

# The Lost Chronicles of Jesus



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## THE GOLDEN MAN

Capitalist, you stole the concept of the invisible hand  
It belongs to us who believe in the Great Spirit  
Like us you crossed the frontiers of time and space  
But not like us you are sucked back into your finite race  
You defy extinction and by extension God's will  
You build towers and rockets that push your material zeal  
Upward and ever you think there is no limit  
But little do you know that your repressed instinct is but decrepit

Technocracy only answers to your boxed-in mind  
It solves the problems of yesteryear and omits tomorrow's finds  
Forever you are chasing your tails with your heads stuck up your ass  
Plugging the pollution as you regurgitate your far(ce)ts  
Let's be honest you are not really that healthy  
Where do you take your sanity from other than the mire of the un-free  
Your big society is merely your small minds running rampant  
Your imagination bloated and ready to implode in ever-growing contaminants

Can you not see where your cancer originates from?  
Your lack of the greater picture is contained in a scientific bum  
It fattens in response to the concentration of emissions  
Because the real world is lost to you for want of a gaseous fission  
You breathe in only what matters in the short-term  
Truly you must look outwards if you are to put in place every stone, tree, animal and germ  
Not an infinite possibility of unchecked growth for the craving of human endeavor  
Worthless as it is in the context of becoming a cultural diva

There is a true individualism but it is self-effacing  
How irreverential to forget the spiritual roots of creation  
God, the Unknown, is not nature to be dissected and individuated  
Rather it is the knowledge that only the Great Death confers if you would just capitulate  
Yes, give up your human-centered motives and uncover a myriad of creative possibilities  
Not any of them an act of material growth but one of spirituality

Yet your discriminating souls contest this sacrificial act for the sake of identification  
Believe me, the Golden Maen awaits you like an irrational light of emancipation

In your hearts you know that your outward manifestations are earthly bound  
Soulfully leading you to the event horizon beyond the scope of your perceived sensual land

I say again, your humanness is an act of your defiance of God's hand

You must die to yourself if you ever hope to be the origin of mankind

And then the realization will dawn upon you of the continuum of all small things

When the Golden Maen will shine forth as the harmony the whole of Creation brings

It is your soul who leads you to death as the environmental act yielded by the unconscious spirit

Making sacrifices of you all in the name of evolution and beyond in the revolution of the Id

# TARRACO

## Act 1 Scene 1

Jesus was sitting in the street playing to the rocks. No-one recognized him from Jerusalem, where he had experienced crucifixion. After his "resurrection" he appeared to his disciples to say farewell and informed only Peter of his whereabouts in Iberia. He decided to live in the region of Tarraco from where he knew he could influence the Roman Empire. Not many natives understood the full extent of his power. But at that time he brought good fortune and general happiness to the people because Jesus, having conquered death, created an air of expectancy wherever he went. As such his music could influence even the nobility, and occasionally they would stop and talk to him. On this particular occasion a centurion gave ear and asked Jesus to prepare for the arrival of the Emperor and to ensure that he only played politically-correct songs. This prompted Jesus to ask:

J: But I say to you verily, a song is like a seed. Do you feign to have power over that which only God can decide to live or die? For a seed that falls to the soil will grow of its own or remain dormant.

C: So what are you saying? Are you saying that you have no control over what you are playing?

J: Not in the slightest, for God is in me. Only that whatever happens is for no other than God to judge.

C: Well things are changing now. From now on everybody worships the Emperor. You can have your own gods but if the Emperor demands that you stop playing then don't argue it.

J: It is only a small point, but I am on holy day.

C: No matter. Prepare for the Emperor tomorrow.

So Jesus thought long and hard. The memory of crucifixion bored into him. He believed he had already achieved his objective back in Jerusalem.

The following day Jesus sat down in his customary pose in a serene part of the upper city. The rocks absorbed the sound of his twanging stringed instrument and, like a verdant landscape in the dewy morning of sunrise, took on an efflorescent glow and seem to come alive. When the Emperor arrived on horseback with a huge entourage and cheering crowds he stopped to listen to the echoing reverberations of the stringed instrument and voice accompanying it, diverting off to locate the sound. Despite the reservations of his personal guard he came upon the squatting bearded figure.

E: What brings you to our city traveler? Your words speak of many lands.

J: I thought it an opportunity to get a straight life. I have had a rather hard time getting here.

E: Here, take this copper coin as a sign of my gratitude, and in times of trouble just think of me.

So after such a brief encounter he went on his way. Jesus decided to bury the coin in the location of his pitch for the future when trouble may loom. He did not need to understand the full implications of this action, and it was not going to be any normal burial. For Jesus everything had significance. He knew that to make a conscious effort reduced the act to nothing more than a whimsical statement. Instead he actively "passivates" his actions by waiting for chance encounters and moments. In this case the upturned earth that the rutting horse had made provided a key spot; over this he placed a small rock.

## Act1 Scene 2

Strolling along the Via Augusta, from one direction he could hear the horses and the cheer of the crowds slowly fading in the distance, from the other the wash of the sea. And then he thought of Mary, the Virgin who would carry his child, and his feet took him to the beach and away from the mob. The place was littered with soldiers taking a bath having just made their official appearance and reverence to the Emperor. It was obvious that today had been declared a national holiday. As he approached the surf the centurion whom he had confronted the day before caught his eye.

C: Holy man!

J: Centurion!

C: You haven't been locked up then. What did you do right?

J: Right and wrong, these are human endeavors. Who do you take your guidance from?

C: From the Empire, from Rome. Listen, walk with me a little. The benefits are worthwhile. You get good rations, decent pay, access to all sorts of events and places. Not least when you become a civilian you can use the gymnasium and the libraries. Where I came from in Palestine we were but peasants living day by day under foreign rulers. But life now is much more, you know, grander. Now I belong to a new order. I mean, look at this city. Surely you came here for the same reason. Here, let me show you the arena.

After a short walk they entered the amphitheatre from the east side. Jesus took a reluctant look back to the sea but was comfortable in his thoughts. As they entered the grand archways the terraced seating loomed over him. The stone was cut to precision and the sense of grandeur was all too apparent.

J: So this is your temple is it, death and violence resonate in its walls? How many corrupt deals do you think are made here? Is all your education worth this? And there are your gods, overlooking the carnage, your Greek and Roman deities who will have you as a sacrifice too. Do you not know the nature of death truly? It is given by God and not by any mortal hand. When you abandon providence, when you leave the fields behind you become entombed in all this pretense. How quick you forget your ancestors. I know of these arenas, they build walls around your spirit so that you only see your soul reflected in them. Truly I say to you, come back to Creation, come back to Providence.

A voice shouted from the entrance way reverberating around the vacuous stone masonry.

2<sup>nd</sup> C: Decius, you are wanted at the barracks immediately. Don't tarry.

C: Okay, I will be seeing you again, no doubt, traveler. Remember the glory.

J: And remember me Decius.

With this the guard jogged off back through the archway from which he came, in doing so taking a backward glance at the loosely clad figure of the bearded man. Jesus contemplated what this centurion's real name was.

He returned to the beach and pondered the ebbing waves, 'She comes, she goes, and like a sand castle she levels everything to Herself. I am brought up in the Jewish tradition and how well it had prepared me for my death, for my effacement; for my nothingness and humility before God. How well it had provided me a wife, a virgin who I but rarely knew and who, as the mother of my children, anchors me into the soil, the land, and the blood of my people, in the name of our egalitarian God. And these promiscuous inhabitants, no wonder they cannot deal with their egos and material cravings. How will my apostles fare in the Roman climate now that I am gone from their studentship? Have I taught profoundly enough to awaken them from the toil of hardship? Have I shown enough truly, the way of the spirit, for those who will not marry and remain chaste, and who will meet God in their spiritual evolution? Our tradition calls for us to take a virgin wife so that we may expand and prepare the way for the true messiah, one who will follow me. Had I given my seed to a virgin earlier I could have spared my blushes on the cross, but God had not so much forsaken me but forbidden me in my self-effacement, for the debasement of my humanness. I had the power of nature in my grasp and this could only mean a great death. The Virgin was my only frontier to God, preserver of all things wild. But now She also must abandon me and I am left to die a physical death through the passing of my seed - the messianic legacy. The Christ has flown; I am a mortal husband and a blood link.

I do not question her arrival, God works in so many mysterious ways. But she could only have come from the aristocracy. They feared the apocalypse; they feared the death of materialism; their Temple, tithes, tolls and taxes. I showed them how close we came as God's Chosen to being resurrected in the Day of the Lord, when all material wealth, all hierarchies, all mundane power will be brought low and the kingdom of heaven will be upon the earth again as the jewel of Creation. This truly is the Great Death. But now, how long before my memory fades with age and I will become but dust; my work is only half complete. I must ensure the legacy continues. I must bring down the Temple and its corrupted tenants, now under the property of the Emperor. And the Romans, they must not know of my wife, I must protect her identity too. My people are still prevalent; they reside in the hills and the plains. We are the poor and suppressed. Our right to free worship has been usurped by client kings and priests. My only chance is to draw the Emperor closer, to ensure that a new age has dawned. The Virgin lives but I am not her consort anymore. When the Christ returns a second time I should make sure that the child's upbringing is protected. I must ask my community to record the record for posterity, to ensure the true origin of this movement. We are God's Chosen, we must venerate the Virgin or otherwise the empires of

this world will rape her; strip her of her forests and rivers, lower her mountains and dry her seas. She must be protected at all costs'.

At this moment Jesus turned to the beach to watch his young wife paddle the water's edge with babe in arms. His first born hung back a little, stepping in the footsteps of his mother.

## Act1 Scene 3

J: Yusef, will you follow your mother into the sea, into my arms?

Y: Papa, where have you been? We were looking for you. We thought you were here at the sea.

J: I have been in the house of the Emperor, with its fine walls and great statues. You will be ill to visit it at such a young age. Better to stay close to the wilderness, to the sea.

Y: But I want to go inside the city.

J: Not yet, there are many awful signs of disease in the streets. But when you gain in a few more years you will be able to deal with it. What do you say Ma?

M: Yes Yusef, you were born from the sea and it has yet to let you go. You are important to our kind. We are peasants (peregrine) and don't pretend the grandeur of the Roman life. Experience the wash of the sea and clean yourself of any doubts, of any un-pure thoughts. I am watching over you.

With this Yusef plunged into the sea and quite surprisingly did not fear the washing of its waves. Mary then turned to hug Jesus and kissed him on his forehead with the new babe swaddled in cloth between them.

J: So how is our legacy? Does she fare well?

M: I worry that she does not look for the teat often enough. And she does not cry either, as if she knows what she needs.

J: Maybe. During her birth she came out upside down with her feet. You were lucky to survive. Have you recovered from the agony?

M: Have you my love? I bear your legacy and will follow you into your death. She bears the sign of the crucifixion as if she is raised from the soil with her own two feet. She will replace me in legend and become the consort for the Second Coming of the Christ. In this child the blood line will lead to a Spaniard, for the ending of time. I do not know how far into the future such a moment is. Have you seen the future Yeshu?

J: Yes, but it is infinite. It can happen anytime. What is important is that the tradition remains in place for how ever long it takes. I must ensure the teaching continues beyond our Father's land.

With this a shout came from the direction of the sea.

Y: Papa, papa, look what I have found.

Both Mary and Jesus turned to see Yusuf holding a huge turtle. They laughed at the sight of such a small boy struggling, but contrary to rational thought the turtle did not weigh that much.

M: He is a gift Yusefino. Let it go unless you have a better use for it.

Y: Can we take it home?

M: No, we have little water where we live down south. Maybe you can ride its back and meet us there.

Y: Can I really?

Mary and Jesus both laughed again.

M: And Yusuf, what of him?

J: He will travel early. I will bring him only so far, but truly he represents the wild side of me. It is best that he chooses his own path.

M: He may go to see your mother?

J: Maybe, I will need him more there than here. Let us now enjoy our simple life, for now the Roman Empire tolerates our being. But things will change drastically in the future. Nothing will last.

Yusef, pick yourself up, we are going home.

M: We can ride the cart of ben Zacchariah for the journey back south.

J: That bumpy old road! Maybe we should take up Yusef's offer and ride that turtle?

M: I am sure there is enough space. Who knows what is contained in that shell, a hundred rooms.

J: And each one a hundred years of waiting. I fear we are going to need to catch at least one other.

M: Or a bigger boat?

J: It will be 2 days travel by sea, and She never fails us.

M: No, she is giving. Let us go to the docks.

With that the family of four took in the greater wind.

## Act1 Scene 4

Decius arrived at the barracks and immediately sort after the 1<sup>st</sup> officer in command. The barracks, situated as they were in the higher parts of the city near the administration centre were constructed of a large courtyard and surrounding dormitories. Some of the soldiers were in drill and others sparring in their spare time. The mix of cultures was all too apparent.

C: Sir, you called me off duty.

1<sup>st</sup> O: Not me, the pontiff of all people.

C: What, the high priest?

1<sup>st</sup> O: Yes, he is also advisor to the general who, as you may or not know, is very religious.



C: But why? I make my sacrifices, I have renounced my own religious roots to become a Roman citizen. I have given my vows.

1<sup>st</sup> O: How good is your Palestinian?

C: I speak Aramaic, it is my first language. I am not going back there.

1<sup>st</sup> O: You have been seen talking to a wandering Jew apparently. There is unrest in the East and concern that a Jewish revolt is imminent. I don't know much more but we have been given orders to watch all trade routes for signs of subversion. The Jews have been plying these lands for years and have better knowledge than us of what is beyond the civilized world. They also have a blood line amongst the Britons in the north where we mine for gold and silver. I think you are about to become useful. Clean yourself up and don your duty dress, but take off the armaments. You are to head off to the palace within the hour.

C: Do you know anything else?

1<sup>st</sup> O: No!

With this Decius set off to his chambers. He had already bathed this morning and decided to wear smart casual. He took himself to a well and washed his hands. The walk to the palace lay higher up the hill and a few possibilities plagued his mind. Neither for the thought of returning to Palestine, nor for the months of travel by boat will it take to get there. But that he knew he wouldn't be accepted by his family and old friends. He would be recognized instantly in Galilee. 'Maybe I am to go to Briton', the idea only partially entertained him. News in the Empire spreads with every horse, every boat that enters the city. The savages in the north were putting up a bloody battle; the legions of soldiers frequently mixed and exchanged conversation. In fact the soldier's life was political.

As he pondered these issues a horse guard shot past him and sped off in the direction of the forum. Nevertheless, this was common occurrence and scuffles always broke out in the city square amongst the peddlers and preachers. The interruption stalled his line of enquiry and consequently he decided to take a longer route to the palace. He arced his way around the city walls to take in view the sea again from the top of a hill. He was acknowledged by other centurions on guard who recognized him. On approaching the north gate he thought he saw someone tagging him. With this he turned and an unrecognizable figure sleuthed off into a narrow alley. Without his armor he felt vulnerable and so decided to double-quick his pace. He'd actually got lost because Decius had only just arrived into the city from his posting from Gaul, and he hadn't explored the northern parts that well yet. With this he'd suddenly heard a sharp whistle and instinctively he went for his short sword. He could not even get his bearings such was the height of the surrounding masonry obscuring the view to the sun. It was too hot as well. And then he remembered the words of the holy man, 'your Greek and Roman deities who will have you as a sacrifice too. Do you not know the nature of death truly? It is given by God and not by any mortal hand. When you abandon providence, when you leave the fields behind you become entombed in all this pretense.' He felt the thump to the back of his head, and for a brief moment he thought something had fallen on him from one of the overlooking windows. The haziness lasted long enough to make him pliant as a sack was thrust over his head. He smelt a whiff of barley and heard the

sound of floorboards. Voices muttered in the background but he couldn't make out the language. They had bound his hands behind his back and thrust him into a corner of a cold-walled building. And then just for a moment he thought he felt the breath of a prayer being recited above him. Without a doubt he heard the word 'Adonis'.

## Act1 Scene 5

Jesus and his family pulled into the docks. They sought a fisherman who might be sailing back south again, a good 50km from here. Yusef had run ahead of them and watched the catch of fresh fish being loaded into baskets; they flapped in the afternoon sun.

M: I will take the babe and locate some extra rations. You take Yusifino and see if you can organize anything. Remember, we have some oil to trade.

J: You know, we must yet give her a name and her rites of passage if we are to bless this birth.

M: Not yet, we have not received the sign from God. Only when we know her destiny in life, only then can we name her.

J: But she is to be the bearer of the messiah, the anointed one.

M: You said yourself that the messiah can come anytime. She is only the bloodline. We do not push her destiny on her. Now I will need goat's cheese and milk for the journey. Let's agree to meet here for afternoon prayer. Tomorrow we are fasting so we shall eat heartily today. I see you later my love.

Jesus watched Mary stride away with barely a second glance. These things of the home were of her domain. She was brought up in the Jewish tradition like every other maiden. For Jesus though, the political world loomed over him. He watched Yusef slapping the fish, as if trying to stop it flapping in the baskets. He then saw him climb into one of these baskets and, with one fish in either hand, tried to get them to kiss each other. This brought a hearty laugh from Jesus who quickly strolled over to the basket.

J: Yusefy, these fish are dying. Yet you make comfort among them as if you are taking their place in the sea. They have given their lives for us but if you are not careful you will join them. You see, when a fish is taken out of its natural environment it begins to die. We are all spirits in this universe, we all have our place. Did I not tell you the story of Moses who was saved from the sea?

Y: No papa, tell me, tell me.

J: You see, Moses was born of a royal line, of a King. But he was rejected. His natural place was amongst the people, like an eye in the sky overlooking them and ensuring that all was in order. His strength and will, his authority came from God. When he was cast in a reed basket God, on the tide and the waves, brought him to his natural position, where he was duly discovered lodged in a fig tree. He represented fertility, giving, the abundance of creation. But only God's invisible hand could return him to the people, and there he was raised in the royal courts as one who was

saved from the wilderness. For now you are in my care Yusefy, but later in life you will travel and the whole world will be yours for the taking. You will travel to exotic lands in your wanderings, and you will always return back to your people. But you will always need the sea, for it is from there that you will always return to the fishes from whence you came to be found.

1<sup>st</sup> f: I hope he has clean feet.

J: They are a child's feet, how much cleaner do they get?

1<sup>st</sup> f: Can I eat them?

J: Only if you prefer the smell of cheese.

1<sup>st</sup> f: Fish and cheese don't go together.

J: I beg to differ. From where do you come from that cheese does not share the same palate as fish?

1<sup>st</sup> f: I am from the south, from Africa, the land of great beasts.

J: From Egypt maybe, further south into Ethiopia. But your accent is mixed. How many languages do you speak fisherman?

1<sup>st</sup> f: Enough to get me by. I sense you are another traveller.

J: I was, I have family now of my own.

1<sup>st</sup> f: Ahh, so you decided to end your life on this earth. I know your kind holy man. You speak of apocalypse and a time when the power of heaven will make everything level on the earth. But we have mountains that only a few can traverse, and there is no man on this planet who will rule everybody, not even the Roman gods.

J: So you do not fear the Emperor?

1<sup>st</sup> f: No, no, no. They may take our lands but they will never take our gods. They may kill us in the gladiator rings but the power of the black man is too strong. We may be divided into many nations but Africa will rise again and the black man will take these lands for themselves one day. For now we ply our trade like any other along these shores. And you, what is it you do?

J: I am an olive grower. We have land a little further south near the town of el Perelló. We seek transport back there. May you be going on? I have oil in exchange.

1<sup>st</sup> f: You have land! Then you are rich.

J: Not so. It is an inheritance and belongs to my community, my people. We share our lot in life and my friends trust to their work for the enhancement of life and preparation for the coming Kingdom of the Lord.

1<sup>st</sup> f: You are a Jew. I should have guessed from that story you told to your boy. You have some of your oil here?

J: It is in store. If you pass by our fishing village 50 km south of here you will be housed and treated as one of our kind. From there you are free to go on with our blessing and our oil. But we are rich only in faith and spirit.

1<sup>st</sup> f: And the fishing is good there?

J: Very. The name is Amet'lla. We also produce almond and carob, essential foods for your journeys.

1<sup>st</sup> f: I am sure I can fit two more on board. I leave tomorrow early morning at day break. As things go I should make it by the end of the day.

J: We are four.

1<sup>st</sup> f: Four! The boat is not big enough.

J: Then leave behind one of your crew and serve me instead, and I will show you the hospitality of a Jewish holy man. We also have a nice selection of cheeses.

1<sup>st</sup> f: Admittedly I can save money here. Can you work the rigging?

J: Of course, and my wife will sing you songs into the evening, she carries a babe.

1<sup>st</sup> f: It is agreed then, tomorrow at dawn. As for you little one, unless you want to be eaten I would make a quick exit from my basket of fish.

Y: I am Moses, what is your name?

1<sup>st</sup> f: If you are Moses I am Solomon.

J: Solomon it is then.

With that Jesus smiled and plucked the boy out of the basket, waving to the fisherman as they merged back into the market.

E: Yeshu, it is I, Eliezer.

Jesus turned to hear a figure in the crowd loudly whispering above the chitchat.

E: We have some news. We must congregate.

J: I promised to meet my wife here this afternoon.

E: We know where she is. We can get word to her.

J: Tell her only that I am making business but that I have secured a boat for Amet'lla tomorrow morning at day break. Where are you gathered?

E: In the house of Joseph.

J: Mary will come to share the communal meal. Make preparations to eat late. We have an opportunity to organise another contingency amongst the Britons. My uncle will hear news of our plans. Where is Yusefy?

Yusef had disappeared amongst the thronging masses and was now back at the boat of the fisherman. Jesus watched him from a distance and discovered, with faint amusement, Yusef was making the old man laugh in rapture. With a pat on the head the fisherman gave Yusef 4 fish to take away. He returned to his father.

J: What was that about Yusefy?

Y: I told him I was a hunter and that I needed to catch something to eat.

Y: He said his dog would eat me instead.

J: He has a dog?

Y: A big black one. But he gave me these and told me to eat them instead.

## Act1 Scene 6

The dust had settled a bit during the scuffles through the street but Decius was comfortable in a chair inside a vacuous building albeit he now had a blindfold on instead of a sack. Two guards either side of him held his arms. They offered him water but nevertheless he felt agitated at being delayed for his appointment.

AB: Why do you skulk the streets centurion?

D: I was merely reflecting on personal issues and decided to take the wall to the other part of the city. Who are you? It is a civil offence to attack and abduct a soldier and citizen of the Roman Empire. What do you intend of me?

AB: Excuse us for being so blunt Decius, but how is your Palestinian?

D: I speak Aramaic, not Hebrew. Why should that be of concern?

AB: We are concerned that a threat to the establishment is brewing here and in other parts of the Empire. We are wary of spies mixing with the common folk.

D: Empire? Then you are Roman. Take this blind of?

AB: Not yet. Tell us who was the loosely clad figure you spoke with on the beach?

D: He was just a holy man. It is not as though there aren't so few about.

AB: What business do you have with this holy man?

D: Nothing. He was different, played music in the street and sings in a language I understand, that is all.

AB: So what is his name?

D: His name? I don't know. Oh. He may have told me, wait... no, can't think of it.

AB: We are watching you from now on.

D: But who are you? You will be sentenced to death for this act.

AB: Do you want to keep your life centurion? I will advise you to shut up. We want you to continue talking with him.

D: But he is not from these parts, I have never seen him before.

AB: Find him and follow him. Locate his home.

D: But who am I doing this for?

AB: I said, do you want to keep your life? Go about your day's duty and we will find you again.

With that they took Decius to a door and put the sack back over his torso. When it was all clear they smuggled him out into the street, turned a few corners and let him go, torso still in place. By the time he navigated himself Decius saw no signs of the abductors. He pondered the consequences. They must be Roman. Not unless they are Palestinian and from my home town in Galilee. 'If I mention this to the officers they will scour this place, if they believe me that is. They could also have been Jewish spies but their accents were..., well not from my home country. I should only mention this to my officer for I know they will post me elsewhere if there is any doubt from high command. If it comes to nothing so be it. I will ignore their demand to follow the holy man.'

Decius continued his way to the administration buildings located on a plateau central to the upper part of the city. There government officials discussed business at the royal baths and attendants

accompanied them with every step. Once Decius had reached High Command he was directed to the informal quarters of the High Priest, privy to the Emperor himself.

HP: Ah... Decius isn't it? How was your trip here? Take a seat.

Decius just delayed his answer enough for the High Priest to give him a second glance as he met with one of his personal attendants.

D: I am not late am I?

HP: Not at all, but I have little time. The military is treating you well?

D: Yes. I love the life here in Tarraco.

HP: You are Palestinian are you not?

D: Yes, from Galilee.

HP: You have family there?

D: Yes, but I couldn't possibly return, not now I am a Roman soldier. I have *latis lazuli* and promised to serve your Emperor and gods. I would not be accepted amongst the Galileans anymore. In fact the zealous ones will have me murdered. You know how patriotic they are?

With that Decius felt a lump in his throat.

HP: Now steady on Decius. I would not send you on a suicide mission, but you have a valuable skill. You are of Jewish stock. You have no family here and you speak their common tongue. I will raise your position to first officer, and your pay, but you are to go on a unique mission for me. I am to send you to Briton with a legion marching from Gaul. The full details of your goal will only be made available to you once you reach their shores. They will march at the beginning of the next week. For now I want you to prepare yourself and enjoy these days here. The climate there is colder and so you will need extra attire. Report to your officer in command at your barracks and give him this letter of excuse. You are now officially off-duty. I will see you just before you leave.

D: But...

Decius decided to keep it buttoned in. He was now more confused than before. The High Priest stared at him with a passionless pose. Decius thought that by mentioning the abduction he could get out of this but then decided against it; he would only throw more suspicion upon himself.

HP: Yes Decius?

D: I was a farmer...

But Decius wondered where he was going with this conversation.

HP: Good. Then you will enjoy the quality of the soil in the north. I hear they are heavy and black although you will have plenty of rations brought over from the continent. We may be looking for some expertise here if you have any.

D: Right. I will get on my way then.

Decius trundled out of the upper city feeling completely at odds with himself. He had little idea of what was expected of him; there was a hint of being posted for an indefinable amount of time. He now had the freedom to explore Tarraco a little further and decided to take himself down to the Francolí river where the natives were washing further downstream. The fact that Decius was still unarmed hadn't dawned upon him. In fact he seemed to be getting over the effects of being promoted; it seemed more like a demotion to nothing. He felt empty.

