



Map of southwestern Asia Minor (modern Turkey) showing the route traveled by Lucius and Marcus in this story (marked with a bold line).

A ROOSTER FOR ASKLEPIOS



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*To Laurel,
who first inspired me to turn my hand from
historical research to writing fiction.*

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

THE STORY THAT you are about to read is grounded in real historical data about the experiences of countless ordinary people who lived in Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey) around the middle of the first century A.D. when the area was ruled by Rome. All of the places described in this series really existed, including many of the individual streets, houses, and public buildings where the narrative takes place. Using the map inside the front cover, you can travel by car (or Google Maps) over the same route that the primary characters took as they journeyed from Pisidian Antioch (the modern town of Yalvaç in central Turkey) to Pergamon (modern Bergama in western Turkey) and back. If you allow enough time, you can even visit the excavated ruins of some of the key places mentioned in the story and stand on the very spot where an incident took place. This is not possible in every instance because none of the sites has been excavated in full and many remain untouched by the archaeologist's spade, whether because the precise location is unclear, the remains are too scanty, or the limited funding available for archaeological digs has gone to other projects. In some cases an important ancient site lies buried below a modern city, as with the city of Apamea (modern Dinar).

If you do get a chance to visit the sites mentioned in these novels, you might observe that the descriptions in the following pages do not match what you are seeing in the excavations. This is because the ruins that are visible today at sites like Pisidian Antioch, Ephesus, Pergamon, and Hierapolis reflect conditions from a century or two later than the time of our story. This is especially true for the Asklepon at Bergama (ancient Pergamon). The descriptions in this narrative are based as far as possible on official archaeological reports of what was there at the time when the novel takes place. Local details such as the appearance and furnishings of rooms and the clothing that the characters wear are of course imagined, but they are based on what we know from historical and archaeological sources.

The same is true for the beliefs, values, and practices depicted in the narrative—every effort has been made to present characters who think and act as they might have done in the Roman era, not as we would today. Even the names of most of the characters were derived from historical records, though the names are often the only thing that we know about them. This is especially true for women and slaves; the names that they bear in the story are typical for their era, but such people were largely ignored by ancient historians.

More creativity was required in crafting the characters' patterns of speech, since we have little information about how ordinary people spoke in Roman times, especially those on the lower rungs of the social ladder. The closest that we can get

are the plays of men like Terence and Plautus, whose comedic depictions of slaves and other non-elite individuals tell us more about the stereotypes held by educated elite males than about the people whose speech-patterns they copied for the stage. The language used by the characters in the following story has been broadly influenced by such materials but is by no means bound by them. Stilted and/or erroneous English has been used on occasion to represent the speech of characters at different social levels.

One area where the novel diverges from ancient customs concerns the use of personal names. At the time when this story takes place, most Roman male citizens had three legal names. The first name, or *praenomen*, was used primarily by family members and close friends. The second name, or *nomen*, was the family name, similar to the last names that we use today. This was the name that showed where one fit in the social pecking order. The third name, or *cognomen*, was originally used to differentiate people from different clans in the same family and thus was hereditary. Over time, however, it came to be used more like a nickname to distinguish between individuals with the same *praenomen* and *nomen*.

Ordinarily a Roman man would be called either by his *cognomen* (third name) or a combination of his *praenomen* and *nomen* (first two names). For example, the full name of the Roman orator whom we know as “Cicero” was “Marcus Tullius Cicero.” His friends would have called him either “Cicero” or “Marcus Tullius,” or if no one else from the same family was present, simply “Tullius” (his *nomen*), as it would have been clear whom they had in mind. Close friends might have called him “Marcus.”

All of this can be confusing for modern readers, especially since many Roman men bore the same first name. To avoid this difficulty, the names of male characters in this story have been simplified (some might say “bastardized”) for the sake of clarity. Thus one of the two main characters, a wealthy Roman citizen named Lucius Coelius Felix, is called “Lucius” throughout the story except when he is addressed by a character who clearly would not have used the *praenomen* in real life. In reality, most people would have called him either “Felix” or “Lucius Coelius.” On the other hand, three men from the same family who live in different cities are called by their family name of “Caristianus” whenever they appear in the story in order to highlight their family ties. In short, narrative clarity has been prioritized over historical accuracy where the names of elite men are concerned. If the inconsistencies that result from this decision grate too strongly on the ears of historically trained readers, they are free to substitute the correct names as they read the story. Readers who are unfamiliar with Roman naming conventions may enjoy the story as it stands.

When it comes to naming women and slaves, by contrast, Roman customs have been followed fairly closely. Women’s names were in flux around the time when

this story takes place. Traditionally they would have been called by a feminine form of the family name (“Tullia” in the case of Cicero) and either a feminine form of the third name (“Tullia Cicera”) or a number (“Prima,” “Secunda,” “Tertia,” etc.) that denoted her place in the family order if she had sisters. By the time of this narrative, however, many Roman women were being given personal names unrelated to their father’s name. The latter practice has been followed here since it is easier for modern readers to follow.

Slaves normally had only one name. There is, however, an important exception to this rule that plays a role in our story. When a male slave was freed by his master, he usually took the *praenomen* and *nomen* of his former master and appended his slave name as a *cognomen*. Thus a slave called Fortunatus who had been owned by Gaius Julius Caesar would become Gaius Julius Fortunatus if he was liberated. As a result, the possession of an honorable *nomen* did not necessarily indicate that a man was descended from an ancient and honorable Roman family; he could just as well be a freedman. Still, Romans from old-line families would have known from the slave name at the end that his origins were ignoble.

Finally, a word about the title—it comes from Plato’s account in *Phaedo* 118a of the last words spoken by Socrates: “Crito, I owe the sacrifice of a rooster to Asklepios; will you pay that debt and not neglect to do so?” Whether Socrates actually said these words is debated, but there is ample evidence that the Greek god Asklepios had a special liking for roosters as sacrifices. To understand why, you’ll have to read the book!

I would like to thank a number of scholarly colleagues who have taken the time and trouble to read some or all the first two books in this series and to give me detailed feedback about my depictions of everyday life in the Roman world. Special thanks go to Terry Donaldson, Mark Nanos, Bronwen Wickkiser, and Mark Wilson; their observations have saved me from a number of historical misrepresentations and errors. This does not mean that they agree with every detail of my account—historians can and do disagree on matters of interpretation, and even the best historical novelist has to rely on imagination to fill in gaps in the data. But it is my hope that they will not be embarrassed to see their names associated with this project. Thanks are also due to Maureen Bernas for her helpful suggestions regarding narrative details and to Keith Salis for his able copy reading assistance. Any remaining mistakes or deviations from fact are the fault of the author.

To learn more about the people, places, and practices mentioned in this trilogy, see the Resources page for the series at <http://aslavesstory.com>. For updates, follow us on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/aslavesstory/> and on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/aslavesstory>.

PROLOGUE

BEFORE THE FIRST rooster had finished crowing, Marcus was awake and rousing himself from his bedroll on the floor of the small, dark storeroom. He was sorry to see that Selena was no longer with him. Whether she had left him in the middle of the night or risen early to begin her daily chores was impossible to say. But it was no matter. She, like Marcus, was a slave in the household of Lucius Coelius Felix, and slaves had work to do before the master appeared for the morning ritual. He would see her later.

Marcus pulled his tunic over his head, then looked around for the piece of rope that he used as a belt. It was nowhere to be found. It was hard to imagine where he could have lost it—the room was bare except for a few tall pottery jars that held grain and other dried foods. Perhaps Selena had picked it up by mistake or was playing some sort of game with him. But he had no time to look for it; he had to go and prepare the family shrine for the greeting of the household gods. His master insisted that the ritual begin at the first light of dawn, before he had taken any food or drink, and it was Marcus's job to ensure that everything was ready on time.

Marcus left his room and paced hurriedly through the darkened hallways where other slaves were beginning to stir. He passed by the kitchen, where several women were already at work in the flickering light of the hearth-fire organizing the day's meals. Besides the family, there were fifteen adult slaves and several children who had to eat, not to mention the group of friends whom the master had invited to dine with him that evening. The guest list was small but selective, as was typical for Lucius, and it would take three women all day to prepare the delicacies that such an event demanded.

Unlike the cooks, Marcus knew exactly who would be attending. As the personal assistant to a wealthy aristocrat, it was his business to know such things. There was nothing special about the dinner—just a few of the master's favored clients whom he wished to reward for performing various services for him in the last few months. Marcus knew that his master was not particularly fond of such dinners, but they were the grease that kept the wheels of an elite Roman household running smoothly.

The family shrine stood on the south wall of the cavernous atrium of the house, flanked on either side by small fluted columns and overshadowed by a triangular pediment that gave it the appearance of a small temple. In the recessed area between the columns, a mural depicted two Lares—household deities who guarded the family's prosperity—dancing joyfully on either side of a mature man tending a flaming altar who represented the genius, or male ancestral spirit, of the Coelius

family. Immediately below these figures curved the slithering figure of a snake, the visible image of the invisible divine spirit that watched over the household.

A narrow platform protruded from the wall beneath the snake. On this shelf stood a set of silver and bronze statuettes depicting the Penates—the gods of the food pantry—and a handful of other deities to whom the master paid daily tribute: Jupiter, the father of the gods; Cybele, the earth mother; Fortuna, the goddess of prosperity; and Mercury, the patron deity of trade and commerce. The latter god was routinely invoked in houses such as this one where the family's wealth had been gained by shrewd business dealings rather than being inherited from a long line of ancestors.

Stepping up to the shrine, Marcus gathered up the remains of the previous day's offerings and the vessels that had been used in the ceremony and carried them to the kitchen. There he lit an oil lamp at the fire that had been kept burning all night in honor of Vesta, the goddess of the hearth, and returned with it to the shrine. More trips were required to convey the honey cakes, offering dish, wine bowl, and other items that would be needed for the morning's ceremony. Each item had its proper place on the small table that stood directly below the altar.

When all was ready, Marcus turned his attention to the shrine itself. The process of preparing it for the impending ritual was so routine that he could have done it in his sleep: wiping the crumbs from the offering shelf, removing the leftover ashes from the miniature altar, dusting the statues, and lighting the incense burner from the sacred lamp. He worked quickly; his master could arrive at any moment, and he insisted that everything be in order when he appeared.

While Marcus was busy with these tasks, the other slaves filtered slowly into the atrium and gathered in front of the shrine. The master would enter the room alone, as he had done every morning since the death of his wife nearly a year ago from a painful wasting disease. Whether his only son, Gaius, would join them for the ritual was impossible to say; it depended on how late he had been out carousing the previous night and who was sharing his bed this morning.

His labors finished, Marcus slipped into his usual position beside the steward Trophimus in the front rank of the waiting slaves, directly behind the spot where his master always stood. As head of the Coelius household, it was Lucius's duty to preside as priest over the rituals and ensure that they were performed in precisely the same manner every day, as Roman custom dictated. Marcus bowed his head in a show of respect to the gods and the other slaves followed suit.

Soon the clatter of approaching sandals caught his ear. Marcus looked up to see Lucius entering the atrium accompanied by the slave girl Selena, who had been asleep in his own bed the last time he saw her. His rope belt was tied around her waist. She gave Marcus a fleeting glance, then lowered her eyes. Now he knew

why she had disappeared before the morning—her services had been needed elsewhere.

Marcus could not complain, of course, since everyone knew that the bodies of household slaves were at their master's disposal. But this was something new; never before had Lucius permitted a slave girl to accompany him to the morning ritual. Whatever the reason for the change, Marcus knew that he would have to keep his distance from Selena for the time being, at least until his master tired of her. But it mattered little; there were other women in the household who would be happy to share his bed, not to mention the ones at the local bordello.

Lucius took his place in front of the shrine while Selena joined the knot of slaves standing behind Marcus. Pulling the hem of his toga over his head in a sign of reverence to the gods, Lucius lifted a silver tray of honey cakes from the table and waved it toward the images on the wall. Then he took a goblet of wine and dribbled several drops of the ruby liquid into a shallow bowl as an offering to the gods. After a brief pause, he took a deep draught from the goblet, then poured the rest of the wine into the bowl. Then he intoned the opening words of the daily prayer.

*Hail to you, mother Vesta, keeper of the hearth,
And to you, father Janus, guardian of the door!
Before you I make an offering of bread and wine.
May you be strengthened by this bread,
May you be honored by this wine.
May you look kindly and favorably upon me,
My children, my house, and my household.*

After a moment of silence, he lifted the tray and bowl from the table and placed them on the shelf in front of the statues of the gods. Raising his hands toward the ceiling, he continued to pray.

*Mighty Jupiter, lord of all that lives!
May you be strengthened by this bread,
May you be honored by this wine.
May you look kindly and favorably upon me,
My children, my house, and my household.*

*Queen Cybele, mother of the gods!
May you be strengthened by this bread,
May you be honored by this wine.*

*May you look kindly and favorably upon me,
My children, my house, and my household.*

*Lady Fortuna, mistress of human affairs!!
May you be strengthened by this bread,
May you be honored by this wine.
May you look kindly and favorably upon me,
My children, my house, and my household.*

*Divine Mercury, giver of prosperity!
May you be strengthened by this bread,
May you be honored by this wine.
May you look kindly and favorably upon me,
My children, my house, and my household.*

Marcus's mind began to wander. How many times had he heard his master utter the same sacred words and perform the same ritual acts in honor of the gods? He knew that Roman custom specified that rituals had to be performed with scrupulous precision in order to ensure the favor of the gods, but he still found the repetition wearisome at times. He wondered if the gods ever grew tired of witnessing the same performances day after day. He guessed not, since every ritual that he had ever observed, whether public or private, followed a prescribed script that left no room for deviation. Like everyone else, he had been present when a priest had had to repeat the entire process from the beginning due to a mistaken word or an ill-timed action. Still, he found it hard to comprehend why the gods should be so particular about the words and actions that humans used to address them. Would they really withhold their benefits because of a slip of the tongue? But he was only a slave; who was he to question the ways of divinity?

Lost in his thoughts, Marcus hardly noticed when his master turned his attention to the Lares and the Penates.

*By this offering I venerate our Lares, so that my house
May have good fortune, happiness, and prosperity.
I humbly ask that you may bestow your blessing upon me,
My children, my home, and my household.*

*By this offering I venerate the divine Penates of my fathers,
So that my house may have good fortune, happiness, and prosperity.
I commend to you the good fortune of my parents and my children,
That you should guard them well.*

As Lucius's supplications droned on, Marcus became gradually aware of another set of sounds floating around in the background of his mind. They had the appearance of words, but they were neither Greek nor Latin. They bore a sure cadence, but they were unlike any poetry that Marcus had ever heard.

Semae sarel adnae elovenu adnae acad beaftat adnae...

Similar nonsensical syllables had crept into his head on other occasions, but it had been a while since he had heard them. They came most often when his mind was wandering during the performance of a ritual, but he could not figure why this should be so. Was it possible that some god or spirit was trying to communicate with him? That seemed unlikely; why should a god speak to him, a slave? Perhaps one of the priests could explain it to him. He struggled to fix the odd syllables in his memory in case he ran across someone whom he could ask.

*Semae sarel adnae elovenu adnae acad beaftat adnae
Eloveca becol lebabca ubecol nafseca ubecol modeca...*

As he closed his eyes and focused on the sounds, he became aware of a vague set of images flittering ghostlike in the corners of his thoughts, just beyond reach. Like the shades that haunted the streets on a moonless evening, they evaporated before he could make out their faces. He felt a vague sense that they might have something to do with his childhood, but he could not place them.

May the gods keep faith with us. So be it!

Lucius's sonorous voice shattered his reverie. The ritual was over. Marcus felt disoriented for a few moments, but he regained his composure as the other slaves began dispersing to their stations. He could stand here no longer; he, too, had work to do. He tried repeating the sounds to himself so that he could remember them later, but already they were slipping away. If the gods were indeed trying to tell him something, they would have to return another day.

BOOK I:
PISIDIAN ANTIOCH

CHAPTER 1

“THE IMPERATOR HAS ascended to the heavens!” the herald’s cry echoed through the marketplace. “Long live Nero Claudius Caesar Augustus Germanicus!”

The news of the emperor Claudius’s death in Rome and the acclamation of his sixteen-year-old stepson Nero as his successor took everyone in Antioch-near-Pisidia by surprise, as such faraway events generally did. The Roman colony stood only fifteen miles south of the main road that bore travelers and goods across Asia Minor from Ephesus to Mesopotamia, but the presence of an intervening mountain range meant that news was sometimes slow to reach them.

Of course, the citizens of Antioch knew that Claudius had to be an old man by now, but it was easy to forget that fact when the imperial sanctuary, where the city fathers paid divine honors to Rome and Augustus, held a statue showing the Emperor in the prime of his life. The image was impressive: his chest and thighs bore the taut muscles of an athlete, his outstretched arm carried a gilded scepter like the father of the gods, his head wore a circlet of freshly cut laurel, and his face glowed in triumph. This was the divine Claudius, the noble warrior who had wrestled a killer whale like the hero Hercules and quelled the fierce barbarians of distant Britain, a victory that had eluded even the mighty Caesar. Everyone knew that such an auspicious life would be crowned with exaltation to the realm of the gods, and few were surprised when the Roman Senate dutifully acknowledged that fact soon after his death.

While there had been rumors that the young Nero needed more seasoning before he was ready to rule, the initial reports from Rome were promising. The new emperor was said to be following the advice of his old tutor, the philosopher Lucius Annaeus Seneca, who was known to be a champion of traditional Roman virtues. Following Seneca’s lead, he had declared his intention to adhere to the course set by the divine Augustus in treating the Senate with respect, eliminating corruption, and honoring the rule of law. His fondness for the Greek arts had elicited concern from some of the more traditionally minded senators, but the majority had argued for toleration on the grounds that such interests might actually endear him to the residents of the eastern provinces. The Greek residents of Antioch certainly found it a hopeful sign.

The year of Nero’s accession coincided with an equally momentous event in the life of Lucius Coelius Felix: his election as agoranomos, or overseer of the city markets. Lucius had found it difficult to conceal his surprise when Gaius Caristianus Fronto, one of the leading citizens of the city, called him to his home and

invited him to stand for office. There would be no other candidates, Caristianus assured him, so his election was a mere formality. The term was for one year.

Lucius could guess why he had been chosen. An effective agoranomos needed a certain level of administrative skill, which he had demonstrated in managing his family's many business enterprises, and a significant pool of ready cash, enough to buy grain for the city if the harvest was poor and prices grew too high for the rabble to afford. He also had to be wealthy enough to make substantial contributions to the city's building projects, festivals, and other civic programs, since it was the generosity of the public magistrates that made such activities possible.

Most of the day-to-day administration of the markets would be handled by civic slaves who had been trained since childhood to perform such duties. But the position was no sinecure. The agoranomos had to ensure that the shops and stalls were maintained in good order; enforce the collection of rents from tardy vendors; judge cases pertaining to illegal weights, excessive prices, or shoddy goods; and attend to any shortages of vital supplies. In fact, serving as agoranomos was one of the more demanding offices that an aristocrat could hold.

Still, Lucius would have done nearly anything to earn the benefits that this post would afford him, particularly the honors that would accrue to him and his family after he was inducted into the ranks of the magistracy. Lucius's lineage was thoroughly plebeian—his grandfather had been a landless Italian farmer who enlisted in the army of Augustus and worked his way up to the rank of centurion, a post that entitled him to a substantial piece of land when his regiment was decommissioned in the vicinity of Antioch after the civil wars. The land was good, and he had accrued enough wealth by the sweat of his brow to enable Lucius's father to move into the city and make a name for himself as a trader and money-lender. But the local aristocrats—those who could trace their lineage to old Roman families—still looked down their nose at the Coelius family even as they applied to them for money to keep their own fortunes afloat.

All of that would end if Lucius were to become agoranomos. Even the proudest aristocrat had to honor a man whose toga bore the broad purple stripe of a magistrate. The duties of the post would also elevate him to the corridors of power—he alone would control access to the markets, and only he could settle any disputes that arose there. Such power brought with it new opportunities; a clever agoranomos could find countless ways of enhancing his fortune while in office. Best of all, he would become eligible for membership on the city council once his term ended, which would in turn open the door to other civic offices. Even if his aging body should prevent him from being elected to loftier positions, his son Gaius would become a member of the elite class as a result of his father's service.

He did not have to think long before accepting Caristianus's offer. This was a

once in a lifetime opportunity; the gods did not grant such favors a second time to those who refused them. Unlike some of his predecessors, he would take the position seriously and do everything in his power to ensure that his patron did not regret his decision. Surely the god of commerce, whom he honored every morning, was behind this promotion and would prosper his efforts.

Of course, he would not have to dirty his hands with the daily running of the markets; that task was handled by an office full of city-owned slaves. But he needed a trusted agent to oversee their work and ensure that everything was done properly. This was especially crucial where money was involved, since he would be held personally accountable for the proceeds of the market when his term ended.

Fortunately, he did not have to look far; his personal secretary Marcus was perfect for the job. Marcus had been groomed since childhood to work in his master's office. Unlike most slaves, he had been taught to read, write, and work with numbers, and by his eighteenth birthday he had taken over the management of his master's account books, his correspondence, and even some of his lesser clients. There was no question that he could handle the duties of the position.

The job would be time-consuming, however, so Marcus would have to be released from some of his other responsibilities. After conferring with several of his friends and clients, Lucius succeeded in acquiring a capable young slave named Agathon who had some experience with bookkeeping. He was not cheap, but if he was as skilled as his previous master claimed, he could take over the books for both the household and the farm, thus freeing Marcus to handle some of the other opportunities that Lucius expected to come his way by the time his term as agoranomos ended. Until then, Marcus's schedule would be very full.

