coming, Madam.

Valeria: Yes, it may, but it has to begin somewhere, so it is for us to hold true to our faith and wait for a time when we can proclaim openly our Saviour's message without fear of persecution.

Lydia: Do you think the emperor will ever allow that?

Valeria: I don't know. My husband attends him daily but speaks very little of his inclinations.

Lydia: You're husband is a good man and would advise the emperor wisely.

Valeria: Yes, he is a good man. He's always been kind and considerate to me. Druses is a Roman in the tradition of Rome, and though I love him I wish with all my heart that I could share my love of Christ with him.

Lydia: He doesn't know you're a Christian?

Valeria: No, he doesn't. He knows I'm sympathetic to their plight but no more, and though it grieves me to say it, that's how it must remain at least for now. In these difficult times we must work for the church's survival in whatever ways we can, even with a hidden hand if God wills. But come Lydia, a melody to cheer us.

(Lydia plays out the scene.)

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