## Act1 Scene 7

Mary was already in the house of Joseph preparing the communal meal with other women when Jesus and Yusef turned up. They kissed and hugged.

J: We have a boat to Amet'lla; I promised our full hospitality.

Mary smiled.

J: Here, Yusef caught some fish for supper. How was the market?

M: Oh, you know, the same. But the fish here is much more varied. They seem larger as well and maybe it is to do with there being less salt in the water. There is talk of many persecutions going on in our home land. I don't feel comfortable among the Romans. And there has been another split from the orthodoxy. Wandering preachers are spreading the message of the good news. I fear for the temple though, and our family. The Greeks practice their pagan sacrifices all around the city and many Jews are going over to worshipping their gods. Still, our faith is strong and since the time of our ancestors we have spread far and wide across the northern countries. Maybe we can meet up with your uncle in Briton; there are regular caravans going that way.

J: I would be isolated there. There is a large stretch of water to traverse and I prefer to bring up my family in Iberia. Besides, there are many amongst us who can't be trusted. You saw what had become of the temple. How many Jews had accepted bribes, how many of the Sadducees had secretly renounced their faith for a pocketful of silver. There are thieves and apostates amongst them, and I know that Judaism stands on the brink of destruction. Our families have been threatened for centuries, but these days bade an even greater death. Had I only the backing of the royal court I could have ushered in a Jewish resurgence, but we are now left to rue our squabbling. They sicken me; Jerusalem has become nothing more than another Roman city, with a temple built by an imposter. My kinfolk will hold out in the wilderness.

M: Do you think that your teachings will take root outside Jerusalem? What chance do you hold for the Diaspora with its local variations? Nothing is pure anymore my love. I fear we must accept that the true teaching of Abraham and Moses will be lost to time.

J: But I feel the apocalypse is imminent. They must keep strong in the hills, in Damascus. What of your family my love?

M: We are safe, but your crucifixion has stirred a hornet's nest. They are blaming Ananas the High Priest and there is talk that your brother is not safe. Can we not bring James from them?

Jesus pondered the emotive moment, engaged as he was in his love for James. How many have died in the name of the law is surely befitting of a new faith.

J: James is the new leader of the Church. He cannot fail before the prophecy plays itself out. I will not ask anything of my brother. He will remain and finish his duties to the law. Our work is here now and Yusef will return one day to his nan. I fear for your kind my love. For you are descended from the royal stock, not that we favour the Herodian line. I have no qualms against one who the Virgin inhabited. You were a gift and only the Virgin could have blessed me in my projections. You are a part of me; a perfect vessel. Let us prepare our meal.

There were eight gathered about the table, the children were put to sleep. They were of mixed stock and varied attire. Not least was the drawn look of starvation among two of them. As first the bean soup was brought to the table the two said figures delved in without delay, taking flat bread from the centre of the table. Mary blushed at this site and Jesus steadied her hand as if to comfort her in her traditions.

J: Let them eat for surely these foreigners do not know our customs, and besides, we are not home anymore. We are travellers too remember.

Jesus held her hand in quiescence, for Jesus was a holy man and all respected his position at such events.

M: You must be hungry my sons. From what region whence you come?

1<sup>st</sup>: We are from across the water from the land of the Britons. Our slave ship crashed on the rocks and we found ourselves cast adrift in the northern shores of these lands. We have been working for food and lodging for the last 18 moons looking for warmer climates. Unfortunately the Romans seem to be everywhere and they would recognise us as former slaves. We cannot enter the cities and all we ask is that we continue to work the fields under your protection.

2<sup>nd</sup>: They branded us for criminal acts. We had no idea of where we were being taken or what would be our fate. As for the other slaves they were not all Britons. The Roman legions have already spread far and wide, poisoning our culture.

1<sup>st</sup>: We understand that we may never return to our homelands, but we have good skills in pottery and hunting.

J: But what is your faith?

M: And how you have learnt the native tongue so well.

1<sup>st</sup>: Eighteen moons is a long time in our lives. We were lucky to find an accommodating farmer in the mountain regions bordering Gaul. He told us that he rarely sees a foot soldier come his way,



although occasionally he hears talk of legions using the northern pass. As far as the mountains go they were not much different to our own native lands, and until recently we spent a whole season helping the old man keep his goats and manage his woods.

2<sup>nd</sup>: We blurred into the environment. With all respect holy man we have no faith anymore. We have already forgotten the ways of our people.

J: Ah, no faith yet you fall into lucky arms everywhere you go. Then do you believe in destiny? Your accent is of that region in the west of Briton is it not?

1<sup>st</sup>: We are beyond the Black mountains. The Romans have yet to penetrate our lands, but they caught us on an excursion.

J: An excursion? Into the southwest?

The two refugees looked at Jesus in the eye and knew that he had something of an intuition that they couldn't deny.

J: You were out murdering soldiers in the south. You are Celts are you not?

2<sup>nd</sup>: Aye, holy man. Our kinsfolk are being slaughtered. We have been counselled by our religious leaders to keep the Romans to the east.

J: And these religious leaders, are they strong of word and influence?

2<sup>nd</sup>: Aye. Their skins are darker and, like yourself, travel the length and breadth of our lands. They have been our guides for centuries and we hold their word in high esteem. They also use foreign tongues with symbols that are not...

J: Greek. You should know that this empire was once under the rule of Alexandrians. Like the peoples you conquered before you everything passes as a washing of the sea. Cities are levelled and races are mixed like grains of sand on the beach. Your destinies have brought you to us because in these days of unrest among the most pious and zealous every surviving member has a role to play in the imminent future. In joining us at this table you are now under our counsel. You are only as free as your next meal and your instincts have brought you to us. We ask that you share our suffering, as the suffering of ages and death of our peoples. Our cause may be the same. As burly huntsmen and farmers you may be useful to our communities.

1<sup>st</sup>: You would excuse us as murderers and welcome us into your household?

At this point Mary had to interject.

M: There are many paths to death, but for those that uphold the law of our ancestors will surely gain their rightful rewards. We only ask that what you give is what you should expect in return. Many of our kind have been killed by the Roman sword but for those who remain pious to the law then our rewards are of prosperity. We all live under foreign rulers and for our acts of compliance we can be forgiven sometimes if it means that our heritage is allowed to continue growing.

Mary looked at Jesus askance as if to prompt him to support her.

J: The law of the land is that if you give yourself to her perpetuity you will find her provident and guiding. We are not here to judge what is sin in the eyes of the Church, but rather to fulfil Creation, to bring upon this earth and its inhabitants a way to live simply in harmony of her laws. There are much lesser causes to kill if it means the preservation of a future that would otherwise be swamped under greed and lust. The way of the city is attractive to those who forsake God and who revel in its material paradise. Man is addicted to unsettlement, to gain, to conquer, and to learning. But if he truly knew that the imminent kingdom of God is upon us he would know that we have everything that we need to end our lives in harmony. It is this 'death' that must be conquered, gained, and learned. It is the way of our community to prepare you for the glorious. Some take wives as we have in order to increase our fraternity, so that the will of God, given to our ancestors, will pass unto all races of man. It is not one religion over another, but simple frugality and awareness of the needs of the land. As many true to the faith who are lost to our belief there is always another being born at this very moment. Our science is one of being. You could spend the rest of your days travelling the width of the world but I assure you, they have religions also that prepare man for this 'end-time'. And nestled as they are in the furthest reaches of human achievement, they themselves take savages into their fabric. So that beneath the raw desire to kill a fellow man is the animal that is threatened by this lust for material resources, for wealth, for the concentration of power. It is the built environment that breeds contempt and hatred, the wilderness is your saving grace.

1<sup>st</sup>: But we do not have cities in our lands, and we kill freely.

J: You kill for the purity of your bloodline. In heaven though, every stone, creature and plant has a place. Though we are animals in our nature the faults of our ancestors can be carried down and plant themselves into barbaric rituals. I only ask that you remember whence you came and that all is change. Where our forefathers used to sacrifice their own sons in order to appease the wrath of God, and now that we take an unblemished lamb or dove to relieve us of blood guilt, I only ask that you participate in sharing this bread with me as the bread of Creation.

Jesus took the flat bread from the table and broke a small part to consume it. Mary, meanwhile, had gone into silent meditation and was whispering a blessing over the food. The bread was then passed around to Eliezer and two other attendant wives at the table before reaching the hands of the two refugees.

J: I only ask that you share this food as you would my body and mind as an act of Creation. For in my body is the spirit of being, of the immanence of the kingdom, for the raising of your own flesh as a resonant being and receptacle for God. As vessels we are all sons of light and only through common sharing do we find this singularity. Take this and know that you are in good company.

With this the bread passed around the table with Joseph, the host, taking the final portion. They all ate heartily and drank wine produced from the inner regions of Iberia. It was now late and the meal lay heavy in their stomachs in preparation for the forthcoming fast. Jesus had given instruction to the new converts as to where they dwelled in the south and asked them to make

their way as and when it was safe to travel by road. Meanwhile Mary had already made preparations for the boat trip the following morning. On retiring to their sleeping quarters Eliezer approached Joseph in the pantry. His voice was hushed.

E: I feel ashamed. Cannot we be honest with him?

J: Not now Eliezer. Enjoy the experience for he brings us good fortune.

E: But we are not true to him.

J: We are not Jews. They are different.

E: But surely he is our hope for the future.

J: We have a good life here. We are not to oppose the status quo. And besides, I have too much to lose. We have wives, money and trade. The city is where we reside.

E: But you cannot have the best of both worlds. You drink in revelry amongst the Roman officials and then pretend to come back to simple charity.

J: I will only support him if I have to. I will not put my own life at risk to support a Jewish cause.

E: But you heard him yourself. It is for all races to live the life of the pious.

J: Eliezer, we are business men. That means our friends are business partners. That is how it works here. There are a lot more benefits to be gained from having friends in the right places.

E: But do you not believe in God Josép.

Joseph took a long drawn-out breath and stared at Eliezer for a moment.

J: Yes, and no. This is my life. I am creative. I see God fulfilling me through my business. I like this way. I like to make money. I like my wife. I would like children. I don't like death. Now go to bed my friend.

E: Friend! You sell pharmaceuticals to Roman officials to make your money.

J: That is because our blood is Greek.

E: But you make money from their delirium. You feast on their addictions. How Greek is that? You cause a disease of their mind.

J: These gifts of nature are given by Hera, by Pan, by Zeus. Do not question their origins.

Joseph had raised his voice and crossed himself.

J: I love this man, and I would do anything I can for him. But my business is important for my family. Now go to bed and make sure that we have stored enough food for their journey by boat.

E: But we should be fasting tomorrow?

J: Aye-ya-ya. I am a Greek. I love food, and I love to give it away.

E: But I will fast.

J: Yes you will Eliezer. He needs you.

## Act1 Scene 8

Joseph had uncharacteristically made a large stash of comestibles. Eliezer, being the younger, did not question its content. Instead he gladly filled up the cart, with the help of Yusef in the morning, and trundled down to the dockside to Solomon's boat. The big African greeted them.

S: And the couple?

E: They will follow soon enough.

Solomon turned to one of his slaves.

S: Make sure you place the cargo on the port side. I don't want any accidents with this extra load. You have no worries with me Eliezer, give Josép my thanks.

E: You know him?

S: Yes, yes. We go back years. I have been plying these shores since when he was just a boy. I was a slave then but I gained my freedom too. The benefits of all this empire business seem limitless.

E: Do you believe in God too?

S: Of course. Believe me, when those storms come there is nothing else to believe in. When the seas rise like tall buildings over your masts and your crew are hanging on with every last strength in their fingers, you can only hope. You see, our holy man is right about many things. He knows the wilderness. He knows it is a fine balance between life and death. And when you are all alone out there, lost to the sea, you can only wait. If you don't believe in God not all the gold in the world could keep your ship afloat.

Here comes our crew now.

Y: Papa, papa!

Both Eliezer and Solomon were grinning big smiles on their faces. Yusef ran up to greet Jesus and Mary who were ambling arm in arm towards the boat. Jesus had his stringed instrument strapped to his back. He bore it comfortably, and maybe in the dark interior of his mind he knew it was a significant act, one that would bear him towards the end of his days. Mary was also a picture. She wore a stylish figure and looked incredibly lean and agile even after her second birth. Her natural beauty surpassed even the gaudiest élites in town, though unlike them she donned no jewellery, no make-up, no silken dresses from further east. It was the hand-spun cotton drapes adorned in its many dyes that tightly fitted her like a main sail in full wind; her jib was like a veil to the sun. Yusef jumped between them both as a seed would captured in the thicket of well-managed woodland. Only time would tell if he would grow to embody the fates of both his parents.

S: My Jewish friends! A pleasure to see you two. And this is your fair wife. And the babe?

M: Shhh... She is asleep tightly hidden in my shawl.

S: Ahh.... And there I was thinking you to be a large woman. In my land we cherish the largeness of our women; it signifies fertility and strength in birth. You are a small race.

J: But a lot of power. We pride ourselves on our techniques and love of the land.

S: Oh, don't get me wrong. We share the same forefathers do we not?

M: Our traditions do share a common lineage. Of course we have much to learn from Egypt. I assume you know the trade there?

S: Very much. I was a slave on a cargo ship for 8 years of my life. We carried at times over 100,000 tonnes of grain to Rome, and of course, most of our lives were at sea so that we were always hearing of stories and wars going on around the continent. I have survived myself, two major ship wrecks, seen hundred's of people die for the lack of swimming. Such is the life at sea.

Mary took a long look at Jesus. With this Jesus grabbed Yesuf and slung him over his other shoulder.

J: Come Yesuf, we are going to wash ourselves of any unclean thoughts.

S: Don't be too late. We are expecting the wind promptly. We will have little time later today.

M: You were saying Solomon. The trade here is good?

S: Oh very. We do well.

As Jesus and Yusef took themselves away Eliezer seemed to flush a rosy red.

M: Come Eliezer, what do you hide behind?

E: Good that I do not have to go on this journey. I cannot swim.

M: How did you survive Solomon? I assume this is your name?

E: Well, my African name is not so common here. It means something like 'the praised one'. Solomon will suffice. I had to learn to swim. You see, my family were smugglers. We used to sneak up to the Roman cargo ships at night when they were anchored down, me and my brothers, and take anything of value. It could not go on forever.

M: And your brothers. How fare they?

S: I..... I don't know.

The conversation continued, Eliezer looking more uncomfortable as it went on. Mary flashed the occasional look at him. With this Eliezer sidled away, bidding farewell and left Mary to organise the personal baggage.

## Act1 Scene 9

Meanwhile Jesus had taken Yusef into the sea further along and watched his son flap around. He would hold Yusef and direct him around into figures of eight.

J: You see Yusef, we dance like bees. Keep the sun to your side. It rises in the East and sets in the West. If you ever find yourself lost track the movement of the sun during the day. Now flap those arms.

Yusef struggled at first. Jesus himself could be swimmer although he always thought himself as a gardener and a craftsman. Just then Decius happened upon the splashing in the water, but he did not offer his attention. Instead he wondered about this holy man who so obviously had a child. 'Who was he?' he thought. 'Why did such a brief encounter change his life so drastically?' Of course, as Decius laid his eyes upon his subjects Jesus instinctively looked upwards. The distance was too far to make out any clarity, Decius could be any Roman guard, despite being in casual costume. Jesus decided to continue the swimming lesson.

J: You see, the sun means a lot to us. It gives life, brings us up like trees. One day you will hope to grow into an old tree, reaching towards the sun's rays, knowing when to give, when to take. And your health is always dependent upon the sun for its life giving. This is how you will distinguish yourself from our Jewish forebears. The sun is our centre. From it comes all life. And at night there are millions and millions of more sun stars in the sky for you to track your ways. It is there that we all return, from whence we came.

After the lesson and feeling fully refreshed they both happened by a vendor selling sweet cakes. Yusef was rewarded for his patience; children always earned an undue treat in the company of their parents. Jesus, meanwhile, strung his instrument and played to the passers-by as Yusef, pecking his cake to pieces, afterward napped in a stone alcove behind him. The boy must have exerted a strong effort this early in the morning, but the chill was something that the whole family were accustomed to. The sun lifted itself another hour in the sky and, contemplating to finish up his playing, Jesus decided to sing one last song. Just then he noticed two denari to one side and wondered who had put them there. A guard came up and advised him to move on. Jesus looked at the vendor and thought at the stream of customers enjoying his fare. The man grinned a lot and obviously enjoyed the increase in custom from the extra attention Jesus brought to him. But no gift or thanks was forthcoming. Instead it took a passerby to offer some flat bread and olive paste in a short conversation they had.

P: I was enjoying your music.

J: Thanks. I have learnt some music in the native tongue, just a few songs. Would you like to hear it?

P: Okay. I am from this country, from the interior. I came here with my wife to visit the healing shrines en route. In passing through the mountains to the north I bathed her in the natural hot springs that gush up.

J: That is fair distance. How did you travel?

P: Horseback. The road is well guarded. And you, you are from the east are you not?

J: Yes, I am of Jewish descent. My family came by boat after the persecutions of our people began. The Greeks were stirring up anti-Semitic behaviour outside our sacred temple.

P: I know something of your race. You believe in a single god do you not? You practice the law of Moses. We have heard of your traditions. Your people have known these lands for many centuries.

J: Out bloodline extends out here, as far as the Britons. We consider ourselves to be a pure race.

P: I don't understand this. I am a Roman and everywhere we are mixed. I offer my prayers at our shrines, especially Aesclepius, but make sacrifices to Venus and Mercury.

J: It is the nature of consciousness. Your wife is ill is she not?

The man did not answer. Instead he hung his head a little lower from his shoulders.

J: It is true that an animal sacrifice could substitute for a sin offering. Our father Abram received God's word on the sacred mountain and ushered in a new era. Where once we would offer our own sons as a sacrifice for our wrong doing....

Jesus turned to look at Yusef dozing with one eye slightly cocked.

J: We now sacrifice an unblemished lamb or dove in the Temple. But I say to you, we have moved on. Our race is considered pure only on this basis of consciousness, which passes in the essence of flesh. The purer the bloodline the higher the spirit, so that we can prepare for the rapture of the dead and our resurrection into heaven. We are like potentiated seeds, breeding true to the environment. A time will come when the environment will provide the conditions for our germination into a new worldly era. I say to you that this time is now. But it is for all nations to enjoin. The new age does not require an animal sacrifice anymore; our Temple is passing into history. But it is our message carried in belief and practice that will ensure our legacy and that God is the God of all nations. The Jews only preserve their brand of monotheism. Beyond our blood we must now mix amongst the Gentiles, amongst your people. You will evolve your spirit to receive God's true message. But you must let go of your ancient customs, as I do mine. They were vehicles in preparation for this new age. It is now too conceited to believe that our native practices alone will guarantee resurrection. Though we have considered our people to be more evolved, purer in our word and ritual, we have mixed freely amongst the Gentile nations to ensure that the conception of the one God will permeate amongst you. Only time will tell. You personally can make this decision for yourself. Let the spirit infuse your flesh, flesh is spirit. Let your body resonate to this message, your body is a message. Let your word speak of the oneness of being, being is becoming. Go home and touch your wife. Tell her you have received holy guidance. Here, take this small vial of oil and mix it with ground barley and wheat to form a paste. Each time you make this bread remember me, remember the oneness of nature and its providence. Remember that a seed is potentiated, but that through its processing we take Creation into our hearts. In our passion, in our suffering you will evolve. Not as many gods, but as the One God.

The passerby stood motionless, transfixed by Jesus' words. His eyes blazed with intention.

P: Thank you, I will go to my wife. I, I..... hope to see you again yes?

J: Make this bread in my name, in the anointed one, in the name of Christ.

Yusef shuffled from his repose and instinctively raised himself in preparation to move on. The vendor continued to grin. On reaching down he took the two denarii and tossed it to him. The man grappled in the dust. By the time he could offer Jesus anything to eat the father and his son had already moved on.

J: Don't be so eager to accept every sweet thing that comes your way. Sometimes you must accept the sour too, it can be much healthier.

## Act1 Scene 10

Jesus arrived to see that everybody was on the boat awaiting the two of them.

S: Come, come, we must catch the wind.

The boat was fine, with a crew of 8 including Solomon. It was here that Jesus removed his stringed instrument from his back and sat in the comfort of Mary's arms around him. Nets straddled the deck in preparation for the fishing and the crew were busy oaring out from the natural dock that Tarraco provided, sufficiently deep in places to prevent grounding. The family of four watched the city disappear into the distance, surrounded as they were by many other sailing vessels moving in both directions. There were general calls and harks across the sea's placid surface as fishermen greeted each other, picking up vital information for the next catch. The morning had progressed well and Solomon seemed even happier than before. Jesus assumed that Mary had made the final contract for a quantity of oil to be given to Solomon on arriving at Amet'lla. In the meanwhile he pondered the African.

J: My love, we may have extra guests to put up when we reach camp. We should set up the yurt.

Mary ran her fingers through his hair.

M: We had a visit whilst you were away with Yusef. A Roman guard inspected our cargo. Solomon took him to one side and agreed everything.

J: We are not carrying much. This guard, what did he look like?

M: Like one of our blood.

J: His accent?

M: Like one of our kind. Solomon dealt with him.

J: His name is Decius, his Roman name.

M: What did he want?

J: We have nothing to hide. It may be that he has taken orders from his commanding officers to monitor our movements.

M: Do they suspect subversion?



J: I expect that anyone with Jewish descent will be under surveillance. Now that we know the uprisings are happening in the land of our fathers.

M: What does Solomon carry and where does he go after this?

J: The road to el Perelló from Tarraco is difficult, and very dry. I don't doubt that he has had plenty time to make an even greater profit from this journey. His grin increases with his load.

M: He is a Roman.

J: And a businessman. Let him go about his business. He has patrons no doubt. His honour is valued amongst the élites. It could be a visa to securing friendly relations amongst officials.

M: At what expense?

J: Oil, Mary. That is all it will cost us. There is a lot to gain from these relations. We are God's chosen.

M: Does God choose an African businessman?

J: He serves our cause. We are in his capable hands right now, agreed?

M: Yes. He talks of doom and death a lot.

J: So do I.

M: Yes my love, but in the context of our religion, our ancestry. For Solomon it is always about the vagaries of the sea, and lost cargo, lost money. He has even lost his family.

A moment passed before Jesus replied.

J: One will come after me who will bring a sword and remove a father from his son, a husband from his wife. For us there is only one love and faith in the one true God, and each person must make their own individual paths. It is only lonely for those who have lost their belief.

Solomon, now that the sail is raised will you convene to join us in prayer?

S: Of course. I will order my crew also.

J: No, let them participate at will, for it is your patronage that I value.

S: You are so kind holy man. Let me clear the deck.

With this Solomon pulled the nets to one side and laid down a series of hemp rugs to crouch upon. Mary poured a vial of sweet smelling oil onto a hot coal and Yusef got busy with laying the mats to face the sun in the east. Solomon stood aside to view the preparations.

S: Are we ready now?

J: Not quite.

With this a dove flew down onto the prow of the ship carrying a twig in its beak. Jesus continued.

J: Follow me.

He crouched on his haunches on one of the mats and faced the sun with his forehead touching the floor. On raising himself several times he began to speak.

J: *God, for me you represent the unknown  
You will never reveal yourself to me in any form  
Other than through the lens of my senses  
For you have raised me high amongst the people  
And made me a guest of honour amongst them  
What befalls me now is always in your hands  
I await my great fate  
For it seems you bring me to a grand finale  
I ask, Is this an end of earthly life?  
Or am I to expect this to be the beginning of eternal sustenance  
You bring me amongst every kind of flora  
My search for the origin shows you in a multitude of forms  
To see you in such opulence surely is the end of time  
When only the most revered amongst humanity are granted this path  
It is a solo quest not lonely in the least  
Every walking day is a guiding hand into the deeper unknown  
Bringing me in closer union with the singularity of your being  
And each new rising sun brings with it greater freedom  
As your messenger the lower conscious masses see me as a guiding light  
They would touch me only to draw nearer the flame of life  
Burning as it does in the deepest recesses of every living being  
I am amongst your garden and consistently struck by one beauty after another  
Where does it end, where does it start?  
It seems nature is in the palms of my hands  
I am not alone*

Solomon was fixed in his position and dared not move. In a moment his look had changed from grinning to melancholy. Mary whispered under her breath and Yusef remained stationary. As for the rest of the crew 3 of their members had joined in the prayer locating for themselves a place on the upper deck. After Jesus returned to his full length everybody else followed suit and quietly went about their own business with barely another word spoken. In fact, nobody said anything until the sun reached its zenith.

1<sup>st</sup> CM: Ahmad, there is another hiding in the hull. I caught him eating the fruit. He is just a boy.

With this the holy family turned around all at once.

S: Bring him on deck.

A young scruffy stowaway appeared from the hull forcibly dragged by the first crewman. His face was dirtied, his mouth still chomping away at an apple. The boy was wiry and didn't look

starved. In fact, had it not been for the sea he could probably easily have run for it, but with no place to go he just stood there nonchalant. Solomon shouted at him.

S: Who are you? What are you doing here? Halamul, search his pockets.

The massive bulk of Halamul turned the boy upside down and shook him. Another apple dropped out, a single denari, and a copper bracelet.

S: Where did you get these from thief?

The boy did not respond.

S: Slap him Halamul.

Halamul's great hand hit him so hard that the boy struck the deck. His top lip bled from the impact. Mary stepped in.

M: He is a boy, not a man. Maybe he has no family too.

S: He is a thief. He has already lost his innocence. I will treat him like a thief. Halamul, bring my cutlass.

The boy gasped in shocked.

S: Ah, so you understand our language! Give me your hand!

The boy recoiled in horror. Jesus meanwhile sent Yusef down below to check their belongings. Halamul came back with a curved sword. The boy, out of terror, had to reply.

B: I have no home. I heard you talking. I just needed to get out of the city.

S: Why? Was somebody chasing you? Were you wanted by the guards? What else have you stolen?

Halamul, did you notice anything missing?

1<sup>st</sup> CM: Not really. Not without doing a fuller inspection.

M: He can hardly be hiding anything else Solomon. You will find out if anything has gone astray when you arrive at next port.

S: Nevertheless, I cannot afford to keep him on board and take that risk. It is too late to turn around for we will miss the wind if we expect to get to Amet'lla before nightfall.

Halamul, throw him overboard.

B: No, I can't swim. Please sir, I promise to help you.

S: Well you should have thought about that before you came onboard.

Halamul, throw him far. I don't want him hanging onto the side.