ONE day in March, when the winter snows had melted and the trees and fields were showing their first touches of green, a new face appeared among the horde of clients who visited Lucius's house every morning to pay their compliments and request his assistance. Marcus was unaware of the man's arrival, since he was seated at his small desk in Lucius's office taking notes of his conversations and recording the various commitments that Lucius made to his clients and vice versa. It was the job of Hermas, the butler, to prioritize the mob that milled about in the atrium, not his. But when a new visitor entered and Hermas was unsure what to do with him—especially if he looked like he might be an aristocrat, or the agent of one—he often consulted with Marcus about how to handle him while Lucius was talking with one of his less important clients.

As he led the next visitor behind the wooden partition into Lucius's office, Her-

mas signaled to Marcus to join him in the atrium. He pointed to a short man who was leaning with his eyes closed against one of the columns that ringed the shallow pool in the middle of the room. He was surrounded by a shaft of sunlight that was beaming through the opening in the roof, and he appeared to be enjoying the warmth. Hermas showed Marcus a small bag of coins that the man had given him to secure his attention. After a few moments of whispered consultation, Marcus nodded to the butler and walked over to the man.

“Greetings,” said Marcus. “I am Marcus, the personal secretary of Lucius Coelius Felix, the master of this house. I understand that you would like to see my master?”

The man wore the anxious but friendly face of a slave in his mid-thirties. He was attired in a spotless blue tunic and sturdy sandals and wore a gold ring on each hand. His dark, curly hair was neatly trimmed and his face freshly shaven, and Marcus’s nose caught a hint of perfume. This was no ordinary man’s servant.

“Greetings,” replied the man. “Actually, it’s you that I wanted to see. The butler tells me that you’re the one who arranges meetings with your master outside of his usual reception hours. My master would like to stop by and see him at a convenient time.”

“Who is your master?” asked Marcus warily. “I’ve not seen you here before.”

“Forgive me,” replied the slave. “I should have told you that from the start. My master is Gaius Curtius Theodorus, a visitor newly arrived in your city, and I am Fortunatus, one of the managers of his affairs. We’ve come here from Ephesus, where my master is a merchant and the owner of substantial property. He would like to extend his business to your city, and he sent me to arrange a meeting with your master the agoranomos to discuss how to manage such a move. He will pay you well for your assistance.”

He held out a small bag of coins, but Marcus did not immediately reach out to take it, so he tucked it back into his belt.

“What kind of business in your master in?” probed Marcus.

“He imports luxury goods—silks, spices, rare woods, that kind of thing,” said Fortunatus. “He’s going to need a local partner to help watch over his business in Antioch, and he thought that your master might be interested. He’s willing to offer generous terms to the right person,” he added with a wink. He held out the bag of coins again, and this time Marcus took it.

Marcus stared at the man for a moment. This was the first real business opportunity that had come to Lucius in his role as agoranomos, and he knew that he would want to hear about it.

“Wait here,” he said at last. “I’ll ask my master about it between clients.”

The man nodded and bowed slightly as Marcus turned to walk away. *I could come to like this man*, he thought.

Marcus spoke with the butler for a moment, then returned unobtrusively to the office and took up his usual station behind and to the side of Lucius. He knew this client, and after a few moments he could tell that he had not missed anything important.

“I think I understand your concern,” said Lucius, cutting the man off in mid-sentence. “I’ll have Marcus look into the matter for you. Now if you’ll excuse me...” The man stood, bowed obsequiously, pronounced a blessing upon his patron, and left.

“What a bore,” said Lucius with a grimace. “But he has his uses. He wants to borrow yet more money from me to get a creditor off his back. Find out from Linus how much he owes and let me know by tomorrow morning. I’ll probably lend him what he wants, but I’d like to be sure where things stand first. I might have to cut him off if this keeps up.”

Marcus nodded. “So how do things look out there?” inquired Lucius. “Are there many more of them?”

“I’m afraid so,” answered Marcus. “But I’d like to speak with you for a moment before your next client, if I may.”

Marcus described his conversation with Fortunatus and handed Lucius the bag of coins that the slave had given him. Lucius hefted it for a moment, then returned it to Marcus.

“That does sound like an interesting proposition,” said Lucius when he was done. “If he is who he says he is—what was his name again?”

“I believe he said it was Gaius Curtius Theodorus, sir,” replied Marcus.

“Curtius,” echoed Lucius, wrinkling his brow. “I’ve never heard of anyone by that name here in Antioch. That’s too bad—it would be nice to know something about his family before I decide whether to see him. Of course, it’s possible that he’s a freedman; a lot of those merchants are.” He paused and stared at the wall for a long moment. Marcus waited.

“Yes, Theodorus could be a slave name,” he went on. “By Jupiter, I hope not; I don’t want to go into business with a freedman. Perhaps you or Linus could find out for me. Linus is good at digging up personal information on potential borrowers.”

Marcus nodded and scratched a note onto his wax tablet to talk with Linus about it.

“Still,” Lucius continued after another moment of reflection, “if this Curtius is wealthy enough to be trading in silks and spices, this could be a good chance to gain a foothold in a lucrative new business. I guess there’s no harm in talking with him. Go and tell his slave that his master can join me for dinner this evening. I don’t have any other commitments, do I?”

“No, sir, you’re free,” answered Marcus.

“Good,” replied Lucius. “I’d like to learn more about this man and what he has in mind. Tell Trophimus to get the house in order and arrange a good meal with the cooks. Nothing exquisite—we don’t know yet what kind of man we’re dealing with, and I don’t want to honor him above his station. But give him a decent meal nonetheless. You know what I mean.”

“Yes, sir,” replied Marcus. “I’ll take care of it.”

“And tell Hermas to hold my next visitor until I call him—I need to run to the toilet. That damned abdominal problem is giving me cramps again, and I need some relief.”

Marcus nodded and returned to the atrium, speaking first to the butler and then to Fortunatus.

“Very good—that’s good news indeed,” replied Fortunatus when Marcus told him of the dinner invitation. “My master did not expect such prompt accommodation, but I can assure you that he will be happy to accept this gracious offer. Can I tell him that your master found his proposition worthwhile?”

“He will listen to what your master has to say,” answered Marcus cautiously. To betray the extent of his master’s interest might weaken Lucius’s bargaining position.

“Then we will see you this evening,” replied Fortunatus with a genial smile.

“So you’ll be coming with him?” asked Marcus, surprised.

“Most certainly,” answered Fortunatus. “He doesn’t go anywhere without me.”

“Then I look forward to speaking with you further,” responded Marcus. “Farewell.”

“Farewell,” echoed Fortunatus, bowing slightly in the direction of Lucius’s office before turning and striding across the atrium.

THE evenings were still too cool for Lucius and his guest to dine in the garden, so they reclined in the main dining room as they typically did this time of year. Marcus had no role in the meal service—that was the domain of the cooks and servers—and he had finished his work for the day, so he and Fortunatus relaxed together beside the shallow pool in the middle of the atrium while the other slaves carried dishes in and out of the nearby room where their masters were dining. Marcus had suggested to his master that a table and chairs be set up for him and Fortunatus in the atrium as a gesture of respect for their guest, and Lucius had readily agreed. He even offered to have the cook bring them samples of some of the dishes that he and his guest would be enjoying in the dining room. Normally

Marcus would have eaten a simple meal with some of his fellow slaves wherever they happened to find a seat, so he relished the chance to sit at a real table and converse in a leisurely manner with a new acquaintance. He knew from experience that their masters would be busy for several hours.

Marcus had never traveled beyond the immediate vicinity of Antioch, so he was eager to hear about the celebrated metropolis of Ephesus. He knew that Ephesus was the capital of the Roman province of Asia and that it housed a magnificent temple of Artemis that was regarded as one of the Seven Wonders of the world, but that was all. When Fortunatus informed him that the city was perhaps ten times the size of Antioch and that it contained more temples than Antioch had buildings, the news took his breath away. Antioch was the only city that he had ever seen, and he found it hard to envision a place that so dwarfed his home city. Fortunatus painted a verbal picture of the statue-lined streets, the marble-clad buildings, the vast harbor teeming with ships of all sizes, and the huge theater with its varied entertainments, but it was more than Marcus could take in. If his master should decide to go into business with Gaius Curtius Theodorus, perhaps he would be able to travel some day to Ephesus and see it with his own eyes. Right now, however, that was a fool's dream.

After a while Marcus turned the conversation to more personal matters.

"So is your master a native of Ephesus?" he asked in an innocent tone.

"No, his grandfather moved there from Rome," answered Fortunatus. Marcus waited for further explanation, but none followed. He decided to try a different tack.

"Is Curtius an ancient Roman family name?" he probed. "I've not run across the name here in Antioch, and I know nothing about the names of people in Rome."

"I'm surprised by your question," replied Fortunatus. "I would have thought that the name of Curtius was known throughout the empire. The Curtii are one of the oldest and most revered families in Rome. Their ancestor Mettius Curtius was a Sabine general who led an army against the Romans in the time of Romulus, and members of the Curtius family have held all of the major offices of the city during the course of the centuries. Most recently, a family member named Curtius Rufus served as proconsul of Africa, while his son, Quintus Curtius Rufus, is a well-known historian in Rome who recently published a ten-volume account of the exploits of Alexander the Great. Everyone is reading it."

Marcus's face flushed while Fortunatus was speaking; he felt embarrassed that he had exposed his ignorance so flagrantly. But the man's kindly expression put him at ease. He saw no smugness, no air of superiority; Fortunatus had simply answered his question. Marcus guessed that his master had warned him not to say or do anything that would antagonize Marcus.

“So why did your master’s grandfather leave Rome?” Marcus inquired. The question seemed natural enough.

“Like so many others, he was seeking fame and fortune,” replied Fortunatus. “Lots of Romans from ancient and respected families moved east once the cities of Asia came under Roman control. Of course, others had made the same move before them, but the business opportunities became much more lucrative after Pompey eliminated the pirates who had preyed for so long on the shipping trade along the coast. Similar opportunities arose as the power of Rome reached the interior of Anatolia, including your lands of Galatia and Pisidia. I’m sure there are many Roman families here in Antioch who could tell a similar story.”

“Yes, that’s true,” answered Marcus. Many of the leading citizens of Antioch, including the Caristanii and the Sergii, were fond of pointing out that they came from aristocratic Roman families whose members had moved to Antioch for business reasons, not from the lower-order veterans that Augustus had settled there when the colony was founded.

“So your master’s family must have had a lot of money when they arrived in Ephesus,” Marcus probed further.

“Actually, no,” replied Fortunatus after a brief hesitation. “As you are no doubt aware, bearing an old name and being wealthy are separate matters; the one doesn’t necessarily entail the other. The old man had enough to start a small business, and he worked hard to build it up. The gods were apparently pleased with him, since everything that he touched turned to gold. By the time my master reached his majority, the family’s fortune had been built; all that he had to do was manage it.”

“Was it his grandfather, then, who was first called Theodorus?” asked Marcus. “That would make sense if people believed that his success was a mark of divine blessing, since the name could be taken to mean ‘gifted by a god.’ Or was your master the first to bear that name?”

Fortunatus flinched slightly at the question. Apparently Marcus had touched on a sensitive subject. He wondered what it might mean.

“It was his grandfather’s name,” answered Fortunatus following a brief delay. “It seems that his mother had a difficult pregnancy, and the first word that she uttered upon seeing him was ‘Theodorus,’ which in Latin as in Greek means ‘gift of God.’ The nickname stuck, and he later passed it on to his descendants.”

“I see,” said Marcus. The explanation sounded innocent enough. So why had Fortunatus winced when he heard the question? Could it be that he was not telling Marcus the full story?

Marcus could not think of a polite way to continue his interrogation, so he decided to drop that line of questioning for now and await an opportunity to return to the subject. But Fortunatus was on his guard now, and he steered the conversa-

tion well away from his master's family history. At Marcus's urging, he described the various kinds of businesses that his master operated and what was involved in running each one, and Marcus gave him a similar description of Lucius's operations. Fortunatus inquired about the market for luxury goods in Antioch and Marcus told him as much as he knew while noting that this was not his area of expertise. From there the conversation turned to what Gaius Curtius wanted to do in Antioch and whether there was a place for him in the local market, followed by a discussion of how the two assistants might work together in the days ahead if their masters should decide that the venture was worthwhile. Marcus hardly noticed when Hermas entered the atrium and began lighting the oil lamps that rested in carved niches and on tall stands around the walls, illumining the room in flickering shadows.

Marcus was so engrossed in the conversation that he completely forgot about the question that had nagged him earlier. He remembered it only as Lucius and his guest emerged from the dining room talking loudly and clapping one another on the back like old friends. It seemed that his master had enjoyed a productive evening.

"So where are you staying?" asked Lucius. "I forgot to ask you earlier."

"At the home of Titus Cissonius, down in the lower part of the city," replied Curtius. "A friend of mine recommended that I stay with him. He's been very hospitable."

"I know the name," answered Lucius. "His grandfather and mine fought together under Augustus and were part of the original group of veterans that settled the colony. But I don't know him personally; we don't move in the same circles. Next time, you'll have to stay with me. The view is much nicer up here on the hill, and my garden should be in bloom by then."

"Thank you, my friend. I'll be sure to keep that in mind," smiled Curtius.

"In the meantime, I'm not going to let you go out into the night unescorted," said Lucius as they paced across the atrium toward the door. "Antioch has little of the street crime that I would imagine you get in a big city like Ephesus, but one still has to be careful. And of course, one can get lost even in a small city like ours."

By now they had reached the front door. "Gallos," he said to the porter before Curtius could protest, "go tell Hermas and Eros that I want them to go with you and escort this gentleman to his house. You can grab a torch as you go out. Make sure to lock the door behind you; you've been getting rather absent-minded in your old age. You can go to bed when you get back; no one else will be coming to the house this late at night." The old man nodded and shuffled off to find the butler.

"Thank you for your thoughtfulness," said Curtius as he extended his hand to

Lucius. "And thank you for the unexpected invitation. I've truly enjoyed my visit with you."

"And I with you," replied Lucius. The two men continued to exchange pleasantries until the three slaves returned to escort Curtius and Fortunatus to their residence.

"Farewell," said Curtius as they parted at the front door. "I look forward to hearing from you regarding the matters that we discussed."

"We will talk again soon," replied Lucius. "Until then, farewell."

When the guests had left, Marcus took a lamp from one of the stands in the atrium and started toward his master's bedroom to prepare his bed and help him undress. Ordinarily such work was done by Eros, the young slave who tended to Lucius's bodily needs, but the job fell to Marcus when Eros was out as he was this evening. Marcus wondered why his master had sent Eros rather than him to accompany Curtius when he intended to go directly to bed, but it was not his place to ask about such matters. Lucius would tell him if he wanted him to know. The experience brought back old memories, since he himself had held the same job when he was young, before Lucius began training him to work with the account books.

Lucius plodded wearily behind Marcus as he climbed the stairs. Marcus had the charcoal heating brazier and the oil lamps lit by the time he arrived.

"It's been a long night," said Lucius as Marcus helped him out of his toga and folded it neatly for later inspection and cleaning. "I must be growing old. I used to be able to stay up all night at a dinner party and then do business with clients the next morning after a couple of hours of sleep. Now it's hard for me to keep going much beyond dark."

Marcus nodded as Lucius sat down on the bed and allowed Marcus to remove his sandals. He had heard the same speech many times before.

"And that abdominal pain that has been bothering me lately doesn't make things any easier," he continued. "Help me onto my chamber pot before you leave. I'm so weary that I'm afraid I might fall over."

Marcus did as he was asked, though he was surprised by the request. The room reeked with the odor. Marcus tried not to breathe as he dropped a small nugget of frankincense onto the brazier to mask the smell, then set the pot outside the door.

"Will you want anything else before you retire?" asked Marcus when everything had been arranged. "Can I get you a book, or a snack from the kitchen?"

"No," answered Lucius. "I'm too tired to do anything, and I'm so full that I don't have room for another bite. But I'd like to hear about your conversation with Curtius's servant. You two seemed to be getting along well. Did you learn anything useful?"

Marcus summarized the salient points of his interaction with Fortunatus, paus-

ing over the exchange that had apparently discomfited his fellow slave.

“I’ve thought and thought about that moment, but I can’t come up with any explanation for his odd reaction,” added Marcus. “Perhaps I was mistaken, or perhaps it was just a bout of indigestion. But I thought you would want to hear about it.”

“This is helpful information,” observed Lucius. “I didn’t want to ask such personal questions during my initial conversation with Gaius, so I’m glad that you were able to get so much out of his slave.”

Marcus noticed that his master had used his guest’s first name, a sign that the men had already forged a friendship.

“Go ahead and tell Linus to make some inquiries,” Lucius added, “but at this point I’m inclined to trust him. I saw no evidence of duplicity in my conversation with him, and I gave him plenty of chances to reveal himself if he were out to deceive me. On top of that, he carried letters of recommendation from several important citizens of Ephesus. I don’t know the men, but the letters seemed authentic. It’s always possible that they were forged, but he has to know that any such deceit would eventually be exposed.”

Marcus nodded to indicate his agreement.

“What impressed me most,” Lucius went on, “was the fact that he offered to send me a deposit of a hundred thousand sesterces to pay for setting up and operating the business. All that he wants from me is access to my friends and clients. I won’t have to put up any money, yet I’ll receive thirty percent of the profits. And he promised to send one of his best managers—a free citizen, not a slave—to organize and run the shop, so I won’t have to be involved in the day-to-day operations. It’s hard to see what I could lose from the arrangement, unless perhaps his manager offends one of my friends, and that would hurt him as much as me. You have an eye for details—can you see anything that I’m missing?”

Marcus reflected for a moment on what his master had said, but he could see no obvious flaws in the proposal.

“The only question that comes to my mind is how you can be sure that he is paying you your share of the profits,” answered Marcus. “But if he would agree to grant me full and free access to his account books, I’m sure that I could spot any deceptions.”

“That’s a good point,” replied Lucius. “I’ll make sure that it’s included in our agreement. If you think of any other potential problems, you can tell me in the morning. I’m tired and my mind is fading. I think I’ve had enough for one day.”

Marcus nodded and turned to put out the lamps. He felt gratified to have a master who sought his advice and took his opinions seriously. Few slaves could claim such a privilege. A broad smile creased his face as he pulled the door shut and left the room.

THE coming of spring brought people out of their houses and into the streets, and soon the markets were buzzing with activity. Marcus was as happy as anyone to see the city returning to life, but there were days when he felt overwhelmed by his many responsibilities. In addition to his ordinary household duties—caring for the family shrine, attending his master's daily sessions with his clients, assisting him with his correspondence, accompanying him to the baths when needed—he had to keep watch over the recordkeeping in the agoranomos's office as Lucius's agent and supervise Lucius's account books. The young slave Agathon whom his master had purchased to take over this task from Marcus when he was appointed was proving to be a quick learner, but Marcus still felt like he was spending more time in teaching him and answering his questions than he had gained by handing off some of his duties to the young slave.

Lucius's fledgling partnership with Gaius Curtius Theodorus also added to his workload, since it required him to meet often with the slave whom Curtius had sent to assist his manager with the running of the business in order to ensure the validity of his records. He had also spent several weeks overseeing the conversion of two small offices in a prime section of the local market into a larger shop for the display of Curtius's luxury goods. On top of all this, his master always had other tasks for him to perform on behalf of his clients and friends. Some of these jobs could be delegated to Hermas, who had few responsibilities once the morning visitations were over, but others required Marcus's personal attention. He wondered if he could possibly keep up with everything once the harvest and shearing seasons began and the markets reached the peak of their activity. Agathon would have to be ready by then to work with little oversight.

Lucius, too, was finding that his new duties as both agoranomos and partner in a luxury goods business required more work than he had expected. Even with an office full of slaves handling the daily administration of the markets, he still had to set aside time nearly every day to settle disputes, hear cases involving violations of market policies, review applications for the use of empty shops, and respond to the many other problems that fell under his purview. In the evenings he found himself hosting more dinner parties than usual to introduce Curtius's business manager, an Ephesian named Quintus Vedius Firmus, to his friends and clients so that he could tell them about the new venture. The newly-opened shop kept a supply of popular products on hand, but the more expensive luxury items had to be ordered according to the purchaser's specifications from a warehouse in Apamea or even in Ephesus. This required personal interaction between buyer and seller. Lucius

confided to Marcus after one of these dinner meetings that that he felt vaguely soiled by the process—“like a common street hawker,” he said—but he consoled himself with the assurance that he was providing a useful service to his friends and making money for himself in the bargain.

While the added duties were a nuisance, Lucius could have managed well enough if not for the health problems that been nagging him for the last few months. In addition to the ordinary aches and pains of aging—he had, after all, celebrated his fiftieth birthday last year—he had developed some type of chronic abdominal problem that was causing him to tire more easily. The problem affected Marcus, too, not only because he was concerned about his master’s health but also because one of the symptoms of the illness was a gaseous diarrhea that affronted the nostrils and clung to the clothing of anyone unfortunate enough to be nearby when it occurred. Fortunately for Marcus, it was Eros’s job to help Lucius with his bodily needs and clean up his messes at home, but he worried about what he would do if Lucius were to lose control of his bowels in a public place.

He nearly found out on a warm afternoon in mid-May. Lucius had been complaining all morning about a pain in his stomach, and three times he had ordered Hermas to delay his guests while he visited the toilet in an effort to find relief. After a simple midday meal and a brief nap, he began his usual short trek up the hill to the baths with Marcus walking next to him. The two of them were alone; Lucius had never liked the aristocratic practice of traveling through town with a large retinue, and Eros, who usually accompanied him, had been sent to carry a load of garments to the fuller to be cleaned and would join them later.

As they reached the ornate fountain at the top of the street, Lucius stopped and sat down on the edge of the marble pool where fresh water poured into the city from the aqueduct. This was always a pleasant place to sit on a hot day—one could enjoy the cool spray of the fountain while admiring the elegant statuary around the pool and the views that it provided over the upper part of the city and the surrounding fields.