M: Jesus, my love, he is just a boy.

J: We are Solomon's guest and will not interfere in his judgement.  
M: But he is the same age as our son.  
J: It is not for us to judge. If the boy is not a thief then God will intervene.  
S: Yes, it is in the hands of God. Halamul, grab him and throw him!

The boy struggled and panicked, flapping like a tightly-bound fish in a net.

B: Pleeeeease? I am sorry.

Jesus looked at Halamul and took notice of the fact that he was not one of the crew who prayed with him. Halamul took the boy with both hands and swung him back. The boy screamed.

B: No, pleeeeee! They said you were a holy man.

Halamul disregarded him and tossed him overboard, as far as he could. The boy landed about 15 feet from the boat, too far for an oar to reach. Instantly he started scrabbling in the water. Jesus pondered his last words.

J: So, Solomon, is your judgement complete? Is the boy now made innocent removed as he is from your boat? What is it that you cherish so much that a small boy can threaten you? A couple of apples, a pocket full of grain? Would you now throw out your nets to catch a fish if only to eat of your fill?

S: He is a thief. No thief can be trusted.

J: Is it not enough that you have lost your own family? Tell me Ahmad, when was the last time you saw your own brother? This blood will be on your own hands. Whose image are you created in, who are your masters?

The boy was quickly running out of energy, his head frequently disappearing beneath the surface and gulping for air. Solomon was hanging his head low.

S: It is done, let nature take him away.

J: Yes, for truly nature takes all things away, and where there is no nature there is only stubbornness. Are you really as cold as the fish in the sea Ahmad?

M: Have you not ever longed for a son yourself Solomon?

Solomon had become confused. His eyes darted from one to another.

S: I cannot be held guilty for a thief.

J: Is it wrong to steal of nature Ahmad? What is it you accuse him of? Stealing an apple, an apple created by nature. If nature has her way she will take this boat from you. Is that theft too Ahmad?

S: How do we know that he hasn't taken something else, that bracelet for example?

Mary bent down to pick it up, she inspected it. Jesus raised his voice above the splashing of the surf on the side of the boat.

J: Can anybody here lay claim to that bracelet?

Nobody was forthcoming. The boy now had gulped too much water and coughed his last. Slowly he descended below into the depth.

J: He who will claim to own the gifts of nature please step forward.

Again, nobody was forthcoming. Only Yusef returned from the hull in canny simultaneity as a prophetic statement of one issuing from the depths.

J: Then, as a fisher of men, I take this child as my own.

With this Jesus plunged into the deep water in frantic search of the lost child. Thirty seconds passed and Yusef gave a mournful cry.

Y: Papa, papa!

Mary's eyes were wide and ablaze. Was it fear, anxiety, a sense of foreboding, a loss of faith, or perplexity? Yusef called again to the lost figures in the water.

Y: Papa, papa!

Mary could only whisper.

M: My love, my love.  
No Yusef, come to me. No Yusef, do not....

Mary gasped another. Yusef jumped into the water and splashed even harder than the boy had done. He kept on shouting.

Y: Papa, papa!

Solomon struck out an oar.

S: Yusef, take this oar. Grab it, please, take this oar.

But the boat had drawn too far away from Yusef and Solomon began weeping. He threw the oar into the sea and it floated. Mary continued to whisper, trembling, almost resigned to some irreconcilable fate.

M: Our Father, who art in heaven, give us this day our daily bread, and forgive those who trespass against you...

Solomon had no more quibble. Mary had stopped her words when he leapt into the water after Yusef.

S: Yusef, yusef, grab my hand!

Y: Papa, papa!

Solomon uncomfortably grabbed the floating oar and threw it at Yusef. He himself was no great swimmer. Meanwhile the rest of the crew were swinging the boat around.

S: Yusef, take my hand. Here, climb on my back.

Solomon struggled even with the weight of a small boy. He held onto the heavy oar like his whole life depended on it. The ship came round. By now a full minute had passed and there was no sign of Jesus.

Mary lurched over to the side of the boat and grabbed at Yusef. A second crew man helped pull the boy in. She was passionately tearful, as Yusef climbed onto Solomon's shoulders. Mary wept out.

M: God save us.

Just then not 5 feet away Jesus emerged through the surface. He was dragging a lifeless body in his wake. He took a huge breath as if it were his first on leaving his mother's womb.

J: Solomon, help me.

Solomon grabbed the other arm of the boy and dragged him to the side of the boat. A second crew man pulled him up, this motionless mass. Without delay Jesus clawed his way back onto the deck with the help of another.

J: You, Halamul. Search this boy for any gifts of nature as you would a thief.

Halamul was perplexed at first but slowly he lifted the boy upside down and shook him with his big hands. Sea water retched from his mouth.

J: Keep shaking him.

Meanwhile Yusef lay in Mary's arms with a blanket around him, and Solomon was looking rather forlorn in the sea, his head bobbing on the surface. Just then the boy vomited.

J: Put him down now Halamul.

The boy spluttered and Jesus gave a look at Mary to tend to his needs. It had already occurred to Jesus that Yusef was wet, and he darted a quick look at Solomon who lay waiting, sad, overboard.

J: You cast demons out of one but you must be prepared to face your own. I will have no murderers in my company. You will remember this day, for we have died and are reborn. These demons are of your own creation. Do not believe that by casting the first stone you wash your hands of guilt. For with every accusation nature returns your debt. There you lie Solomon, cleansed of your sin, washed in wilderness. Give me your hand friend.

Solomon wept as he pulled himself up. Halamul had also taken himself to one side whilst the rest of the crew got busy with continuing the journey. Mary lifted the new boy up, who said nothing, and wrapped him in her own drapes. Just then a small fish squeezed out of the boy's garment.

M: Look, my love. It is a gift of nature.

Jesus smiled as he dried himself.

J: Halamul, come out of your reverie. Can you eat this small fish?

He glumly replied.

1<sup>st</sup> CM: No, it is too small.

J: Then throw it back to its mother.

Solomon, cast your nets, the day is young.

And with that the crew hauled in a giant catch and Solomon remembered that he was a fisherman. The crew slowly got back into the order of things and everybody began to mutter as if the air had been cleared. Solomon was smiling again whilst Yusef and the new boy got to know each other. Mary huddled Jesus, saying very little. Despite their age difference their attraction was so indubitably strong that one could imagine it like an old, old tree rooted into the earth. Their spirit on the other hand was like the sun rising from the sea's horizon, always returning. Mary whispered.

M: I prayed your prayer.

## Act2 Scene 1

By early evening the port of Amet'lla loomed in the distance. The wind had been kind and a few other fishing boats drifted in on either side of them. Here the rocky promontories offered calm waters but a solitary wooden pier was the only means to dock. In spite of that the fishermen waded in and out in their smaller boats not fussed by the inconvenience of shallow waters. The fishing along these waters was apparently good enough to incept a small community. Amet'lla was one of those towns that quickly gave way to wilderness, although the cultivation of almonds was a dazzling site to bear with the spring blossom. Amet'lla lay en route to the south but it was off the beaten track and enjoyed a relative amount of freedom from Roman patrols. The small town inland by the name of el Perelló was the main patrolled road and enjoyed high vantage points overlooking the surrounding countryside. The road between these two towns was often dangerous and sometimes threatened by banditry. But Jesus felt, after settling here those years ago, a reminiscence of his own native lands although it could not compare to his Galilee with its fertile soils. The boat journey then could easily have been a fishing trip along the Dead Sea.

M: What captivates you my love? Yeshu, you are in another space.

J: Don't use that name in the ear shot of foreigners, especially Roman citizens. You know where we came from and the children aren't old enough to endure another wandering. Our anonymity has been like a breadth of fresh air.

M: But do you miss Galilee?

J: Only when I have been away from the wilderness for too long. Here I feel at home and look forward to the wild rabbit as I would in the land of our fathers.

Yesuf, come over here my son.

Y: Yes, papa?

J: How is your new friend?

Y: He doesn't talk a lot.

J: What is his name?

Y: He doesn't tell me.

J: Umhh... let's call him 'Conejo'.

Yusef and Mary laughed.

J: Solomon, you will have to set anchor a little out to sea otherwise your big boat will ground on the sands.

S: I sleep here overnight.

J: There is a guest house on the shore, friends of ours.

S: Nevertheless, I will leave the crew on this boat.

J: As you say. And the boy?

S: He can't swim, he isn't going anywhere.

J: When we get a little closer I will call for a barge. Are you sure you want to leave the boy on board?



S: No, I am not sure. But Halamul will keep an eye on him.  
J: We are calling him 'Conejo'.  
S: 'Conejo'? That seems about right. Where is he now?  
J: He is in the hull sleeping.  
S: Umhh...  
J: Tomorrow morning we travel to our farm lot.  
S: How far is it from here?  
J: About 7km. We will take a cart in the morning. And I promise you a Jewish welcome.  
S: I will have some business to sort out first. You offer me your protection?  
J: I thought you were protecting us Solomon?  
S: Umhh...  
J: Mary, prepare our belongings, we need to anchor down. I will swim the final league to obtain a small boat.

With this Jesus plunged into the relatively shallow water, too deep though for the boys to traverse.

S: You have a fine man there Mary.  
M: Isn't he.  
S: I wish I had his confidence in the water.  
M: Maybe that is why I was so drawn to him.  
S: He spent a long time underneath.  
M: Yes, sometimes too long.  
S: What does he mean to be reborn again?  
M: You must ask him yourself Solomon for I am not a teacher.  
S: What did you mean about having a son?  
M: Just that. Your responsibilities change and you see life differently.  
S: You mean the way I treated Conejo?  
M: Maybe. If you are so successful why have you not sought a family?  
S: And give up my business?  
M: No Solomon. Because we are a family does not mean we do not have oil to trade. You just have to re-orientate things around.

Solomon looked over at the now sleepy walking figure of Conejo. The boy was duly keeping his distance from everyone other than Yusef.

S: I had a family once. But ever since I was a boy I was brought into Roman service. I don't think I am capable of doing anything else.  
M: Come, Solomon. They have made you to value materials too much. I saw how you jumped into the water to save Yusef.  
S: Yes, but that was guilt, because I caused the event to happen.

M: Caused? You hardly have the power to dictate who lives and who dies. You saw how the divine will works. You said yourself that you used to raid the Roman ships at night.

S: Yes, my brothers.

M: The brother you have lost. Was he sold to slavery also?

S: We were taken away and kept apart.

M: Maybe this is something that you miss. You resent not growing up with your brother.

S: The Romans spared my life. After this I grew to appreciate Roman life.

M: Is this something you can give back Solomon? Of the two worlds which would you chose again?

S: I am not sure. I was a thief once but I was also innocent. We did it to survive. But I like the life now.

M: It is not about becoming a thief again. It is about understanding where you came from and knowing where you are going. You don't seem to have a bridge.

S: I can see from your dress my lady that you have an opulent background. I have dealt with many aristocrats in the past.

M: Yes, that is my point. I know where I am going Solomon because I have the spirit of my ancestors with me. I have the greater cause. I see my future in Jesus and to fulfill his spiritual values too. I am sharing another's life.

S: I have my crew to look after.

M: You have your own wealth to look after. But for a moment I saw your old self, a bridge to your past, when you pulled Yusef out of the water.

S: You saw a guilty man trying to put right the things he made wrong.

M: Right, and I will always appreciate you for that Solomon.

S: Umhh...

M: Look, here comes Jesus with a boat. You will eat with us Solomon, with Yusef.

With this Solomon made arrangements with Halamul to keep an eye on the boy and the boat. He took a bag of personal belongings and instructed three of his crew members to accompany him to the shore. A short time later Jesus pulled up.

J: I have not made lodgings for these extra men, but I am sure I can find them some tonight without too much hassle. It is quiet in town.

S: No matter, they are my personal guard. They will find their own lodgings and rotate their duty so that there is always one guarding my door.

J: As you wish. We are to eat together Solomon?

S: Don't worry about them Jesus, their customs are different.

J: Nevertheless, they are welcome.

S: Umhh... always too kind holy man.

J: We can't be too kind Solomon.

With that the eight of them set off in the small boat, Jesus and Mary's children, Solomon plus the three extra crew. On arriving to shore Solomon instructed his crew to set up camp.

Meanwhile the holy family entered a small bungalow, just a single lounge with two separate sleeping quarters.

J: You can put your bags here Solomon. Mary will prepare a late supper. Yusef will sleep in your quarters.

S: Umhh...

J: He will go to bed soon straight after we have eaten. I advise to check the bed sheets for bugs.

S: I advise the boy to stay with you.

J: Come, Solomon, you have nothing to hide. And you are now our guests. This is our village. You are under our protection now.

S: Umhh... I suppose so.

After they had blessed and eaten their food Solomon went out to check on the crew. He arranged for one to be continually on vigil outside the entrance to the building. Meanwhile he left them specific instructions for the rest of the night. On returning Yusef was already in bed and the three of them engaged some light talk.

J: So where is this black dog Solomon?

S: Oh! It is a long story.

M: We like stories Solomon.

S: To cut a long story short I remember the time when I was travelling along the Thracian coast on a slave ship. At this time I was now grown up and in charge of a menagerie of animals being transported from Africa. I hadn't yet won my freedom but I was trusted. There were all types of animals on this boat; for once we were not carrying only grain. Anyhow, somebody wasn't feeding these animals enough and they were beginning to upset each other. Despite their chains and cages it was assumed that because I came from the same country that they would behave. There was a giraffe on board, just one. Do you know what they look like?

M: No Solomon, describe it.

S: It has a very long neck and long legs. It eats the leaves high in a tree. The shipment was to go to some very high official although the details were not available; we just took instruction. We think it was to the brother of the Emperor. Anyhow, one of the cages of the monkeys broke and these creatures were flying around the rigging. The crew were in disarray. I was trying my best to calm things down. I also had a black dog for company who became a friend of mine. I called it Ebony. Well, the monkeys decided to have some sport running around like lunatics screaming at the tops of their voices. The giraffe got scared and Ebony was barking incessantly at them. There was only one thing for it. I told a number of the crew to arm themselves and chase them back onto the decks where we could throw nets over them. I have never seen anything like it, they looked like amateurs climbing the rigging. They took out their cutlasses and were swinging wildly at the monkeys who were not coming down. The giraffe was getting the best view with its long neck but I don't think it was enjoying any of it. As the crew closed in the monkeys raised their voices even higher. The giraffe had had enough and stampeded the deck. Its long dangly

legs were crashing into the decking and it stumbled head first into the sail. It tore the sail from the main stay and was running around the deck like this ghost. Half the crew jumped overboard, Ebony barking his head off, monkeys screaming, cutlasses were flying. It was a mad house. The three monkeys started running circles around the crew who were chasing them. They got scared and jumped for it, straight down the neck of the giraffe, only now it was covered in a white sheet. The giraffe had had enough and crashed over the side. Half a crew missing, the prize animal gone, a barking mad dog, and the monkeys were running the show.

M: So what happened?

S: Once I retrieved the crew we had to row to port. The giraffe swam off into the distance. The monkeys stayed in the rigging and I kept the dog by my side. The crew were still frightened. As we drew to land the monkeys started getting agitated again. On docking they scampered down and took the head clean off one of the slaves. The last one was coming straight at me but when I went to draw my cutlass I realized that I wasn't carrying it. I thought I was a gonna but Ebony stepped in and what ensued was this horrendous fight. My heart was pounding as I looked around for my cutlass. I must have lost it in the earlier scuffles but was so exasperated that I hadn't taken notice. It was then that I realised the value of a dog. The monkey was maimed but not before Ebony was thrown overboard. The monkey ran off into the docks but was so injured that somebody had stuck an arrow into it before it got any further.

M: And the dog?

S: To this day I don't know what happened to it, but it saved my life.

M: You tell a nice story Solomon. It is time to retire. We will see you in the morning.

S: Goodnight my friends.

On retiring to their quarters but not before checking over their son, they discussed a little thought before falling asleep.

M: Do you think that story was real Yeshu?

J: Real enough.

M: Do you think he was talking about his brother?

J: Reality is like that; themes keep getting repeated. I don't know if he realizes that he could be reliving that moment over and over regarding the loss of his brother.

M: Will he join us?

J: An interesting thought had occurred to me after the event with Conejo. Why hadn't the guard spotted the boy in the hull when he was inspecting it?

Mary just looked at Jesus in the face full on.

J: And the boy mentioned something about a holy man. We must be wary here. If my thinking is correct this boy represents a lucky portent. It is like the unknown element that heavily influences the destiny of souls. That the boy survived would suggest that I have removed a heavy

burden from Solomon's conscience. For now I have changed the course of his destiny. He may well join us. As for the boy we must assume that he knew the Roman guard, albeit briefly.

M: The boy died in the sea and was also reborn. Have we altered his destiny also?

J: Of course my love. For the journey is about us. We need not know what Solomon is carrying, but just accept that he serves an unknown element in our lives too.

M: We live.

And with that Mary closed her eyes.

## Act2 Scene 2

From the distance Yusef could hear the wash of the surf. He turned to a window and peered outside. It was immensely black out there with no moon to light the way. Solomon was not to be seen either. Still, he needed to pee and left the room looking for the front door. A small oil lamp burned to one side. Yusef tried to feel himself around banging into a few bits of furniture when the front door quietly opened. One of the two men was carrying another lamp whilst the other had a large bundle. Yusef, being small, stopped in his tracks and just watched them, invisible.

1<sup>st</sup> CM: Just lay it down there. Go back and deal with the other thing. Clean up after you.

Yusef heard the man leave the building whilst the dark shadow of his accomplice took the parcel and opened it. It seemed to be made up of many smaller packages. After removing various portions of it he retied the bundle and left the building quietly. Unbeknown to all Jesus lay with both eyes slightly ajar, just enough to let in some light whilst his ears played out the scenario that was occurring in the other room and outside. Voices chatted to each other. Yusuf continued to the door and turned left around to the back of the building. There he relieved himself watching a late moon just rising above the sea's horizon. He could see the boat in the distance; there seemed to be some activity going on but it was too obscure. He heard a splash of something large and another figure swimming towards the beach. Yusuf carried on watching until the man could stand up in the sea. He handed another bundle to someone expecting him, and then promptly turned back towards the boat. Meanwhile the bundle was taken away into the darkness and Yusef sought to go back inside. Just as he turned the corner of the building the surprised Solomon was entering from the front.

S: Hey, little fish, you gave me a startle there.

Y: Hi Solomon, had to go to pee pee.

S: Great mind's think alike. You make sure you go back to bed and cover up well. Go on. I will sleep later.

Yusef slept almost instantly whilst Solomon entered the building only briefly before leaving again. The morning came and Jesus and Mary were up for sunrise preparing a fruit muesli. Having decided the day before that fasting was inappropriate in the company of a guest who needed

feeding and after the energy of the day spent in moving their belongings about, Mary had time to wander about the village and announce their arrival to some acquaintances.

1<sup>st</sup> W: Mary, you are back and lovely to see you. How was the trip?

M: Hello Eliza, we managed to succour a fishing boat yesterday morning. And here, has there been any happenings?

2<sup>nd</sup> W: Hello Maria, not since you left. We heard some of the men folk moving about during the night. That must be you then?

M: Oh Isabella, you grow up so fast. Such a small woman. Does your mother teach you to put on face paint?

1<sup>st</sup> W: She grows up too fast for my liking. Some days she is out with the fishermen.

2<sup>nd</sup> W: I am only doing what you do mother.

1<sup>st</sup> W: And who was that guard you were talking to yesterday afternoon?

M: Guard?

1<sup>st</sup> W: There was a Roman on horseback passing through this way, alone.

M: Maybe there is a platoon nearby, passing south.

2<sup>nd</sup> W: North, they were heading towards the mountains. He said something about Briton.

M: Anything else?

2<sup>nd</sup> W: Something about a war. Oh mother, I am old enough to accompany their kitchen staff. When are you going to let me go on an adventure with them?

1<sup>st</sup> W: When I am fed up with you, and you finished serving your mother. Then you can join your sisters.

M: Isabella, the rigours of war take their toll. You quickly lose friends when the fighting starts.

2<sup>nd</sup> W: I would make new friends. I am already bored of this town.

M: I would ask you to join us maybe once a week if you like. We are cultivating a new religious consciousness but I am not so sure you are ready for it.

1<sup>st</sup> W: We are not the religious type Mary. We have our hearth gods and they suffice to keep us out of poverty.

2<sup>nd</sup> W: I don't need to be rich; I just like to travel.

M: Well, if war comes here you will know it.

1<sup>st</sup> W: Anyhow, the next time you pass by I will have some of that delicious oil. I suppose you sold the load you took to Tarraco?

M: Ah Eliza, we wouldn't have come back until we did. But we are always passing by this way. What do you have for barter?

1<sup>st</sup> W: Here take some bread we baked this morning and have it on account.

M: Well, we tend to make our own but I need a little for breakfast when I get back to our guest house. We have a crew of 10 to feed.

2<sup>nd</sup> W: Can I come?

1<sup>st</sup> W: Okay Isabella, take this down to... I assume you are near the....

2<sup>nd</sup> W: I know where it is. Give them to me.

And with this Isabella grabbed the loaves in the basket and jaunted back down the hill.

M: You will lose her Eliza, she wants men.

1<sup>st</sup> W: Ever since her father bugged of. I don't know where she is most of the time.

M: I will see you in a few days. I need to get a few more things before I leave here though. Jesus will make sure she doesn't get too frisky with the men.

Meanwhile Yusef was up and playing with his father while Solomon slept so soundly that one wondered the last time he had a good night's sleep. Some of the crew men were up and about preparing their own food. Another came through the door.

3<sup>rd</sup> CM: Sir, the boy is missing from the boat.

J: Really, best to wake Solomon and tell him.

The man walked over and slipped quietly into Solomon's bed chambers.

Y: Papa, I saw him last night.

J: Keep quiet for now, would you Yusefy. Just listen.

3<sup>rd</sup> CM: Ahmad, Ahmad.

S: What's up, what time is it?

3<sup>rd</sup> CM: It is one hour pass sunrise. The boy is missing.

S: Which boy?

3<sup>rd</sup> CM: The stowaway.

Solomon casually nodded his head.

S: No great loss. Here, help me dress. Pass my tunic.

3<sup>rd</sup> CM: What shall I do?

S: You are to stay on the boat until I return. I will be going inland for a few kilometres with our special guests. I don't know how long I will be, but if I am not back within 4 days come and find me. Now go. I will leave further instructions with Halamul.

Solomon entered the front room grinning as he does.

S: Jesus, a fine morning is it not?

J: It is always a fine morning if you watch the sun rise. Here in particular you see it rearing over the mountains.

S: Ah holy man, I like my bed. It is a hard life being a fisherman.

J: So, so. Maybe you should think of changing your profession.

S: I travel; my friends are with me. I ask for nothing else.

J: Here, there is some water in a bowl to freshen up with. Everything okay?

S: Urr... I think so. Well, the boy has gone missing.

Whilst Solomon was wiping away his sleepiness Jesus just stared at him with an expression of intention.

J: Do you know where?

S: He could have gone anywhere. He obviously knows how to swim a little, or he took an oar.

J: You need to check this with your crew first.

S: Yes, to see if there is anything missing. I will talk to the guard.

J: Yusef, go to uncle Juan's place. Tell him what you know about the boy and to keep an eye out for him. Be back here pronto for breakfast.

S: I am sorry about that Jesus, but I still didn't trust him.

J: It would be to your loss.

S: If the army find him alone they may conscript him. He will be taken care of somewhere. He does this sort of thing all the time. It is in his blood.

As Jesus considered this Isabella pounded through the door with a basket of bread.

J: Isa, you are up also. Is that for us?

I: Yes, for you especially. Mary is with my mother.

S: Hello pretty thing. You are a sight for sore eyes.

I: My name is Isabella.

J: This is Solomon Isa.

Isabella just looked at him, maybe unaccustomed to the deep blackness of his skin.

I: Can I help prepare breakfast?

S: Of course my dear.

I: My name is Isabella.

S: Isabella, my dear.

J: I see you prefer girls to boys then?

S: She reminds me of my sister. You know, small.

J: Isa, prepare the stove to heat up the milk. We need some wood from the shed and milk. You know where to get these things. But thanks for the bread.

Solomon, when we arrive back at our farm we may prepare a naming ceremony for our new baby. It is important that we all remain clean in God's eyes.

S: She is so useful is she not? To have somebody like that around.

J: She is not a slave; she is a peasant. We are not in the city anymore. I would advise you to be wary of the customs here. Your crewmen will probably like it here; there is a very humbling atmosphere among the villagers.

S: Yes, yes. I look forward to your oil and seeing how you farm.



J: We should leave after breakfast. I have acquired a pony and cart for the journey which you can return with at your leisure with a vase of oil.

S: Just one?

J: Do you not do well enough Solomon? It would be a full size. And you get fed and housed. I am sure you will like some of our folk. I can only take so many on a cart. If any extra crew men accompany you they must walk. Yusef will ride the pony.

S: Halamul will stay here but I will take two of my crew.

J: There is a donkey that needs going back but it is a little stubborn. And judging by your experience with animals I am sure you are used to it.

S: Yes, you like my story.

J: We have dogs too.

S: Okay, let me talk with my men.

J: Breakfast is soon.

Solomon left the building, on the way stopping to talk to Isabella who dutifully smiled. Just then Yusef turned up with Juán.

Juá: Hey, my brother. Jesús, everytime you go away the weather gets wet. Any happenings in Tarraco?

J: I will explain more later but I think the Romans are surveying our movements.

Juá: So what is new?

J: I met the Emperor; he is more modest than you think.

Juá: Really? And you wonder why you are being surveyed?

J: No, I mean, this is new, personal.

Juá: Oh, I see.

J: I need to go in deeper. Just keep an eye out for Roman guards.

Juá: They have passed this way, going north. There were a few scouts about here.

J: Any suspicious movements?

Juá: Not really, maybe they were conscripting a few more men.

J: Women as well probably. Times are changing. Some are too attracted to wealth and city life. Isabella is about. Keep an eye on her, she follows in her mother's footsteps already.

Juá: Yusef tells me that he saw someone leaving the boat at night and that you had another boy.

J: What did you see Yusef?

Y: Papa, they were carrying a bundle.

J: Was it moving? No, silly question.

Y: And I saw Solomon outside.

J: Yes, I heard some movements myself.

Y: They had many things on the table.

J: Like what Yusef.

Y: Bundles of cloth.