Today, however, Marcus could see that his master was in no mood for relaxation. He sat with his eyes closed and his face tensed as if in pain. But he said nothing, so Marcus could only guess at what was going through his mind.

After a short rest, he rose and began ambling toward the baths with Marcus by his side. As they passed by the athletic field where a bevy of young men stood warming up for the afternoon’s recreation, Marcus recalled how much his master used to enjoy exercising and chatting with his friends in the spring sunshine after a long, cold winter. How he had aged in the last few years! The thick brown curls that had softened the angles of his square face had grown thin and speckled with gray and the broad forehead was now creased with wrinkles. His stocky frame,

never very muscular, now bore a notable paunch, and his shoulders sagged when he walked. On a good day, his face still showed traces of the ruggedly handsome man that Marcus had known when he was young. On a bad day, his dull eyes and halting gait made him look every bit the old man.

Today was clearly a bad day. His chin rested on his chest, his shoulders were hunched, and his feet dragged the ground as he walked. Still, Marcus was taken aback when he stopped, leaned forward, and threw his left arm across his abdomen. Alarmed, Marcus seized his other arm and bent down to get a better look at his face. His eyes were squeezed shut, his brow furrowed, and his mouth contorted in pain.

“Master, what’s the matter?” asked Marcus anxiously. “Is it your stomach again?”

Lucius nodded but did not look up. Marcus placed an arm around his back to support him. “Do you need to use the latrine?”

Lucius nodded again, his face reddening with pain. Marcus feared that he might pass out.

“Then we need to get you moving, sir,” said Marcus in a voice that sounded calmer than he felt. “You can make it. The latrine is just ahead in the bath building.”

Lucius took a few halting steps, then stopped again.

“Come on, sir,” urged Marcus. “A few more steps. The door is just ahead of us.”

He was exaggerating, but it was the only way he could think to keep his master moving. This time, however, Lucius refused to budge. He doubled over and began to groan. Marcus felt paralyzed; he did not know what to do. He glanced around for assistance, but he was hesitant to ask a free citizen to aid him with such a servile problem. He was about to lift his master’s tunic and tell him to empty his bowels on the side of the road when a deep voice spoke from behind him.

“What’s the matter here?” the man asked.

“My master is sick—he needs to get to the toilet, fast,” answered Marcus in a voice that clearly betrayed his panic.

“Step back,” said the man who had addressed him. When Marcus hesitated, the man tore his arm away from Lucius, then grabbed Lucius’s shoulders from behind while nodding to another man to lift his feet. The two men carried Lucius the final yards into the bath building while calling to those ahead of them to “step aside” and “make way.” They pushed through the light crowd that was milling about the doorway and ignored the attendant who tried to stop them to collect their entrance fees. Marcus padded rapidly behind them.

As they reached the latrine, Marcus called for them to hold Lucius up while he removed his loin cloth. Then they lowered him roughly onto one of the stone benches over an open hole.

“Eewww!” cried one of the men as Lucius finally relaxed and allowed the contents of his bowels to spatter noisily into the void below him. Both men quickly exited the room. Several others who had been chatting among themselves while seated on the toilet made similar noises and rose to leave. Soon Lucius and Marcus had the room to themselves.

“That was close,” said Marcus in a nasal tone, breathing through his mouth to avoid the stench. “I really didn’t think we would make it.”

Lucius sat silently with his head in his hands, apparently waiting to see if anything else was coming. Marcus reached down and picked up his master’s loin cloth, which lay in a small heap in front of him, and noticed a large brown spot in the middle of the material. He glanced at the tunic and saw similar spots along one its edges. His stomach turned as he realized that they had not arrived as safely as he had thought.

“Master,” he said gently, “you’re going to need some clean clothes. Should I leave you here and run home to get them, or would you like for me to take you into the baths first?”

Before he could answer, a tall, thin man came striding into the room with a younger man trailing closely behind him. They walked directly up to Lucius and stood before him.

“Sir,” the tall man said, “I’m a physician. I heard that you were ill. I’m here to help.”

From the appearance of the men’s clothing, Marcus guessed that they were slaves and not free citizens. The tall man looked to be one of the doctors that the city kept around to care for people who could not afford a private physician, while the younger man was likely an assistant who was being trained for a similar post. Such men often loitered around the baths or the gymnasium when business was slow in hopes of finding patients who could pay them. Wealthy citizens like Lucius generally avoided the public physicians, whom they regarded as poorly trained quacks. But Marcus had heard that some were quite good, especially the Greeks, whose skills were said to rival those of private doctors.

“So what seems to be the problem?” asked the physician.

“Isn’t it obvious?” answered Lucius in a scornful voice. “I’ve shit all over myself.”

“I see,” replied the physician coolly. He paused for a moment as if searching for the right words. “What I wanted to know was why.”

“Why? What do you mean, why?” echoed Lucius testily. “What in the name of the gods is that supposed to mean? Who sent you here?”

“One of the men who carried you in here told me that you were ill and asked me to come and look at you,” the physician responded. “I believe I can help you.

But if you don't need my services, I will leave you alone."

"You do that!" muttered Lucius. "If I need a doctor, I'll call someone I know!"

The man bowed his head slightly, then turned and left the room. Marcus was sorry to see him go, since he knew that it was unlikely that his master would consult a physician on his own. Lucius had been relatively healthy throughout his adult years, and he had never thought much of the Greek doctor that his wife had insisted he purchase to care for their children and the slaves after their oldest son had died from a mysterious illness. His opinion had thoroughly soured when neither this man nor the private physicians that he had called in to treat his wife after she grew ill had been able to keep her from dying. He sold the doctor soon after her death, and no physician had been permitted into his house since then. Marcus had given up trying to convince him to seek medical help with his current problem.

Marcus stood silently a few steps away from his master, awaiting his instructions. The evil smell had begun to dissipate by now and a handful of people who had missed the earlier episode began trickling into the latrine. Marcus could see from their expressions that some of them found the odor more pungent than usual, but he had bundled up Lucius's clothing so as to hide the soiled spots from view. For all they knew, Marcus was simply tending to his master while he used the latrine.

"Help me into the baths and then go and get me some clothes," said Lucius as he rose unsteadily to his feet. Marcus rushed to take his elbow. He was surprised at how frail his master seemed as he leant on his arm for support. Lucius had always been so strong and self-reliant; for him to behave in this way meant that he was truly ill. Soon the time would come when he would have to call in a physician.

CHAPTER 2

THE NEXT MORNING found Lucius and Marcus trudging up the road toward the local temple of Asklepios, the god of health and healing. Lucius had resisted Marcus's suggestion that he talk with a physician about his stomach problems, but he could not ignore Selena's pleas. Selena was still a slave, but she had spent virtually every night in Lucius's room since that night when she disappeared from Marcus's bed. Marcus could see that a genuine bond of affection had grown up between them, though Lucius did his best to hide it. It was one thing to have a slave as a regular bed fellow, but quite another to take her as a mistress—or even worse, a wife. Such things happened, of course, but they were rare at the upper echelons of society, and in a small city like Antioch such a relationship would surely set tongues wagging.

Already the arrangement was causing problems within the household. The steward was suddenly uncertain about his authority over Selena, and some of the other slaves spoke jealously about how she was using her influence with the master to gain special treatment, though Marcus had seen nothing to support such claims. Eros was the only one who didn't seem to mind; now that Selena was spending the night with Lucius, he no longer had to sleep outside of Lucius's door in order to assist him with any needs that might arise during the night.

Marcus shared some of the other slaves' anxieties about Selena, but he was happy to see her using her influence to persuade Lucius to seek help with his ailment. It was a canny strategy: Lucius could be prodded to discuss his illness at the temple where physicians worked side-by-side with the priests, yet he could frame the visit in his own mind as an act of piety and not as a reversal of his often-stated skepticism regarding the value and effectiveness of doctors. Marcus was annoyed that he had not thought of the idea himself; if he had, his master might have been better by now.

Asklepios was a relatively recent import to Antioch. Before the Romans arrived—before even the Greeks had settled in the area—the lands where the city now stood belonged to Mên Askaênos, the Phrygian moon god whose slaves worked the fields on behalf of the deity and his priests. The Greeks had appropriated a portion of Mên's territory to serve as the site for a new city and leased other lands from his priests for farming, but they also adopted Mên as the patron of their city. They prayed to him to cure their ailments, and in more desperate cases they climbed the steep path to his sanctuary on a nearby hilltop and paid one of his slaves to carve their prayers onto the dark stone walls that surrounded the sacred premises. They also prayed to Asklepios, but Mên was the more prominent deity.

Everything changed with the coming of the Romans. They divided Mên's lands among a group of army veterans, then erected a massive temple to Rome and Augustus on a high spot in the heart of the city. This temple became a permanent reminder that Antioch now belonged to Rome, not to the Greeks. Augustus was now their divine patron, replacing the Phrygian god who had ruled here for centuries. Mên was not displaced entirely, but he was forced to share his territory with the ancestral gods of Rome.

He also had to share his healing duties with Asklepios, or Aesculapius, as the Romans called him. Asklepios was far older than Rome: Homer had called him the "blameless physician," and his temple at Epidaurus had been erected while Rome was still a minor city struggling to free itself from Etruscan rule. His cult statue had been brought to Rome at a time when the populace was suffering under a plague that neither gods nor physicians could cure. The plague soon ended, and Asklepios became the preeminent healing deity of the Romans. As their empire expanded, Asklepios went with them. Where no temple existed, they built one; where a temple was already present, they enhanced it.

Now Lucius was on his way to visit this god. Following the protocol for such an occasion, he was accompanied by a small procession comprising members of his household. At the front marched the crier, whose job was to announce his master's presence to people on the street so that they would know to step aside and let them pass. Directly behind him came Hermas, who bore the unenviable task of pushing aside anyone who was slow to comply with the crier's announcement. Next came Lucius, wearing a pure white tunic, and Marcus, who kept a close eye on his master in case his services should be needed to tend a sudden bout of illness.

Behind Marcus were two women, a kitchen slave named Amica who bore the white rooster that Lucius planned to present to the god, and Selena, who carried a small box of incense and a juglet of wine that would be used in the ceremony. Marcus peered over his shoulder from time to time to make sure that the rooster was under control. He knew little about animals, but the few cockfights that he had witnessed had given him a healthy respect for the birds' piercing talons. It would be an ill omen for his master if his offering should escape before they reached their destination.

The temple of Asklepios was situated near the gymnasium and bath complex that Lucius visited nearly every day, reflecting the role that the two facilities played in preserving the health of the residents of Antioch. It was a small and unobtrusive building, just big enough to house a statue of the god in its central chamber. Like most temples, it rested on top of a stepped rectangular platform, surrounded on all sides by a single row of fluted columns. Between the temple and the street stood a small pedestal altar in the middle of a paved courtyard.

As they approached the temple, Marcus observed a small knot of people huddled together in front of the building. He had expected this, since early morning was a popular time for people to visit the gods and seek their help. An aristocrat like Lucius would be given precedence over the other supplicants, but they had to be careful not to interrupt an offering that was in progress, since that might offend the god.

Stepping to the front of the procession, Marcus motioned for the others to wait while he walked ahead to appraise the situation. Perhaps a dozen people stood in line awaiting their turn to approach the altar. None were aristocrats, but that was to be expected; nearly all of the elite class was busy receiving clients or calling on their patrons at this time of morning.

As he drew closer, Marcus could see that the priest was facing the temple with his arms extended in prayer, so they would have to wait until he was done. Marcus motioned to Hermas to edge the retinue closer so that Lucius could step directly up to the altar when the ritual was over.

“Make way!” called Marcus in a loud voice when the priest had chanted his final prayer. “Make way for Lucius Coelius Felix the agoranomos! Make way!” The crier repeated his call.

The waiting petitioners backed away as Lucius and his company marched somberly toward the temple. Marcus stepped up to his master’s side when the procession reached the altar. Hermas and the crier moved to the rear.

“Lucius Coelius Felix, agoranomos of Colonia Caesareia Antiocheia, has come to pay tribute and honor to the mighty savior Asklepios and to petition for his assistance,” announced Marcus in his most official tone.

“Asklepios welcomes his august guest,” replied the priest, his voice formal but friendly. “Does he petition for himself or for someone else?”

“For himself,” replied Marcus. He recognized the old priest as the same man who had officiated when Lucius had come seeking healing for his wife last year. He knew that Lucius despised the man, but he also knew that his master was capable of veiling his feelings when the occasion demanded.

Marcus stepped aside so that Lucius could approach the priest. He was happy to have an excuse to move away from the altar and escape the smoke that had begun to make his eyes water. Looking back at the priest, he noticed that his eyes were watering also. Serving at an altar was a lot like being a kitchen slave, he thought; both jobs required people to ignore the discomforts that came with regular exposure to fire and smoke. Marcus wondered how they could stand it.

Lucius pulled a corner of his toga over the top of his head as a gesture of respect for the god. The priest nodded and the flute player began a slow, quavering tune. Lucius cleansed his hands in the bowl of purifying water that the priest held out

to him, then turned to face Amica. Lifting the rooster carefully from her arms, he handed it to the priest, who passed it off to a waiting slave. The bird remained quiet throughout the transfer; it appeared to have fallen asleep during the procession. This was a good sign, thought Marcus; a sacrificial animal had to go willingly to its death for the ritual to be effective.

The rest of the ceremony followed the standard sacrificial litany. The priest turned and extended his hands toward the statue of Asklepios in the temple, then uttered a formulaic prayer extolling the god's virtues and urging him to accept Lucius's offering. While he was speaking, the slave slit the bird's throat, opened its breast, and removed its entrails for the priest to inspect. When the prayer was done, the priest fingered the entrails and nodded to indicate that the animal was acceptable to the god, then laid the vital organs onto the altar fire. The slaughterer handed the corpse to another slave who carried it off to the side where the bodies of the offerings were butchered and cooked. Lucius then received the wine and incense from Selena and passed them to the priest, who added some of each to the fire. The ritual ended with the priest offering a final prayer to Asklepios in which he commended Lucius to the deity and petitioned him to come to the assistance of his humble worshiper.

When the priest had finished, Lucius turned to depart. Before he could leave the altar, however, the priest caught his toga and stopped him. He spoke softly to Lucius, but Marcus was close enough to hear what he said.

"It's good to see you here again," the priest began. "I'm very sorry that we weren't able to help your wife. She was a good woman."

Lucius's face remained stony as the priest smiled benevolently toward him. He appeared to be inviting Lucius to speak, but Lucius offered no reply. Marcus could only guess what his master was thinking.

"The ways of the gods are not ours to understand," the priest continued after a moment. "But we servants of Asklepios do what we can. Our prayers are not always answered and our medicines are not always effective, but nothing comes to those who do not ask. Your coming today is a good beginning. I'd like to try and help you if you will let me."

Lucius's expression showed no sign of softening. Once again he turned to leave.

"Before you go," said the priest, his eyes brimming with concern, "you should know that we have a new physician at the temple whose skills exceed anything that I've seen. His name is Heracleion, and he came here recently from Hierapolis, where he treated many important people who ventured there to seek healing at the hot springs. If you would be willing to receive him, I'll send him to you before the day is out. If you don't like him, you can send him away. But I can assure you that he will do everything in his power to help you with whatever difficulty you might

be having. If he can't help you, he will tell you. What do you think?"

Lucius had already turned halfway around as the priest uttered these final words, so Marcus now stood directly in front of him and Selena on his left. Lucius looked at each of them in turn as if seeking their opinions. Marcus remained impassive; he knew better than to give advice to his master unless he were asked, and he did not want to presume upon his master's silence.

Selena, however, had no such qualms. "Let him come," she pleaded, making no effort to veil her concern. "There's no harm in talking with the man, and he might be able to help you."

Marcus glanced sideways at the priest. From his thin smile and raised eyebrow, Marcus could see that he was bemused by this odd exchange between a master and his slave. Happily, Lucius was looking in the opposite direction and did not notice the priest's face. He would have been humiliated to think that someone had discovered the nature of his relationship with Selena.

Lucius looked at Marcus, who nodded almost imperceptibly. Finally he turned back to face the priest.

"Very well, then," he said reluctantly, "send him to me. As one of our philosophers used to say, 'Nothing comes from nothing.' I'll be amazed if he does me any good, but I'll talk with him. Send him to me immediately after the midday meal." Lucius smiled weakly at Selena, whose face beamed in reply.

"I'll send him, sir," replied the priest. "May the gods grant you your heart's wish."

"And yours also," echoed Lucius, turning his eyes one more time toward the priest. A thin smile played on his lips. "Farewell, old man."

"Farewell, young sir," echoed the priest with a barely suppressed grin.

Lucius's party regrouped and began moving away. As the onlookers crowded back toward the altar, Marcus heard the voice of a lone man rising on the breeze: "There goes a man who casts stones in the teeth of Fate." Marcus wasn't sure what the man was trying to say, but he hoped that his master had not heard him.

A few hours later, Hermas entered Lucius's office to tell him that a physician had arrived to see him. Lucius had already taken his midday nap, and he and Marcus were sitting together reviewing the household records.

"I'll go out now so that you can talk," said Marcus. "Should I take the books or leave them here?"

"Stay," answered Lucius. "If the man has anything useful to say, I'd like you to help me recall it. Pull out your tablet and be ready to write down what he recommends."

Marcus was surprised at his master's sudden interest in the physician, but he did as he was told. Gathering up his writing tools, he took a seat at the small desk where he normally sat when taking notes of his master's conversations with his clients.

A few moments later Hermas led a familiar-looking man into the room. "Sir," he said, "I present to you Quintus Pollio Heracleion."

Marcus's jaw dropped in surprise—it was the physician who had tried to help Lucius at the baths! He was a tall man of perhaps forty years of age, rather thin but healthy in appearance. His worn tunic had been replaced by a fine toga, his reddish hair was neatly combed, and his face looked freshly shaved. His expression was composed and confident, showing none of the servile fear that marked the faces of people who were unaccustomed to standing in the presence of an aristocrat. This man was no slave; Marcus had clearly misjudged him.

"Greetings, my lord," said the physician. "Thank you for inviting me to your home."

"Greetings to you as well," replied Lucius. Marcus could not see his master's face from where he sat, but he felt sure that Lucius was as surprised as he was. Fortunately, the man was staring directly at Lucius, so Marcus was able to regain his composure before he was observed.

"Hermas, bring our guest a chair," said Lucius. His voice sounded flustered, and Marcus guessed that he must be stalling in order to collect his thoughts, since his clients ordinarily stood when conversing with him. His friends were permitted to sit, of course, but Lucius counted no man a friend unless he was his social equal.

The two men stared at one another for a moment, each waiting for the other to commence the conversation. At last Lucius broke the silence.

"Yesterday at the baths—you tried to help me, and I sent you away."

"You were ill and upset," answered Heracleion with a comforting smile. "We physicians see that all the time. I didn't take it personally. We can begin anew today. What seems to be the problem?"

Marcus was impressed by the man's easy and open manner; he knew that his master was loathe to apologize to anyone, especially one whom he regarded as his inferior. He saw Lucius's shoulders relax as he began to describe the illness that had been troubling him.

"Have the symptoms been constant, or have they worsened over time?" inquired Heracleion.

"I'd say that I've been troubled more lately," replied Lucius after a moment of reflection. "The pains in my stomach have been stronger, and I've had to go to the toilet more often. But that incident yesterday on the way to the baths was something new."

“Tell me about it,” said Heracleion. Lucius related as much as he could remember, then invited Marcus to fill in the gaps.

“I can see why that would be troubling,” said Heracleion in a businesslike voice. “Do you have any idea what might have caused it? Did you eat any unusual foods that day? Did you hear any upsetting news? Were you visited by anyone who might have pronounced a curse on you? Might someone in the street have given you the evil eye?”

Lucius thought for a moment. “I don’t recall anything unusual,” he replied at last. “My stomach had been bothering me throughout the morning, so I purposefully ate a light meal—just some bread, cheese, and olives with a little wine—and I don’t recall any unusual difficulties with my clients that morning. I do my best to maintain good relations with all my clients, and I know of no one whom I would consider an enemy. Am I forgetting anything, Marcus?”

“Nothing comes to mind, sir,” answered Marcus.

“He’s a good boy,” Lucius said, gesturing toward Marcus. “My memory isn’t what it used to be, but I can count on Marcus to catch anything I miss. I’d be in trouble without him.”

Heracleion glanced at Marcus and smiled. Marcus felt his face grow warm; he was both pleased and embarrassed by this unexpected affirmation.

“What about your diet? Have your eating patterns changed lately?” probed Heracleion.

“Now that you mention it, they have,” answered Lucius. He gave the physician a brief synopsis of his business dealings with Gaius Curtius and the special meals that he had been hosting over the last several weeks to introduce Curtius’s manager to his friends.

“I have a superb cook who makes the most exquisite dishes for my friends,” continued Lucius. “Even I don’t know what I’m eating half the time.”

“Perhaps you’ve found the source of your problem,” replied Heracleion. “I think you need to find out what your cook is putting into your food. Is it possible that someone in your household might have reason to poison you?”

Marcus’s jaw dropped, and he saw Lucius’s back stiffen. Neither of them had thought of such a possibility.

Lucius reflected for a moment before replying. “No, I don’t think so,” he said. “I treat my slaves well, especially those that are hard workers, like Marcus here. I’ve been hiring extra staff from some of my friends to assist with the cooking and serving at my dinner parties, but none of them know me, much less have any reason to harm me. And I’ve often complimented my cook on her skills. I can’t imagine that she would harbor any grudges against me”

He paused briefly as if thinking, then went on. “No, I can’t think of any reason

why one of my slaves would want to harm me. Can you, Marcus?”

“No, sir,” replied Marcus quickly. To say otherwise would have led to all kinds of trouble in the household, including the possibility of torture for any slave suspected of knowing about a plot against the master. Fortunately, it was also true. Marcus could think of little things that Lucius had done from time to time to hurt or offend one of the slaves, but nothing that would motivate anyone to want to harm him. Compared to what he heard from other slaves, his master was better than most.