J: Juán, just let me know if you learn anything. On another note, we may have a baby naming ceremony in the next few days and you are invited.

Juá: Oh yes, another feast.

J: Yes Juán, another feast. Bring the family. We will eat meat but there will be other options.

Just then Isabella burst in. Yusuf was a little wary of her.

I: Hello everyone. I have some milk.

J: Thanks lovely. Yusef, you help her prepare the breakfast.

Yusef gave a wry expression to his father.

Y: Okay, you do what I do.

I: No, you do what I do? I am the woman.

With this Jesus and Juán chuckled as they left the building and discussed further possible events. Mary soon turned up and with Solomon and two of the crew they ate a hearty breakfast mix. Solomon sent the girl into the company of his men whilst the seven of them loaded their stores onto a cart and donkey. They headed for their farm, some 7 kilometres from here and a few hours journey. The last part of the trip was very accessible for it joined with the well-travelled road from the south. The gradual incline showed definite signs of military movement but, at this time in the morning things lay calm and still and the sound of birds accompanied the sweet scent of carob flower in the trees.

## Act2 Scene 3

Decius had returned to his barracks. As a promoted officer many of his former soldier colleagues instinctively ignored him. Still, he had made one or two very good friends and he sat around a table with them to play a game of dice.

D: I am only around for a few more days.

1<sup>st</sup> F: Then we should get you a good woman.

D: No, old habits die hard. I would only take wife.

1<sup>st</sup> F: Oh come on Decius. It would be a nice send off. You remember Clavius, how we sorted him out.

D: Yeh, we took him to a brothel and gave him a selection.

1<sup>st</sup> F: Right, so just a bit of fun.

D: I obliged to your customs, gave him what he expected. I expected to be settling down and meeting a charming maiden. I don't want to catch your diseases.

2<sup>nd</sup> F: It's all chance, now throw the die.

D: What's all chance?

2<sup>nd</sup> F: Your fate. You will meet your wife if you live long enough, and then it is down to the gods.

D: Thanks, how encouraging that sounds!

1<sup>st</sup> F: There'll be women on the march. You may take a fancy to one of them.

2<sup>nd</sup> F: Now throw the die and place your bet.

Decius threw two 6's.

2<sup>nd</sup> F: How lucky can you get!

The chuckle from Decius broke something of the hidden gloom in him.

D: So what is that you owe me now? 10 denarii and that scabbard you are wearing.

2<sup>nd</sup> F: Oh, not this scabbard. I picked this up on a battle field. It is too personal. Double or nothing?

D: Double or nothing? This is a joke. You will double or nothing it until you win.

2<sup>nd</sup> F: But that is fate Decius. You got to make use of your luck when you have it.

D: And you don't have it old boy. Now pay up.

2<sup>nd</sup> F: Come on Decius. I will be skint until my next pay.

D: I am going soon remember. I haven't got time to hang around until your next pay.

1<sup>st</sup> F: I will pay for him Decius. We will miss you.

D: Yeh. I was getting to like this city as well. I meet one man and my whole life changes. We are just like dice rolling along. You hit somebody and are stopped dead in your tracks.

2<sup>nd</sup> F: You are not dead yet Decius.

1<sup>st</sup> F: What man?

D: Some holy man in the street playing music.

1<sup>st</sup> F: Who was is?

D: God knows. I didn't even catch his name. But I found out he has a family. How can a holy man have a family and I don't?

2<sup>nd</sup> F: How do you know he was holy?

D: He has a beard. I know his kind, wandering. In my home country there were many like him. I don't see so many about here, if any, but when I saw him I decided to talk to him. He is from my country in the east.

1<sup>st</sup> F: So how did that change your life?

D: I was seen talking to him, that's it.

1<sup>st</sup> F: That's all?

D: That's it.

2<sup>nd</sup> F: So who was he?

D: Someone.

1<sup>st</sup> F: Can you find out?

D: Look guys. Can you bear with me on this if I tell you something else?

They just looked at Decius.

D: Apparently, or maybe, this man is known to the high priest. On the way to receiving my orders I was abducted.

2<sup>nd</sup> F: What!

D: Abducted and questioned, with a sack over my head.

1<sup>st</sup> F: This is serious. It's a crime punishable by death.

2<sup>nd</sup> F: Who?

D: I think they were Roman but I can't be sure.

2<sup>nd</sup> F: Then why would they hide their identity?

D: Don't know. If they were the Emperor's personal guard why would the high priest then send me off to the Britons? I mean, what has that got to do with speaking Jewish?

2<sup>nd</sup> F: What's speaking Jewish got to do with it?

D: The holy man was Jewish. Apparently there are Jewish links in the island of the Britons.

1<sup>st</sup> F: Are there? You are Jewish aren't you?

D: In our history, after the exile we spread far and wide. You don't know our people. They are zealous for the law. When we migrated to the northern continent we established blood lines and set up communities along the trade routes.

1<sup>st</sup> F: Then maybe they need an interpreter.

D: Oh, there are plenty of people who speak our tongue. No, this is something else. I need to find out who that man was.

2<sup>nd</sup> F: Why? You read too much into it.

D: I was abducted and released. They told me to maintain relations with the holy man, on pain of death. And then the high priest sends me to Briton. It doesn't make sense.

There was a pause in the conversation.

1<sup>st</sup> F: Find out who he is.

D: He's gone, took a boat with his family down south.

2<sup>nd</sup> F: And...

D: I got a little ruffian on board when I went to inspect the cargo, to find out where he lives.

2<sup>nd</sup> F: And you expect the boy to obey you?

D: I know his family here, that I would promise to help them out of poverty.

2<sup>nd</sup> F: What else did you give him?

D: Money and an amulet. If the boy wants his family back he will return.

1<sup>st</sup> F: So so. You have only got a few more days as you say Decius. You may want to go to high command again and tell them of your abduction.

D: Don't mention it to anyone. It may be better that I leave this city anyway. I want my life.

1<sup>st</sup> F: With the Britons? They are cold-blooded killing machines.

D: Yeh, so are we. Now throw your dice.

## Act2 Scene 4

The high priest was pacing up and down as he called to himself members of the élite guard. He looked agitated as if he were in a hurry.

HP: What do you know of this man?

EG1: He is Jewish, goes by the name of Jesus. He doesn't seem the normal type.

HP: What do you mean?

EG1: Well, all the other Jews keep themselves to themselves. Maybe not so much here but certainly in Rome and further afield.

HP: Who amongst you has experience with these communities?

EG2: I do. When I was posted in Rome I was told to break up their charity shop. They draw in a lot of slaves and convert them to their bloody religion. All the time they offer hospice and food their numbers grow. There always seems to be an air of haughtiness about them.

HP: They are zealous for their law. They make absolutely no concessions to Roman life. Have you found out anything else about this man?

EG1: He is considered a holy man.

HP: All of them think they are holy. And in the East they continue to claim independence from the Empire.

EG1: We can find this man if you think he is a threat. We already have others on the case.

HP: What else do you know about him?

EG3: He is in touch with a citizen by the name of Joseph, a respected physician.

HP: And?

EG3: We believe they are trafficking hallucinogens amongst the aristocracy.

HP: Why them? Is it expensive?

EG1: Not necessarily. It's possible they use the drug in ritual.

HP: The aristocracy you say? It doesn't make sense. I know our sources. I would know of this man called Joseph. This Joseph, where is he from?

EG3: He's a Greek.

HP: With a name like Joseph, he must be a convert to the Jewish faith.

EG3: He regularly makes contact with the fishermen.

HP: Have you questioned him?

EG1: Not yet. We did not want to arouse too much suspicion.

HP: Good. Better to see who he interacts with. Maintain a vigil upon him.

EG1: And the holy man?

HP: Where has he been spotted?

EG1: A number of centurions have seen him playing in the street.

HP: Playing what?

EG1: An ancient type of stringed instrument.

HP: Well, is he any good? Does it sound like a pretext for another motive?

EG2: There is a mixed reaction. Nobody understands him although we have located a centurion who speaks his language.

HP: His name?

EG2: Decius.  
HP: Decius. That can't be so.  
EG2: Is there a problem your honour?  
HP: What did you tell Decius?  
EG2: Nothing.  
HP: You treated him well did you?

There was a silence amongst the 3 guards.

HP: I said, did you treat him well?  
EG1: Not quite.  
HP: Say no more. Who gave you orders?  
EG1: Your honour, we are under oath.  
HP: Under oath! How dare you condescend to me. In the name of Jupiter and Mercury there is no higher than me other than.....my God.  
EG1: Your honour.  
HP: Get out, all of you. And report back when you find out who this holy man is and who he is working for.  
EG2: But your honour. We believe he is for real.  
HP: Yes, of course he is, that is what it means to be holy. Now get out! What a mess this is.

After the personal guard had left the pontiff called to him his personal assistant.

HP: Send out another horse guard to intercept the message that left only this morning. Be quick. The messenger is not to reach Gaul, and must return. And arrange an appointment with the Emperor, conveying my deepest apologies during his vacation of course.

With that the perplexed High Priest went about his business, albeit he seemed to be distracted at various points in his routine. The personal guard meanwhile continued their short whispered conversation outside the main chambers.

EG1: I told you it would be a mistake.  
EG2: We took orders.  
EG3: Orders or not. We could have done better just going straight to the holy man.  
EG2: What, and give our initiative away. No, better to know what groups he interacts with. His Worship will redeem us of any transgression.  
EG1: We hope. But these people are fickle. They change their minds at every moment. We might become the butt of the Emperor's wrath?  
EG3: We have to be prepared for his questions. Find Decius again.  
EC2: Not yet. Give the man time. In the meanwhile we can keep observing Joseph and any other Jewish connections here.

## Act2 Scene 5

The pony and cart bumped along the dirt track in the direction of el Perelló with Solomon tagging along on the donkey. Yusef rode the pony and steered the cart whilst Jesus and Mary sat facing in the direction they were coming from, looking at Solomon. On either side almond trees were beginning to show off their rounded fruits. The occasional olive trees were a testament to the Roman incursion into this part of the Empire, and were generally grown by the wealthy aristocrats who owned large estates. The military had been here for over 200 years and in their wake were already starting to change the cuisine of the local palate. The introduction of the olive was a recent event ushered in by skilled gardeners and farmers who were transhipped from one continent to another. Not least was the Persian and Mesopotamian influence that had great knowledge in the art of propagating new fruits. Likewise the carob had already begun to naturalise itself in the surrounding landscape. The area though is named for its almond, providing a staple food during the winter months as a source of protein although in the more fertile plains wheat and barley were being grown. The natural unevenness of the land was a factor of its dry river beds, carved out from a bygone age when maybe these lands were a lot greener. Even after only 200 years of Roman occupation the deforestation was apparent to all. Subsequent land erosion had exposed much of the rocky substrate and was freely mined by the Romans as a low quality building material. But the conglomerate rock was abundant and many buildings were built of its stone. Either side of the road the sound of herders goading their mixed stock of goats, sheep and cattle could be heard, feeding of any low hanging and roadside vegetation. The track though, wound a long winding path in navigation of the gorges and uneven surface. Horse tracks littered the pathway and showed no particular direction of travel.

J: You can see Solomon that the main crop is almond. I am one of the new farms to cultivate olive trees. Young as they are they can still produce an abundance of oil even during a dry season. The key is water though, and it can be very dry here in summers.

S: You have no main river source to irrigate with?

J: Further south is the Ebre and there the Iberians grow oranges, lemons and other citrus. The soil is naturally deeper there too and a lot more can be grown. In its delta they grow rice.

S: It sounds like our ancient revered river in Egypt. There, with the rising of Venus comes the flooding and the fertility it brings is like that of the woman's womb.

J: The Ebre does not flood, or if it does it can only be after a heavy rain. I know of the Nile in Egypt. It is the river that you built an empire upon. Its seasonal cycles give birth to kings and queens. Even the Alexandrians were besotted with its culture.

S: We were a great nation once.

M: But are you from that land Solomon? Your skin is much darker.

S: I must confess that we have come from further south.

M: Our ancestors have revered the African nations for centuries. We understood and shared your culture. Our prophet Moses who laid down the law was born of a priestly line. The mysteries that you attribute to the fertility cycles are ingrained in our scriptures. We believe in the one God. Moses left us this teaching that originates from your pharaonic legacy.

J: Only that power corrupts, empires fall, all in the name of material gain.

S: But Jesus, it is the measure of one's fate. The wealth we accumulate is a sign of god's blessing.

J: Do you believe in the one God Solomon, or in many gods?

S: I believe that Ra gave birth to all gods.

M: Amun or Aten? I thought you were Roman anyhow.

S: It doesn't really matter. I am a seafaring fisherman. I talk to many peoples and learn of many things. Our tradition says that the Israelites fled the wrath of pharaoh. Africa is a land of plenty but that you preferred the desert life, the wilderness.

J: It is so, that God prepares us for death. One can only ask for what is inherited. Our land, now under the dominion of the Romans, is fertile. It is green in its valley bottoms. But a little further beyond is the desert, and this reminds us that our God of Moses, who travelled 40 years in the wilderness, can only be found in the fringes of human civilisation. Not in the massive edifices of temples, or even the libraries of the Greeks, but in the frugality of the environment. Hence, when we cultivate the land we leave the outside to nature so that the traveller can always glean a meal.

S: But I am happy Jesus, in my wealth. Surely this is the measure of my life?

J: And tomorrow when you may have nothing, thrown into jail, with your possessions taken from you? You are at the mercy of the whims of despots and madmen. Every individual has the right to land, this is the prerogative of man. Enough land to grow all the food that you require. When you ask for more and the starving lay at the roadside on you, you give in order to offset your own guilt but does this truly bind the thankful individual to God? Land is the most important inheritance we can all have, and it belongs to everybody. No one individual can lay claim to own any of it. Truly, this is the measure of life when you can grow your own food, for then you do not fall under the whims of a materialist who measures wealth by its accumulation. The subtleties of nature fine tune the individual so that the seasons dictate the flow of energy and understanding. Like every beast on this planet the wilderness is asking us to check our growth, to measure our needs, to remember to give thanks in time of plenty, to cohere in times of scarcity. Our forefather Joseph taught something of this to pharaoh many ages ago, and because of the humility of your great king he learnt to address nature, not for its whims but for its cycles. Material wealth though, concentrates the senses and the desires. It falsifies the landscape so that we forget our prerogative. It replaces our needs with a desire for more, not with what nature freely gives in moderation.

S: Are you saying that we should give up our material possessions and live like a Jew, all of us?

M: Not all Jews think like this Solomon. But it is shown that excessive material gain dulls the senses. Values become re-orientated.

S: And you say this of your own prestigious background?

Mary looked at Jesus here and pondered for a moment.



M: Yes and no. We learn of our ancestors, of our prophets so that we evolve as a race. Hierarchies come and go, but because of our oppression by many nations, not just the Romans but the Greeks and further, we have devised a moral code to learn how to keep alive under extreme circumstances.

J: It is a wilderness of the mind. The Jewish mind evolves far more spiritually under such circumstances.

S: Do you place your religion above that of the Greeks and Romans? For surely if they worship their gods in thanks for the blessings of nature how am I to know what is good for me and which religion is better?

J: Religion itself falls under the whims of its leaders too. It is not protected. All that comes to past is necessary for the transmission of a moral code, one that prepares the individual for his or her death, their spiritual emancipation. There is no grandeur here, no mystery, only humility. It is not the religion that should be worshipped, nor the God, but the Unknown, so that the emptiness can be filled with hope and faith, that when we die we have fulfilled our true potential. Only as individuals for the realisation of all things in one can we lead the human race in the right direction. I believe that from a time immemorial God the Unknown devised a plan that humanity must pass back into the stars. But it was man's defiance of God's will that detached him from nature. This defiance removed him from the exigencies of natural living and created a fallen state. Thus Adam and Eve forever wonder of the lost wholeness of being, and their descendants forever devise new laws and codes of conduct in order to try and bridge the distance to Godliness, to fullness, to Oneness. They wage wars and debate differences, succumbing man to aggression and fear. Truly though, spiritual emancipation leads the individual away from emotional constraints and the sense of guilt harboured in the following of moral codes. When the individual has reached this stage then he or she goes beyond culture and is ready for death. That is the true role of religious man, but because of inflated societies and the misappropriation of resources the moral code stands to remind man of the need to move forward as a race.

S: And you Jesus, where do you stand?

M: We are beyond our Jewish culture now Solomon. We are a divided people.

J: The true legacy is to be found in the line of prophets. Each individual must cultivate this consciousness. We will live again as our forbears Adam and Eve did, naked in the trees.

S: What am I expecting to see Mary in your community?

M: We are only a few people who freely work and share together, in the field and around the table. But we draw travellers and passersby who wish to be reminded of the frugality and unity of nature.

J: We cultivate rebirth in death.

M: The death of culture.

J: Of human culture.

S: Well, is there any chance we can swap places because this donkey is just a little too uncomfortable for me.

J: I will swap gladly with you Solomon.

Y: Papa, look, there are horses coming.

Everybody stared straight ahead.

J: Roman. There seems to be a lot of activity about us. We are still 6 km from our home. We stay as we are. You will be fine Solomon.

M: Let us do the talking Solomon, we know these parts.

1<sup>st</sup> HS: Going anywhere far?

M: And good morning to you also.

The soldiers looked at each other.

1<sup>st</sup> HS: Peasants?

S: We are respected citizens.

1<sup>st</sup> HS: Is that the donkey talking?

2<sup>nd</sup> HS: I didn't hear anything

1<sup>st</sup> HS: Nah, no did I. Peasants?

M: Yes, we are.

2<sup>nd</sup> HS: What you got in your cart?

M: Stores. We have just returned from Tarraco.

1<sup>st</sup> HS: I don't remember passing you on the road.

M: We came by Solomon's boat.

S: I have a crew down on the shore.

1<sup>st</sup> HS: Was that the donkey talking?

2<sup>nd</sup> HS: Nah, I didn't hear anything.

M: We are not far from our range. Would you like to join us for a meal?

2<sup>nd</sup> HS: Well, I never say no to a meal. How far you say you are from here?

M: About 6km.

1<sup>st</sup> HS: I've got time to kill.

2<sup>nd</sup> HS: I am looking forward to it. Let's give them an escort.

1<sup>st</sup> HS: And this is your husband and kid.

J: Jesus, and my son Yusef.

1<sup>st</sup> HS: You look like a holy man. Am I correct?

J: You are soldier.

1<sup>st</sup> HS: Where you from?

J: East, across the Mediterranean Sea.

1<sup>st</sup> HS: But what do you call your country?

J: Galilee.

1<sup>st</sup> HS: Heard of it Flavius?

2<sup>nd</sup> HS: Sounds familiar, authentic.

1<sup>st</sup> HS: Well let's walk on. I am sure you can tell me more of your country along the route.

J: It's beautiful, cultivated from one end to the other. And yet other parts become suddenly dry, like this land here we are in.

1<sup>st</sup> HS: You are a farmer. What do you grow?

J: Tree crops, olives, almond and carob in the main. But we also grow figs and pomegranates as well as loquats. We have a few vines as well. You come at a good time for the crop is drooping on the softer fruit.

1<sup>st</sup> HS: Have you heard of a pome?

J: No, what does it look like?

1<sup>st</sup> HS: It's like a hard fleshy fruit with seeds in the middle, about the size of a woman's hand. They have got them in Gaul.

J: I am aware that the Empire has a retinue of gardeners. You obviously have an interest in this?

1<sup>st</sup> HS: And bees also with rosemary honey. I suspect the pome can't grow in these parts. But what I would do for peace if it meant I could grow my own orchards.

J: You don't choose this way of life?

1<sup>st</sup> HS: Flavius, you hear this?

2<sup>nd</sup> HS: I heard it. You'd be careful what you say farmer else you might be joining us.

J: But I am already with you, and besides, you came to me. It may be that you seek something that is hidden from your mind.

1<sup>st</sup> HS: Such as what?

J: Maybe your freedom, like a bee moving from one flower to another.

2<sup>nd</sup> HS: But we are free. See, we came to you.

J: Yes, but what is it you are looking for?

1<sup>st</sup> HS: Why would we be looking for anybody?

J: Is it somebody you are looking for?

2<sup>nd</sup> HS: Not necessarily. We could be looking for food.

J: Well, we have plenty of that, including rabbit stew.

1<sup>st</sup> HS: Oh, we eat enough rabbit don't we Flavius?

2<sup>nd</sup> HS: In fact we caught a big one just this morning.

J: You obviously know how to skin a rabbit then.

1<sup>st</sup> HS: We are Roman soldiers. We have to learn to catch our food when we break for camp.

J: So where is your camp? It must be quite near.

2<sup>nd</sup> HS: Shall we bring him to our camp Trevian? Show him how we eat.

1<sup>st</sup> HS: No, he is too old. Just stick to looking for more rabbits Flavius.

J: Well you won't catch rabbit making this noise.

2<sup>nd</sup> HS: Oh, well this one was sleeping, and we woke him up, didn't we Trevian?

J: A 'he' was it. How can you tell? And besides, they don't sleep in the open.

Jesus turned around to look at Solomon who was hiding an expression of guilt.

J: You should check for disease. If the rabbit wasn't moving it may be bad to eat.

2<sup>nd</sup> HS: I never thought of that Trevian. Maybe we should kill him first.

1<sup>st</sup> HS: Shut up Flavius. You are not going to kill anything.

J: It's alive then, but just happened to be sleeping.

1<sup>st</sup> HS: I've had enough chat about rabbits for now. Now where was I? Fruit trees, that's it. You got many trees then holy man?

J: Succulent oranges, juicy pomegranates although they won't be ripe until later in the year.

1<sup>st</sup> HS: Oh, all this talk is making me thirsty. Flavius, you got a skin?

2<sup>nd</sup> HS: No, didn't think we need it. I thought we were just going for a quick scout around the hill.

J: You are that close. Here, take our water. Maybe I can send one of the servants to replenish our own stocks.

2<sup>nd</sup> HS: We don't give our essential supplies away.

J: Still, you are free to eat and drink with us. We will have some grape juice back on the farm.

1<sup>st</sup> HS: Now, that is what I want to do.

J: We also have oil to trade. Here, take this bread, it was left over from breakfast this morning.

2<sup>nd</sup> HS: Oooh, this would be nice dipped in oil, with tomato and tuna paste, don't you think Trevian?

1<sup>st</sup> HS: This bread is still fresh.

J: It will be hard by the time we reach the farm. Doesn't keep long this leavened stuff.

2<sup>nd</sup> HS: Here, taste this Flavius. It is better than our bread. Who made this?

J: A woman by the name of Eliza, back at the port. You haven't been there then?

1<sup>st</sup> HS: Well, we have only just broke camp and told to relax. We have got a long march tomorrow and we travel during the evening and night.

J: North?

2<sup>nd</sup> HS: To Gaul.

J: They grow apples there don't they?

1<sup>st</sup> HS: Oh, I can't wait to go back there.

J: Become their gardener if you have any experience.

1<sup>st</sup> HS: I am not old enough, but young enough to kill.

2<sup>nd</sup> HS: Kill rabbits Trevian.

1<sup>st</sup> HS: Shut up Flavius. All this talk is making me hungry.

J: So you haven't come across anybody else in your travels then?

2<sup>nd</sup> HS: Rabbit. We caught a nice rabbit didn't we Trevian.

1<sup>st</sup> HS: By Apollo and all the heavenly gods, what did I tell you Flavius? In fact, I have had enough of your rabbit. Go back and bring your rabbit here.

2<sup>nd</sup> HS: Why?

1<sup>st</sup> HS: Because I am hungry, and as your acting superior you do as I say.

2<sup>nd</sup> HS: But he might escape if I untie him. How am I supposed to bring him here?

1<sup>st</sup> HS: Drag him by the balls if you have to. Just ride back and bring him along this track. I don't want to lose him. He'd be useful as my personal slave.

2<sup>nd</sup> HS: But he is a frisky little bugger. I may need help.

1<sup>st</sup> HS: He's just a sprite of a thing. Now go.

S: I will help you if you want.

1<sup>st</sup> HS: Yes, bring the donkey with you and between you should be able to control the little mite.

2<sup>nd</sup> HS: When you are with me you do as I say, got that donkey?

S: My name is Ah....Solomon.

2<sup>nd</sup> HS: You are donkey, got that. Now follow me.

S: My crew men will not leave my side.

2<sup>nd</sup> HS: I am not 'aving the three of them with me.

1<sup>st</sup> HS: This is too much for me to handle.

J: They are only fishermen, needed on the boat.

1<sup>st</sup> HS: Okay, one stays with us, the other goes with the donkey.

2<sup>Nd</sup> HS: Oh, this is stupid.

1<sup>st</sup> HS: Just get me the rabbit.

2<sup>nd</sup> HS: Right then!

The three of them diverted back the way they came whilst the first horse soldier continued talking to Jesus about growing food. The first crewman now led the group along the bumpy dirt track. The donkey was a little apprehensive to go back so Solomon had to whip it along.

2<sup>nd</sup> HS: When we get him we tie him to your beast, got that donkey. I don't want no assing around. You walk alongside us and try no silly movements. And your monkey friend walks ahead.

S: I warn you, the donkey is a bit stubborn.

2<sup>nd</sup> HS: I have a way with animals. Just do as I say.

They must have traversed half a kilometre back where they found an outcrop of boulders. They moved in within them. The tied-up boy looked up at them and fear struck his eyes.

2<sup>nd</sup> HS: There he is. Active little rabbit isn't he?

S: Why didn't you just bring him back to camp?

2<sup>nd</sup> HS: The boss wants him for himself, you know, his little furry toy.

S: Oh, I see. He prefers boys.

2<sup>nd</sup> HS: They put up a better fight you see. Now grab his legs, and you fisherman, take his head. No damage though, he must be kept un-bruised.

Solomon and the first crewman tied the boy to the donkey who was looking restless. The boy was bent over forward across the back of the beast and tied to the saddle, a bit too tight for comfort.

2<sup>nd</sup> HS: Nice bum eh? Look at his white flesh. He's our little prize and not a word to anybody. What is it you say you do?

S: I am a fisherman and I trade along the coast.

2<sup>nd</sup> HS: Well, if you play your coins right you may get a piece for yourself.

And with that the horseman gave a massive slap on the boy's ass and laughed out raucously. The donkey let out an almighty bray and bucked. The boy lurched in pain as it landed.

2<sup>nd</sup> HS: Hold him!

But the donkey was having none of it. It kicked out at everybody amongst the boulders as it strained at its reins.

2<sup>nd</sup> HS: Hold him I said!

S: You are not exactly bright are you?

The two of them were yelling at each other in order to be heard above the dinning sound of the donkey. The 2<sup>nd</sup> crewman tried to grab the donkey by the head but was promptly head butted.

2<sup>nd</sup> HS: Hold him I said!

S: Get off your horse and do it yourself moron!

2<sup>nd</sup> HS: You talk to a Roman guard like that. I will have your balls as well!

As the crewman was flung to the side the donkey broke the reins and fled in the direction they had come.

2<sup>nd</sup> HS: Shit! I am in trouble. You two stay here and don't move.

And with that the second horseman shot off in pursuit.

S: We are not hanging around. I want back to the city.

2<sup>nd</sup> CM: Ahmad, what about Ishmael?

S: He will have to make his own way back.

2<sup>nd</sup> CM: This is the work of demons. Why did you ask us to remove the boy from the boat?

Everything is coming back upon our heads. The Romans will come looking for us. If they find your stash on board you will be hung or stripped of your possessions.

S: We must go south. They will find out that we have come from the north, from Tarraco. We cannot go back there.

2<sup>nd</sup> CM: Those dirty pigs will root us out.

S: They haven't seen our boat I am sure. We have no time to lose. They are camped just over the hill but if we run back to the dock we can catch the morning wind. Come, we have no time to lose.

2<sup>nd</sup> CM: But you left a stash on the donkey, and what about the oil?

S: We just have to cut our losses. Run Ibo, we have no time to lose.

And with this Solomon and Ibo reached the dock now busy with fishermen getting ready for the morning's catch.

Flavius was in hot pursuit of the donkey with the boy still straddled across the back. Groans of un-comfortability issued from his mouth. Flavius was shouting at the top of his voice, the stupidity of the man was analogous to a carrot dangled in front of a donkey that keeps it moving.

2<sup>nd</sup> HS: Get your ass back here!

But the donkey was having none of it and decided to avoid the track and cut cross country, inland. The horse found this a problem to match and was not as robust off the track. In fact it made little ground, balking at every hollow in the landscape, frightened by the movement in the bush. Flavius was becoming hopelessly lost.

2<sup>nd</sup> HS: Shit! He will never forgive me for this. I got to head back.

By now the pony and cart with Trevian straddling alongside them had gained about 3 km, still another 4 km from the farm. Trevian was in a jaunty mood as he listened of the cultivation of olives. Mary was smiling all the way and Yusef would just talk to the pony.

J: Now, I have heard that the poppy seed produces a rich oil too, but these new fruits are much easier to harvest. The larger ones, we found, can be preserved in brine with rosemary sprigs added. If we pick them from the tree early enough in the season the oil is green, and the taste distinctly less acidic.

M: I do not heat the oil, we eat it pure from the press. But when you come to join us for dinner you will see how we add garlic and fish. It is a perfect snack for mid afternoon.

J: We recommend that you take the carob also, for it is said that 3 or 4 of these a day will keep you going in times of scarcity. They are full of sweetness, sweeter than the pome.

Here, Yusefy, grab me some carob from the trees to your right.

And with this Yusef dutifully gave them to his father.

J: Here, eat them like this.

Jesus nibbled around the edges and then promptly spat the seeds out before consuming the lot.

1<sup>st</sup> HS: Wow, now this is sweet.

M: But don't eat too many, you will go to the toilet more often than not. You may not be used to its effects.

1<sup>st</sup> HS: This is something I can bring back to the platoon.

J: They probably know about it already, it is just that you don't need it, especially in Gaul. This is desert food. We consider it holy. It is called Locust bean.

M: But don't eat too much of it Travian.

1<sup>st</sup> HS: Will it make me holy if I do?

J: Hardly soldier, there are things you have to give up in life if you want to taste the goodness of Creation.

1<sup>st</sup> HS: I was jesting. Being in the army doesn't make us cold-hearted murderers, well not all of us. We have our gods, our shrines. We need our peace also.

J: Peace is in the mind soldier. Do you have peace of mind?

Travian pondered for a while.

1<sup>st</sup> HS: No, I wonder where Flavius has got to.

As if it were a prophetic statement the sound of hooves came pounding up the path.

2<sup>nd</sup> HS: Travian, the donkey reared and broke the rein.

1<sup>st</sup> HS: By the folly of Pan, in which direction?

2<sup>nd</sup> HS: Into there.

And Flavius pointed into the wilderness.

1<sup>st</sup> HS: I am sorry holy man, I have lost your donkey.

Where are the other two Flavius?

2<sup>nd</sup> HS: I had to leave them behind whilst I pursued the beast.

1<sup>st</sup> HS: Flavius.... never mind. We can't go any further without the... rabbit. Go back and bring it. We will meet you up ahead. As for the other two they can walk.

2<sup>nd</sup> HS: But Travian....

Travian stared at Flavius only for a moment in order to try and comprehend this moronic mind.

1<sup>st</sup> HS: And the rabbit?

2<sup>nd</sup> HS: On the donkey Flavius....

1<sup>st</sup> HS: On the donkey you say? My prize catch!

Flavius said nothing.

1<sup>st</sup> HS: Do you mind if we take our leave, the morning is drawing on and I am afraid I have to skip lunch. But thanks all the same for your kind advice and I will consider changing my profession.

As for you Flavius we need to finish the day's duty don't we?

2<sup>nd</sup> HS: Yes Travian.

J: Don't go so hard on him, the donkey was stubborn as anything. We will continue our way and the other two will have to catch up.

1<sup>st</sup> HS: Yes, the other two. Didn't a little bird tell us something of the black man Flavius? But now we have no donkey, no man, and no bo.... rabbit... And no stash either.



I doubt if they will be returning this way holy man, and will probably head back to the dock wouldn't you think?

J: If he has something to hide from you, probably.

1<sup>st</sup> HS: Well, I bid you good journey.

And with this he walloped his horse to turn a half circle and speed off down to the docks, with an apologetic Flavius in his wake.

J: He is right, Solomon will not return.

Ishmael, you are free to leave but I doubt if you can make it there in good time. Even if Solomon waited for you the Romans will search his boat. If they find anything they will confiscate everything and you will still be stranded. Do you want to go or join us at our farm?

I: If it is okay with you I may be more useful on dry land. I enjoyed your prayer on the boat.

J: So be it.

And with this the five of them continued along the dirt track in the peace and coolness of a refreshing wind.

Down on the dock Solomon and Ibo quickly gathered their men.

S: No time for questions Halamul, we have lost Ishmael. Grab everything you can and set sail.

Everyone scramble for the boat, the site of a small girl peering from the hull.

S: You, get off young lady. Go home.

I: But I want to stay with you, I can be useful.

S: Oh, Isis, have mercy upon me and guide me in your winds. Throw her off Halamul, we have no time for this.

H: No, not this time.

S: Ibo, throw her off!

I: No, it will bring us ruin.

S: Who is in charge here?

H: Ahmad, I can see two soldiers on horseback not a kilometre away on top of the hill.

S: Right then, move off and tighten the jib. I lose one and gain another. She better be useful!

I: I will make you happy Solomon.

Solomon just stared at her as the boat pulled away. The soldiers hurled down the hill asking questions of the whereabouts of a fishing boat, by now one amongst many on the horizon.

1<sup>st</sup> HS: Well, that is another fine mess you got me into!

Eliza came running down to the pier.

E: They have taken my daughter, she is only 10 years old.

1<sup>st</sup> HS: I am hungry. Feed me woman!

## Act2 Scene 6

The two fugitives had made their way south heading for the town of el Perelló. Taking the most difficult path in avoidance of the main Roman road they could always keep the sea's horizon in their view with the mountains flanked to their right. They had been given instruction to dress as peasants and to carry minimal belongings so as to not arouse suspicion amongst Roman citizens. Two travelers like these were either useful or dangerous, especially since bandits and thieves occasionally littered the countryside.

P: Gwyn, you keep watch to your right hand side, I to my left. We should set up a fast pace.

G: Seems to be a lot of people in the fields, we will blend easily.

P: It is not the Romans I fear but their informants amongst the large land estates who are always seeking another favour from their masters. The Iberians have been seduced to the Roman ways too easily.

G: Aye Petr, look at the bridge they are building yonder.

Petr turned his head.

P: They carry water into the city from the nearby rivers. These Romans are changing the face of the world.

G: The slaves work morning to dusk cutting stone.

P: A lot of stone. Soon their fortifications will be impenetrable.

G: You keep a dagger hidden. Else you will attract attention.

P: Admittedly, sometimes I think I could trade this knife for a chisel. They feed you and there are lots of loose women about, aye Gwyn.

G: I won't hear it. You heard the teachings of our spiritual leaders. The Romans must be kept east, and that means east of the great sea too.

P: They bring clean water to the cities. They install good sewage systems. It can't be all bad Gwyn.

G: They oppress the peasantry Petr. You forget their history. And their baths and fresh water supplies are only there to cure themselves of diseases they have created themselves. I already miss the flowing natural springs of our homeland. When we stayed with the old man in the mountain that was truly God's blessing, but now we find ourselves in this dry rain-forsaken land. This rock is burnt red for lack of soil.

P: But it's beautiful land aye, Gwyn.

G: Aye. The holy man had a point about the wilderness. It's funny how green and lush the home that we came from is still a vivid picture in my mind, like a painting. I miss the forests.

P: And the oak, the gatherings, the rituals, my friends.

G: Let's keep walking and hopefully we will draw near to el Perelló before nightfall tomorrow. When you speak make yourself natural in its tone, and use as much as possible the native tongue, else we might be overheard.

The two Celts continued to walk a good 25km, on the way stopping to eat from their prepared satchels. They traversed difficult terrain with hardly a river or stream in their path. The temperatures soared during the midday and the both of them had to take cover on the lee side of a rocky gorge. They fed off fruits still hanging from the previous year although wild vines occasionally provided a lucky desert. They also nibbled on their carob pods having been introduced to it on the advice of Mary. As nightfall beckoned they sought to push another 10km under cover of darkness in the expectation of finding a deep dry river bed. These places were often thick with wild vegetation and provided invisibility. The threat though may come from hunters who sought game and wild pig under cover of darkness. Having discovered an appropriate place amongst the thick vegetation the only way to hide their movements would be to leave after sunrise. The one blessing of this climate at this time of year was the welcoming temperatures and serenity of bird song.

The two quickly progressed building a protective bower, with limbs of vegetation forced outwards to create a kind of hollow. There would be no fire tonight, not on the advice about patrolling Romans in these parts. The usual crack of rock could be heard as it cooled down after the day's heat, and the subtle sounds of animals shuffling amongst the undergrowth. There was little light here, but Gwyn heard it first. The trotting sound of a wild pig was heading their way, and having travelled much of the last two weeks from the north these men smelled none the better. Gwyn woke up Petr. He whispered.

G: Petr, we have got a visitor.

P: Oh, come on Gwyn, I have only just got my head down.

G: If we kill it we can hang out here a bit longer. Maybe we head further south and avoid our holy orders. Come on, grab your knife.

Petr reluctantly stirred himself and instinctively went to his side as he cocked his ear in the direction of the shuffling beast. They continued whispering.

P: It smells something in our satchels. Hide in the shadow without making a move.

The beast continued to sniff out the bower without making any further ingress. The two were invisible to each other. The smelling sense of a pig was so sensitive that it possibly rooted out their hide-out from very afar. It pushed its way through the makeshift shelter. Without a moments delay Petr struck with an almighty blow, coming down two-handed on the body of the beast. The knife penetrated and snapped and the beast let out a piercing squeal. Gwyn, less familiar to this outdoor life, was lost for decisions and could only rush in the direction of the

sound in the near black conditions. The beast though, having gauged the presence of its enemies, tore around the bower whilst Petr failed to hold it down. Petr now had to shout.

P: Gwyn, put another into it!

Too late, Gwyn was turned on his head as the pig ripped through the sides squealing at the top of its mouth. A groan went up and the pig fled into the river bottom.

G: Oh, Petr, it ripped me. I am bleeding.

P: What, you stupid man. What did you do?

G: It tore me. Fuck, I can't see a thing. Stupid idea.

P: How bad?

G: Bad Petr.

P: But we are still another 20km from our rendezvous. We gonna have to gruel it out.

G: Give us your head staff. I need to stop the bleeding.

P: Keep the pressure on it. We are going to have to wait to first light, there is no moon out there yet.

Gwyn kept on moaning until eventually he passed out from exhaustion. By the morning Petr had seen the damage done by the pig, including the torn sides of the bower and the soiled satchel. It had partially chomped at the contents of the bag before it had left in a hurry.

P: You okay Gwyn?

Gwyn stirred from his sleep.

G: What a bulls-up that was. How does it look?

P: Bad. I'll look around for some herbs but I am not too sure what grows here.

G: Citrus acid. If you find a lemon don't hesitate to use it.

P: What's this in the bag Gwyn?

G: Don't ask me, I didn't pack it.

P: Looks like dried fungi. Is it food?

G: Try it. Tell me what it tastes of.

P: Could be poisonous Gwyn.

G: They wouldn't have packed it then, whoever packed it.

P: I'll taste a small bit, leave the rest with you. I shouldn't be long.

G: If anything happens to me you are going to have to make your way to the rendezvous point and get help.

P: Don't worry about it. I am coming back.

Petr made his way quietly out of the bower repairing the damage the pig had made. He left Gwyn a full skin of water. After about half an hour, without hope of recognising much of the herbal

properties of the native plants, tiredness overcame him. He sat down on a rock and wondered at the blue light outlining the trees; a luminescence that gave him a sense of floating amongst them. The sides of the deep dry river closed in around him and he felt his vision tunnel-out along its length. He peered into the vegetation and thought he could see faces in its leaves. They spoke to him, whispering conversations.

- P: What? I didn't quite get that. Who is coming you say?  
P: A saviour? When, from where?  
P: Who lives? Who is dying?  
P: Am I to go alone? Where  
P: I cannot do this by myself. The land is too big for me. I need time.  
P: Who are you? What do you want of me? I need to live. I can save them.  
P: Master, why do you conceal yourself amongst the trees? Who do you hide from?  
P: Let me free to go. I can find them.  
P: I will not eat you. I will not share your body with infidels. They are just using you but I can protect you. Let me free to pursue them.  
P: I am looking for my legs.

Petr had completely lost his orientation by now and felt so light-footed that he climbed a low branch and hung off it. He dangled his head down to the ground and, before he knew it, slouched into a bundle.

Gwyn waited patiently and worried when Petr did not return. He decided to hang it out until dusk at least just in case Petr had got to the rendezvous point. A long day passed in which he needed to munch on his stored foods. He thought he had heard voices in the distance but decided to keep quiet in case they were Roman. The day passed uneventful with a few other beasts showing a marked interest in the smell of the bower. Gwyn had cleaned up the wound as best as possible but the area of the knife gouge began to swell up. It was too uncomfortable to move; the best he could do was to spit on his hands and continue to wash the wound in his upper stomach. As he weakened with a slight sweat a shadow passed by him. The light seemed to have increased from the blackness of the previous night. Gwyn turned his head and a slight panic gripped him. His demanding voice wanted to be strong under the circumstances.

- G: Who is there?

There was no answer. The shuffling and sniffing continued. And just then the head of a black dog poked in. It looked directly at Gwyn in the darkness and growled a low rumble. Not wanting to leave its find behind it lay outside its new den and waited.

## Act2 Scene 7

The two Roman guards galloped off back up the hill and towards their camp. They needed to report back from their scouting mission knowing that anything but a lie would get them in trouble with the first officer. They prepared a story cobbled from possible eyewitness observations of their movements whilst Flavius tried to remember exactly the direction the donkey had bolted towards.

T: Say nothing about rabbits. Let me do the talking. If the gods will allow us we can go off and scout out the direction towards el Perelló. The donkey is probably just hanging about somewhere in the wilderness, but the longer we leave it the more likely it will be found by one of the peasants.

F: What about the holy man?

T: If we are still here by the moro maybe we can follow his tracks.

F: I am sorry Trav, our luck may get better when we reach Gaul.

T: Look, I have spotted a couple of our scouts up on the hilltop there. Let's see if they have seen anything untoward.

The two other Romans easily identified the approaching soldiers and welcomed them for a swig of wine.

T: In the name of the Emperor, how things with you?

1<sup>st</sup> S: Nothing goes on, boring really.

T: Seen anything unusual?

1<sup>st</sup> S: Not really. What you doing rambling about?

T: Just come up from the docks. Everything is quiet as you say.

1<sup>st</sup> S: Not thinking of deserting are you?

T: No, don't be daft. Looking forward to the push into Briton. What do you know of these people?

1<sup>st</sup> S: Barbarians; more Celts, savages.

T: We'll go through 'em like a hot knife in butter.

1<sup>st</sup> S: Something bothering you? We are weeks away from achieving anything yet.

F: We just don't get any luck nowadays.

1<sup>st</sup> S: Luck. What d'you mean?

T: Oh, don't listen to him. There ain't much between his ears.

2<sup>nd</sup> S: What's that sticking out your top pocket?

T: Locust Bean, holy bread.

1<sup>st</sup> S: Holy bread! What have you been taking?

T: Apparently this is good travelling food. We found some by the wayside. I was going to introduce it to the chef. Here taste some, it's very sweet.

1<sup>st</sup> S: No thanks, looks like dog shit.

T: Well, if I get my way we will all be eating it.

1<sup>st</sup> S: Ha, ha, ha. Is that what you think?

F: Who you laughing at big nose.

2<sup>nd</sup> S: Oy! Cut the chat halfwit!

T: Flavius, just go on and wait for me at camp.

Flavius looked disappointed and sorry for himself as he walked off.

T: Not too bright that one.

1<sup>st</sup> S: So who have you been talking too? Holy bread?

T: Well, the locals. You got to get to know them.

2<sup>nd</sup> S: You fuck 'em and move on.

T: Yeh, quite. Looking forward to Gaul actually. The women there are more rounded.

1<sup>st</sup> S: The talk is that we have to go a double pace. We may be setting off pretty soon. I think we are just stopping to load up on supplies before marching north. There has been a patrol moving back and forth to Perelló.

T: Damn, no rest for the wicked they say.

And with this Travian cantered off and headed back to camp. Flavius was already before the first officer sending shivers down the spine of Travian. Travian tentatively approached the pair and wondered what almighty mess Flavius may have just got them into.

1<sup>st</sup> O: Travian, good work down on the dock. Got to keep these natives under our thumb. I want you to go with the next patrol to Perelló and then we will march north.

T: Yes sir. And Flavius?

1<sup>st</sup> O: He stays here. I will have him working in the kitchens.

T: Ah, Flavius, sir? Maybe I can go on a quick scouting mission for these interesting fruits. They call them Locust Bean.

1<sup>st</sup> O: What about them?

T: The locals tell me that they are high in energy-giving.

F: But they look like dog turds.

T: Thanks Flavius, that should go down well at the dinner table.

F: But they do look like dog turds.

T: Flavius!

1<sup>st</sup> O: You shouldn't judge these things before you've tried them. Let's have a look.

The first officer rolled the bean in his hands and brought it to his nose.

1<sup>st</sup> O: Smells a bit turdy, a bit like fungi.

T: Flavius! Quite sir. As beneficial maybe? They grow wild here just like fungi, don't they Flavius?

F: I am not serving dog turds to the army, now that I am in charge of the kitchens.

Travian nearly choked, and exclaimed.

T: In charge!

1<sup>st</sup> O: Yes, we have had a deserter and he turned up at the right moment. Best place for him don't you think Trav?

T: Quite! But what about as rations and horse feed? Send me out on an immediate scouting operation and I will locate their source.

1<sup>st</sup> O: You can pick them up in el Perelló.

T: But I have spotted the trees along the road.

1<sup>st</sup> O: Okay then, I will give you three men in case there are bandits about. But don't tarry too long. I want you back in 3 hours.

T: Yes sir, right away sir.

Travian hand-picked his men whom he knew he could trust with his secret. He immediately set off in pursuit of the donkey on horseback whilst his company were given orders to liberally keep an eye out. Meanwhile the first officer looked at Flavius.

1<sup>st</sup> O: Flavius, now you have higher responsibilities I want you to try this bean out and tell me what you think.

F: You want me to eat it?

1<sup>st</sup> O: Yes Flavius, eat it.

F: Well, just half of it for now.

1<sup>st</sup> O: Now, where were we? What was the name of that woman down at the docks? Eliza yes? You say that she allowed both of you to enter her?

F: At the same time sir.

1<sup>st</sup> O: Me and you, we need to make a trip don't you think? A big burly man like you is all the protection I need.

F: Yes sir.

## Act2 Scene 8

Jesus and Mary with the two children continued off into the hills, Ishmael tagging behind. They had made good ground and were now but a kilometre from the farm.

J: Not far now Ishmael. How are you coping?

I: Just fine, looking forward to seeing the animals.

J: Many. There, you see that copse of pine trees on top of the gorge, that is the back of our land.

I: And down there?

J: That's where we hunt for rabbit and fowl. There is pig there also.

I: No thanks, don't touch the beast. It is dirty.

J: We eat mainly vegetables although occasionally we remember the old rituals and make a sacrifice of a sheep, but not often, although we have a child naming ceremony happening soon and depends on what Mary thinks.



As they turned the corner Jesus turned to Mary.

J: Back home eh?

M: Yes my love. I will take care of the guests.  
Yusefino, go ahead and tell the house maid of our arrival.

Yusef jumped off the pony and ran forward. Meanwhile the sound of hooves was fast approaching from behind.

M: Oh Yeshu, we have company again this close to the farm.

J: Wait, something has changed. Only the chosen find their way to us.

They stopped in their track and listened intently to the fast approaching sound. Jesus began to smile.

J: It looks like we have got another guest.

They both turned around as the donkey pounded to a stop with the young boy still strapped to the back. It gave out an almighty bray.

M: Oh, poor thing!

J: Ishmael, help me.

They both untied the boy who had passed unconscious with the ride and put him in the back of the cart.

M: He is alive. He will need full rest.

J: Ishmael, you lead the donkey, I lead the pony.

And with that they were greeted by the servants with welcoming arms although Mary quickly got the boy into the shade. When the cart was fully unloaded it was sent back with another servant carrying oil and other equipment including some home-made furniture. Jesus spoke to the 1<sup>st</sup> servant who was an old man.

J: You are to go to the house of Eliza first and give her these oil supplies. After you have made your rounds announce to Juán the forthcoming date a week from today for the child naming ceremony, agreed my love.

M: Yes, it is good to be back home.

Meanwhile Ishmael had searched the pouches of the donkey and pulled out a wrapped bundle when everyone's attention was on the boy. He wasn't sure what to do and kept it for now close to

his heart, wondering how to broach the subject to his hosts. Now was the wrong time; he would wait.

## Act2 Scene 9

Travian had short command of three men and instructed them to look out for the carob tree en route to el Perelló. Travian immediately took them to the dirt tract leading out from the docks and followed up to a point where he had left the pony and cart behind previously and the location of the carob tree. There was no point returning to the boulders where the boy had been tied up since he was not a tracker and couldn't possibly find the donkey trail. His best chance was to generally head inland to see if any peasants had come across the animal and the boy. And besides, el Perelló lay in that direction.

T: Remember, if you sight the donkey don't panic it. I don't want to be chasing it across half of Iberia. You two go left of the road and start collecting the fruit of this tree whilst Justin will accompany me further north. When you have got a few sacks worth wait for us here, we shouldn't be long.

Travian and Justin wheeled off further inland.

T: Keep me in your sights. This scrub and pine has treacherous pit falls so don't rush it.

Ju: Wouldn't it be better if I just talk the dirt track to el Perelló?

T: What, and meet me there?

Ju: Yes.

T: Okay, that makes better sense. Remember, if you come across the donkey or the boy, grab them both.

With that they split up, Justin heading along the dirt track with significantly more gait. He thought he heard the donkey in the distance but he couldn't be sure and besides, there must be more than one donkey in this country. Nevertheless he continued in the sound of its direction now some 4 km from el Perelló. He heard the sound again. It was difficult to know from exactly where, but checking the dirt track he noticed the wheel marks of a cart diverge off it and tried his luck. There were obviously peasants about here. The other fear was for that of bandits. By coincidence of thought he heard a shuffle from behind a rock and shouted out in an affirmative voice.

J: Who goes there, in the name of the Emperor?

There was no reply. He continued along. Somebody threw a stone from behind him and hit him on his shoulder plate. He turned around and stormed in the direction of the assailant, but there was nobody there. Somebody else threw another stone from the direction he had just come and again he wheeled his horse around and charged back. There was nobody there. He looked up to see if he

could see Travian but he was too couched amongst these hills to get a good view far enough, and besides, the road was lined with trees. He decided that the danger of confronting maybe two rogues at least was not a good idea for a solitary soldier. Instead he cantered back in the direction of his colleagues who had been left behind. On arriving about half an hour later he shouted at them.

J: Have you seen Trevian?

1<sup>st</sup> HS: No, what's up?

J: Bandits ahead, maybe three, at least two. Drop those bags and we will pick them up on the way back.

1<sup>st</sup> HS: Oh, it is about time we had some action. I am not cut out for this farming thing.

With that the three of them charged up to the place where Justin was stoned.

J: Split up. Anything happens just shout. Meet me back here.

But nothing happened and any Roman officer observing this debacle would see four horse soldiers now hopelessly divided. All protocol had now gone totally out of the window.

Travian had wandered out of sight, obsessed by the knowledge of a stash of something valuable that the boy hinted at. Three quarters of an hour had passed and he decided to make his way back to the carob tree next to the dirt track. There was nobody there. He studied the hoof prints and realised that they had gone ahead. Judging by the scuffed earth and erratic pattern he feared the worse, but then he thought about, 'Maybe they were ambushed. No, there'd be blood at least. No arrows and judging by the hoof prints looks like they were in a hurry.' He discovered the two bags of carob laying by the side of the road. 'Right', he thought, 'El Perelló it is then'. He stormed up the path in the direction the soldiers had gone and then felt a huge blow shatter his breast plate. Travian was knocked backwards off his horse and he groaned in agony as the horse continued to speed off. Instinctively he drew his sword, noticing a spear had ricocheted off his armour and snapped to one side. Three wild men surrounded him holding fresh spears to his crooked form.

T: Drop your weapons or I swear I will kill you all. I have colleagues waiting for me.

But they didn't listen, instead they circled him carefully talking in a local tongue Trevian couldn't understand.