“If you feel confident in your cook,” continued Heracleion, “then it might be a simple matter of her including things in her dishes that disagree with your digestion. The fact that your stomach has troubled you more during your recent round of dinner parties supports this thesis.”

Lucius nodded, and Marcus agreed that it made sense.

“My approach to medical treatment is to start with the most obvious possibilities and the simplest treatments before moving to more intrusive options,” added Heracleion. “Too many physicians operate by guesswork; they don’t understand how the body works, so they try different remedies in the hope that something they do will cure their patients. I’ve known some who seemed to think that the effectiveness of a treatment could be measured by how much misery it caused their patients.”

Marcus chuckled; that was certainly a popular image of physicians.

“I’m not like that,” Heracleion continued. “I won’t propose any treatments that will cause you to suffer unless we’ve tried lesser options first and I have good reason to believe that the pain is necessary for healing.”

“I like your approach,” said Lucius matter-of-factly. “You’ve summarized well my experience with physicians and why I prefer to avoid them. I think that I can work with you. What do you propose to do in my case?”

Marcus was surprised and pleased at his master’s change of heart. Perhaps this man could truly help him to overcome his difficulties.

“If you want my opinion,” replied Heracleion, “I think you need to keep away from those exotic foods that your cook has been preparing and stick with a plain diet for a while. Tell her to bring you only the kinds of foods that you ate when you were young, before you developed a taste for delicacies. I don’t mean baby food, but simple ingredients with little or no spicing. It will be hard, I know, especially when your dinner guests are raving about some new dish that your cook has concocted. But if you want to get well, it’s a small price to pay.”

“And you really think that will do it?” inquired Lucius.

“I’m not sure,” answered Heracleion. “But it’s a good place to start. If it doesn’t work, we can try something else. I’ll also send you some dried blackberry leaf that

can be brewed into a tea to control your diarrhea. Drink some of it with every meal—it's not bad if you add a little honey to it. It works better than those terra sigillata lozenges they sell in the market that only address the symptoms, though they can be helpful in a pinch."

"You should also watch what wines you drink," he went on. "Avoid the dark, heavy ones—they're hard on the stomach. Stick with light, dry wines to prevent trouble. Italian wines are the best, if you can get them, especially Phalerian and Syrentine, as they help to bind the bowels. Oinanthe and melampsithios have the same effect. Avoid wines produced near the coast, since they contain a great deal of sea water that can upset the stomach."

"Thanks for the advice," replied Lucius. "I'm sure that Marcus was taking notes of what you said. It's a small price to pay for a cure from this infernal sickness."

"I'm glad to hear it," replied Heracleion. "I'll leave you now," he added, rising from his seat. "I can see that my arrival interrupted your work." He glanced toward Marcus and smiled.

"No, stay," protested Lucius. "I'm in no hurry. I was going to the baths this afternoon, but there's no rush. If you're going to be caring for me, I'd like to know more about you."

So the deed was done, thought Marcus; Lucius had accepted Heracleion as his physician. Selena would be thrilled with the news.

"The old priest tells me that you're new to our city," continued Lucius. "Where did you come from, and what brought you to Antioch?"

"It's not a very interesting story," replied Heracleion, "but I'll tell you if you want to know. I grew up in Hierapolis, a city famous for the healing properties of its hot springs. From an early age I worked at the temple of Asklepios, where I was trained as a physician. The temple was always quite busy, as the springs attract vast numbers of people who wish to be cured."

"You might think that this would make it a good place for a physician to ply his trade," he went on, "but it wasn't. Too many of the people whom I saw had waited until they were beyond healing before coming to the springs. Many of them died there, while others left only to die at home. If you've ever been to the city, you'll know that the cemetery that runs along both sides of the main road contains far more tombs than you would expect for a city of its size. Many of them belong to people from other cities who were too sick to travel home or who chose to stay and enjoy the comforts of the springs until their bodies gave out."

Heracleion shifted in his chair, then resumed his story.

"After a while, I grew tired of working there. I longed to work in a place where I could treat people who had a greater chance of getting well. But I didn't have enough money to move on my own, and I had no way of knowing where my ser-

vices might be needed. I prayed repeatedly to Asklepios to send me to another of his sanctuaries where I could be of more use, but the years passed by and nothing happened.”

“Still, I never gave up hope,” he went on. “In addition to the many visitors who came from far away seeking to be cured, I treated a number of local citizens, including several aristocrats. One of them, a man named Quintus Pollio, liked my work so much that he adopted me and left me enough money in his will to enable me to leave the city. My dream had always been to move to Pergamon where I could study and work at the famous healing center of Asklepios, so that’s what I did. It didn’t take long, though, for me to realize that their patients were little different from the ones that I was trying to escape at Hierapolis, and they already had hordes of physicians working there. I wanted a quieter place. One of my patients was a man from Antioch who complained about the poor medical care that he had received there, and I took that as a sign from the gods that I should move here. I arrived three months ago. It’s been a good move for me, and I’ve decided to stay. And that’s my story.”

“An interesting tale,” observed Lucius. “I wonder if you might recall the name of the man from Antioch who told you about the medical care here? I can certainly vouch for the truth of what he said!”

“I’m sorry, but I don’t,” replied Heracleion. “I treated many people there, and he didn’t stay very long at the Askleion. I do remember that he wasn’t an aristocrat like you.

“Then I probably wouldn’t know him,” said Lucius. “I’m not aware of anyone who has traveled from here to Pergamon for treatment. That’s a long trip—a man would have to be quite desperate to go that far in hope of a cure. I don’t see how a seriously ill man could even attempt such a journey.”

“You’d be surprised at what people are willing to endure in hopes of being cured,” answered Heracleion. “Those who can afford it travel in carriages, carts, or wagons. The poorer ones walk or are carried by family members on pallets tied to poles. Contrary to what you might think, sick people are capable of amazing feats of strength if they are convinced that they will be healed in the end.”

“I’ll have to trust your experience there,” said Lucius. “I find it hard to imagine being in that situation. But I’m pleased to hear that you spent time in Pergamon; that gives me even more confidence in your abilities. I’m happy to know that we finally have a qualified physician in our midst. I’m very sorry that I mistook you yesterday for one of those civic drudges.”

“Don’t give it another thought,” replied Heracleion. “I might have done the same under those circumstances. I’m just pleased that you gave me a second chance.”

“That certainly wasn’t my intention!” laughed Lucius. “I think one the gods

must have been sporting with me. But I'm glad that you came to see me. You've taken a weight off of my shoulders."

"I'm happy to hear it," said Heracleion. "Now if you don't mind, I need to return to the temple so that I can prepare that tea for you and see if anyone else needs my services. Please send Marcus to me in a few days to tell me how you are doing."

"I'll do that," answered Lucius. "Or better yet, I'll invite you to dine with me so that you can see how well I'm following your instructions."

"I would be honored," said Heracleion as he rose to go.

"Hermas!" shouted Lucius. He waited a moment, then called again more loudly.

"I don't know where that young man has gone," he said, clearly exasperated. "I'll tend to him later. Marcus, could you show our guest to the door?"

Marcus rose from his seat and stepped quickly to Heracleion's side.

"Farewell," said Heracleion to Lucius with a genial grin.

"Farewell," echoed Lucius. "We will talk again soon."

Heracleion followed Marcus through the atrium to the front door. Marcus paused before opening it and turned to face him.

"I want to thank you for all that you did for my master today," said Marcus. "We've been trying for weeks to get him to see a physician, but he always refuses. He even tried to back out of going to the temple this morning. I fear that his sickness is growing worse. But he's in good hands now."

"Thank you for the compliment," replied Heracleion with a smile. "I'll do my best to cure him. But only the gods know what the future holds."

LUCIUS'S health did in fact improve under Heracleion's care. His abdominal pain became less frequent and the blackberry tea controlled his diarrhea, though his stools remained soft. Lucius extolled his new physician to all of his friends and even invited him to some of his dinner parties, though not when he was entertaining his closest associates—he wouldn't want them to think that he was consorting with ordinary working people. But there was no shame in having a physician in one's retinue, especially one as good as Heracleion.

Lucius wanted his married daughters and their families to know about Heracleion as well, so he invited Helena and Prisca to join him one day for the midday meal. The garden that occupied his central courtyard was resplendent this year, and he knew that they would enjoy seeing it before the flowers faded. It had been quite a while since the three of them had sat down together like this; the girls were busy with their husbands and children, and Lucius's schedule was full as well.

They sat at a table in the shade of the colonnaded portico that surrounded the garden, just beyond the office where Marcus was going over the account books with Agathon. As a result, Marcus was able to overhear much of what they said. Lucius was telling them how Heracleion had helped him.

"I've heard of him," replied Helena when he had finished his story. "One of my friends took her son to him and found him to be agreeable and competent. Based on what you've said, I might even visit him myself the next time I need a physician. Of course, I'd prefer to be treated by someone from a good family, but there's no one like that here in Antioch. But a freedman is better than a slave, especially if he knows what he's doing."

"What do you mean, a freedman?" asked Lucius. "Are you judging him by his name? If so, you are mistaken. It does sound like the name of a freedman—a Greek name tacked onto the end of a Roman family name—but he came by it honestly; he was adopted by one of his wealthy patients in Hierapolis and received a sizeable inheritance at the man's death."

"I can see why he might have told you that," answered Helena smugly. "He's new in town, and he wanted your business. But I have it on good authority that he's a freedman."

"And what is this authority?" asked Lucius testily. "One of your female friends?"

"Yes, but one who should know," replied Helena. "She's the wife of the old priest Asclepiades. She told my mother-in-law, and she told me. Isn't that a good enough authority?"

Lucius grew silent. Marcus wished that he could see his master's face; he was curious to know how this news was affecting him. He knew that Lucius enjoyed Heracleion's company, and he had noted recently that Lucius had begun to speak with him more like a peer than a client. If what Helena had said was true, that would have to end.

At last Lucius spoke. His voice sounded hesitant and troubled. "I guess I should thank you for telling me this, though I can't say that I like it. Heracleion is a good man; I find it hard to believe that he would have intentionally deceived me. I'll ask him about it the next time I see him. Perhaps there's been some kind of mistake."

"Perhaps," echoed Helena. The tameness of her reply surprised Marcus. When she was younger, she would have pounced on anyone who refused to acknowledge that she was right when she had a strong argument. Could it be that maturity—or her husband—had taught her to keep her tongue under control?

The talk shifted to other subjects, and Marcus turned his attention back to Agathon and the record books. His ears perked up again, however, when he heard Lucius's younger daughter Prisca berating him about her brother Gaius.

"Father, you've always been too easy on him," Prisca was saying. "He's not a

child any more—he's eighteen years old, and you're over fifty and having health problems. What if you could no longer manage your affairs? Is he ready to take over? He would ruin you, and you know it. Even I, a woman, can see that you ought to be training him to take over the management of your household and businesses. Instead, you let him spend all of his time drinking and whoring and running around with his friends. You should hear what people say about him behind your back. He's not doing your reputation any good."

Again Marcus was surprised; was this really gentle Prisca speaking? She had always been the peacemaker, the one who soothed the tensions aroused by her sharp-tongued sister. He had never heard her speak so critically about her brother. But she was also eminently sensible, and he could see how her anxiety for her father might drive her to confront him on such a vital matter. She was right, of course; it was past time for Gaius to begin learning to manage his father's affairs. It would be better for everyone if Lucius would take him under his wing now rather than waiting until he was sick or dying. Perhaps Gaius could even learn a little wisdom before it was too late.

"Come now, he's not a bad boy," answered Lucius defensively. "He's busy studying and training for the games of Mên in August. You can't expect him to grow up all at once. His time will come soon enough. And those young friends of his—the ones that you were criticizing just now—will be running this city when my generation is gone. When that day comes, Gaius will be right there with them. The time that he's spending with them now is more important to his future than any instruction that I could give him."

"Father," interrupted Helena, her voice dripping with sarcasm, "do you really think Gaius is studying? Go ask the teachers at the gymnasium when was the last time they saw him in their lecture halls. You're more likely to find him in a low-class tavern getting drunk on cheap wine and gambling away his allowance, or else wasting it on common whores. And that's not all—have you not heard how he and his friends go around pawing the wives and daughters of poor citizens in broad daylight, then beat up their men when they intervene to protect them? The men don't dare to report it because Gaius and his friends are aristocrats. People are criticizing you for not reining in your wayward son. I'm embarrassed to have him as my relation. Have you not heard any of this?"

A deadly silence followed. Marcus had no idea how much of this his master knew. He himself had heard occasional rumors about Gaius's activities, but he had not said anything to Lucius because he did not want to speak ill of his son. He also had no way of knowing how much of it was true. The city buzzed continually with gossip about the private lives of important men and women, and everyone knew that much of it was unfounded. He had even heard his master joking with his friends about some of the rumors that they had heard about themselves. But

Helena was clearly taking the stories about Gaius seriously. Could she be right?

“I’ve—I’ve heard things here and there,” said Lucius at last in a halting voice, “but you know as well as I do that you can’t believe everything you hear. I was a lot like him when I was young—I even got into fights on occasion—and I turned out all right. But I never fought with a man who couldn’t defend himself, and I certainly never attacked innocent women. This is the first that I’ve heard of anything like that. Where did you get your information?”

“I’ve heard similar stories,” interjected Prisca before her sister could speak. “My husband’s cousin was a member of Gaius’s circle until his father ordered him to keep away from them. I defended Gaius when he first told me about it, but I gave in after hearing what he had learned from his cousin. It largely agrees with what Helena has said. But even if only half of it is true, it’s hurting your reputation. You need to do something.”

“She’s right, father—you need to do something,” echoed Helena.

More silence ensued. Marcus could almost feel the anguish that must be tearing at his master’s heart. But he knew that honor would compel Lucius to act; he could not allow his reputation to be sullied by his son’s disgraceful acts.

“I’ll talk with him,” said Lucius after a long pause. “If what you say is true, he needs to be stopped. You’re right—your brother is old enough to start behaving like a man and taking on a man’s duties. I’ve been too lenient with him; I can see that now. The time has come for stronger action. I’m embarrassed that I had to learn these things from my own daughters, but I’m grateful to you for helping this old fool to see the error of his ways. I hope it’s not too late to turn things around.”

CHAPTER 3

THE FESTIVAL OF Fors Fortuna, which fell on the seventh day before the Kalends of July, was rapidly approaching, and Lucius was feeling nervous. At the new year's celebration in January he had announced his intention to commission a marble statue of Lady Fortune for the upper market in honor of his accession to office, and he was beginning to wonder if it would be completed in time for the festival. The man whom he had chosen for the job—the son of the master sculptor who had carved the images of the imperial family for the temple of Augustus—had initially rejected the commission on the grounds that it was impossible to have it ready by the time he wanted it. But he had relented when Lucius agreed to increase the price so that he could hire an extra assistant to help him on the job. Lucius and Marcus had stopped by the sculptor's shop periodically to assess his progress and keep the pressure on, but neither of them knew enough about sculpting to judge how the work was going. It appeared to be progressing well, but Lucius still prayed daily for the goddess to aid him in his work.

Lucius's gratitude to Lady Fortune was understandable, since virtually everything in his life was going well these days. His new business was thriving—Curtius's shop had filled a genuine need among the aristocratic class of Antioch, and Vedius had turned out to be a capable manager. Marcus's reviews of Vedius's account books had found nothing amiss, and Lucius's share of the profits had been paid to him as agreed. Lucius's money-lending operation continued to bring in a steady income, though there were always a few borrowers who had trouble repaying their loans. Lucius was not a hard man, and he preferred to renegotiate the terms of a delinquent loan where possible rather than seizing the security that had been pledged in support of the loan. Antioch was a small city, and one never knew what kind of mischief a disgruntled former client might cause. A wise man did his best to stay on good terms with everyone around him.

The farm was also prospering. The crops had suffered last year from a pestilence that reduced the yield on the olives and an autumn frost that damaged some of the grape vines, but no such problems had been reported this year. In fact, all of the omens pointed to a bumper harvest. The spring rains had been plentiful and timely and the grain was as vigorous as it had ever been. The grapes and olives were also shaping up well. Similar reports were coming in from other farms in the area. This was the best news that an agoranomos could hope for, since it meant that he would not have to worry about food shortages this year. It was too early to be sure, of course; a scorching summer could change everything. But if the gods continued to bless the fields as they had done through the month of June, the markets would be full and the farmers would earn a healthy income.

Still, life was not perfect. Lucius's stomach pains had returned, though not as sharply as before, and he was having renewed bouts of diarrhea again despite the blackberry tea. But he had not lost faith in Heracleion despite his discovery that the physician had been less than honest about his personal history. When Lucius had confronted him about the story, he insisted that he had not lied but merely glossed over the awkward reality that he had been a slave while working at the temple in Hierapolis. The rest of his story was true: he had indeed been purchased, freed, and adopted by a wealthy citizen who eventually died and willed him enough money to allow him to travel to Pergamon and then to Antioch.

Heracleion apologized for the omission and offered to withdraw as Lucius's physician, but Lucius would not hear of it. Heracleion had behaved dishonorably, to be sure, but Lucius could understand why he might have wanted to obscure his servile origins when starting anew as a free citizen in a strange city, and there was no other physician whom he would trust to care for him. His friends would have looked askance at him taking a freedman as a son-in-law or business partner, but there was no shame in having a former slave as a physician, especially one as well-trained as Heracleion.

Since that conversation Heracleion had tried several new medications with mixed results. One was reasonably effective at controlling the diarrhea but caused his stomach to cramp, while others made him nauseous or simply failed to work. A single attempt to purge his bowels with black hellebore extract proved so painful that Lucius prohibited any further experiments in that direction. The poppy elixir that Heracleion had prescribed to alleviate his stomach pains was effective in small doses, but it made his head spin when he drank too much.

In the end, they decided that the best course was to move to a stronger decoction of blackberry tea, since it was the only treatment that had been both safe and effective to this point. Heracleion also gave him a pouch of lupine lozenges to take with his meals to expel any intestinal worms that might be lurking in his bowels and instructed his cook to make liberal use of medicinal herbs such as anise, caraway, dill, and cinnamon when preparing his meals in order to strengthen the effects of the tea.

Lucius also agreed to work harder at maintaining a simple diet. Limiting his meat consumption was proving to be especially difficult, since elaborate meat dishes were a vital element of Roman aristocratic cuisine. In fact, the daily ingestion of meat was one of the most visible perquisites of wealth, as it underlined the gulf between the elites and the mass of ordinary citizens who could not afford to eat flesh on a regular basis. Heracleion enlisted Marcus to help him in this area.

Lucius kept up a good face when the physician was present, but his confidence clearly sagged on those occasions when his symptoms flared up. Heracleion con-

tinued to advise patience as he experimented with various treatments for Lucius's intestinal problems, but Marcus was beginning to doubt his skills, and he suspected that Lucius was also. He was therefore pleased when Lucius accepted his proposal that he add a statue of Asklepios to his household shrine and begin making daily offerings to the god in an effort to move him to intervene. It was hard to feel hopeful at this point, but if nothing else the god might speak to the physician about what should be done.

GAIUS was also adjusting to the new routine that Lucius had imposed upon him, though the path had been rocky at first. Lucius and Gaius had led separate lives for the last couple of years, since Gaius usually left the house while Lucius was seeing clients in the morning and did not return until late at night. Lucius's initial attempt to reverse that pattern had not gone well.

On the same afternoon when he promised his daughters that he would address Gaius's behavior, Lucius had sent Hermas to the gymnasium to tell his son that he wanted to see him in his office the next day after he was done with his clients. Marcus was sitting with his master poring over the account books when the appointed hour came, but Gaius never arrived. After a while Lucius began dictating a letter to Marcus to fill the time.

Marcus could see that his master was struggling to remain calm. The stiffness in his jaw and the subtle quaver in his voice as he neared the end of the letter betrayed his simmering anger. Marcus could feel the tension building as he heated the sealing wax for his master and prepared the letter for delivery. Suddenly Lucius exploded.

"Where in Hades is that accursed son of mine?" he roared, pounding the table with both fists. "By Jupiter, I'll teach him to keep me waiting like this!" His face reddened and his neck muscles bulged as he rose abruptly from his desk. Marcus knew better than to speak when his master was this angry; there was no telling what he might say or do.

"Hermas!" he bellowed in a voice that echoed across the atrium. "Hermas! Come in here right now!" He paused briefly, then shouted again. Hearing no reply, he ordered Marcus to go and find him.

Marcus had not reached the threshold when Hermas came barreling into the room. He nearly knocked Marcus over in his haste. His eyes were wide with fear.

"Where is my son?" Lucius thundered. "I told you that I wanted him here in my office by the fourth hour. What did you tell him? Or did you lie when you told me you had seen him? Speak, fool!"

"I wasn't lying, sir," whimpered the slave. "I told him exactly what you said. I wasn't sure that he heard me the first time, so I repeated the message. Then he... he..."

"He did what?" barked Lucius. "Out with it!"

"He... he cursed me... swung his fist toward my face... told me to leave him alone," muttered the frightened slave.

Lucius stared silently into Hermas's stricken face. "He told you to leave him alone, did he?" he muttered at last in a slow, deep growl. "And what did you do?"

"I... I told him that his father would be very cross with him if he did not arrive at the appointed hour," answered Hermas hurriedly. "I told him that you said it was very important."

"And what did he say to that?" probed Lucius. Marcus could see that he was straining to control his indignation.

"I don't think he said anything," replied Hermas. "He and his friends were too busy laughing and making fun of me. I couldn't swear that he even heard me."

Lucius stood glowering at the terrified slave, whose eyes were now glued to the tiles at his feet. Marcus felt sorry for him. Gaius had treated him the same way when he was younger, and he knew how humiliating it felt.

"Marcus, go up to the gymnasium and tell that disrespectful son of mine that I want to see him this instant," ordered Lucius in his most imperious voice. "Tell him that I command him to stop whatever he is doing, put on his tunic, and come as he is; he is not to waste time cooling down or cleaning up. Tell him that if he is not standing in my office by the time I finish eating—by the gods, he's likely to ruin my digestion!—tell him if he's not here by then, I'll cut off his allowance and prohibit him from taking part in the upcoming games of Mên, or any other games for that matter. Tell him that I'll banish him to my farm where he'll eat slop with the pigs! Tell him I'll disinherit him and leave him a pauper! Tell him..."

"Yes, sir, I understand," interrupted Marcus. "I'll get him here." Marcus bowed, turned, and left the room. Hermas exited quickly behind him.

A short time later, Marcus returned to find Lucius staring out over his garden with a plate of food resting untouched on a small table beside him. His gaze did not waver when Marcus told him that he had found Gaius and that he had agreed to come home immediately in obedience to his father's order. Marcus stood for a moment awaiting further instructions. Receiving none, he finally ambled off toward the office and sat down at his desk.

Marcus tried to focus on the account books that lay open before him, but his mind kept returning to what had just occurred at the gymnasium. He wondered if he should have told his master how Gaius had initially refused to listen to him when he explained that he had come with a message from his father, or how Gai-

us's face had flushed crimson with rage as Marcus repeated his father's threats. He winced as he recalled the profanity that Gaius had rained upon both him and his father for interrupting his workout and how he had to be coaxed by his friends into obeying the summons in order to avoid being excluded from the games. All that he had said was that Gaius had received his message and was on his way.

As he was pondering whether to return to his master and tell him the full story, Lucius strode into the room and sat down at his desk without so much as a glance at Marcus. His face was stony. Marcus could see that this was no time to stir the pot further.

A short time later Gaius strolled carelessly into the office as if everything was well between them. "Greetings, honorable father..." he began, but Lucius cut him off.

"Where have you been?" barked Lucius. "I told you to be here at the fourth hour."

"I don't know what you mean, sir," answered Gaius with an innocent shrug. "I came as soon as Marcus told me you were looking for me. As you can see, I'm still sweating from my workout."

"And what about the message that Hermas delivered to you yesterday afternoon saying that I wanted to talk with you this morning?" prodded Lucius, his face stern.

"Hermas?" echoed Gaius, feigning puzzlement. "I've not seen Hermas for two or three days. Did he tell you that he gave me a message?"

"He did indeed," said Lucius curtly. "He also said that you and your friends abused him and told him to leave you alone."

"Then he's a lying bastard," announced Gaius defiantly. "He brought no message to me. He was probably down at the whorehouse, or out throwing dice, and concocted that story in order to cover it up. You know how those slaves are—they lie as readily as they fart." Gaius smirked at his own remark.

Lucius stared silently at his son for several moments. Marcus could not see his face, but he could guess what it looked like—that blank-eyed expression that he put on whenever he was weighing a course of action. Gaius's words had apparently sown doubt in his mind and undermined his plans. The pained expression that Gaius now affected gave him the look of a wronged innocent, which was no doubt what he intended. Marcus himself might have been taken in by the charade if Gaius had not mentioned the other slave's visit when Marcus came to retrieve him.

Marcus shuddered as he realized what a skilled liar Gaius had become. He was sorely tempted to break in and tell Lucius about his earlier conversation with Gaius in order to shake him from his lassitude, but he knew that it would accomplish nothing; the testimony of a slave was worthless against that of an aristocrat unless

the slave were tortured, and even then the aristocrat's claim invariably won out.

"I don't believe you," said Lucius at last, his voice somber. "I believe that you were busy with your friends and chose to ignore my summons."

"What?" cried Gaius, clearly surprised that his ruse had failed. "Are you really going to trust the words of that lying slave over mine? Why would I...?"

"Shut up!" roared Lucius. "I'm not one of those empty-headed girls or brainless friends of yours who will believe anything you say because you have a pretty face and know how to run and box. I know you better than you think. You're an inveterate liar who will say whatever it takes to get what you want or avoid punishment. I wouldn't trust you to tell me if it was light outside on a sunny day!"

Gaius stared down at his feet. Marcus busied himself with the papers on his desk so that neither man could see the grin of satisfaction that was spreading across his face.

"In fact, that's precisely why I've called you here," continued Lucius in a more restrained tone. "I've heard some things about your actions around town that have caused me great pain."

"What...?" Gaius tried to interrupt, but Lucius ignored him.

"Your behavior is bringing disgrace upon the name of our family, and I won't have it." Lucius paused for a moment, his eyes boring holes into the top of Gaius's head.

"Do you hear me?" demanded Lucius. "I—won't—have it!" He pounded his fist onto the desk to accentuate each word.

Lucius scowled silently at his son, whose eyes remained glued to the floor. *He actually looks shaken*, thought Marcus. But he knew Gaius well enough to know that this, too, could be an act. After a few tense moments, Lucius lowered his gaze to his desk, then looked up again.

"Still, I can't blame you entirely," he continued in a more subdued tone. "I have to admit that I bear some responsibility for your misconduct. I've not been much of a father to you since your mother died. I've left you to fend for yourself when I should have been training you, so it's only natural that you would make some bad decisions. After all, you're still young."

Gaius's shoulders relaxed, and Marcus thought that he saw a thin smile curl the young man's lips. If Lucius saw it, however, he gave no sign.

"Beginning tomorrow," said Lucius, "all of that is going to change. The time has come for me to start training you to take my place as head of the family. I don't know if you're aware that I've been sick recently, and it's possible that it might be something serious. Even if it's not, I'm growing older by the day, and you've reached an age when you need to begin settling down and preparing for the life that lies ahead of you as my successor."

Gaius raised his head in surprise. Clearly he had not expected anything like this. But even he knew better than to interrupt his father again.

“I want you to begin attending my morning greeting sessions, as I did with my father at your age,” intoned Lucius. “It’s the only way to learn how things work around here. You will get to know my clients, and they will come to view you as my successor. I’ll also take you with me when I visit some of my friends. They know who you are, of course, but only as the son of Lucius Coelius Felix, not as a future member of their social circle. One day their sons will rule over this city, and I mean for you to be there with them. For that to happen, however, you have to show them that you are every bit as capable as their sons. Your reputation as an athlete will help you at first, but it will only take you so far—especially if they’ve heard about some of your other activities around town.”

Lucius paused with these words. Marcus was surprised to see that Gaius looked embarrassed.

“After my clients are gone,” Lucius continued, “I want you to sit for an hour or two with Marcus and begin learning about the account books. You have to be able to keep watch on your money or you’ll end up spending more than you earn and lose everything that I’ve built up to the creditors. Worse yet, a crooked record-keeper—someone less honest than Marcus here—could steal you blind and you’d never know it.”

Gaius’s face grew agitated as Lucius described this final element of his plan. As soon as he had finished speaking, Gaius exploded.

“By the gods, you can’t be serious!” he exclaimed. “You want me to learn from a slave? Do you think that I’m still a child in need of a pedagogue? Surely not! Teach me yourself if you must, but I won’t be lectured by a slave.”

“You—will—do—as—I—say!” bellowed Lucius, spitting out each word like poison. “Or I’ll throw you out of this family and put Marcus in your place. He’s worth three of you!”

The air crackled with tension as father and son glared at one another across the desk. Marcus felt stunned. He knew that Lucius would never disinherit his son regardless of what he might say in the heat of the moment, but he did feel a brief thrill at his master’s acknowledgment that he had at least thought about freeing him one day. His momentary joy was undercut, however, by a wave of anxiety about how Lucius’s threat might affect his future relations with Gaius. If he did indeed end up tutoring his master’s son—a proposal that was as distasteful to him as it was to Gaius—Lucius’s menacing words would only render his task more difficult. Gaius would submit to his father’s will in the end, but he would take out his resentment on Marcus. If he felt sufficiently jealous, he might even try to poison Lucius against him. The whips of the Furies would have been preferable to suffering under Gaius’s hand. He sorely wished that his master had kept his tongue.

“Well, sir,” demanded Lucius in his most imperious voice, “what do you have to say for yourself? Answer me! If you keep staring at me like a fool, I’ll take you out and have you whipped.”

Gaius glared defiantly at him for a moment longer, then lowered his eyes. He had been beaten, and he knew it. Marcus relished the moment.

“Your will be done, father” he muttered, placing heightened emphasis on the final word.

“Good,” answered Lucius, his voice softening a bit. “That’s the proper attitude for a son of Rome. I trust that you will remember this lesson in future, as I have no intention of repeating it. You’ll be free to make your own decisions when I’m gone, but until then, I am the one who decides what you will and won’t do. The words of a father are as the words of a god to his family. I will forgive your impertinence this time, but you had better not try me again.”

“Yes, sir,” replied Gaius, looking for all the world like a child caught with his hand in a honey pot. Marcus stifled a grin.

Suddenly Gaius’s face lit up. “But how am I supposed to stay in shape if I’m sitting in the house all day with you and your friends?” he retorted. “The festival of Mên is only a few weeks away, and if I’m not ready, I’ll lose and be disgraced in the games. Won’t that disrupt your plan to enhance my reputation in the eyes of your friends?”

“If you had let me finish laying out my plans before allowing your anger to get the better of you,” Lucius replied icily, “you would have learned that I had not overlooked your need to prepare for the games.” Lucius paused for a few seconds before continuing.

He’s toying with Gaius now, thought Marcus. *He wants to make sure that Gaius knows who is in charge before he begins his training.* Marcus was happy to see his master taking such a firm stand; he only wished that he had done it sooner. Gaius squirmed but said nothing.

“As I was saying,” Lucius resumed, “you will work with Marcus for an hour or two after we’re done with my clients. If you do well, the rest of the day is yours to spend as you wish. If you use your time wisely, you’ll still have plenty of time to practice your running, or boxing, or whatever else you’re doing these days. If you fritter it away on wine and women, you’ll have to live with the shame of being defeated by lesser competitors. It’s up to you.”

That was a stroke of genius, thought Marcus. Gaius was immensely proud of his athletic skills, and he hated to lose. Perhaps Lucius’s plan would work after all.

“And you might want to think about getting into bed at a decent hour,” Lucius continued, “since you will be waking up early from now on. You don’t want to be tired out when you arrive at the gymnasium in the afternoon.”

Gaius looked dejected but gave no response. “May I go now?” he said at last.

“Yes, you may,” replied Lucius. “But I have one more thing to say to you before you go. Your outburst when I informed you that you would be studying with Marcus was uncalled for. It showed a singular lack of maturity on your part. You might be the scion of an influential citizen, but you know nothing about book-keeping. Marcus, by contrast, is an expert in this area. There’s no shame in learning from a slave who knows his business. In fact, Marcus has taught me a lot in the time that he’s been managing my accounts. It’s important that you allow him to show you what he knows so that you can manage my estate when I’m gone.”

Marcus’s heart pounded upon hearing his master speak so highly of him. Lucius was stingy with praise, and Marcus has never heard him offer so much praise for his skills.

“I’m going to sit in on some of your sessions with Marcus,” Lucius continued, “and if I see that you are not taking your education seriously, or that you are mistreating Marcus in any way, I will put an end to your free afternoons. Do I make myself clear?”

“Yes, sir—quite clear,” replied Gaius, his voice tinged with resentment. A surge of relief swept over Marcus; his master was not throwing him to the dogs after all. How his words would affect Gaius’s behavior remained to be seen, but at least he had been warned.

“You may go now,” said Lucius, turning his face to the papers on his desk. “Marcus and I have business to do. I’ll send Hermas to wake you in the morning, and you had better be here in the office in proper attire by the time I admit my first client.”

Gaius nodded slightly, then turned and strode out of the room. Marcus was relieved to see him go. He could not foresee how his master’s new plan would play out, and he was not at all happy about his own role in it. But he had no choice in the matter—if his master wanted him to teach Gaius about record-keeping, that was what he would do. He uttered a silent prayer to the family’s guardian spirit to watch over his sessions with Gaius and keep peace between them in the days ahead. He could only hope that someone was listening.

A few days before the festival of Fors Fortuna, Lucius received a letter from Gaius Curtius Theodorus, his business partner, stating that he was on his way to Antioch to discuss an important matter with him. Neither he nor Marcus could guess what might have motivated him to make the long journey from Ephesus to their city nor why he had written so vaguely about his intentions. Marcus reassured his master

that the business was running well—he had reviewed the books a few days earlier, and he would have noticed if anything was amiss. He had also spoken with the manager while he was there, and he had seen nothing that suggested any anxiety on his part. Apparently he, like Lucius, was unaware of Curtius’s impending arrival, since he would have mentioned it if he had known.

Lucius was perplexed. What could be the purpose of Curtius’s visit? Perhaps he was thinking of making changes to the business and wanted to discuss them with Lucius before confiding in his manager. Perhaps he wanted to discuss some new venture that would build on their present partnership. Perhaps it was some kind of personal matter that had nothing to do with the business. All that he could do was wait for Curtius’s arrival.

Two days later, a well-dressed slave appeared at Lucius’s door announcing that Gaius Curtius Theodorus had arrived in Antioch and that he wished to invite Lucius for dinner at the home of his host the next day if he were free. Lucius replied that he had no prior plans and would be happy to attend.

“At what hour should I plan to arrive at Cissonius’s house?” he asked.

“I’m sorry, sir,” replied the slave, “but my master is not staying with his friend Cissonius during this visit. He is being hosted by a woman named Eirene Attiki. She is the widow of Alexandros Attikos, whose name you might recognize. Her house is in the Greek part of the city.”

“I’ve heard his name,” mused Lucius, “but I don’t recall if I ever met him. But no matter—where exactly does this Eirene live?”

As the slave gave directions, Marcus jotted the salient points onto his wax tablet. Lucius had lived his entire life in Antioch, but he still had a poor sense of direction, and recently his memory had begun slipping as well.

When the slave had finished, Lucius glanced at Marcus, who nodded to indicate that he understood where they needed to go. Lucius told the slave to greet his master on his behalf and then sent him on his way.

The room settled into silence as Lucius turned back to the letter that he had been reading and Marcus returned to his record books. A short time later, Marcus noticed that his master had stopped reading and was staring at the doorway. Finally he spoke.

“I just can’t figure out what is going on here,” he said over his shoulder. “Why is Curtius staying with this woman and not with Cissonius, or better yet, with me? Could that be his real reason for coming to Antioch—to see her? Regardless of how attractive she is, I can’t see him traveling such a distance to visit a mistress, especially when it might affect his business relationships here in Antioch.”

Lucius lapsed into silence for a moment, then turned suddenly to face Marcus. “Do you think he might be considering bringing her into the business? A wom-

an? If that's his plan, I'll have to hope that she has more sense than her husband. I never knew him personally—I think he was quite a bit older than me—but I remember hearing that when he served on the city council he was known as the patron of lost causes. His ancestors were part of the first group of Greek colonists to arrive here from Magnesia-on-the-Maeander, and he was always trying to turn back the calendar. He even tried to get the council to restore the power of the popular assembly! I recall my friend Caristianus describing him as the embodiment of everything that's wrong with Greeks these days: wily, unprincipled, and quick to argue. But he did have money, and no doubt plenty of clients as well. Perhaps Curtius is hoping to use his widow to tap into his clientele."

Marcus nodded to indicate that he was listening. He knew that his master liked to think out loud, and he had learned long ago not to interrupt him.

"Of course, it's also possible that the issue that Curtius wishes to discuss with me has nothing to do with her," Lucius continued. "Perhaps she's merely someone who placed a large order through our shop and he decided to accompany the shipment because he needed to meet with me on another matter. Then she invited him to stay with her as an expression of gratitude and he couldn't say no to a good customer. That makes as much sense as my other ideas. Do you know the name? Have you run across it in our account books?"

Marcus had to think for a moment before answering; he had not expected to be invited into his master's deliberations. "I'm not sure," he replied at last. "The name is common enough to have escaped my attention, but I think I would remember if she had paid for an order recently, especially if it was a large one as you suggested."

"Well, you can check on it tomorrow," offered Lucius. "At least we won't have to wait long to find the answer. I want you to come with me to the dinner in case Curtius wants to talk about the business, as I'm sure he will."

"Yes, sir," replied Marcus.

"And I think I'll take Gaius along, too," Lucius continued. "I need to introduce him to Curtius, and this would be a good opportunity for him to observe how we work together."

Marcus winced inwardly but said nothing. He knew that his master was right to take his son with him, but he feared what might happen if Gaius thought that he was being upstaged by a slave who knew more about the business than he did. He felt sure that Gaius would find a way to make him look like a fool before the night was out.

The following afternoon Lucius took Hermas with him to the baths while Marcus went to find out what his business manager knew about Eirene Attiki. He also ordered Marcus to hire a litter for the evening, since the woman lived at the highest point of the city where the early Greek settlers had built their colony and

he did not want to risk getting ill or overly tired along the way. While he was out, Marcus also went to take a look at their hostess's house so that he could be sure of finding it that evening.

When he returned home, Marcus found his master sitting on a stool in his office and Eros standing beside him, trimming his hair. His face looked freshly shaved and the room smelled of perfume. Lucius was not a man who worried much about his appearance—in fact, he sometimes mocked his son for taking such pains over his hair and skin, declaring that he was behaving “like a damned effeminate Greek.” Marcus suppressed a chuckle when he realized that his master was now doing the very same thing. Lucius ignored him, but his face grew red with embarrassment. He clearly felt ambivalent about setting aside his scruples in order to make a positive impression on a woman whom he had not met.

Disregarding his master's discomfort, Marcus reported what he had learned: a woman named Eirene Attiki had indeed placed an order at their shop when they first opened for business, but it was not very big, and she had not been in recently. He also described her house, though it was hard to tell much about it from the road except that it was built in the older Greek style and not in the Roman manner. Lucius grunted but said nothing.

Having given his report, Marcus strolled to the kitchen to find something to eat, then sat down in the atrium to rest. He knew that Lucius would expect him to stand within earshot for the entire evening until his services were needed, and he had little hope that anyone would offer him a meal.

The litter arrived at the designated time, carried by four well-dressed, muscular slaves. They were accompanied by a fifth slave whose job was to clear a path for the company. Marcus had ordered the best litter available, and this one definitely fit the bill. Crafted of richly-carved woods and ivory, it was surmounted by a thick, soft mattress and shaded by a leather roof that had been stretched between four vertical posts that rose from each of the corners of the couch. Elaborately woven curtains hung from the rods that framed the roof.

Marcus had never known Lucius to ride in anything so fine; in fact, he could not recall ever seeing a man being carried in such an ornate contraption. Litters of this sort were normally reserved for the wives and daughters of leading citizens. Lucius hesitated when he stepped out of the house and saw it, but after a few obligatory complaints he climbed onto the mattress and sat down. Marcus spoke with the crier who would be leading the party and gave him directions to the house. Gaius stationed himself on the right side of the litter, leaving Marcus to walk on the left—the unlucky side—as they commenced their journey.

The four bearers lifted the litter onto their shoulders while the fifth slave took his place at the head of the procession. Behind them stood two more slaves, members of Lucius's household whom he had brought along to make the company look

more impressive. As they stepped away from the house, the crier raised his booming voice in a shout that echoed through the streets all the way to their destination: “Make way for Lucius Coelius Felix, esteemed agoranomos, and his worthy son Gaius!”

Pedestrians stepped aside to make room for them as the party marched steadily toward their goal. Marcus felt uneasy but also proud to be included in such an honorable company.

As they turned onto the street where their hostess’s house was located, Marcus saw two men standing on either side of a doorway on the left side of the street. This was their destination. A young boy who had apparently been stationed to watch out for them darted into the house as they approached. The porter came out to greet them, then guided them through the vestibule into the colonnaded garden area that was the focal point of an aristocratic Greek house. The porter announced their presence, then stepped out of the way as Curtius bounded forward to greet them. A handsome, middle-aged woman padded a few steps behind him.

“My friend, my friend, how good it is to see you,” gushed Curtius, grasping both of Lucius’s hands in his own. “It has been a long time since our last visit.”

“Yes, it has,” replied Lucius, returning his friend’s smile. “If I had known that you were coming, I would have insisted that you stay at my house. But it seems that you had other plans.” Lucius cast his eyes toward the woman whom he took to be their hostess.

“Ah, yes,” replied Curtius with a touch of embarrassment. “Allow me to present to you Eirene Attiki.” The woman stepped forward and inclined her head slightly toward Lucius, who smiled and returned the gesture. “Eirene is the widow of Alexandros Attikos, whom I’m told was one of the chief citizens of Antioch before he departed this life a couple of years ago. I wonder if you knew him?”

“I—knew of him,” answered Lucius cautiously. “Everyone knew his name. But I never knew him personally. We moved in different circles.” Marcus wondered if his master’s halting reply had betrayed his dislike of the man, but the woman’s face remained placid.

“Eirene was one of our first customers here in Antioch, and she repeatedly invited me to stay with her family when I came again to your city,” explained Curtius. “I didn’t want to lose a good customer, so I decided to take her up on her offer.”

Marcus could tell that the man was dissimulating, and the expression on Lucius’s face suggested that he knew it, too. But there was nothing to be done about it right now. The truth would doubtless come out later in the evening.

“I’d like to thank you for your kindness to my friend,” said Lucius to Eirene, “and for inviting us into your home this evening. May the gods preserve you and your household.”

“You are welcome here any time,” replied Eirene with a gracious smile. “A friend of Gaius is a friend of mine.”

That seals it, thought Marcus. No mere customer would call a man of Curtius’s stature by his first name. There was definitely more to this relationship than Curtius wanted to admit. Marcus could see why he might find her attractive. Her thin, delicate face, framed by elaborate coils of auburn hair, bore only the faintest of wrinkles, while her coal-black eyes and sheer green gown gleamed under the shadow of the colonnade. If her husband had been much older than her when they married—a likely scenario given her early widowhood—then it made sense that she would take an interest in a man like Curtius who was new in town and closer to her own age.