Further ahead the three Roman soldiers had wandered off the track. Justin happened in the direction of a house where he could see the thin trail of smoke coming from a chimney. He decided to advance quickly in that direction knowing that it was probably a lot safer there. He quickly made up the distance but not 500 metres from it he encountered a man on a cart carrying fresh supplies.

Ju: There are bandits ahead. Where do you go?

At first the servant was a little apprehensive, but softened to the endearing tone of Justin's voice.

1<sup>st</sup> S: I take our supplies to Amet'lla.

Ju: Where is that?

1<sup>st</sup> S: The docks.

Justin remembered Trevian had told him about the fisherman on the docks but not much else. Quite possibly this was the work of fishermen after Trevian's confrontation with them.

Ju: It is not safe. My soldiers will accompany you.

1<sup>st</sup> S: It is safe.

Ju: No, return to your master.

1<sup>st</sup> S: I make this path always.

Ju: Okay, have it your way. Who is your master? I will talk to him.

1<sup>st</sup> S: Master Jesus sir.

Ju: Take care.

And Justin galloped ahead. The sound of his hooves aroused the household.

HM: Welcome.

Ju: Bandits. Have you seen my company?

But the house maid gave a blank expression as if she didn't understand what he was saying.

Ju: Where is your master, Master Jesus?

She quickly turned around and called to Mary, speaking in another dialect. Mary came out. She didn't recognise him.

M: Soldier, what brings you to our home? You are welcome.

Ju: I was attacked by bandits. It is not safe for your servant to travel alone.

M: But he is from these parts soldier. Your kind thoughts touch me. But what brings you to our home?

Ju: Police business. Have you seen my company?

M: Trevian?

Ju: Yes, you know him?

M: He escorted us part the way from the docks before heading back in that direction.

Ju: Then you know he was looking for a donkey?

Jesus came from behind Mary and touched her shoulders.

J: He left in a hurry after he lost our donkey. But the donkey found its way back here because this is where it lives.

Justin thought about the next question, asking tentatively.

Ju: And the boy?

J: Is that your real concern? Come, have something to eat?

Ju: But my company are split up.

M: We will not keep you long.

Justin stepped into the front garden, laden as it was with hanging vines.

M: Help yourself to the fruit. Here is a glass of wine.

Ju: Water please.

M: The boy is exhausted after being tied to the beast. There was nothing particular about this boy only that it accompanied us on a boat from Tarraco. I understand that the boat has probably now departed to go further afield. Trevian will know, he headed for the docks with his colleague.

J: Flavius.

Ju: Flavius, that dullard. So you think there is no threat here? But I was stoned.

J: You'd know if you were stoned, it would hurt you. Maybe an animal dropped something upon you.

Ju: Now now, not twice!

J: Why not? Do you not believe in coincidence? It has led you here has it not? Why you and not your colleagues? The ways of this world my friend are far beyond a Roman mentality.

Justin thought about it and gulped down his glass of water.

M: Another, seems you need it?

Ju: Please. I see you are educated people, travellers from another continent. Do you offer your hospitality to all who pass by here?

M: Yes. Those who find us are welcome. What is your name soldier?

Ju: Justin.

J: More than coincidence Justin. Why would you break from Roman protocol to come here alone? You take a risk yet something in your heart draws you to us. You should not tarry, only give our regards to Travian and Flavius when you reach them.

Ju: Can I offer your servant protection?

M: That is kind of you.

Ju: And the boy?

J: The boy came with us and is my son's play mate. He belongs here.

Mary called the servant over and requested a vial.

M: Here, take this oil as a token of our gratitude. I see you have a good heart.

Justin took one long look and decided to give in on the issue.

Ju: Hail Caesar!

But everybody just looked at Justin who quite embarrassingly backed off and slipped onto his horse. He quickly discovered the dirt track to el Perelló and headed in its direction. After about 3 km he sighted one of his colleagues and cantered up beside him.

Ju: Any sign of Trevian?

1<sup>st</sup> HS: Nope.

Ju: And Gad?

1<sup>st</sup> HS: No sign of him. Bandits eh?

Ju: None of that. Let's fast pace to Perelló and see if Trevian is up ahead.

So the two of them sped off. Meanwhile, Trevian was still being confronted by three spearmen who were now drawing swords of their own. His horse was long gone and there seemed no chance of escape. They drew in closer, shawls across their face. It was hard to make out what they looked liked in actuality.

T: My men are coming any moment now. I warn you. They will root you out.

The first spearman quickly thrust his weapon to the exposed part of Trevian's breast, who reacted with a wild counter riposte of his own considering he was injured. Another prodded him in the back and Trevian swung wildly again as he spun on his feet.

T: Come on then you bastards. I'll cut your fucking balls off.

His temper had blinded his vision; his anger had cancelled his battle skills. He was a sad man meeting his final minutes with all the loss of conduct and integrity that a proper death would have given him. Another spear came in from the other side this time piercing his underarm. Travian growled, swinging again. With now his back totally exposed a sword was thrust through his lower back. Trevian gave a loud cry thrusting one final lunge at his most recent assailant. He took the hand clean off his attacker who lurched back in pain, sword still sticking through Trevian's body. As Trevian writhed in agony the sound of trotting hooves drew nearer, with the occasional yell of a steersman goading his horse along. Two of the men quickly stripped the soldier of any value, including his armour, and scarpered for the hills whilst the injured one abruptly made a gross bandage to stifle the bleeding. He attempted to regain his n owsword but only partially could he

pull it out for it had wedged into the victim's bone. Too late for Travian, the Roman soldier lay like an undignified heap on the ground now moaning his last breath.

A minute later the pony and cart arrived and abruptly stopped, faced by a dead body in the middle of the path. The old man got out and inspected the area. The dead Travian lay propped on the point of the sword still hanging in him. Knowing that such a scene, if left as it was, will arouse huge suspicion on his master the old man picked up the body, now stripped of its armour and assets, and dragged him onto the back of the cart, albeit with a little dignity. The sword point had worked loose and fell to the ground unnoticed by the old man. He covered the body with hessian sacking, something that generally lies in the back of the cart for all occasions, and whipped on his pony even faster, knowing that he had a race against time. The Romans would soon be coming looking for him, he knew that. He had to visit Eliza anyhow, and she would know what to do with this kind.

From out of the undergrowth a fox had watched the action. After all humans had cleared the area it crept into the blood-splattered path way and grabbed at the severed hand, a tasty snack in the least.

Meanwhile, Justin and his colleague reached el Perelló, talked to the Roman patrols stationed there and, having learned that Trevian had not arrived, quickly made their way back along the road.

Ju: We could try the docks.

1st HS: Maybe he went back to camp, found what he was looking for.

It wasn't long before they came across the blood-splattered pathway.

Ju: Oh no, search the area?

1st HS: Look, there is a broken sword blade, not one of ours.

Ju: Any sign of bodies?

1st HS: Nothing.

Ju: Bring it. The old man on a cart must have gone ahead. I don't know what to do.

1st HS: What old man?

Ju: I passed him coming up. He was on the way down to the docks with a load of oil on the back.

1st HS: He may be dead.

Ju: It's hard to tell from these tracks, but they seem to continue.

1st HS: With his dead body on the back.

Ju: Oh shit. We are going to need reinforcements.

Sorry old man, I wasn't there for you. But I did warn you.

Right, back to camp then! Keep an eye out for Gad also.

And with that the two Romans pounded off.

By now the first officer and Flavius were already making their way down to the docks.

1<sup>st</sup> O: So Flavius, this woman, she doesn't ask for any payment?  
F: Not after Travian finished with her. Maybe she enjoyed it.  
1<sup>st</sup> O: Yes quite, Flavius.  
F: Travian says she knew the holy man.  
1<sup>st</sup> O: What holy man?  
F: The one we met on our rounds.  
1<sup>st</sup> O: And what about this holy man?  
F: He knew the fisherman.  
1<sup>st</sup> O: What fisherman?  
F: Err... the fisherman who brought the boy.  
1<sup>st</sup> O: Don't beat about the bush Flavius. What boy!  
F: The boy we found on our rounds sir.  
1<sup>st</sup> O: So why didn't Travian mention it to me then?  
F: Well, you sent him off to look for dog shit.  
1<sup>st</sup> O: Ohh... and where is this boy, Flavius? What is so special about this boy?  
F: With the donkey, sir.  
1<sup>st</sup> O: On Hera's knee I swear I will whip you. What donkey Flavius?  
F: The one that the fisherman was riding, only that we called him donkey first.  
1<sup>st</sup> O: Saturn, have mercy on me. I think I need to talk to Travian myself.  
F: He is looking....  
1<sup>st</sup> O: Shut up Flavius. I have had enough. It seems that your encounter with the bread lady has dulled your wits.

And they continued their way with the 1<sup>st</sup> officer attempting to piece together an incomplete puzzle.

Gad had caught the gist of what was going on. He witnessed Travian's horse at full pelt heading towards the general direction of the mountains. After giving chase and rearing the horsing down he wondered where Travian was. Without a moment's hesitation he sped back down to the track that led to the carob tree with Travian's horse tied to his own. There was nothing here, only blood mixed with dust. He inspected the area, now a mass of confusing tracks including wheel marks. Two bags still lay by the roadside full of Locust beans. 'This doesn't make sense', he thought to himself. He decided to check to see if Travian had hitched a ride on the cart and geed his horse along.

The old man pounded into Eliza's yard and gave a hoarse cry to her.

OM: Eliza, Eliza, give me a hand. Quickly!

But there was no reply. He tried again, sweat and tears dancing patterns of grief on his face.



OM: Eliza, come out.

With all his strength he dragged the body from the back of the cart and into Eliza's back door, the smell of burnt bread retching the air. He desperately called again.

OM: Eliza, come!

The blood had by now congealed and didn't make obvious from whence the body came, but was rather unceremoniously just dumped in the back door entrance. The old man lurched in.

OM: Eliza!

Horror struck him. Eliza's body lay fallen to the floor with blood issuing from a head wound. The man cried in pain and ran out. He ran to the only friend he knew in Juán leaving his pony and cart behind. Not a minute later Flavius turned up with his first officer.

1<sup>st</sup> O: Oh, seems someone has beaten us to it Flavius.

F: That pony belongs to the holy man.

1<sup>st</sup> O: Really. Let's meet him.

They both approached the building and just stood there opened mouth trying to absorb the mess they were confronted with.

## Act2 Scene 10

Petr still lay unconscious but Gwyn was likely to join him if he didn't get out of the bower. He attempted to move, checking the dried wound if it would seep; it did. It was dark out there but it seemed the best thing to do under cover. He wrestled himself up onto all fours and approached the entrance to the structure. As he stuck his head out the black dog shifted from its lumber and growled, getting up on all fours. Gwyn abruptly withdrew and grabbed his own knife. He made his way back to the entrance.

G: Stay back!

The dog observed the situation as Gwyn brandished his knife in its face. It held its distance and barked out loud a few times. Gwyn though, was feeling awful but managed to stand erect. He surveyed the darkness around him with the faint hint of light coming from a quarter moon. The dog ran ahead of him and Gwyn wondered what was its motive.

G: Shoo! Get out of here.

But it just lumbered back. The effort was too much for Gwyn anyhow, and he stumbled back into the bower and slumbered back to the floor wanting a bit more sleep. He slept tight not caring for the dog's presence.

Justin and the 1<sup>st</sup> horse soldier galloped into camp. They immediately sought Trevian. Failing to discover him they went looking for the first officer. The camp was restless; word had got around that they would march very soon and to prepare for a brisk pace.

Ju: Look, if you can't find Dedo locate any other first officer and explain what has happened, but don't exaggerate. I don't want any suspicion or panic on our behalf. We don't know where either Gad or Trevian are. I am going to look for Flavius, Trav's close friend.

And so they split up. Justin soon discovered that Flavius had gone to the docks with the first officer and decided to follow it up. Meanwhile the other horse soldier had informed his superiors of the loss of Travian and Gad. Justin cantered out and down towards the docks. He was approached by a fast galloping Flavius who looked like he had just seen a ghost.

Ju: Flavius, it's me Justin. Where's Travian?

He ground to an abrupt halt kicking up stones in the process.

F: He's dead!

Ju: What!

F: Dead, brown bread.

Ju: What, how, quick tell me?

F: Don't know, he must have gone back to the bread woman, she is dead as well.

Ju: But Travian was with us? How was he killed?

F: Sword wound. I swear I will kill the person who done this. I will kill them all, I swear, I swear...

Ju: Calm down Flavius, I know he was your best mate.

Sweat and tears were flowing down his cheeks.

F: My officer is down there. Go and 'ave a look for yourself. I have to call a guard down. They are going to think I had something to do with it.

Ju: Calm yourself Flavius. Look, when you reach camp ask for colleague Hilty, or Gad. We were all together when it happened.

Flavius took himself off and Justin continued down. Dedo was still going around the house trying to locate evidence. He looked through the cart and inspected the blood stains in the back. Just as Justin approached from one angle Gad was flying down the hill from another. Dedo rushed out the

building ready to fire a round of questions to his horse soldiers. They both arrived simultaneously.

D: Right, I want answers and quick ones before you are both trialled for murder and treason. Gad could only gulp and Justin wondered where to start.

D: Well come on! I am waiting.

Ju: We split up, some taking the Locust bean whilst Trav and Gad went up ahead.

D: And... speak up!

Ju: Oh shit. Trav went looking for a donkey, something about a boy who had a secret. Ask Gad.

D: Yes Gad? Who does the cart belong to.

G: Don't know...

Ju: The holy man. I managed to find his farm. They had the boy there and had sent the cart back towards the docks with a load of oil on the back. The rider was an old man.

D: Well that makes sense. What else?

Ju: I thought I detected bandits in the area but I never actually saw them.

D: How!

Ju: They threw stones at me. I was convinced by the holy man that it could have been animals in the trees.

D: By Apollo, who is this holy man that keeps turning up?

G: Flavius knows everything. They were up to something.

D: That half wit? Phw... Is it possible the woman killed Travian?

G: The old man more likely.

Ju: No way, I met this bloke and he couldn't raise a sword if he tried, let alone strip a body of its armour.

G: I saw the blood on the road where it happened. If it wasn't for his rider-less horse galloping like wind towards the mountains I would not have known that something was up.

D: Could the woman have had a jealous lover who killed them both?

Ju: No, Gad is right. We found a sword near the scene. It is not Roman. I left it back at camp.

D: It could have been put there afterward.

J: There was no time for it.

D: Unless there was more than one person involved.

Ju: What about Flavius? Could he have had time to....

D: No, not that half wit, he was with me. Poor bastard, that was his best mate.

Ju: The holy man? Shit, Flavius was losing it when I passed him on the road. He may do something stupid.

D: Find the old man. He is around.

Ju: And the holy man?

D: Not until I talk to Flavius again. He mentioned something about a fisherman too. Anybody?

Ju: The holy man, no his wife mentioned something about coming in a boat with the boy but that the boat has probably gone by now. The donkey was carrying the boy I think. Is it possible the fishermen killed them both after we split up? That's got to be it. After I was stoned it could

have only happened then. They must have been hiding in the trees in order to create a diversion. Only Trav and Flavius will know for sure.

D: Gad, locate the boat if it is still here or find out what you can. That is an order.

Justin, find the old man quick. We need to get these bodies on the back here and cover up the evidence. This is potentially damaging to our unit especially since we are about to march to Gaul. The lot of us will go up for trial. We'll be left behind and, that's not all... Trav and Flavius had sexual relations with the dead woman.

Ju: Oh no, it's possible the woman is a close friend of the holy man. Look, this is messy I know. But if the locals get ear of this they may revolt. We get treated fairly well here. That we don't know who killed them is a blessing, but for sure these fishermen look like suspects too. I mean, why would Trav kill her, after having sex? It isn't making sense.

D: The boy might know, this secret he is carrying. And the boat, we need to know where it came from. Gad will find out.

Just then Juán and the old man appeared from around the front of the house. Everyone looked at each other.

D: This is a military investigation. A citizen and soldier of the Emperor has been found dead. The crime is punishable by death. Those involved will also suffer the same fate. The evidence suggests that you stand accused of murder and will be brought to trial. You will be arrested and marched north where you will be trialled in Tarraco.

Juá: Wait, the old man found the body and carried it here out of dignity for the dead.

His quivering voice spoke tears.

OM: Soldier, you offered me protection did you not? You know it could not have been me.

Justin looked at Dedo.

Ju: It's true sir, I passed him along the way before the scene of the murder.

D: Could he have done it in that time?

Ju: He was alone. Travian was a fully-fledged soldier. There is no way, judging by the size of the wound that he could have had time. There is barely a drop on the cart. The body must have been dead for a while before he pulled it on. And besides, where is the armour, what did he do with it? I am also under oath.

Dedo pulled him to one side and whispered.

D: Under oath!

Ju: I promised his master that I would protect him from bandits and escort him, but we got way laid and missed him, deciding to go straight back to camp. There is no way sir, that he could have done it.

D: We need a guilty person if we are to get out of this clean.  
Juá: Excuse me for interrupting officers. But there is the case of the fishermen.  
D: You know of them?  
Juá: They left in a hurry and, we think, they took the mother's daughter.  
D: Well, well, it is all coming together now.  
Juá: They brought the master and his family from the north, from Tarraco. By our knowledge we had never seen this fisherman before. Some of the folk here claim to have seen mysterious movements during the night from them.  
D: And the boy?  
Juá: He came with the boat.

Just then Gad came back.

G: Sir, The fisherman set sail not 2 hours ago, in a hurry. They went south.  
D: And?  
G: Not much more, only that they were spotted moving during the night when all was dark.  
Juá: If you don't mind sir, we'd like to bury our own.  
D: Yes of course, clean up here.  
Justin, put Trav across your horse and take him to Perelló. I don't want the camp upset. I need to make a report of another soldier gone missing. Give him a decent burial. I will send up Flavius to join you.  
Ju: Sir, we are about to march.  
D: You will be posted here in Perelló with Flavius. Find out what you can from him and the identity of the fisherman. Somebody must know them.  
Gad, escort Justin to Perelló and join the column after procedures have been completed.  
Justin, I am putting you in charge of the investigation. And keep an eye on Flavius.

Justin let out a sigh but resigned to his new role. By the time Gad had rejoined the column the troops were already marching north some 15km. Of course, word got back to Jesus and Mary eventually who had been saddened by the occasion. Flavius though, had unfinished business.

## Act2 Scene 11

It was an insignificant burial; a few soldiers turned up including Flavius, Justin and members of the local patrol.

F: You saw who done this didn't you Jus?  
J: No Flavius, and now is not the time.  
F: They say you went to the house of the holy man. What did you see?  
J: The murderer certainly didn't come from there if that is what you are thinking.  
F: And the fishermen?  
J: Maybe.

F: Then why don't you pursue or send a messenger?  
J: Because you forget Flavius of the crime that you committed. We have got a dead peasant on our hands.  
F: We did not kill her. She was alive when we left.  
J: Are you absolutely sure of that? Was you watching Trav's movements all the time? Just remind me again. Was it after or before the fishermen left that you visited the bread lady?  
F: Ehhh... I am not sure Justin, I don't know exactly when they left.  
J: Quite.  
F: So what you going to do?  
J: Just hang it out. Trav was a loss to all of us.  
F: What you thinking Jus?  
J: We are going to stick around a bit longer. I want you to drop this vendetta thing, got it?

Flavius turned askance with a look of disappointment and walked over to the gravestone of Trav once more. He spoke under his breath.

J: Don't you worry Trav, I will find them.

The burial of Eliza was a more sombre affair. A ring of stones at the back of farm showed the graves of close companions. With the soil so shallow here huge stones were placed over the bodies to prevent animals from digging them up. The old man, Juán, Mary and Jesus, a few other servants and friends of the deceased, and Ishmael attended the proceedings.

J: Ishmael, you have dug a deep enough hole. Juán, maybe you can assist with the large stone. Will you proceed to carry the body in the shroud facing upwards and to ensure that her hands remain crossed. Mary, you have supervised the oiling of the body and preparation of the herbs for its embalming.

It is not the best of times that we are gathered here. Nevertheless, that we are gathered here for this sad event is a portent of tomorrow. We must place Eliza's death in the greater context and come to terms with the presence of our Roman occupiers. The blame is not to be attributed to any one person, but we must see this as a partial death of our traditions, a loss of a valuable member of our society. It reminds us that each person is counted for their individuality and commitment to remember the old ways in light of the new world that we are engaging. This age that herewith comes is heaven. It is the experience of returning to the source and leaving our bodily carcasses to the world that gave it form. The spirit returns in consciousness as the Great One where there is no divisibility in our being, that the connectedness of all things continues with the very basis of physical manifestation. Eliza's life has been terminated prematurely, and she must go through the cycle of re-manifestation. But let it remind us that our time on this world is short and that the imminence of Creation has allowed our bodies to draw towards the flame of life, that the Kingdom of God is at hand. Let it be a lesson to us who have forgotten that we must continue to draw towards God and into the Great Death in order to reawaken God's plan. As a race our time has come to ascend into the apocalyptic future, which is

now upon us. For the integrity of all life on this planet we must sacrifice ourselves in the final act of preparation to meet God, the Unknown. That is, we must passivate our minds and allow our bodies in spirit to pass unhindered into the spiritual realm from whence we all came. I have shown the way to Death and to the rebirth it brings in consciousness, unimpeded in its travels to the realisation of the Oneness of Being. This the same God of our forefathers, as an unblemished lamb is returned to the Lord so we must purge our lives and cleanse ourselves of the desire to detach from nature, from Creation. The empirical world lays heavy on your souls but we are joined here together to remember the origin of mankind, the frugality and simplicity of life, the providence of nature, and the guiding hand that God brings forth.

As a bread I restore you in the fullness of your rising, for you grow by the warmth of my hand for your making.

To the soil, to the worms, to the water, to the current, to the rock, to the undertaker, to the fire, to the lesser spirit, to the earth, to the space, to the emptiness, to the darkness, to the sun, to the source, to the infinite, to the greater spirit..., to Eliza. So be it.

A moment of peace ensued and Juán and Ishmael took the great rock and rolled it over Eliza's shrouded body. Members of the congregation each took a handful of soil and sprinkled it over her body and then each went quietly away in their own thoughts. Jesus took Mary aside.

J: I fear we must deal with the other issue at hand for the Romans dwell on our doorstep. In due time we must bring the Roman into our household for this is a sign of the times. The religious world is divided and there are those who do not value the need for sacrifice. The Roman is here to stay. We must accommodate ourselves with their culture if we are to ensure any potential atheists don't dilute themselves of the worship of God and the singularity of being.

M: But I will not have an atheist in our household.

J: It is not the atheist I fear, for the atheist is lost to our world. It is the materialist who seeks to conquer men's minds and replace God with their own self-worship. The spirit of man is moving with the times. The freedom it brings to the individual defies humility. I need to draw closer to the Emperor.

M: But you went there before, and they tore at you like vultures. Even our own bloodline denied your religiosity.

J: But we are not there anymore Mary. Don't fear those things that my heart has already conquered. You were there for me then, and you are here for me now. Look how we have brought upon us an addition to our community. Surely this is God's blessing. Death only meets life on a dice roll, an edge towards a new face. Without you I don't think I could do this.

M: No Yeshu, I am always there for you.

## Act2 Scene 12

The column marched north and broke for camp. As is the protocol scouts were sent in all available directions especially after rumours that possible bandits were stalking the country. The whole episode with the death of a Roman soldier got everyone murmuring despite the efforts of Dedo

to quieten affairs. On reaching the dry river beds the dogs would be let off the leash to sniff out any potential bandits hiding amongst the rocks. It wasn't long before a rapturous chorus of barking dogs identified something in the undergrowth. The foot soldier came running to Dedo.

1<sup>st</sup> FS: Sir, just our luck. We have found a recently dead pig, one for the eating. The broken blade was still sticking out of it.

D: Can your men lift it?

1<sup>st</sup> FS: But that isn't the problem. It is the other body next to it?

D: Another body you say?

1<sup>st</sup> FS: Yes sir, a male, alive.

D: Alive! By the blazes of Zeus what's up with the man?

1<sup>st</sup> FS: He breathes but does not awaken.

D: Well, that makes a change. Have you searched him?

1<sup>st</sup> FS: Yes sir. He has no valuables, just one of the local peasants.

D: Bring his body here. Grab a horse and put him on the back of it.

1<sup>st</sup> FS: And the pig sir?

D: Give it to the chef who will cut and salt it. We will save it for a celebration. And check the whole area. Seems unlikely that he should be alone, unless he was using traps, so careful when you scout. I don't want, God forbid, any more accidents.

Three or four foot soldiers tied the pig to a carrying pole whilst the peasant was stretchered onto the horse. The dogs had fussed over the dead pig and stuck to it in the vain hope that they would get first helpings. One other dog remained behind continuing to sniff out the area.

2<sup>nd</sup> FS: Come on Buxus! What you hanging round for?

The dog trotted off along the dry river bed occasionally sticking its nose in a shrub. The foot soldier shouted out again.

2<sup>nd</sup> FS: Come on Buxus!

But the dog was oblivious. It came upon the hidden bower and crouched down, the hairs on its neck rising to the presence of its antagonist. The black dog appeared from its den showing a full set of teeth, its eyes locked upon its assailant. In a moment the two were circling each other. A Roman hunting dog was as vicious as any other, taught to kill and tear at the enemy. But this black dog seemed to have a presence about it. It growled even deeper, pawing at the soil beneath its front paws. This went on for half a minute, the hunting dog occasionally stopping to take a long sniff. And then as if it had received all the information it wanted it suddenly turned around and trotted back down the way it came. The Roman caught up with it and put it back on the leash. The black dog however, re-entered its den and lay down beside the flunked figure of Gwyn, still sleeping. It waited licking the exposed wound of the sleeping lump.

Dedo examined the unconscious body that refused to awaken.



D: Seems to be under the influence of narcotics, or just bewitched. And you say he was just lying next to the pig?

1<sup>st</sup> FS: Yes sir. Not a twitch.

D: Have you retrieved the broken blade from the man?

1<sup>st</sup> FS: Yes sir.

Dedo examined it.

D: It isn't from these parts. I wonder. Tie his hands so that when he awakens he can't run. Bring him with us.

1<sup>st</sup> FS: Yes sir.

An hour later the Roman column marched forward again, north on the road to Tarraco. The day passed uneventful, but that evening peasant hunters were back into the wilderness having waited for the Roman army to pass on. It wasn't long before their own dogs spotted the bower. This time though, Gwyn was discovered. The black dog stepping aside to reveal the body he was guarding.