Curtius was not a handsome man, but his dark features were not disagreeable, and he had a winsome manner that both women and men found endearing. He was also wealthy. He did not flaunt his wealth, but everyone could see from his fine clothing and elegant manners that he had been reared in a noble family. The fact that he had a wife in Ephesus was an inconvenience, to be sure, but there was nothing unusual about a wealthy aristocrat taking a lover of either sex.

Still, few men were so flagrant as to sleep openly at their lover’s home. They might do this at Rome, but customs were more traditional in a provincial city like Antioch. Marcus made a mental note to ask Lucius how such a public display of affection might affect their business.

His mind thus preoccupied, Marcus was only vaguely aware that his master had formally introduced his son Gaius to the couple and that Curtius had said something about having invited other guests to join them for dinner. He forced his mind back to the matters at hand as the party strolled toward the dining room where the other guests were waiting. His master would need his help to recall the guests’ names and backgrounds once they returned home.

The dining room was situated on the long wall of the colonnade, where it opened directly onto the garden. Marcus had seen similar floorplans once or twice in Roman homes where the owners were consciously imitating Greek styles, and he had always liked the idea. If he were a wealthy aristocrat, he would have enjoyed peering out over his garden while reclining with his friends over dinner. He might be a slave, but he could still dream.

The other guests were standing and talking among themselves as Eirene led Lucius and his company into the room. They stopped immediately and exchanged warm greetings with the newcomers. Marcus recognized a couple of the faces, but the rest were new to him.

“I believe you know Demetrius Antipatros; he tells me that he has visited your house on more than one occasion,” explained Curtius. “The man next to him is Titus Cissonius, my host during my previous visits to your city.”

“Greetings,” said both men in unison. The first man added a respectful “sir” to the end of his greeting, reflecting his status as one of Lucius’s money-lending clients. Lucius had probably given Curtius his name as a potential customer, but Marcus could only guess why his partner had invited the man to dinner. Demetrius Antipatros was an elderly wine merchant who had never shown any interest in Lucius’s business affairs apart from borrowing money from him now and then to finance his inventory. Lucius liked him well enough; he always repaid his loans, and he pointedly included Lucius on his list of customers who received first access to shipments of rare wines when they arrived. He was not one of those parasitic clients whom every patron despises even as he makes use of their services.

The other two guests were introduced as Gaius Julius Aristarchos and Tertius Sentius Maximus. As usual, Marcus surveyed both men quickly in case Lucius should ask him about them later. From their togas it was evident that both were Roman citizens. The first man was about the same age as Demetrius Antipatros, and like him bore a name that revealed his Greek ancestry. His first two names signified that his family had been granted citizenship under the divine Gaius Julius Caesar, though whether they were members of the Greek ruling class who had been inducted into the Roman aristocracy or freed slaves who had taken the name of their patron was impossible to say. The heritage of the second man, who looked to be only a couple of years older than Marcus, was unclear. Roman names such as his were so common in Antioch that they revealed nothing about their holders. As far as he could remember, however, Marcus had never encountered the name Sentius in Antioch. Perhaps he was a new resident, or even a visitor like Curtius.

Lucius and Gaius were guided to the place of honor on the central couch while the other guests arranged themselves on the two side couches. Marcus noted with surprise that Eirene had stationed herself at the end of the couch beside Aristarchos and not in the host’s position next to the guest of honor. That spot was occupied by his master’s friend Curtius, who thus became the honorary host for the evening. This made sense, thought Marcus, if the purpose of the gathering was to discuss their business. Curtius could easily direct the conversation from where he lay.

Marcus caught Lucius’s eye and raised his eyebrows to ask if he should leave now, and Lucius nodded his assent. Marcus stepped out into the colonnade and positioned himself next to the doorway where he could listen in on the conversation and be available if he were needed.

As Eirene’s slaves brought in the wine and some appetizers, Curtius asked each of the guests to say a little about themselves for the sake of Lucius and his son. From these remarks Marcus learned that Aristarchos and Eirene’s husband had grown up on adjacent estates on the opposite side of the city from Lucius’s farm

and that both of their families were descended from Greek colonists who had settled the area centuries before the Romans arrived.

Sentius, by contrast, was a newcomer, having arrived in the area only a few weeks earlier. His father owned a shipping company in Attalia and had recently decided to send his three sons north during the growing season to solicit new customers for his business. As the youngest son, he had received the most distant assignment. Marcus wondered if he knew that Lucius's brother-in-law was in the same line of business and that most of the large landowners in the area had long-standing relationships with Lucius's family. Sentius would not be getting many orders from Antioch.

After this, the conversation turned to the usual dinnertime topics—the weather, the status of the crops, local politics, the latest gossip—and Marcus's interest began to wane. He remained standing until his legs grew weary, then decided that it would be safe to sit down since he was out of sight of the diners. As far as he could tell, none of the other guests had brought an assistant with them; the only other slaves loitering near the dining room were the ones attending to the visitors. Even Fortunatus was nowhere to be seen. The other slaves who had arrived with Lucius, including the litter-bearers, were huddled together in the far corner of the colonnade with the slaves of the other men, where they sat talking or gambling while their masters were busy with their meal. Marcus was tempted to join them, but he knew that he had to stay close enough to hear what was being said in case the conversation turned to matters of business.

Marcus's eyes wandered over the lovely garden that filled the courtyard in front of him. At its center lay a small oblong pool that held a life-sized marble statue of Aphrodite. The pool was surrounded by an assortment of bushes and shrubs arranged in what appeared to be some sort of geometrical pattern, though Marcus could not make it out from where he sat. A number of the bushes were in bloom, bearing flowers of differing hues, while here and there tall flowering plants protruded above the bushes, adding further variety to the palette of colors. Marble statues of deities were scattered here and there among the foliage. Topping it all off was a fine series of architectural murals that ran around the four walls beneath the colonnade. The play of the late-day shadows gave the scene an almost magical air. Marcus was entranced.

Time passed slowly, and Marcus became faintly aware that he was drifting off to sleep. He pinched himself in an effort to stay awake. Apparently he failed, since he was suddenly startled back to life by someone dropping a plate of food and a cup of wine onto the tiled floor beside him.

"The mistress told me to bring you this," said the voice of a middle-aged female slave from above him. She left before Marcus had a chance to thank her. Marcus

was amazed; few aristocrats ever spared a thought for their guests' slaves during a dinner party. One of the gods must be looking out for him this evening! Perhaps Lucius or Curtius had said something about his value to their business and their hostess had decided that he deserved better treatment than the other slaves. Whatever the reason, he was grateful. He devoured the food hungrily.

Suddenly his ears caught the sound of Curtius calling for the attention of the other guests. He set his plate onto the ground, stood up, and leaned toward the doorway so that he could hear what was being said.

"This has been a most pleasant evening," began Curtius, "and I would like to thank our hostess for arranging it. The entire meal was exquisite. But now the time has come to discuss the matter that brought us here this evening."

Curtius paused for a moment. Lucius noticed Marcus peeking around the doorjamb and signaled for him to enter the room. Marcus stood against the wall just inside the doorway.

"As you all know, Lucius Coelius and I have become friends during the last few months as a result of our common business enterprise. I would like to think that we have become good friends."

Curtius paused and smiled broadly at Lucius, who nodded and returned the expression.

"That is why I have invited him here tonight," continued Curtius, turning his attention to the other guests. "As my good friend and an important local official, I believe that he is uniquely suited to assist us in our efforts to obtain permission to build a new prayer house and school for the Jewish community of Antioch."

The other guests applauded as though Curtius had just completed a magnificent speech. Marcus was confused. Had he heard correctly? Was Curtius really asking Lucius to help erect a building for the Jews? Lucius looked bewildered; this was definitely not what he had expected. How would he respond? Marcus could not even guess. Fortunately, Curtius continued speaking so that no immediate response was required.

"Allow me to explain," he said, turning back to Lucius. "Jews have resided in Antioch ever since the city was founded by the Greek king Antiochus nearly three centuries ago. Over the years, the building that they have been using as their prayer house has grown rather decrepit, and it now requires substantial repairs. The community has also outgrown the building. They would like to erect a new facility that would include space for a school where they can educate their children. They have collected sufficient money for the purpose, but they have been unable to gain permission from the city council to purchase a site and begin construction. They asked me for help, and I told them that I would talk with you about possibly using your influence to assist them. I hope that I've not been too presumptuous."

Curtius stopped and peered at Lucius, who was evidently struggling to keep his composure. He began two or three times to say something, but checked himself each time. Finally he spoke.

“Curtius, I do indeed count you as my friend. But I came here this evening in the belief that you had something truly important to discuss with me.” Despite his best efforts, a peevish tone began to creep into his voice.

“I can’t imagine why you thought that I would be interested in something like this,” he went on. “I’ve had no dealings with these Jews of whom you speak, nor do I wish to do so. In fact, I don’t know that I’ve ever even met a Jew. Why should I care about their prayer house? And why should you? How did you get involved with these people?” Marcus winced; Lucius had done his best, but he had finally been unable to contain his annoyance with his partner.

“Why should I care about the Jews of Antioch, you ask? Why indeed?” replied Curtius. “Isn’t the answer obvious?” Lucius looked thoroughly puzzled as Curtius paused for a moment and stared directly into his face.

“Lucius, my friend,” he said slowly, “I am a Jew.”

CHAPTER 4

A LOOK OF shock and consternation spread across Lucius's face as he realized what his business partner was saying. Gaius wore an expression of unbridled disgust. Marcus felt too dumbfounded to move. Had he heard correctly? Could his master's partner really be a Jew? What would this mean for their business?

Marcus knew what his master thought of Jews: he despised them. Jews, he said, were like an infection in the Roman body politic—they poisoned it from the inside and undermined the health of its members. Roman officials from Julius Caesar onward had granted them special privileges on account of the peculiarity of their beliefs, yet they still held themselves aloof from Roman civic life. In particular, they refused to pay due homage to the patron deities of the city and the empire, even the divine Caesars.

Lucius could not understand why any emperor would tolerate such disrespect, though he had been told that it had something to do with the antiquity of their laws, which reputedly predated the founding of Rome. Antiquity alone, however, could not excuse them for clinging stubbornly to a perverse set of ideas that imposed all kinds of peculiar requirements upon them while giving them nothing in return. To be a Jew, Lucius had once said, was to be an unmitigated fool.

Curtius, however, was no fool. In fact, Marcus would never have guessed that he was a Jew if he had not told them. The same was true for the other guests at tonight's dinner—if they supported Curtius's project, then they, too, must be Jews. Yet there was nothing unusual about their manners or appearance. How could these observations be reconciled with the negative view of Jews that he had held for his entire life? Everyone had heard jokes that poked fun at the bizarre customs of the Jews; he had even told a few himself. Might there be different types of Jews? Were some of them more Romanized than others? Surely a whole city could not be wrong in its judgments. These Jews must be exceptions.

Suddenly Marcus became aware that Curtius had continued talking after his stunning admission. From what Marcus could gather, he had been summarizing his life story up to the time of his initial visit to Antioch. Marcus forced himself to focus on what Curtius was saying, since he could see that Lucius was still in shock and would remember none of it.

"Soon after I arrived in Antioch," Curtius was saying, "I found my way to the Jewish prayer house, where I happened to meet Demetrius Antipatros, who had stopped in to check on some minor repairs that were being done to the building. He invited me to join them the next Sabbath for prayers, and I did. That's where I met the other people whom you see before you this evening."

“So—you are all Jews?” asked Lucius in a guarded tone. His eyes scanned the room as he spoke. He reminded Marcus of a wild animal cornered by a group of hunters.

“No, not all of us,” answered Eirene. “Gaius Curtius, Demetrius Antipatros, and Tertius Sentius are Jews. Gaius Julius and Titus Cissonius are what the Jews call ‘God-fearers.’ They honor the Jewish god, attend Jewish prayer services, and follow the laws of the Jews, but they have not yet crossed over and become Jews. Despite that limitation, both men have been generous patrons of the local Jewish community.” She smiled warmly at both men, who returned her smile.

“I, on the other hand, am a proselyte, a Jew by choice and not by birth,” she went on. “My given name was Porcia, but I took the name Eirene when I became a Jew. I visited the Jewish prayer house secretly for many years while my husband was alive, but I could not do so openly because he was deeply prejudiced against Jews. When he died, however, I had no more reason to hide my devotion to the god of the Jews, so I decided to formally unite myself to his people. I lost many friends when I did so, but the Jewish community graciously embraced me as one of their own, even though I had wasted many years serving the false gods of my ancestors.”

Lucius’s face flushed at Eirene’s description of her ancestral deities as “false gods,” and Marcus could see that he was straining to remain polite. Gaius, meanwhile, stared at the mural above Eirene’s head in an obvious effort to avoid making eye contact with anyone in the room.

“This is all—very interesting,” stammered Lucius. “But I don’t see how it changes my earlier position. I appreciate the honor that you have shown me in seeking my assistance, but I think you’ve come to the wrong person. I have no interest in supporting your building project, and I doubt that I could help you if I did. I believe the time has come for me to take my leave. Marcus, go and tell the bearers to prepare my litter.” Lucius sat up on the edge of his couch in preparation for his departure, and Gaius followed suit.

“Wait, Marcus,” said Curtius before Marcus had time to leave the room. Marcus looked back at Lucius, who was staring indignantly at Curtius. Only a social superior or a close friend would dare to give orders to another man’s slave. At the moment, Curtius was neither.

“Lucius, forgive me for interfering, but I need you to hear me out,” said Curtius. “I don’t expect you to help us out of the kindness of your heart. There are benefits for you, too, in this proposal. Will you allow me to speak?”

Lucius stared at Curtius for a moment, then fell back onto his couch. “I will listen to you out of respect for our friendship. But I don’t think you’re going to change my mind.”

Curtius breathed a sigh of relief. Marcus returned to his station beside the door.

“Lucius, I believe that friends should speak frankly with one another, so I’m going to be frank with you,” began Curtius. “I know that you aspire to a higher position once you complete your term as agoranomos, and I’m guessing that you are worried that taking the side of such an unpopular group as us might end your political career. I certainly wouldn’t want to cause you any such difficulties. But if you help us to achieve our goals, we can help you to achieve yours.”

Curtius smiled knowingly. Lucius’s face remained stolid.

“As you can see,” continued Curtius, waving his hand around the room, “there are many wealthy men among the Jews of Antioch and their sympathizers, and some are also citizens. If they learn that you have aided us in this vital matter, even if you are unsuccessful, they and their clients will back you for any office that you might seek. Together, they control enough votes to make a difference in an election. Aristarchos will explain how this can work, since he knows the politics of your city better than I do.”

Curtius signaled to Aristarchos to continue the conversation.

“Thank you, Gaius,” said Aristarchos. “Lucius Coelius, everyone knows that you are a wealthy man who has done much to aid his city, and you fully deserve to be rewarded for your service. As long as you have the backing of Caristianus and his party, you can be confident of obtaining any position that you desire. But can you be sure that they will support you? Many worthy men have aspired to be aediles or duumvirs, but few ever reach that goal. If you will allow me, I’ll explain how you can be certain that you are one of them.”

“I’m listening,” replied Lucius cautiously. He still looked doubtful, but there was a spark of interest in his eyes. Gaius, too, seemed to be paying attention.

“Since you know little about the local Jewish community,” continued Aristarchos, “you might not be aware that most of us have supported the Sergius party in recent years. Several of the Sergii have done favors for our people, and one of them, Lucius Sergius Paulus, used to attend our prayer services now and then before he went off to Rome as a senator.”

Marcus could see from the surprised expression on Lucius’s face that this was news to him. If this was true, it cast Curtius’s request for assistance in a new light.

“Unfortunately,” explained Aristarchos, “the Sergii have been unable to assist us with our present need since Caristianus and his allies control all of the key offices. Caristianus is no friend of the Jews, and we have been informed that he has instructed his officials to deny our application as repayment for our support of the Sergii.”

That makes sense, thought Marcus. Even he knew that political feuds like this

one could turn nasty, with the winning factions using their influence to reward their supporters and punish their opponents. Once a faction gained the reins of power, it could be difficult to unseat them.

“We need that building,” added Aristarchos, tapping his fist on the couch to emphasize each word, “and we are willing to do whatever it takes to get it. Some of us are even willing to change sides in the next election if that will win us our permit.”

“So you’ll support Caristianus now?” asked Lucius with surprise.

“We are willing to strike a deal with him,” replied Aristarchos cagily. “That’s why we invited you here. We would like for you to be our mediator and deliver our proposal to him. He won’t even talk with us, but he has to listen to his agoranomos. If everything turns out as we hope, Caristianus will be so grateful for the role that you played in bringing us over to his side that he will beg you to name your own reward. And the equally thankful Jewish community will acknowledge your support with an inscription in a prominent location in our prayer house.”

Marcus was impressed—they had clearly thought this through. They weren’t asking Lucius to apply any pressure to whomever was denying their petition, nor even to take their side. All that they were asking was for him to deliver their proposal to Caristianus. The plan was risky, of course, as Caristianus might still decide to punish Lucius for consorting with his opponents and thus undermining his authority. But the potential gains were great as well.

All eyes turned to Lucius as Aristarchos ended his presentation. Lucius sat quietly on the edge of the couch where Curtius had arrested his departure a few minutes earlier. He seemed to be studying the mosaic in the middle of the floor.

“So what do you think?” probed Curtius at last. “Will you help us?”

“I don’t know,” answered Lucius without looking up. “I just don’t know. I’ll need to think about it. There’s too much here for me to figure out in one evening, especially with all the wine that I’ve drunk. But I understand now why you wanted me to hear you out. I’d like to apologize for my earlier rudeness; I should have trusted you as my friend and partner.”

Lucius lifted his eyes toward Curtius, who dismissed his apology with a smile and a wave of the hand. “Think nothing of it,” he added graciously.

“All of this has come as a complete surprise to me,” Lucius went on, peering around at the others while addressing his comments to Curtius. “I thought that you had invited me here to discuss some new idea for our business operations. I never suspected that it was anything like this.” His voice trailed off.

“I understand,” responded Curtius in a sympathetic tone. “I thought about telling you more in advance, but I was afraid that you might not come. I’m sorry if I misled you.”

Curtius stretched out his hand and Lucius took it. Then Lucius turned to face Marcus.

“Marcus, I hope you’ve gotten all of this,” he said rather shakily, “because you know I’ll need your help tomorrow to remember it.” Lucius grinned and the others chuckled. “Now go and get my litter ready. It’s time to go home.”

“WELL, Gaius, what did you think of our little dinner party last evening?” asked Lucius as the last of his clients left the reception room the next morning. Marcus already knew what Gaius thought, as he had fulminated like a madman from the moment they left Eirene’s house until Lucius silenced him with the promise that they would discuss it the next day. The expression on Gaius’s face as he turned to face his father showed that he was primed for battle.

“You’re not thinking of going along with that ridiculous plan, are you?” Gaius began.

“I’m thinking about it,” replied Lucius calmly. “What do you think I should do?”

“You can’t be serious!” Gaius ejaculated. “It’s bad enough that you’ve got one Jew’s prick up your ass; why would you invite a whole pack of them to join in?”

Marcus winced, but Lucius kept his poise, giving his son a thin, condescending smile. “Is that what you call a well-reasoned argument?” he asked. “It sounds to me like you should have paid more attention during your rhetoric lessons.”

“Who needs arguments?” stammered Gaius. “Isn’t the answer plain? You get tied up with Jews, you end up in the sewer with them. It’s that simple.”

“Is it really?” probed Lucius. “Is there nothing to be gained from such an alliance? Would you say that a man should never make common cause with his enemies?”

“What do you mean?” asked Gaius.

“I mean, is it wrong for a man to form temporary alliances with people whom he dislikes or even despises in order to achieve his own ends?” replied Lucius. “What do you think?”

“I guess there are situations where such a course might be warranted,” answered Gaius. “But I don’t see how that applies in this case.”

“Try to look at it dispassionately,” suggested Lucius. “No one is asking me to love the Jews, or even to like them, much less to endorse their superstitions or honor their god. All they want is to make a deal with me. Each of us will get something that he values—a quid pro quo. Does the mere fact that the deal involves Jews mean that I should reject it without deliberation?”

“But Jews undermine the unity of the city,” Gaius protested. “They refuse to honor our gods, they avoid the games and other public spectacles, and worst of all, they reject the divinity of the emperor. Their loyalty is to their own people and homeland, not to Antioch or even to Rome. How can you, a civic official, possibly think about doing something that would give them more influence in our city?”

“Ah, now you’re moving onto firmer ground,” responded Lucius with an encouraging smile. “That’s more like it; use your reason, not just your emotions. The question that you’ve raised is a valid one: might my intervention on behalf of the Jews cause harm to our city? I’ve been wondering about that myself. I can’t see any real danger in allowing them to build a new prayer house; Caristianus is just being obstinate on that point. They have a building already, so all they would be doing is trading it for a new one.”

“I’m less clear,” he went on before Gaius could interrupt, “about the potential consequences of bringing them over to Caristianus’s side.” His expression turned suddenly thoughtful. “Right now the Jews’ influence is minimal because the Sergii are out of power. But what would happen if they were to become part of the ruling coalition? Would they insist on having some of their people placed in office? Might they threaten to bolt to another faction—perhaps that of Baebius—if they didn’t get their own way? In short, how would a change in the political loyalties of the Jews affect the balance of power among the principal families of the city? That’s a weighty question, and not one to be answered lightly.”

Marcus marveled at the way Lucius was able to pick his way through the thicket of issues that lay behind the apparently simple request that Curtius had presented to him the prior evening. This skill in sorting through the practical implications of a decision was what had enabled him to be so successful in his business affairs and indirectly led to his appointment as agoranomos. Such displays were becoming less common as Lucius grew older, but these observations showed that he still had the mental acuity and tenacity to wrestle a difficult problem to the ground. He hoped that Gaius was paying attention; he could learn much from his father.

“There’s another problem that you haven’t mentioned yet,” said Gaius, apparently warming to his father’s challenge to make better use of his rhetorical skills. “What if you fail? What if Caristianus not only refuses your request but also decides to ostracize you? What then? You’re not the only one who would be affected if something like that were to occur; my own future could be ruined, and Helena and Prisca might suffer also. Why take such a risk for a bunch of Jews?”

“You make a good point,” observed Lucius, “and I would have rejected Curtius’s request on the spot if I thought that there was a serious chance of something like that occurring. But the fact that Caristianus made me agoranomos shows that he thinks highly of me, and I’d be offering him a deal that would enhance his power

and prestige, not detract from it. It's hard for me to see how simply presenting Curtius's proposal would turn him against me. He's an arrogant bastard, to be sure, but I don't believe he's vindictive—at least not toward his friends.”

“And what if I should succeed?” Lucius continued. “Both of us would be set for life. I have no illusions that Caristianus would put me forward as a candidate for duumvir; there are too many other men ahead of me. But perhaps I could become an aedile. And if not me, then you, once you are old enough and mature enough to remind him of the debt that he—or his son—owes us.”

Lucius paused and stared thoughtfully at Gaius.

“You and I haven't always gotten along as well as we might,” said Lucius. “But I hope you understand that ensuring your future success is my principal goal in life. You are my only son; the future of the Coelius family rests with you. As I've labored over the years to enhance our family's wealth and honor, I've had only one purpose in view: to lay the groundwork for your future advancement. One day, with the gods' help, you will be one of the leading citizens of this city—if you don't allow yourself to get sidetracked along the way. I might not live to see it, but I mean to do all that I can to bring it about. You can be assured that I would never do anything that I thought would harm your prospects for success.”

Marcus was surprised to see Gaius's eyes glistening with tears. Suddenly Hermas barged into the room.

“Sir, you asked me to let you know when Gnaeus Neratius Postumus arrived,” announced the butler. “He's here now. Are you ready to receive him?”

“Ah, thank you, Hermas,” replied Lucius, his eyes still fixed on his son. Gaius blinked several times, then turned to peer at a small woodland painting that stood in the middle of the faux architectural pattern that decorated the wall nearest him. “Tell him that I'll be with him in a moment. I'll send Marcus out to get him when I'm ready.”

Hermas nodded and left the room. “I don't know if you remember old Postumus,” said Lucius to his son, who slowly turned around to face him. “He's only a client, but he seems to know everything that goes on in this city, and he has an uncanny awareness of local political currents. He's a good man for you to know. I thought that I would solicit his thoughts regarding the matters that we've been discussing just now. I sent him a message earlier today inviting him to stop by and visit me around this time if he were free. I'm eager to hear what he has to say. Will you stay and help me sort it all out? I'd truly value your opinion.”

Gaius wiped his eyes with his hands and nodded his agreement.

“Well, then, that's settled,” announced Lucius, slapping his desk with both hands as he rose to his feet. “But before we go any further, I need to visit the toilet. My stomach held up well last night, but I'm paying for it this morning; my intes-

tines have been rumbling for the last hour and they're beginning to cramp. Gods, curse this illness! Marcus, pour me a cup of that blackberry tea. I'll be back in a moment and we can get started."

Two weeks later, Marcus was seated in one of the upper rows of the theater in the lower part of the city awaiting the arrival of the procession that would perform the sacred rites of Fors Fortuna, one of the many names by which the divine Lady Fortune was worshipped. Every seat was filled—all five thousand of them—despite the blazing midsummer sun.

Farmers and villagers always flocked to the city on festival days, but the day of Fors Fortuna drew more of them than usual because it doubled as a celebration of the early harvest. The rustics were easy to spot: they spoke an odd dialect—a mixture of Greek and Phrygian—and wore non-Roman clothing. Many had come to town a day or two earlier to peddle their wares. The upper market was closed today due to the festivities, but the lower market had remained open for business until midday, when the sacred procession had begun to gather there.

"What do you think is holding them up?" queried Hermas, as eager as anyone for the festivities to commence. "Maybe they ran into bad luck on the way here. Even the goddess of fortune can't be lucky all the time!"

Hermas snickered at his own joke. Marcus stuck his thumb between his closed fingers and waved his fist in a fig sign to avert any evil spirits that might have been attracted by his friend's irreverent words. He, too, was surprised that the procession was so late, but he knew better than to test the goddess's favor by laughing at a jest made at her expense.

The opening round of singers, dancers, and poets had finished their performances and the crowd was growing restive in anticipation of the main event. Some hooted their displeasure aloud, while others paced the aisles conversing with friends and leering obscenely at pretty girls and boys. Marcus was not surprised by their ill-mannered behavior; people were always rowdy on Fortune's day. Drinking—or more accurately, getting drunk—was a key element of the festival, whether to celebrate the good fortune that people had enjoyed over the last year or to forget the evils that had befallen them. From what Marcus could see, most of the people sitting around him had already imbibed liberally from the wine jar before coming to the theater. The serious drinking, however, would commence later, when the final sacrifices had been presented and the public table was open for all to share.

As more time passed and the procession still did not arrive, Marcus began to

wonder if it might have been delayed on account of his master. Lucius had complained about not sleeping well last night, and he had said something about having cramps in his stomach as he left for the festival. Fortunately, Marcus had ordered a litter ahead of time to carry him down to the lower market where the officiants were gathering, so he did not have to walk down the hill in pain. But Marcus could easily imagine how Lucius's abdominal problems might have held up the proceedings. He prayed that this was not the case, as it would have been an ill omen on a day when his master's statue of Lady Fortune was to be unveiled.

Thinking about his master's troubles reminded him of that ticklish matter concerning the Jews. That, at least, was something that they would not have to worry about today. After careful consideration, Lucius had decided to accept his friend Postumus's advice and wait until the festival was over to present the Jews' proposal to Caristianus. If he had acted earlier and the interview had gone badly, the tension between the two men might have marred the honors that Lucius would enjoy today as one of the principal sponsors of the festival. As it was, Caristianus would be happy to see a member of his party being feted in this way.

"Guess how many beans I got in my hand," barked a red-eyed young man with greasy hair and a dirty tunic who thrust a closed fist toward Marcus from the adjoining aisle. Marcus was momentarily disoriented by this unwelcome disruption of his thoughts.

"I'm not interested," replied Marcus, barely hiding his annoyance. "I don't have any money with me."

"Guess!" the boy persisted, ignoring Marcus's effort to get rid of him. "It don't cost nothin' the first try!"

"Get your filthy hands out of my face or I'll break them!" shouted Marcus as he shoved the boy's arm away from him. The boy glared at Marcus for a moment and waved his fist as if he might strike him, then appeared to think better of it. He turned instead to try his luck with a woman across the aisle.

Gambling of every sort was popular at the festival of Fors Fortuna, since most people believed that the goddess was especially generous in dispensing luck on her feast day. Marcus had wondered since childhood how that could be, since it seemed to him that there was at least one loser for every winner in games of chance. But if it gave people pleasure, he saw nothing against it, though he rarely wasted his own money on the practice. As a slave, his only source of income was the occasional coin that his master or one of his clients gave him as a reward for his services, and he jealously guarded every last quadran. He had learned long ago that he did not have to risk his own money to enjoy the thrill of the games; it was enough to watch other fools gamble away their savings. In fact, he was tempted to climb up now and see what was causing the bursts of shouting that reached his ears now and then from the gallery above him, where he guessed that people were

throwing dice or knucklebones. But he was afraid of losing his seat, and he did not want to risk that possibility in view of his master's special role in the ceremony.

Suddenly a peal of trumpets sounded from the left side of the stage. A moment later, the first members of the procession began filing into the semi-circular orchestra pit in front of the stage. The column was led by a small cortege of priests and a bevy of aristocrats, including Lucius, all wearing olive wreaths in their hair. Behind them came an assortment of musicians—mostly horns and percussion—playing a lively tune, accompanied by a chorus of singers and a pack of dancers who leapt and cavorted to the rhythm of the music. Some of the people in the upper rows caught the beat and began stomping and clapping in time with the music, eliciting looks of disgust from the more sober aristocrats in the lower seats.

Behind the musicians came four slaves leading two huge oxen whose backs were covered by multicolored blankets of woven flowers that reached nearly to the ground. Thick garlands hung down from their brightly gilded horns. Flowers were one of the primary symbols of the festival of Fors Fortuna, and the local gardens had been especially fruitful this year. The crowd erupted in applause at the sight. Immediately after the oxen came another group of slaves carrying trays loaded with fresh fruits and vegetables from the market. Their presence signified the prosperity that the city was enjoying this season at the hands of Lady Fortune. More cheers hailed their arrival.

The end of the procession was marked by the appearance of a score of priestly servants who would be assisting with the day's rites. Some carried knives and other tools that signaled their role in the proceedings. They climbed the steps to the stage and disappeared behind the ornate carved façade that served as the backdrop for performances in the theater.

By this time the priests and aristocrats had taken their seats in the ornate stone chairs that lined the front row of the theater. Marcus could imagine how proud his master must have felt as he lowered himself onto his seat of honor. Never before had he been invited to occupy one of these chairs, which were normally reserved for members of the city council and the priests of Augustus. But his statue of Lady Fortune was being dedicated today, and he had also donated heavily toward the cost of the many animals that would be sacrificed during the festivities. As agoranomos, he would have had a role in the ceremony anyway since the statue was being erected in the marketplace and thus fell under his purview. But that alone was not enough to gain him a seat of honor in the theater. Marcus felt truly happy for his master.

Soon the orchestra was clear except for the dancers, who cavorted over the tiles for a while longer before retiring to the perimeter to join the musicians and singers. Suddenly the music ceased except for a single flute whose plaintive tune was barely audible over the voices of the crowd. The talking began to abate as three

pairs of slaves emerged from the doorways in the stage façade bearing portable altars. One was placed in the center of the stage and one on either side.

Though the day belonged to Lady Fortune, custom dictated that she share her honors with Jupiter, who bore ultimate responsibility for directing the course of the universe despite delegating much of his everyday work to Lady Fortune or the Fates. Accordingly, the central altar had been set up beneath the statues of Jupiter, Augustus, and the genius, or protective spirit, of the city, which occupied the center of the façade. The other two altars were stationed on either side in front of the statues of Lady Fortune and Tyche, her Greek counterpart. The inclusion of an image of Tyche on the façade reflected the mixed population of the city, which had been thoroughly Greek (and Phrygian) before the arrival of the Romans. The Roman veterans whom Augustus had settled here had kept the statue of Tyche when they rebuilt the earlier Greek theater along Roman lines so as to avoid offending such a powerful goddess.

Portable altars such as these were not normally used for blood sacrifices; those would take place later at the temple of Augustus. These altars were designed for presenting gifts of food and incense to the gods. The latter required fire, which was soon kindled by another group of slaves who appeared on the stage bearing striking stones. Meanwhile the slaves who had carried the trays of fruits and vegetables from the market climbed the stage and spread their produce around the altars. From where Marcus sat, the offerings resembled the colorful tiles of a mosaic more than the firstfruits of the harvest.

As the final bearer stepped down from the stage, two augurs, identifiable by their curved staffs, emerged from the central doorway and began pacing slowly around the edge of the stage, one in each direction, reciting formulae that defined the area as sacred to the gods. When they were finished, three priests stepped out onto the stage and stood behind the three altars. Each was accompanied by two slave assistants who bore the items that he would need for the ritual. The theater was silent except for the low, melodic tone of the flute player.

At the middle altar stood the flamen dialis, the high priest of Jupiter, whose position gave him priority over all other priests in the city. Like other priests, he was an aristocrat, though not a member of Lucius's social circle. The flamen took a nugget of incense from a box held by one of the slaves and dropped it gingerly onto the simmering coals. As smoke began to rise from the first nugget, he added more until he had elicited a steady gray ribbon that wafted on the breeze as it ascended to the heavens.

When this was done, he nodded to the other slave, who unrolled a small scroll and held it up for him to see. The priest turned his back to the crowd and raised both hands toward the statue of Jupiter, then read in somber tones a formal prayer to Jupiter Optimus Maximus—"Jupiter the best and greatest."

Jupiter Optimus Maximus, God Almighty, father of the gods, owner of a thousand virtues, bestower of wealth, good hopes, and bounty, we gladly give you thanks and duly offer praise to you under whatever name your dignity may be addressed. From your high and lofty throne, you condescend to look with favor upon the race of men and receive the gifts that they bring to your altar. May good fortune attend the Roman people and the people of this city. May you keep them safe; may you grant them health and peace; may they prosper at your hands, they and all of their families. May you be favorable and propitious toward them in all things. May you accept their offerings and be honored by the sacrifices that they present to you this day.

When the prayer was over, a group of cithara players began plucking a tune on their strings. The flute player deftly changed his melody to coincide with their strains. Other flutists soon joined in. The members of the chorus took a few steps toward the stage, then lifted their voices in a hymn of praise to the father of the gods. As they sang, the priest poured an offering of wine onto the coals, causing white steam to rise from the altar. Then he lifted a selection of fruits and vegetables toward the image of the god, offering more prayers as he did so.

When the flamen had completed his duties, he left the stage and the priest of Tyche began a similar round of activities. Marcus could only make out bits and pieces of his prayer, as he was an old man who had trouble projecting his voice.

Tyche, daughter of Zeus, queen of heaven, mighty in strength, beginning and end, you sit in wisdom's seat and give honor to mortal deeds... endless praise is yours... gracious and propitious... hear our prayer... may we prosper by your aid, may we receive more good than evil... what the scale of your balance gives is the best... accept our offerings, you most excellent of gods.

Once again the prayer was followed by a hymn of praise that celebrated the goddess's attributes and begged her to be favorable toward her faithful worshipers. When that was done, the lead passed to the priest of Lady Fortune. Marcus knew him, as he had visited his master a few days earlier to review the procedures that would be used in the dedication of his statue to the goddess. The priest, a son-in-law of Caristianus named Publius Vetilius, was not much older than Marcus— young for such an important appointment. His prayers and offerings followed the same pattern as those made to Jupiter and Tyche.

Fors Fortuna, all-powerful goddess, swift of pace, bold of spirit, guardian and support of the Roman people, we reverence you today by all of your names. Riches, power, fame, and honor are yours to bestow as you will. We give you thanks for the fruitfulness of our fields, the peace of our city, and the wisdom of our leaders. We have not squandered your blessings; we will manage your gifts with all righteousness and prudence. May you guide our affairs with a steady rudder; may you grant a good lot when we call to you for wisdom. May your favor continue to rest upon us; may you be favorable and propitious to us in all things. May you accept our offerings and be honored by the sacrifices that we offer to you on this your festival day.

As the ceremony wound down, Marcus rose from his seat and began moving toward the exit. He had promised his master that he would meet him outside the theater with a skin of blackberry tea to settle his stomach prior to the dedication ceremony. He did not want to risk having an embarrassing incident with so many eyes watching him, especially not when it might cause offense to the goddess.

By the time he reached the exit tunnel, however, it was clogged with people. He had overlooked the possibility that others might also decide to leave early in order to snag a viewing spot in the temple plaza for the next round of activities. He stared at the throng for a few moments, then began pushing and shoving in an effort to open a path through the crowd. The wall of bodies refused to budge. He was too short to see what was hindering their progress, and when he asked a man standing near him, he claimed ignorance as well.

A feeling of panic began to well up in his stomach. What if the procession left the theater while he was stuck in this corridor? What would happen to his master if he failed to receive his medicine? The possibilities were too dreadful to imagine.

“Help me, Lady Fortune,” he prayed beneath his breath, “for the sake of my master, Lucius Coelius Felix, who is dedicating a statue to you today. He has to get this medicine that I’m carrying. Show me a way through this crowd.”

Suddenly he was struck with an idea. Turning to a moderately well-dressed man beside him, he introduced himself and whispered his plan. The man screwed up his face momentarily, then shook his head. Marcus pulled his purse from his tunic and offered him a few coins. The man quickly nodded his assent.

“Make way!” announced Marcus to the crowd ahead of him. “Make way for a nobleman of Antioch!”

“Make way! Make way!” echoed his companion.

Everyone within earshot turned to see which aristocrat might be foolishly attempting to use this upper exit. A few people instinctively shoved their neighbors aside to open a path for Marcus and his companion.

"Make way!" repeated the two men as they pushed slowly through the mob. The line ahead of them began to move at last, but it stopped again before Marcus was able to see daylight.

"Make way for a nobleman of Antioch!" Marcus called again. This time only a handful of people grudgingly moved aside. Several gave him icy stares.

"So where's this noble master o' yours?" sneered a disheveled man who stood directly in his path. "I don't see 'im nowhere." He made a pretense of peering here and there over Marcus's shoulder, then grinned. "I think you musta lost 'im. Best you go back and find 'im." Several bystanders chuckled.

Marcus's face flushed with anger and embarrassment. He could probably have bested the man in a fair fight, but he didn't want to tangle with him unless he had to.

"Make way, you fool," replied Marcus. "My master is a member of the procession, and I have to reach him to give him some medicine. He's the one who paid for today's sacrifices. He won't be happy if you hold me up."

"Call me a fool, will ya?" the man answered menacingly. "Who's the bigger fool—a slave that spins yarns about aristocratic masters or a free man who steps aside for 'im in a line that ain't movin'?"

Suddenly the crowd lurched forward and Marcus was thrown into the man's chest. He pulled away and tried to push past him, but the man seized his shoulder. Before he knew what was happening, a fist had smashed into his face. He reeled as a bolt of pain brought tears to his eyes and dropped him to his knees. He lowered his head to the pavement and buried his face in his hands. People bumped and shoved him as they surged toward the newly opened doorway, but Marcus hardly noticed; he felt nothing but the pain.

Soon the pangs subsided enough for him to gather his thoughts. Pulling himself to his feet, he saw that his hands were streaked with blood. His nose was running, so he wiped his sleeve across his face only to find that it, too, was now covered with blood. Looking down, he saw that the front of his tunic was spattered with patches of red and brown. He was a mess.

He glanced around for something that he could use to staunch his nosebleed, but found nothing, so he reached down and tore a strip from the edge of his tunic and held it to his nose. As he did, his hand bumped against the skin of tea that hung at his side. He was relieved to find that it was still intact. With one hand on the skin and another over his nose, he rejoined the surging throng. There was no time to clean up; he had to find his master.

CHAPTER 5

BY THE TIME Marcus reached the street, the procession had left the theater and turned onto the road that led uphill to the plaza where the second phase of the day's festivities would take place. Both sides of the street were clogged with spectators. After his experience in the theater, Marcus knew better than to try and force his way through the mob. But what else could he do?

He stood perplexed for several moments until a potential solution came to mind. One of his master's clients lived directly on the parade route. He had only been inside the house a couple of times, but he recalled that it stood on a corner and had a small garden in the back. If he could reach the street that ran alongside the house, he might be able to climb the garden wall and reach the procession through the house. It was risky—what if someone mistook him for a burglar taking advantage of the festivities to break in and steal? He could explain, of course, but there was no telling whether they would believe him, and they might delay him long enough to make him miss the procession. Still, he had to chance it.

With a brief prayer to Lady Fortune for assistance, he pushed against the flow of the crowd until he reached the street that ran behind the theater. The road was virtually empty in the direction that he was going, since everyone was at the other end watching the parade. Dropping his nose rag, he ran through a series of back streets until he came to the road that ran beside the house that he had targeted. The end of the street was clogged with people waiting for the procession, but there was enough room at the back of the crowd for him to reach the garden wall.

But how was he to get over it? The wall was at least eight feet tall and plastered to a smooth finish that left no evident spots for him to gain a foothold. He was too short to reach the top of the wall by jumping, and he saw nothing nearby that he could use as a stepladder. He felt himself beginning to panic. *Don't give up*, he told himself. *There has to be a way to do this.*

Glancing around desperately for solutions, he noticed a knot of young men kneeling at the back of the crowd playing a game of knucklebones. He rushed over to them and explained his problem, offering a liberal payment to anyone who would boost him over the wall. Two of them quickly volunteered to help. Soon he was clambering over the wall into the garden.

His arrival did not go unnoticed. As he had feared, a large dog came bounding toward him as soon as his feet hit the ground. Marcus picked up a stick and fended him off until a burly slave heard the noise and came running from the house carrying a small club.

Marcus explained in a few words who he was and what he was doing there. The

man was skeptical at first, but Marcus knew enough about his master to persuade him that he was not a common thief. He also promised him a rich reward if he would help him to reach his master in time. At last the man acceded and led him through the house and out the front door.

Marcus was relieved to see that the procession had not yet reached the house. A mob stood in front of the doorway, but the slave who had accompanied him called the porter and together they cleared a way through the throng and deposited Marcus at the front of the crowd directly on the parade route. Marcus gave them his entire bag of coins and turned to await his master.

Soon the lead party was close enough for Marcus to see where his master stood in the ranks. As the party drew alongside him, he rushed to Lucius's side and handed him the skin of blackberry tea.

"Where have you been?" shouted Lucius angrily. "And why are you covered in blood?"

"I'll explain later," replied Marcus over the din. Between the music and the crowds, he knew that it would be fruitless to try and say more now.

Lucius glared at him for a moment, then downed the liquid as Marcus kept pace with him in the line. When he was done, he returned the empty skin. Marcus nodded deferentially, then stepped out of the procession and returned to the side of the road. Soon his master was out of sight.

Marcus breathed a sigh of relief. It had been difficult, but he had done his job. If Lady Fortune was truly with his master on this special day, the medicine would protect him from any mishaps until the ceremony was over.