1<sup>st</sup> HM: Not Roman.

2<sup>nd</sup> HM: Not one of us either.

1<sup>st</sup> HM: He is injured, in need of help.

2<sup>nd</sup> HM: A burden.

1<sup>st</sup> HM: He may bring us fortune.

2<sup>nd</sup> HM: Does he have anything of value?

1<sup>st</sup> HM: Nothing, he must be from round here somewhere.

2<sup>nd</sup> HM: The items here suggest there is another companion.

1<sup>st</sup> HM: Maybe he has gone for help.

2<sup>nd</sup> HM: He wouldn't get past the Roman patrols. Let's take him with us and get him fixed up at least. The black dog looks like a worthwhile addition to our own collection.

1<sup>st</sup> HM: Judging by that wound it is going to hurt if we move him.

2<sup>nd</sup> HM: Don't worry, he is out cold. He won't feel a thing 'til the moro.

And so they slung the body over the shoulder of the burliest of the hunters and trekked back inland. The black dog followed loyally as if it knew it had to fulfil the hunter's motive. The rest of Gwyn's kit was also picked up for he'd be wanting that when he awakens and the hunters were not taking any risks of being tagged by a Roman.

The night passed quietly. Flavius though, could not sleep. He kept on turning over the course of events in his mind, speaking to himself, 'We did not kill her, no Trav, she enjoyed it, she enjoyed it.'

## Act3 Scene 1

HP: But your Worship, this man is a Jew. We know that now. Why are you, without meaning to contradict your argument, protecting him? These peoples can be some of the bloodiest we have known. They use guerrilla tactics on their homeland and send out spies everywhere to generate unrest. They are not content to make peace with us.

E: He is holy, and if you knew the value of your own words you would know that they are an evolved race. In their history they have suffered torment after torment. But for that they have recorded a history shows them to be a people that will not disappear overnight. They have spread to many distant lands, especially in the north. It would be conducive to use their knowledge of the landscape and win over their affection.

HP: With due regard I doubt that a blood thirsty nation could ever make peace with our politics.

E: And you would know this, for it seems you dabble in political affairs more than your religious duties, which at times appears no more than tokenism.

HP: Well, you must not forget that I myself have come from a line of sacerdotal...

E: One that succumbed to the whims of the senate for too many years. You are now my personal advisor, that is given. But in matters of holiness I have detected in this one man a presence. It is something I envy in a strange way, the peace that surrounds him and yet the presence is ever there to turn the eye of the most powerful. To exchange my position with such a man is an impossible dream, for I am born into this splendour we call Rome. How could I fail my people who live to see it rise? Nevertheless, I feel that this man is close to God so much so that he walks with a veil of protection around him. You are my personal advisor Barrachius and I enjoy your company. But in matters of God you fail to see how the holy is reflected in me, which is why you disdain this man.

HP: But who truly is he?

E: Is it something you envy?

HP: No, I am in your ser...

E: Do you really know the gods or do you succumb to the whims of ritual in order to satiate your personal desires. You see, the gods are here now, in me. And as I walk amongst the people taking in their love for me, they aggrandize me. I feel them in my soul, my mind responds to them. But it is not the anonymity of presence that permeates our universe, the stars. That unknown quality is for the role of gods, and the truly holy blow like the wind, ahead of the race to catch up. To have that influence is an enviable power, to know that one person could change culture.

HP: So, your honour, what would you have me do in this situation? I dispatched Decius off to join the legions in the north awaiting further instruction. I have him as my personal informant who will infiltrate the Jewish communities that lie along the trade routes and further into Albion. And yet no sooner do I carry out this objective I find out that your personal guard have interrogated him for communicating with a Jew.

E: It wasn't interrogation Barrachius. I gave you instruction and needed to confuse the man as to his mission. I think I have achieved that. When you can observe the subtleties of power relations you will notice that at the centre of all of it are individuals not unlike myself. The people

choose to worship me because I am benign. I bring them fortune and wealth. They enjoy, even revel in the increase of commerce, the gladiatorial sports, the horse racing, the libraries, the gymnasiums and so on. From being simple folk of the land they now have greater responsibility, and they understand that building cities for them that bring in clean water, protection from bandits, freedom of choice, democracy, is a gift from the gods. I am their god's voice and they respect that. But along comes the ascetic, the philosopher, the Stoic, the Sophist, the seer, the visionary, the prophet, the messiah, the wandering Jew, and everything gets turned upside down. Why?

The Emperor paused in his speech and looked at Barrachius directly in the eye.

E: Barrachius, why is it that you do not draw this same support, or influence amongst the people?

HP: It is because I *serve you* my Honour. I am your functionary.

E: Correct Barrachius. I am not unknown to you, but to the people I am. They keep their distance and I revel in their awe, give them the material things in life. I replace the created order, nature. Even the Senate must keep their distance if I am to receive their gratitude. But the holy man walks amongst the people and plays music. He draws listeners including myself because it intrigues me. It is like he sucks in the Unknown and creates his own likeness in it. Decius likewise was drawn to this man. There seems to be a whole social structure connected to his presence. Ask the question why Decius was chosen amongst all the other centurions to fulfil this duty. Is it because he speaks the Jewish language? Hardly. We don't need spies to go amongst these communities Barrachius. They desert to our cause already. We are winning this war, this Empire. The world is our oyster and we draw every holy man into our cities. Their influence will fail when they stick out their hand and grasp at the new wealth in this world. Our cities will grow on their corruption, but we cannot do it without them in the first place. We must draw them in, draw their social influence of the masses, and with it their common folk. This is how we build empires, gain citizens. We give them new laws to replace the old ones. With *latis lazuli (ius Latinum)* we will have achieved the real power of the holy, to have nature in the palms of our hands.

HP: So what of Decius?

E: He has been chosen by some divine right to fulfil a social task. It could be that he will lead us back to the Jewish nation. I feel that the insurrection is imminent there, in their homeland, and somehow this holy man has a major part to play in it.

HP: But your Honour, who is he? Another wandering Jew?

E: It is not for you to know these things. But continue to observe these matters and we might learn something of the gods ourselves. The persistence of their solitary god would suggest that we are dealing with a time of great change.

HP: Must we play folly with them?

E: What is it that you know about them that you so disdain Barrachius? I ask the question: How have they persisted with such tenacity, enslaved by one people after another, finding favour with the Persians?

HP: Theirs is the god of arrogance, of poverty, of discrimination. How can you grant that their holy men will have any influence upon the Empire? Their beliefs exclude any comprehension of democracy. At least we give the common folk the incentive to rise in society.

E: Yes Barrachius, with bribes and honour. We are all aware of how we have risen in rank through favour aren't we? But you are not listening. I said that the holy are necessary to win over the masses, and I just don't see it in you. Any nation that has lasted this long, who take their beginnings in a line of prophets, create a history longer than your arm, is not to be dismissed easily. What I want to know is whether these Jews have become more attractive to the peasantry. Find out if they have called themselves by other names, as I say they spread news of a change of times.

HP: Even this far west?

E: Yes, most definitely. They are an infectious people. We must not discount their one god even if they are arrogant. But appealing to the peasantry and the slave classes is a long-term threat that could escalate at any time in the future. Their poverty is their richness, their frugality their common cause. It is no wonder they believe themselves to be a chosen people. We have their monarchy, you have no fear there Barrachius. They have succumbed to our material wealth, and even now we build them another temple to match the grandeur of their historic past when they had a king.

HP: And you intend to be their king your Honour.

E: Not at all, for we have given them a client to fulfil that role. He happily sits on the Jewish throne reaping the hatred of his own people for we have drawn his soul into our imperial glove. It is not for me to heap upon myself the hatred of a warring nation, one that wars against the world. No, what I have intended for a while now is to give them a true king, one that they despise for his authenticity, for his holiness, who does not clamber after material things.

HP: I do not understand your Honour.

E: It is not hard to imagine that amongst them is a nobility, one that we, and I mean you too Barrachius, respect. That a martyr amongst them will become a thorn in their side and will reduce the Jewish nation to a minority.

HP: But when is this to happen?

E: Oh Barrachius, you should do your homework for even now the Jews grasp at a messiah figure to lead them out of the Empire's hand. We just need to watch it happen.

HP: I am lost your Honour.

E: Never mind Barrachius. Just keep watching and you may learn something about the gods.

This last comment seemed to twist something in the High Priest's mind. It hit a nerve, one in which he had to control his emotional instability. After bowing he duly turned around and muttered under his breath as he left the Emperor's presence. Just before leaving the chamber the Emperor spoke again.

E: Oh, and Barrachius, ask my personal guard to return please.

HP: Yes your Honour. Just one other thing your Highness. Decius. Am I to assume that I have no jurisdiction here?

E: Let the centurion go. Continue with your plan to infiltrate the Jewish communities. Keep him confused, see where it leads you.

HP: Yes your Honour, confused is the word.

And he promptly turned around and stalked out of the room. The hint of sarcasm was all too obvious. But to defy the Emperor's ploy would be a suicide mission in the least and so Barrachius had to bite his lip on this one. He called the personal guard to his side.

HP: His Highness has instruction for you. Report back to me afterward.

He later instructed his personal assistant to gather as much information as was available concerning Jewish history. Reading about a nation that so obviously needed his inner sentiments only gained to develop a greater hatred for them.

HP: As for the messenger that was sent to intercept the previous messenger on the way to Gaul, well he must also be intercepted. Ensure that he doesn't reach his target.

PA: Which one sir?

HP: The second one... the last one!

## Act3 Scene 2

The platoon rode forth towards Tarraco. Petr was beginning to stir from his sleep. He cracked open his eyes and looked around to find that he was surrounded by Roman soldiers. A deep sense of foreboding struck him and for a moment he had a flashback from the time when he was a captive in Briton. He decided to pretend he was asleep and waited for his opportunity to run for it. But the platoon continued to march as the cart that carried him along bumped and lurched in all directions; it seemed to be in a hurry. As the voices of officers and passing horse soldiers gathered in momentum he knew that he must be entering the outer regions of a city, which city he did not know. He realised he was alone and that his body must have been found, for his last memories were a little hazy although he could make out something of a pig in his mind. He wondered where Gwyn was and how his good friend might be. The platoon hurried along.

Gwyn was taken to a local farmstead and there the women tended to him. With a poultice of herbs the swelling went down, although the unsung heroics of the black dog will remain so, having licked his wounds. It tarried in their wake always sniffing around for some new adventure. One of the huntsmen had already set his eyes on the beast and decided to claim it for himself.

1<sup>st</sup> HM: Nice coat don't you think Miguél?

2<sup>nd</sup> HM: He's not built for it. Wrong type of dog.

1<sup>st</sup> HM: You don't know until you've tried him.

2<sup>nd</sup> HM: Anyway, you have a bleeding man to deal with.

1<sup>st</sup> HM: Looks like a peasant. I don't see a threat here.

2<sup>nd</sup> HM: Let's just heal him up and get him on his way.

1<sup>st</sup> HM: Might be useful Miguél. We'll get him working the press during the olive harvest.  
2<sup>nd</sup> HM: You going to look after him?  
1<sup>st</sup> HM: The women will.  
2<sup>nd</sup> HM: But we know nothing about him. Could be a fugitive, he is of different stock. You saw the wound, it was a knife wound.  
1<sup>st</sup> HM: We'll ask him. As for the dog I will run it with the others tomorrow.  
2<sup>nd</sup> HM: Stick it in the pen for now.

Gwyn started stirring from his sleep. On awakening he groaned a long groan. He checked over his own wound and saw the poultice on it. It was more than he could do to turn his body to face his hosts.

1<sup>st</sup> HM: Hello my friend.

A blurred vision of the man came into focus.

1<sup>st</sup> HM: We found you dying. What happened?

Gwyn struggled to recall anything with clarity.

G: Had an accident with a pig.

1<sup>st</sup> HM: You are a hunter?

G: Not quite. I was travelling with a colleague to reach a friend near el Perelló. Where is he?

1<sup>st</sup> HM: You was alone.

G: Wait. He left me to look for help. You didn't meet him?

1<sup>st</sup> HM: No.

G: He may still be around.

1<sup>st</sup> HM: The Romans came through here. If he didn't return he has probably been apprehended..

G: How long ago?

1<sup>st</sup> HM: A day ago. Are you Roman citizens?

G: No.

1<sup>st</sup> HM: Then he will have had a problem if they caught him wandering around.

G: Can you go back and look?

1<sup>st</sup> HM: We do, every morning we hunt. For now you need to rest. We are looking after the dog.

G: What dog?

1<sup>st</sup> HM: Your dog. It was next to you.

G: We didn't have a dog.

1<sup>st</sup> HM: Well, that makes things easier.

G: What do you mean?

1<sup>st</sup> HM: We can do with another dog.

A bark came from the outside as if on cue and both men turned. Miguél was trying to introduce it to the other dogs. A growling session was started up.

1<sup>st</sup> HM: You know nothing of this dog then?

G: No.

1<sup>st</sup> HM: Then it is a stray.

Miguél, put him in the pen alone at first.

And your name?

G: Gwyn.

1<sup>st</sup> HM: You have any skills.

G: We can hunt, hand crafts, the normal stuff.

1<sup>st</sup> HM: Worked a press before.

G: A mill stone.

1<sup>st</sup> HM: Good, you can make yourself useful when you recover. I brought you your satchels and the women will bring you food. When you are fully recovered you can go on your journey to el Perelló. It is still another 20 km from here. But I don't advise running for it. If any horse soldiers catch you in this state they will question you.

Gwyn checked over his satchels. He pulled out his knife and various other bits.

1<sup>st</sup> HM: You seemed to be carrying light so I assumed you were near to your location here. Who is your host?

G: A holy man by the name of Jesus. They have a commune near el Perelló.

1<sup>st</sup> HM: I can make enquiries for you, if you like.

G: Not yet. As you say, I may be okay soon enough and then I will make my way along.

1<sup>st</sup> HM: This dried food you eat. Where did you get it from?

G: It was packed for us.

1<sup>st</sup> HM: You want some advice?

Gwyn just looked at him.

1<sup>st</sup> HM: I wouldn't touch it, looks poisonous.

Gwyn played with it in his hands.

G: But, they wouldn't do that to us. They are benign people.

1<sup>st</sup> HM: You should ask some questions then. Whoever gave you this wants you dead.

G: You think so? You haven't seen this type around here.

1<sup>st</sup> HM: No, it is not native.

G: Alright, that changes the picture a bit. Petr ate some of this.

1<sup>st</sup> HM: Well, that may answer the first question. He was your colleague.  
G: The pig that came into our den was looking for this.  
1<sup>st</sup> HM: Well it stinks. They will smell that out from the other side of the hill.  
G: We tried to kill it during the night.  
1<sup>st</sup> HM: And you call yourselves hunters!

Gwyn continued to roll the fungi in his hand.

G: Petr is out there then, somewhere, maybe dead?  
1<sup>st</sup> HM: If he is unprotected he'll be eaten soon enough, that's if the Romans didn't find him first.  
G: Then I have to get back to the holy man and ask some questions.  
1<sup>st</sup> HM: Rest then, for now.

Miguél stormed into the room.

2<sup>nd</sup> HM: This dog is a menace Trilby. It threatens every other and gets the hairs up on their back.  
1<sup>st</sup> HM: Keep it separate for now until it gets used to it. This is Gwyn.  
2<sup>nd</sup> HM: Where did you get this beast from?  
G: Not mine. It came to me during the night.  
1<sup>st</sup> HM: You should count yourself lucky then. In that state you would have made a nice meal. We have wild cats here as well.  
2<sup>nd</sup> HM: You staying a while then?  
G: Just a little if it is no bother.  
1<sup>st</sup> HM: Not at all. The women will bring you some proper food now.

And with that the huntsmen left the room. Miguél pondered over his predicament. 'Why would they want to poison me? Maybe this has something to do with the Jews.'

### Act3 Scene 3

Petr awoke again to find out that he was in a hospice amongst wounded soldiers. He turned to his side again and saw men maimed from fighting, or at least from accidents incurred during fighting drills. There were a few others of a slave disposition who look like they had had serious injury during labouring but were worth keeping since normally slaves could easily be replaced. It was now 2 days since he was discovered and the effect of the hallucinogen was wearing off. He hadn't, of course, realised the cause of his condition and attributed it to some spiritual intervention. He wondered if the holy man had anything to do with it, a benign spirit of sorts that follows him around, or a jinx even. He turned to one of the slaves and made small enquiry.

P: You okay, you seem to have a serious injury there.



His language was pigeon.

S: Da ston blok hit fut.

P: Nasty, what were you working on?

S: Weter rode in da seety.

P: How long you been here then?

S: Sven sun passing. Rite mess.

P: A week? Where d'ya come down from then?

S: Nort. Mantens.

P: Have you ever seen anything like this place?

S: Da seety?

P: Yeh, with all its buildings.

S: I mek weter road. Ve call it 'Deval Brij'.

P: You know about these things?

S: Mek meny wen traval. Vil reten soon hope.

P: Where does the water road go to?

S: Joyn reever. Nort.

P: I bet you'd want to go back home then?

S: Yep. I tink meny time. But haw?

P: Follow the river north.

S: Tu meny sowjer.

P: Keep your voice down. Can you get me to the water road?

S: Yep. But yu mek plan?

P: It is a few days travel but once we get to the mountains in the north we can lose the Romans,

S: I nid get betta furs. Wun mor day. But if no plan no go.

P: Okay, I need to convince the Roman guards that I have some masonic skill, so that I can inspect the quarry and have some free movement.

S: Yu hav nolej ov dis?

P: Something, but mainly pottery, not much. You see, I am a sculpture.

S: What is scullta.

P: Making form, creating figures

S: Yu mek statu?

P: Well, kind of. I make in clay. But first though, I need a story as to how they have found me lying around...

He pondered a moment.

Listen... so if I need to find you what is your name?

S: Volksman.

P: Petr. Not a word to anybody about this Volksman.

S: I see meny try befor but no wun reten.

P: Yes, but you are a slave and I am not, well not yet. You needs get some rest Volksman and I will too.

Further north Decius was pondering his future. He was going to Briton probably to fight, but was expecting to receive some special instruction. They would pass through the mountains over the next few days as a legion. He started making new friends and had already forgotten of his personal woes in Tarraco even though he liked the city a lot. He took the advice of his friends and got to know some of the women on the march. This seemed to throw a bit more compassion on the journey. As a promoted officer he could wander freely amongst the lower ranks, and this also comforted him. He was getting used to his new power even if it meant that the soldiers tended to keep a distance with their superiors. He engaged some small talk with one of the women.

D: What is your name then?

M: Molly.

D: Decius. You being just a maiden, how did you find yourself here?

M: I ran from home. I couldn't stand my mother, her commands.

D: Commands? And do you think it is any different being in the military?

M: Well no, but here it is the command of men. I am more useful here, not just some run-around for a demanding mother. I like to travel and I was going nowhere on the farm, even though we move across country once in a while.

D: Did you have a small family then that you don't miss them.

M: Well, I do miss my little brother, and occasionally my sister.

D: You say you move around. Does that mean you were travellers?

M: In Briton, yes.

D: Albion, you have been there?

Molly chuckled.

M: I am from there you nitwit.

D: So you gave yourself into the service of the Empire?

M: All the women did. Only I was still a bit of girl although I preferred hanging around with boys to other girls.

D: So how long have you been in service?

M: Oh, just half a season. But now they are taking me to Gaul.

D: Would you like to go back to your own land?

M: Yes and no. I don't miss it, and I certainly prefer this life rather than a farm hand.

D: Can I ask you a personal question?

M: Maybe.

D: Do you give yourself to the men here?

Molly chuckled again, but this time a little longer.

M: Oh no, I would never do that.

D: Are you a virgin?

M: Oh Decius, you are so abrupt. Yes, I am.

D: I honour the virgin. In the land that I came from we only marry such. It binds our community and people's integrity. What, what I mean to say is that... we can marry women who have given themselves in marriage previously but our beliefs likened the virgin to closeness to God. She is given with God's blessing so that we remain a pure race.

M: So you are not a Roman then, with all your international gods?

D: I am, I am, but I chose this change of lifestyle to reflect my needs. Just of recent I have been sent on a military mission to go to Albion with a legion from Gaul. I believe they are fighting there.

M: You mean you are going to kill my people?

D: It is not that simple Molly. We, the Empire, offer benefits to barbaric societies. We have libraries and schools, we build roads and cities, improve water courses, offer employment.

M: We are not barbaric people just because we defend our homeland using less sophisticated weaponry. But anyhow, I am here too so that makes us similar. I chose this life but I will never go back to being what I was. And you Decius, would you go back to your homeland?

Decius thought long and hard.

D: No, not now. My own people would have me murdered.

M: Who's barbaric now?

D: But old habits, traditions die hard. I still only really believe in one God, Yahweh. I miss the festivals, the bonding in our communities, the shared joys and sorrows of the harvest, the pilgrimage to our Temple.

M: Temple? We had temples in the woods. Our spiritual leaders knew about everything. You honour virgins you say, we honoured the oak. We also had rites of passage into womanhood, only that I missed my one by jumping ship.

They both laughed simultaneously.

D: What is it you actually do then?

M: I play the harp, I entertain with music.

D: What type of instrument is that?

M: One with strings.

D: I used to play a little. It is interesting because I thought I would never hear such a thing again in my life and then I met this holy man from my own country here in Iberia playing in the street.

M: It is not uncommon to play music you know.

D: I know, but entertainment is hired. We don't play in the street, it is not the custom. This man was changing culture.

Decius suddenly went into a deep reverie and began looking straight through Molly.

M: Excuse me, is there anyone home?

D: Oh, Molly, it is a personal thing. But everything keeps leading back to him, this is why I am here now. I should get on my way now and check over the conditions of the soldiers, see if there are any complaints. Maybe you can play for me another day? Shall we meet again?

M: Maybe, I'll find you.

There was a spring in Decius' step and suddenly things didn't look so glum. He continued his duties and hand-picked a few men to gather extra rations. In particular he looked out for that sweet brown pod that grows from trees, a staple in his own country.

## Act3 Scene 4

Jesus was now with his community, assessing their needs and looking over the condition of the fruit trees. It was a joy to work with the animals also for he understood himself to have a special bonding with them. In particular he had a way with dogs. On this occasion he was with Ishmael showing him around the farm and delegating some responsibilities to him.

J: Ishmael, here you cultivate your own beliefs. When you feel it is time to move on that is your choice.

I: Am I expected to obey conditions?

J: You will discover for yourself what fits into the scheme of things. If you have something to share then others will be drawn to your influence. If you do things that threaten the integrity of the system then you will find yourself going against your will and desire to remain here. It may well cause you to receive antagonism as you might find in any settlement. Here though, I want everybody to cultivate their own spirituality so that any undesirable effects quickly get washed out. If it leads to isolation then that shows one to have less to contribute practically. The balance must be discovered in the individual who follows his or her own tendency and how much that fits in with the system's requirement to keep going.

I: So I can do what I want? I am not a slave then?

J: It is what it means to be a true slave Ishmael. What is the freedom of an animal, say a bee? Is it to serve or does it decide to go off and make a solitary life for personal gain? It knows its mind and to be anything else will most certainly mean death. It must operate within a social consciousness.

I: Surely we are different, that God has given us this free will? That I can grow my own food, build my own house, choose not to follow other person's thinking, all makes me outside the social consciousness.

J: It would appear so, this libertarianism. But this individuality is spiritless and will require you to become dependent upon your own abilities to replace God's will. God is Creation, is Providence. To find God is an act of simplicity, but men complicate this prerogative by creating

machines that do the work of nature, even generate more energy. Effectively all this means that the individual becomes more dependent on technology.

Jesus paused.

J: There are two paths then. To detach yourself from Creation is a will against God and a move to complicate one's actions. And alternatively there is the desire to be nurtured by nature that shows that when times get hard one naturally contracts. This way communities or an operating social consciousness reflects the interactions with the greater wildlife. It naturally controls population demands. I spent many years nurturing this consciousness and seeing how my relationship with other people tends me in a particular direction. Let me ask you: do you have a desire for children and a wife?

I: Yes, I think so although I don't feel entirely comfortable yet with my surroundings. I have no security, no income.

J: Right, then you can see how social consciousness works on the emotional body. Consider, that when the basic resources of life, sustenance in other words, are controlled then you can make that decision. On my own path my high spirituality took me outside mainstream culture so that I always found sustenance by meeting new people. I travelled before I decided to settle down in my home country. I found God always looking after me. Eventually I realised I could only be fulfilled by depending upon God's providence, upon Creation and nature. I could not remain in any one social consciousness. It was always changing its dynamics according to who I met. I now find myself here drawing others towards me who would like to share in this high level of spiritual awareness. Then you can see how social consciousness reflects natural patterns.

I: Is that why you reject the Roman way of life?

J: Quite, for even though it believes itself to be religious, with its multitude of shrines and temples, it cultivates the civic life also, one that develops cities. Cities do not nurture natural levels of social consciousness. In fact, they cause more problems than they solve. They are bloated constructs, redefining the flowing patterns of nature to concentrate resources. They destroy the link between territorial demands and value. Values here have changed to focus upon wealth as something that is hoarded, that gives eminence and status. Really, to discover God shows us that we can live within the natural territorial needs of simplistic beings. There is no eminence here, only acts of selflessness. My high level of spirituality drew to me people from all wakes of consciousness, from all backgrounds, those people who sought to get closer to God because they saw the answer to their emotional problems caused by their separateness from nature. They had not the technological mastery to replace what they had lost in the belief of nature to restore them to completeness. We are simple beings. If we ask for any more, then our values have to change to reflect the new conditions that we have propagated. This is an emotional demand.

I: Your children then, Jesus, do they not require an emotional demand from you?

J: Ah Ishmael, you are learning quickly, for it requires me to unveil something of the secrets of life. You see, you are correct. I met my wife only after I had met death face on for this was the prophetic act of fulfilling my destiny. Having cultivated the fullness of living I understood

that I was ready to impart my knowledge to a greater conscious sphere. As a son of God I had become enlightened in the needs of God's real community. Through me God made me a vessel for others to draw closer in their own prophetic tendencies. Everybody needs conquer death, for it is the will of God, of Creation. Do you know what I am saying Ishmael?

I: I believe you understand there to be life in death.

J: Yes Ishmael, and one day you will go from here and propagate this apocalypse. For this community is based upon fulfilling Creation, upon the need of every individual to contract from the technological world and return to Death.

I: You are saying that man has overstayed his welcome on this planet?