But what should he do now? His original plan had been to deliver the tea to his master at the theater and then run ahead to the plaza and find a good place from which to view the festivities. He was especially eager to hear the crowds acclaiming his master when the inscription on his magnificent statue of Lady Fortune was read aloud and the image was formally dedicated to the goddess. But it was too late for that now; the road ahead was blocked by the procession, and all of the decent viewing spots would be taken by now.

He paused and considered his options. He could wait until the procession had passed and then join the mob that would spill into the roadway and follow it uphill to the plaza. But the crowd would be so dense by that time that he would probably end up standing in the street with no view of the festivities and no way out. He could circle around to the uphill side of the plaza and find a place at the back of the crowd, but from there all that he would see was the backs of the spectators. Or he could give up and go home until the time came for the sacrificial meat and wine to be distributed.

Glancing down at his blood-stained tunic, he realized that he ought to go home

first in any case and put on some clean clothes before mingling with the other festival-goers. From there he could walk down to the plaza and look for a place from which he could see what was going on.

Charting a course through the backstreets where he could avoid the procession, he soon found himself at the door of his master's house. Silvius, the old porter, had been left at home to watch over the house, but everyone else was at the plaza witnessing their master's triumph. Marcus wiped the blood from his face and hands and put on a fresh tunic, then stopped by the kitchen for a cup of wine to slake his thirst. He downed it greedily, then poured a second cup. While he was there, he gathered up a plate of olives and a hunk of bread and carried them out to the garden to rest for a few moments before plunging again into the mob.

Directly in front of him under the colonnade stood a padded couch that had apparently been left there after his master had eaten his dinner the previous evening. Marcus hesitated for a moment, then sat down on the couch. He knew that this was inappropriate conduct for a slave, but the house was empty and no one would ever know.

Setting his plate down on the table beside the couch, he took a few bites and stared out at the garden, where flowers of every variety and hue vied for his attention. Rarely did he have a moment like this when he could pause and enjoy the beauty that surrounded him every day in his master's courtyard. Now that he had the opportunity, he wanted to enjoy it.

Soon he found himself imagining that he himself was an aristocrat and that this was his garden. All that was needed to complete the picture was for him to lower himself into a reclining position like a free man. He hesitated to take such liberties in his master's absence, but the temptation was too great to resist. Soon his eyes were drooping in the warm June air. Perhaps a brief nap before he went out...

SOME time later he was startled awake by a sudden din from the atrium. It took a few moments for him to realize where he was. He jumped to his feet just as the steward Trophimus walked through the doorway.

"What are you doing here?" the man queried, looking confused. "I thought you were at the plaza attending the ceremony."

"I... I must have fallen asleep," stuttered Marcus. He felt disoriented. Had Trophimus returned home early or had he missed his master's hour of glory?

Marcus gave him a brief account of what had happened that morning up to the time when he had apparently fallen asleep, leaving out the part about reclining on his master's couch.

“That’s a shame,” consoled the steward. “You missed all the excitement. But maybe it’s for the best, since you didn’t have to witness the master’s”—he hesitated for a moment as if searching for the right word. “The master’s disgrace,” he concluded, lowering his eyes.

“Disgrace?” ejaculated Marcus. “What do you mean, ‘disgrace’? This was supposed to be his day of honor, the pinnacle of his career! What could possibly have gone wrong?”

Several of the other slaves had gathered around them by this time.

“It was those accursed oxen,” shouted one. “Whoever chose them was a total ass.”

“No, it was the birds,” argued another. “Didn’t you see how the augurs reacted? They were ready to call off the ceremony even before the oxen started bellowing.”

“I think it was all a plot to make him look bad,” opined a third. “You know there’s lots o’ them snooty aristocrats that didn’t want him to get that position. Some jealous bastard thought that this would be a good way to bring him down.”

“What happened?” interjected Marcus, desperate to hear the news. “I fell asleep and missed it all. Trophimus was about to tell me about it when the rest of you showed up.”

“And I’ll do just that,” replied Trophimus, turning to face the others, “as soon as these lazy slaves go about their business. I know it’s supposed to be a holiday, but in view of the circumstances, the master could return at any moment, and we need to have the house ready before he comes.”

The others glared at him briefly, then scurried away.

“I thought it best to hurry home and remove all signs of celebration,” explained Trophimus, “so as not to trouble the master. He won’t be in any mood to celebrate Lady Fortune after today’s events.”

“So tell me about it,” pressed Marcus, barely controlling his irritation at the delay.

“I saw it all,” began Trophimus. “A few of the younger boys had climbed up on the roof of one of the shops on our side of the plaza early in the morning, and one of them came back and told me that they were holding a seat for me, so I had a good view of the proceedings. To make a long story short, everything that could have gone wrong did so.” A look of consternation filled his face.

“First,” he continued, “the two oxen that were supposed to be sacrificed to Lady Fortune began moaning as if they were in pain. The priest paused in his prayers while a couple of augurs went over to inspect the animals. While they were doing this, a flock of crows that had been resting on the roof above them rose up into the air as if something had startled them. Suddenly the augurs who were with the oxen started dancing around and pawing at their togas like this.” The steward swiped frantically at his arms and shoulders.

“Apparently the birds must have shitted on them as they flew off,” he went on. “People around me began laughing and joking over the fact that something like this had happened to the augurs, whose job is to read omens from the flight of birds. Some of it must have hit the statue also, since a couple of the augurs kept pointing in that direction as if something was wrong. The rest of the augurs peered up after the birds like they were trying to make sense of the omen. Then the chief augur called the presiding priest over to join them. After a short conversation he announced that the dedication of the statue was being postponed due to ill omens. The cover is still on the statue.”

Ill omens? On Lady Fortune’s festival day? Marcus was too stunned to speak. He had imagined the scene for weeks—the curtain that hid the statue from view would be removed with a flourish and the priest would read aloud the words that had been carved into its base: “To the goddess Fortuna. Lucius Coelius Felix, agoranomos, made this for the people of Antioch.” The crowd would roar in approval. His master would wave and grin in acknowledgment of their applause until the priest finally called the throng to order so that he could complete the ceremony. Lucius would be acclaimed as one of the chief citizens of the city, and the unparalleled beauty and prominent location of the statue would ensure that he was remembered as a man of distinction for generations to come.

Could all of that possibly be gone? Marcus felt an ache in the pit of his stomach. “How did the master respond?” he asked at last.

“I was too far away to see his face,” answered Trophimus. “The procession reformed after a bit and began marching slowly up toward the temple of Augustus, where I assume they meant to go ahead with the sacrifices. But I didn’t see the master among them, so I gathered up the other members of the household who were on the roof with me and hurried them all back here in case he might have dropped out of the procession and was on his way home. If he doesn’t show up in a while, I’ll let them go back out and enjoy the festivities. But I didn’t want him to return home to an empty house.”

“That was thoughtful of you,” declared Marcus. “I don’t know if I would have thought of that. Once again I see why the master has so much faith in you to manage his household.”

Trophimus gave him a bittersweet smile. “If I’m right about what happened, he’s going to need all of us on his side in the days to come.”

LUCIUS spent the next two days in his room. He called Marcus in to tell him to send away all of his clients until further notice, but after that Marcus had no further contact with him until the third day, when he announced that he meant to go

out to his farm for a few days.

Trophimus oversaw the packing process while Marcus went down to the stables to ensure that his master's wagon would be ready when he required it. Lucius never traveled any farther than his farm, but he kept a carriage at the local stable so that he could make the trip whenever he liked. It was one of his few indulgences.

Marcus had been surprised to learn that his master intended to take Selena with him to the farm and that she was to ride in the carriage with him. There was ample room for the two of them, but Marcus had never heard of a slave being invited to travel in this way. On the rare occasion that Marcus himself had visited the farm, he had ridden on top of the carriage or been ferried there in the back of an ox-cart. Marcus wondered what was going on between the two of them, but it was not his place to question his master's behavior.

Even more disconcerting was the fact that he left no instructions for Marcus or any of the other slaves about what to do in his absence—he just walked down to the stables with Selena when the wagon was ready and left. Fortunately, the household could operate without him. Trophimus already managed most of the other slaves' daily activities even when his master was at home, and Marcus was equally capable of overseeing his businesses. Lucius himself had disposed of his clients—as he was leaving, he ordered Silvius to tell anyone who wanted to see him that he was going away for a few days and would notify them when he returned. He had already told Marcus to give a similar message to the slaves in the agoranomos's office.

Of course, Gaius should have taken over as head of the family and met with Lucius's clients while he was away, but he had gradually slipped back into his old ways in the last few weeks and only appeared sporadically at his father's greeting sessions. It was just as Marcus had anticipated—Lucius could be forceful with his clients when necessary, but he had always found it difficult to enforce his will on his children. His daughters had always known that they could get what they wanted if they kept after him long enough, and Gaius had clearly learned from their example. He would do as much as his father required of him and nothing more. Marcus doubted if he would even see him while his father was away. He certainly would not lament the loss.

Ten days passed with no word from Lucius. On the tenth day, the porter brought Marcus a letter that had been given to him by one of Caristianus's slaves. He told Marcus that the slave had come twice before asking to speak to Lucius, but he had sent him away both times. Marcus felt annoyed that he had not been told about the messenger until now, but he kept his annoyance to himself, as it was unlikely that a slave of Caristianus would have entrusted a message to anyone but Lucius himself. He placed the letter on his master's desk.

Two days later, Lucius returned. It was morning, and Marcus was sitting in

his master's office working as usual. Suddenly he heard Lucius's voice echoing through the atrium.

"Trophimus! Where are you?" he called. "Trophimus! Oh, there you are. Get someone to run down to the stable and bring up my baggage. It's good to see you."

From the tone of his voice, Lucius appeared to be in a good mood. Marcus was relieved to hear it; he had been worrying about what he would do if his master was still angry or upset when he met him for the first time after the incident in the plaza. Marcus rose and began walking toward the atrium, but Lucius entered the room before he reached the doorway.

"Well, Marcus," he said before Marcus had a chance to speak. "I expected that I would find you here. I hope that everything went well in my absence."

"Greetings, master," answered Marcus. "We all rejoice at your return. I prayed each morning for the gods and the ancestors to watch over you in your absence."

"Your prayers were evidently effective," replied Lucius with a smile. "The gods have indeed refreshed my spirit while I was away, and those medicines that you packed for me were helpful as well. There's nothing like a few days in the country to clear all of the troubles of city life out of a man's head. It was so pleasant that I actually thought about moving there permanently and handing the management of my affairs over to Gaius. Can you believe that? But it's still too early; you and I both know what would happen if I were to try something like that now."

Lucius stared at him for a moment as if expecting a response, but Marcus was unsure what to say. He certainly wasn't going to express his true opinion of Gaius.

"I pray that the gods will make him as capable a manager as you, sir," he answered at last. He hoped that this would be enough to put the subject behind them. Lucius appeared to be satisfied, as he smiled and then leaned over his desk to see what was on it. Seeing the letter that Marcus had placed there, he picked it up and studied the seal.

"This letter is from Caristianus," he observed. "When did it arrive?"

"Two days ago," answered Marcus. "He sent messengers to you twice, and when you remained away from home, he sent this letter."

"It must be important, then," replied Lucius. "Let's see what he has to say." Lucius opened the letter and began to read aloud.

Gaius Caristianus Fronto to Lucius Coelius Felix, greetings. I pray that your visit to your farm was pleasant and that mother Ceres is blessing your fields with abundance. I need to speak to you soon about an urgent matter. Send me a messenger when you return home and tell me when you would be available for a meeting. Do not come until I send for you, since I will be inviting others also. Do not delay. Farewell.

“He certainly makes it sound important, doesn’t he?” observed Lucius. “Of course, he thinks anything is important if it involves him; if it doesn’t, it can always be postponed. Still, I’d better take it seriously. Go and inform him that I can meet with him this afternoon or any time tomorrow. My clients don’t know that I’ve come home, and there’s no harm in waiting another day to notify them. I’d actually enjoy a day of peace and quiet. Of course, I’ll probably run into some of them at the baths this afternoon, but that can’t be helped.”

“Yes, sir, I’ll go right now,” replied Marcus, laying aside his work. He couldn’t imagine what could be so urgent, but he was happy to see that his master was in a good frame of mind to handle it.

THE next morning saw Lucius and Marcus trudging slowly up the street to the home of Lucius’s friend and patron Caristianus. As usual, Lucius had wanted Marcus to come with him to take notes on what was said and to answer any questions that might arise about the running of the agoranomos’s office. Marcus noticed that his master seemed nervous, and he wondered if he had some kind of foreboding about the purpose of their visit. If he did, he wasn’t telling Marcus.

Upon reaching the house, they were ushered immediately into Caristianus’s sumptuous office. Caristianus was always a stickler for formalities, but the scene in his office today reminded Marcus of a courtroom. Caristianus and another man whom Marcus knew to be Gaius Antonius Niger, a member of Caristianus’s inner circle, sat behind an ornate marble table facing the door. Three other men sat in chairs on either side of them. No seat had been provided for Lucius. That was not a good sign; evidently this was not going to be an ordinary conversation among friends. Caristianus had some reason for wanting to underscore his superior status at today’s meeting.

“Greetings, Lucius Coelius,” said Caristianus, peering coldly at him as if he were a petty client rather than a long-time friend and associate. “I believe you know everyone here.”

“I do,” answered Lucius in a tone that suited the formality of the occasion. “My greetings to all of you.” The men replied in kind but said nothing more, leaving an awkward silence.

“Lucius,” began Caristianus, “I don’t like being the bearer of bad news, but we’ve called you here today to tell you that you must resign your office as agoranomos. I’ll let the augurs explain.”

Marcus was stunned. He could not see his master’s face from his station near the doorway, but he felt certain that he had no idea that anything like this was afoot.

“Lucius Coelius Felix,” began one of the men sitting on Caristianus’s right, “you are no doubt aware that a number of ill omens appeared at the beginning of the ceremony in which your image of Lady Fortune was supposed to be dedicated to the goddess.”

“I am aware that some unusual events occurred,” replied Lucius in a guarded tone.

“These *omens* caused the augurs to postpone the ceremony until their meaning could be properly assessed.” The man emphasized the word “omens” in a rather clumsy effort to underline the supernatural nature of what had transpired. He obviously did not like Lucius’s description of them as mere “events.”

“After due consideration and consultation with our fellow augurs,” the man continued, “we have concluded that the gods were signaling their displeasure not with the offering itself but with the man who presented it. Surely you would agree that no man who has been rejected by the gods should be permitted to serve as a civic official in defiance of the gods’ judgment.”

“I would agree that no man should be placed on the ballot without the approval of the gods as revealed in the auspices,” answered Lucius tersely. “But to remove a man from office after he has been confirmed by auspices and duly elected is much more serious—and of course, more public. I believe that my friend Caristianus”—Lucius waved toward the man behind the desk—“would agree that only the most convincing evidence can warrant such an action. To do otherwise would encourage people to bring false accusations against those whom they disliked and so make a mockery of the gods.”

Lucius stared icily at his accuser for a moment, then went on. “I know of no reason why a god should be displeased with me; in fact, both I and the city have prospered since I was made agoranomos. I’ve always been told that prosperity is the surest sign of the gods’ favor. Is that not true? If it is, may I ask on what grounds you and your colleagues now judge me to be accursed?”

“You ask for convincing evidence,” answered the second augur on Caristianus’s left. “Surely the confluence of omens at the time of your ceremony is evidence enough. Let me rehearse the signs. First there were the oxen. As you know, it is crucial that animals go freely to the sacrificial altar, especially on public occasions. Those beasts, however, did nothing but complain, even when they were standing in the august presence of Lady Fortune. Their unruly behavior threatened the entire proceeding.”

“Then came the birds,” added the third augur. “And not just any birds—a flock of ravens, one of the most potent messengers of the gods. An entire flock of them flew from right to left over the image of Lady Fortune, croaking repeatedly as they passed. Both the direction of their flight and the harsh sounds that they emitted

are viewed as bad omens by augurs everywhere. Then to top it all off, the birds dropped excrement all over the goddess and her priests—and on you. Such an act of profanation by a sacred bird is a clear sign of divine displeasure. The act also interrupted the reading of the ritual, so that the priest would have had to start all over from the beginning if the ceremony had been allowed to continue.”

This was the first that Marcus had heard about the birds leaving their droppings on his master. That did not sound good.

“The only possible explanation for such a concatenation of events,” concluded the first augur in a somber tone, “is that the gods were signaling their rejection of your offering. They did not want you participating in the ceremony.”

Marcus began to feel uncomfortable. He felt the weight of the augurs’ arguments, even if he could not accept their conclusions. How could his master possibly counter such evidence?

“I, too, witnessed these events,” replied Lucius when the men had concluded their accusations, “and I agree that they were unusual, perhaps even divinely caused. But I question whether you have read them properly. Everyone knows that augury is an inexact science and that augurs don’t always agree on how such events should be interpreted. I’ve still heard nothing that convinces me that the signs should be applied directly to me, nor have I been accused of any wrongdoing. Moreover, no one has offered any evidence to contradict my claims that the gods have blessed both me and our city since I was installed as agoranomos.”

“That’s where my testimony comes in,” interrupted Caristianus. Marcus was shocked. He had felt confident that Lady Justice was standing with his master as he defended himself from these baseless accusations, but now the opposition had fielded a new champion. What could it mean? Had his master’s old friend and patron joined the side of his enemies?

“I have it on good authority,” announced Caristianus in a voice both low and grave, “that you have been consorting with those Jews who have been pestering the authorities to permit them to build a new meeting place in the city.”

So that’s what this is about, thought Marcus. *Caristianus is upset because my master ate dinner with the Jews.* Apparently he did not know that Lucius had been tricked into attending the dinner, or that he had tried to withdraw when he learned why he had been invited.

“Jews are a pestilence,” continued Caristianus, his voice growing louder. “They want all of the privileges of civic life and accept none of the responsibilities. They demand that we protect them from people who dislike them on account of their peculiar practices, yet they refuse to participate in the public rituals and ceremonies that bind us together as a city. They insist that we make provision for them to worship their god within our walls, yet they refuse to honor the gods who watch

over our affairs. They set themselves up as our superiors while demanding that we accept them as our equals. If they will not behave as proper citizens, they have no place in our city. And anyone who attempts to help them sets himself against the gods and against me.”

“I think you’ve been misinformed,” began Lucius, but Caristianus cut him off.

“I’ll be the judge of that,” he countered. “Answer me this: did you or did you not have dinner with a group of Jews earlier this month?”

“I did, but I didn’t know...”

“And did you discuss with them their request to build a new meeting place?”

“They brought it up, but...”

“And did you tell them that you would help them with it?”

“No, by Jupiter, I did not!”

Caristianus paused for a moment, clearly taken aback by Lucius’s oath. Lucius quickly seized the opportunity. “I swear by the sacred stone of Jupiter that I never agreed to do anything for those Jews. In fact, I didn’t even know that they were Jews until they questioned me about their prayer house. I thought they wanted to discuss matters of business with me. I never would have agreed to meet with them if I had known their intentions. May the gods destroy me if I lie.”

The two men stared coldly at one another for several moments. Marcus held his breath. Lucius’s future hung on what Caristianus said next.

“If you indeed swear that this is how it happened,” answered Caristianus at last, “then I am bound as a gentleman and a friend to believe you. I apologize for listening to a false report about you. I should have known better than to trust such an accusation against a loyal friend.”

Marcus breathed a sigh of relief. The battle was over.

“But,” he continued, “that still leaves the matter of the omens. I am no expert in these matters, having never been trained as an augur, but I cannot simply ignore the observations of these men who were appointed for that purpose. The fact that the events were witnessed by such a large crowd also mandates that something be done or the people will lose faith in the augurs’ pronouncements. Lucius, my friend, I see no way around the augurs’ recommendation in this case. You must step down as agoranomos.”

Lucius stared blankly at Caristianus for several seconds, then lowered his head. What choice did he have? If such an influential citizen believed that the gods had spoken, there was nothing that he could do about it. He did not have to like it, but he had to obey.

“Then—be it—as you say,” he muttered haltingly. Marcus could not believe his ears. His master was abandoning his post! He had labored for years to reach this position and now he was being forced to leave it all behind. How could the gods be so cruel? Marcus felt as if his own heart was being ripped out.

“I know that this is hard for you, and I’m very sorry to see it happen,” said Caristianus, his voice dripping with feigned concern. “You’ve been a very capable agoranomos—one of the best that we’ve had. But one can’t argue with the gods.”

Nor with men who hold the keys of power, thought Marcus.

“I’ve asked Gaius Antonius to take your place,” he added, gesturing to the man beside him, “and he has agreed. If you wish, we can say that you resigned because of your health. No one needs to know the details of our conversation today. Isn’t that right, men?” Caristianus gazed at one and then another of the men at his side. All nodded their agreement, some more readily than others.

At least he’s not a complete monster, thought Marcus. *My master will walk out of here with his dignity intact, unlike these other so-called gentlemen.*

“I think that concludes our meeting, then,” said Caristianus in a voice redolent with authority. “Of course, the council will still need a letter from you stating that you are resigning your position. You can send it to me when it’s ready.”

Lucius stood frozen like a statue in front of Caristianus’s desk, his head bowed and his shoulders drooping. Marcus’s stomach ached for him. He wished that he could read his master’s mind, but he was afraid of what he might find there.

Caristianus rose from his seat and walked over to Lucius’s side. He laid his hand on Lucius’s arm in a gesture of sympathy. “Perhaps you should consider a trip to the sanctuary of Asklepios at Pergamon,” he suggested. “They have some fine physicians who might be able to help with your abdominal problems. My brother lives in Pergamon, and I’d be happy to give you a letter of recommendation if you should decide to go there.”

“Thank you for the generous offer,” replied Lucius, raising his eyes to meet those of Caristianus. “Now if you will excuse me, I will go.”

Lucius turned and paced slowly out of Caristianus’s office with Marcus following in his wake. Marcus hoped that this was the last time he would see the inside of Caristianus’s house.