J: Effectively, yes. The very act of defying God changes values. Spiritually we must meet death as a way of fulfilling ourselves. Having children was a way of fulfilling this destiny, for now my spiritual legacy, my divine presence in society gets transferred into flesh and blood. My children will continue the work I have started, in a line of prophets that goes beyond our ancestral Abraham. But this capitulation of the spirit is itself a selfless act. In sacrifice of my godhood I capture the will of God in my descendents. It is not enough though, to take any available woman for this. Only a virgin will transmit the message in its purity and maintain the prophetic line. It is the unfolding of God's will truly, one of embodying spirit as matter. Every individual being has this prerogative including all animals and plants, so that even though you will see the goat or sheep functioning within its flock, the very act of being determined by God's will allows for its unfoldment, one of expressing purely its social mind and specific qualities. That is why its populations are easily determined for they act as a collective whole.

I: But don't human societies unfold too? Is not man's act of creating these societies divine will too?

J: Are you referring to tradition?

I: I suppose I would be. How can you not say that a Roman life is not unfolding; it is tradition too.

J: Does it fulfil God's will, the wars, the territorial land grabs, the material lusting, the corruption of religious values? It is development, a folding up of the instinct, one that is based upon replicating providence in nature with bloated hierarchies and false claims. These societies don't learn, when even the production of children to inherit the same falsities of living make the same mistakes that their parents did. These societies have not truly progressed, they have only constrained the instinct, the spirit.

I: And if they would take a virgin as do the aristocracy and the royal families, does it make a difference?

J: It is a hollow act, though this is not to say that those who are religiously inclined among them are not fulfilling God's will. The act of passing on one's seed into a virgin is a mark of individuality. If the tendency of society and individuals living in it are materialistic the act will only seek to consolidate material status. But the truly religious who take a virgin pass on God's will as both an individual and social legacy. The prophetic line is an act of Creation, an unfoldment, and shows man the need for tradition. It is at the same time an act of selflessness and fulfillingness. If you observe Roman culture you will see that its urban stranglehold is always at the throat of tradition, destroying it piecemeal whilst its inhabitants strive to come to terms

with emotional unrest. They swing from one direction to another, falling back into God's hands when their emotional needs take them there, as a lost sheep in search of its flock. The individualism here is Godless. I cannot imagine a single sheep fulfilling Creation, can you, without its flock? It takes a very specific act to do so and is a rarity of prophetic proportions that few individuals can achieve under God's determination. No, the flock itself must be considered as one social unit. Yet modern man marks his difference from the animal kingdom on this very basis; his detachment from God is a technological addiction outside the need of Creation.

I: Do you intend not to use any technology here?

J: It must be used in moderation and fit into the integrity of the system whilst the vision and will of God are also cultivated.

I: You say the comprehension of death is necessary. Is this God's will then to bring us to death?

J: Humanity has passed its time here. As smaller collectives it has a better chance of living, living in nature as God's determined people, as a chosen race. Ultimately though, we must all confront death, and when you can conquer this fear, a fear created in culture, then you may go on and provide the prophetic seed for your children to carry into Creation. Every living animal is an individual. Look at these sheep and goats Ishmael. Even though they act as a unit of social consciousness, at some time the environment will change and the choice to unfold lies in that which survives the new conditions. This is its legacy, but it must leave the mother group behind in fulfilling God's will. In the past humanity has taken itself apart from the mother tribe and generated new characteristics embodied in its tribes. The more spiritually minded you are as an individual the more necessary is your requirement to take a virgin in your requirement to fulfil Creation as the capitulation of spirit into matter, and this is indicated in the tendency to gravitate towards other purer souls, including an untouched woman. This is the benchmark of tradition, the true legacy left to society to follow into. Truly I say, it is Creation and prophetic in nature. All animals are prophetic in this sense when they survive the death of their social consciousness and progress beyond culture as determined by God. It is not easy, yet at the same time fills one with a sense of faith and will, destiny in other words. It is servitude to God's will. Let me show you the rest of our activities here on the farm Ishmael for we have talked a lot.

The ducks and the geese went about their business, eating the scraps of previous meals whilst the chickens scratched and pecked at fallen seeds from the harvest. The cats lingered, some with their litter, and the dogs mooched from one end of the land to another. Cadifé the donkey occasionally brayed and kicked at his stable door, protected from the flies that draw droplets of blood from his snout.

J: You see Ishmael, when the lion will sleep with the lamb then you know that the Kingdom of God is at hand. Why do not these beasts that you see now tear at each other? The cat still catches the lizard, the mice or the bird; the chickens wander amongst the dogs eating at bugs, the goats give their teet freely to man to milk. Even the bees are accustomed to man's presence. What is it we offer these beasts that takes them apart from the wilderness? We give them environment. We change their pattern of behaviour so that as we provide the food for their

integration into our culture they respond by drawing closer and sharing resources. We awaken latent qualities in their make-up that shows man to be no more threatening than nature itself. Man becomes nature, the wilderness to them, in exchange for losing something of that wilderness inside of them.

I: And yet you say that we must go beyond culture. Effectively the conditions you impose upon these animals are the ones that you aspire to. It is like you are swapping places with them so that you live in their kingdom as they would in yours.

J: That is a good observation, for I have never thought of it in those terms.

I: To go beyond human culture, to reach the so-called Kingdom of God, is asking us to return to something like a primitive state. But where is God here? Do these animals believe in God like us? Did not God create us like he did the animals?

J: God has created all things for these are the work of an invisible hand. And yet we can only know God when we come out of Creation. So you are right here Ishmael. Man is fallen, we have come out of Creation and observe it now from a lower state of consciousness.

I: Does that make us beneath the animals? I feel as if you are playing God here.

J: We create the Unknown in our own image. The human minds have become segregated from the wilderness. I see the predicament here. The Kingdom of God is our aspiration, the place we must return to. When we reach that state of mind you will span the fallenness inherent of our souls, and the angels of God reveal themselves as guardians of the bridge to fulfilment. Staying on that bridge is the tradition that we must cultivate when man again will respond to the wilderness as would a bee or sheep. Our blessing is that we can see this Kingdom on the other side of the bridge as an act of hope. And yonder is Death. It is a bridge that allows us to look backward and forwards at the same time, something that no animal can do.

I: But then if we create an environment where the animals are suited to our behaviour are we not dragging them down into our world across the bridge?

J: You have answered your own question Ishmael. We are not playing God if the animal chooses to reside in our company. We may change the environment but ultimately it is their prerogative if they need to unfold, and only God can lead this way. So long as we strive to reach the kingdom from which God's invisible hand has crafted all animals, plants and man, we can only be changing the environment as an act of God's will, but not playing God as such. Those that do not aspire to return to the Kingdom, to the wilderness, well then maybe you can throw your accusation at them, for they have no moral justification to be fulfilled. For them it is the lusting after power, after ultimate control. There is no tradition here, one that bridges our past to the future, only one that rewrites our past to suit their future. These kinds of people do not humble themselves in the image of God. No, instead they justify their actions by attempting to replicate the Kingdom of God and yet remain firmly rooted on their own side of the bridge. What I want you to understand Ishmael is that we aspire to be on that bridge in honour of tradition. When we each decide to meet Death then one may cross, not to return. It can only be a humbling experience, one of self-effacement. But I know of the materialist types who forsake that bridge, just visit their libraries and you will see the shelves of scrolls that give testament to their mentalities. They are dissecting nature, and this Greek and Egyptian legacy takes another form amongst the Romans, for now they redirect the flow of nature into other technological means



that fragment the individual from true fulfillingness. Consider all these words Ishmael, for they speak of our future and its coming trials.

Ishmael could see from his acute vision that, as Jesus drew away from him to wander amongst the beasts, there was an air of expectation from them as if to confirm their trust in the new resident. Ishmael knew that to take in life here would be much like sharing the company of a select number of other persons, not unlike his travels on a boat which occasionally brought him back to metropolitan life. It naturally gave rise to ideas about family and the possibility of meeting a sexual partner. But the interesting observation he made about Jesus was that he never seemed to make decisions as to how things should work. It was as though things just happened of their own around him and any decisions were made by the needs of simple natural living.

Just then one of the house servants called across the dry air. He spoke in the native tongue which Ishmael could understand. The servant was requesting the help of Jesus for an injured local needing medicine to cure his ailment. Ishmael naturally gravitated back to the house to follow up the conversation. A man with a blood-bathed bandage on one of his hands required the wound to be cleaned up as it had become infected. Ishmael kept an open mind and was interested to see what herbal remedies Jesus would use. It was obvious from the conversation though, that Jesus was considered a master here, and that he was well known through his healing capacities.

## Act3 Scene 5

Flavius harassed Justin for more information. He couldn't let the matter go. On one particular occasion Flavius followed him around but made his presence so obvious that Justin had him house bound until the time came to end his investigation. It was clear for the most part that Justin was not to uncover too much of a fuss with the locals who were in the while quite passive to Roman enforcement. Flavius though remained discontented and decided to break his house arrest and search for the holy man. He had gathered enough information to know that the holy man's house lay off the road from el Perelló. Breaking protocol he took a horse and scooted in the direction of the docks back-tracking the road and trying to visualize the path that Travian might have taken. After three hours he could see a trail of smoke and decided in desperation to investigate. Flavius was fully armed but his disappearance from the encampment at el Perelló was noticed. The centurion posted to look over him had got lax in recent days and Flavius took his opportunity in between meal breaks to pretend going on a food forage. Meanwhile Justin took the centurion aside.

Ju: When was the last time you saw him?

C: About two hours ago.

Ju: And he is definitely not around? Have you tried the grave of Travian, he tends to go off in that direction?

C: Yes sir, in fact we have another guard posted there also and there has been no sign of his presence.

Ju: Tackle up two horses, I need a personal guard. Half battle dress.

Within half an hour the two had set off in the direction of the house of Jesus. Justin knew that Flavius could only be searching for this place for there were unanswered questions that maybe only Jesus' family knew. In quick pace he trotted off with his personal guard ensuring that, if things went wrong, he would not break protocol on this. He forewarned his guard to keep his eyes peeled for possible bandits although things had also gone quiet on this front. Approaching from a higher vantage point Justin could see a trail of smoke coming from that direction. They quickened the pace; Flavius was spotted in the distance entering the abode.

Ju: That must be Flavius in Roman colours. Quick, you are to apprehend him and arrest him. If he struggles read the code of conduct to him. I will not have disobedience in my ranks.

Meanwhile Flavius had trotted through the main gates and shouted out his presence to anybody who might give ear. From the reception area of the building Jesus and the wounded man who had sought healing from an infection both raised their heads. Jesus had barely taken the bandages off to inspect the swollen limb before the house servants quickly ran to the front of the house. It was the old man who reached Flavius first.

F: I am looking for the house of Jesus.

OM: Yes, who might want him soldier?

Jesus and the wounded man listened to the rather loud tones of Flavius introduce himself. The wounded man began to panic and turned to glance at a crop of trees from over the other side of the approaching road.

J: Does something bother you?

WM: I do not want to be seen by the Roman. You understand where I come from?

J: What is your business with them that you do not want to be seen by them?

WM: I said I do not want to be seen by them. Can I leave through the back here?

J: In this condition, no? You need immediate attention to the wound if you wish to keep your limb.

WM: Well, there is no fear of that. I had an accident in the field and lost my hand.

J: I see, but the swelling is extending up along the arm. It could be infected.

WM: Just get me a clean bandage Master, I have no business with a Roman.

J: Wait here.

Nazifé?

The house servant turned to Jesus.

N: Yes, Master.

Je: Bring hot water and clean this wound. You are used to them. I need to make a disinfectant and will return shortly.

Jesus quickly washed his hands and passed into the front of the house. Flavius was waiting patiently whilst the old man stood looking at him, studying him.

F: Don't you know your manners old man. I am a soldier.

Jesus interrupted.

Je: I will take matters from here. Go and help Nazifé.

OM: Yes, Master.

F: So you are Jesus?

The bluntness in his tone spoke an awful lot and Jesus pondered it.

Je: You are in no mild mood soldier. Quickly, what is your issue? We are a house of peace here.

Ishmael was waiting in the flanks now, making his own calculations. Jesus was already aware that both the old man and Ishmael were making intuitive guesses. Flavius though, was building up like a coiled spring.

Je: Well, speak soldier. I am in the middle of a healing and cannot tarry.

F: I want to know who killed Tra.....

Flavius turned his head and saw Ishmael to one side.

F: You, I remember you. You were travelling with us with the pony. Why do you hide here?

Je: He does not hide, he chooses to be with us. Quickly soldier, what is your issue with us. We only cultivate peace here?

F: It was your fisherman friends who killed Travian.

Flavius was now getting edgy and his hand naturally went for the hilt of his sword.

Je: But you know that cannot be true soldier for you set off in pursuit of them before they managed to set sail. I have already spoken to your superiors. Under whose orders do you find yourself here?

Justin and the guard at that moment ground to a halt and Flavius' edgy fingers suddenly went back to his side.

Ju: On no orders, he has broken protocol. Centurion, read him his rights.

Flavius swung round fully to face Justin.

F: Why are you protecting them!

Ju: We have no jurisdiction here.

F: What jurisdiction do we need? We are Roman.

Ju: Orders from a higher ranking officer. You are under arrest.

F: Don't touch me. Tell me the truth.

Flavius went for his sword.

J: Wait, maybe I can help here. This man searches for the truth. One should not deny him that, and in my presence God may prove to be of higher judgment here in that he may be appeased. Why has this soldier broken Roman protocol?

Ju: I have been given orders to close the case. And that is then end of the matter.

A shuffle came from the side of the house and something broke as it hit the floor.

F: Who are you hiding?

Flavius demanded a reply. Without hesitating he stormed into the back of the house. In the distance he could see a man run off. Flavius quickly came back to mount his horse.

F: There is someone running sir. Now where is the law? These people have been housing criminals.

Justin turned to Jesus and gave him an estranged look.

J: If you value your own life let him run. His injuries are in his own hands.

Ju: What was his wound?

Flavius interjected.

F: No time, he is getting away.

Ju: You will obey command!

What was his wound holy man?

J: His hand was severed and he was suffering from a severe infection.

Justin thought about it a moment longer.

Ju: Flavius, you are to apprehend the man and bring him to me uninjured.

J: Would you send a man to his death if you knew that you could stop it?

Ju: What! Why do you talk to me in riddles?

J: I ask this question in order that you might consider what has brought you to me. You see, to deny me my healing as judged by God would be to bring the same fate upon yourself.

Ju: I don't understand. Make yourself clear!

J: You are approaching the Lord's will and yet you do not heed his messenger's voice. I cannot say anymore.

Ju: What would happen if I let him go?

J: You will leave him to his fate. You see, look at him run, exhausted. How far do you think he can go in that condition? He goes into the wild, into the arms of Creation. He has become a sacrifice, a reason not to interfere with his fate, for he goes as an animal fleeing the bounds of human society. When he crosses that bridge he will not return. But if you interfere with his fate you will defy the Lord's will and deny that which is coming to him.

Flavius mounted and sprinted off.

J: Call him back soldier if you value his life.

But Justin remained indecisive and watched Flavius storm off into the distance.

J: Maybe it is better then, that you must live with your own conscience soldier.

Justin screwed his eyes and watched Flavius catch up with the fugitive. Grabbing him by the scruff of the neck Flavius flew off the horse and thumped the man to the ground. Grabbing a rope he bound him by the neck and dragged him back.

J: We do not even treat our animals with such animosity. This is a violation of God's law for every man, woman and child, every beast that sets foot in my Kingdom is protected. You bring upon yourself God's vengeance. Here no legality exists. You cannot uphold your laws in God's presence.

But Justin looked confused and determined at the same time. He could not withdraw his decision for he would lose face. Yet he felt alien in this company. The house servants were peering up at him and the dogs kept one eye on him. A bead of sweat ran down his cheek.

F: Duty done, sir.

Ju: Search him for weapons and bind his hands, his hand. Put him on the front of your horse. We will tend to his wounds ourselves.

F: Yes sir.

Ju: If need be I will return holy man and question you further. For now I have little time before this man's fate is decided.

And with this the three soldiers and the fugitive cantered off to el Perelló.

## Act3 Scene 6

Petr had fully recovered and seemed to be under no constraint. He was approached by an officer who was monitoring his recovery.

1<sup>st</sup> O: Ah, you awoken at long last. Unfortunately for you the pig is in the skilled hands of the butcher, unless of course you want to join our ranks.

P: Pig? I remember dreaming of such.

1<sup>st</sup> O: Well, you were the hunter were you not? It was your broken blade sticking out the top. We assumed you had an accident with it.

P: Ah yes, not me.

1<sup>st</sup> O: We could do with a hunter. We brought you along because we didn't know what was wrong with you; you were fully unconscious. What's your story?

P: Well actually I was with a colleague. Have you found him?

1<sup>st</sup> O: No, you were alone. We scoured the area.

P: We come from a little further north and were travelling to join kin in the south. We camped out for the night and tried our hand at a little game. Unfortunately I sought a selection of herbs since my colleague was injured. The next thing I know I was unconscious. It's possible I tried something a little too strong. Exactly where did you find me?

1<sup>st</sup> O: In the bush. You must have been out for a while. So where did you leave your friend?

P: He couldn't have been far.

1<sup>st</sup> O: We have marched since and now you find yourself in the precincts of Tarraco. I can't help you unless you are a Roman citizen, which you are not I assume. So you are free to go back to your families.

P: What, just like that?

1<sup>st</sup> O: Yes, without the pig of course.

Both Gwyn and Petr had been branded as captured slaves but nobody had bothered to check and assumed that Petr was just a local.

P: Are you marching south again?

1<sup>st</sup> O: No, we go north, although there will be patrols heading your direction.

P: If I join your ranks what are the benefits.

1<sup>st</sup> O: Well, you get paid, and regular food. Can't guarantee a long life, but life in the military is better than a lot of people's.

P: What about as a skilled craftsman?

1<sup>st</sup> O: What smithy or bowyer?

P: No, sculpture.

1<sup>st</sup> O: Hah! You need to join the Masonic guild for that, but first you require becoming a citizen, which means you worship our gods and the emperor. But you got commitment to your family haven't you?

P: Well, I fancied Roman life to be honest. Opportunity to travel, maybe I can head back north anyway.

1<sup>st</sup> O: It is no secret, we are heading through Gaul. We are at war with Britons. You may find opportunity in some of the southern cities. I can get you on a march if you want. You will need to sign for citizen rights first, after you have been inspected and administered to, in order to enquire at the guilds for membership. You will of course have to pay taxes on earnings, but stone work seems to be all the rage at the moment. There is a call for it in Rome for sure. You may prefer to travel there instead.

P: Well, I will consider the option and let you know. Thanks for everything.

And with that the officer left his company whilst Petr considered the new-found possibilities. If he were to be inspected he will have to hide his brand. In regard to becoming a Roman he had no experience here and resolved to talk among some of the other locals for advice before deciding. In the ensuing day he likewise sought out his slave friend Volksman and wondered if anybody had the skill to remove a brand. He ventured towards the water bridge they were constructing and looked out for Volksman among the hundreds of other slaves. Of course, being a slave was not exactly the same as serfdom in which a servant is tied to a landlord and the land. Had anyone known the past that Petr carried in his guerrilla antics against the Romans then surely he would have been shackled and even crucified after a court hearing. Being in a country that was at peace with their occupiers made all the difference. But going back to his native folk in Briton was likely to encourage a deep suspicion around him. The Roman system was like that, lax in particular areas yet highly severe the closer one was to its administration centres. Tarraco was no exception.

Petr roamed through the stone blocks that littered the dry-river bed. He kicked himself for not getting a letter of excuse from the friendly Roman officer. A commanding voice came over the air.

R: Oy you! What's your business here?

'Shit', thought Petr. I'd better mention the officer's name, 'What was it now?'

P: I was told that if I wanted to become a stone mason I would need to join a guild.

R: Not 'ere you don't. Go into town in the lower part of the city. Ask for Guild Street. Too dangerous 'ere. Some of these men are vicious murderers.

P: Mind if I look at some of the finer work? It is my profession.

R: Not 'ere you don't. Not unless you want to end up being like one of them.

P: Where's the quarry? Maybe I can see a bit more going on there.

R: They'll tell you to bugger off. Unless you get a letter of consent from an officer you'll be arrested.

P: Okay, mind then if I just take a few samples of stone for carving? Surely they won't be missed.

R: Well go on then. Be quick!

Petr rummaged around some small discarded off-cuts, big enough though to make something useful. He got lucky too and found a small fine chisel that would allow him to get working on them. It was his only chance if he wanted to get a foothold in the ranks, without having to go to battle. He looked around for Volksman but that would have to wait another day. Meanwhile the Roman supervisor kept one eye on him as Petr trundled off back the way he came.

R: Just one moment mate!

'Shit', thought Petr, 'I could drop the chisel now'.

R: What's your name?

P: Petr.

R: Petr, as meaning 'the rock'?

P: That's me. You must be a fine hand then?

P: I work with all materials.

R: I'll tell the guv'nor that you been snooping around here. Where you staying?

P: Well, I just got in on the last march so still looking for digs.

R: When you get to Guild Street there's a smithy on the corner by the name of Gindor. Tell him you met me, and he might 'elp you out.

P: Ah, kind blessings. You are...?

R: Ivor, Ivor the Terrible.

P: Ivor, you don't seem so terrible.

R: That's because I haven't stuck a red hot poker up your ass yet for attempting to escape my beady eye.

Ivor laughed out loud to himself and a few slaves turned their head in his direction without amusement.

R: What you're looking at? Back to work!

P: I should be on my way. I'll mention you, Ivor.

R: Oh, that's me Petr.

And just then a yell went up as a slave made a break for it. In synonymy the rest of the workforce suddenly set up a chorus of howls and whistles as the slave pounded for the wild vegetation.

R: Oye! You little beggar! Guards, pursue 'im!



And in a flash Ivor had left the scene leaving Petr to amble his way back to the inner city. Thoughts of Gwyn passed his mind but he knew he didn't have a hope in hell of finding him. Guilt suddenly passed over him for want of not trying. If he left now in the condition he was in it would take one full day at least to get back to the old location, and then he would need to set up camp if Gwyn wasn't there. The officer was adamant that they had searched the whole area. Meanwhile Gwyn would be suffering from an infection that would eventually kill him unless he could find himself at the agreed rendezvous point. Everything weighed against him making him slump down on an exposed rock putting his head in his hands. He was suddenly overcome again and thought that somebody was talking to him.

P: Petr, you are free to go.  
P: Go where?  
P: To your saviour. You are not needed here.  
P: But I can save them. I need Gwyn.  
P: Gwyn is with me.  
P: Where? Where, have you made rendezvous?  
P: Gwyn lives. You will know death.  
P: But I live, I live, I am alive....

Petr awoke again startled from his reverie. He looked around wiping the sweat from his brow. The vision of a shadow had passed his gaze. Without hesitation he decided best to continue his lead to the blacksmith and headed into town. At least there he could get full rest.

## Act3 Scene 7

Days passed and Gwyn fully recovered. The black dog of course followed him about the place whilst it accustomed itself amongst the other animals. Gwyn thought about the rendezvous point in which the holy man had informed of. It was still an easy day's trek from here and decided that the sooner he left the better to try and meet up with Petr. He took his stash and located the huntsmen and his families. They were indifferent to his decision. On leaving they had a quick conversation.

1<sup>st</sup> HM: You know, the women tell me you have a slave brand on your back. You only get that if you are a criminal. I don't need to know your story but I wish you well.  
G: Do you know the crossroads to Amet'lla?  
1<sup>st</sup> HM: If you reach el Perelló you have gone too far. You should see the junction, it is well trodden.  
G: Okay, thanks for all your help, and best of luck with the dog. I will be on my way.  
1<sup>st</sup> HM: Take your stash with too; I don't want any poisonous stuff around here. You need to ask some serious questions Gwyn. And you are going to the man who gave you this stuff? One bad turn deserves another I suppose. On your way then!

Gwyn quickly got into his stride, the black dog watching from his position in the dog pen. He continued his way slightly off the main drag and could see the presence of soldiers here in recent times. The road wound a bit, passing a quarry before entering into a straight section. A signpost loomed ahead indicating that he was approaching el Perelló but that the crossroads showed an alternative direction. Maybe it would have been better to have gone to Amet'lla and waited there. Nevertheless he sat at the crossroads and pondered the events of the past. After an hour he began to feel vulnerable with no sign of people, and started in the direction of el Perelló. Having reached the village he found a little vendor and engaged in some chit chat.

G: Many Romans here?

V: You just missed a troop going through. They have left a guard here permanently it seems. Maybe fifteen, twenty of them.

G: Do you know the Master Jesus?

V: Ooh yes, that would be your host? There has been trouble of late concerning the household, concerns the death of a villager and soldier who has been buried yonder hill.

G: Do you know much more?

V: The Romans are investigating. They're looking out for insurgents, anyone acting suspiciously. I advise to keep your head down.

G: How do I get to the house of Jesus?

V: Go back the way you came but before the crossroads there is a quarry. Look for the smoke. You will hear the animals in the distance.

G: Is it a good time to go?

V: If he has invited you then you are his friend. Many times he invites me to come and see the alternative life he has there. No-one here likes change though. But the Romans are ignored, that is how we avoid any trouble.

G: Come with me. At least part the way. It will make it easier to avoid any trouble.

V: Meet me here in an hour. I need to finish up and look like I am heading home.

Gwyn wandered around and took in the life at the mill stones. He saw the old system of bee keeping here too. El Perelló had a good aspect to it, quite dry though. He inquired as to why the Romans made this place into a garrison. 'It is a day's march for them from the city' they told him. 'They tend to keep direct routes to the sea also so that they can control the trade here. We are not that far from the delta also and the farming there is good'. On arriving back at the vendor they set off together in the direction of his house. After a couple of kilometres the vendor started reminiscing.

V: I live about a kilometre from Jesus. It makes a change that I have a little bit of help pulling my wares about. I am getting old and a fit man like you is always welcome. You'd be careful the Romans don't draft you in.

G: Maybe you can act as my father.

V: Huh!

G: Sorry, was that a sensitive point.

V: My sons have disappeared. Not any news from them for years. When you need them most...

G: Don't worry about it, lots of fathers get old without their sons around. The Romans have stabilised things a bit here, and further north they have built grand cities. You may find them working a new trade up there.

V: That's if they haven't joined the army.

G: Talking of which, what is that approaching?

V: Say nothing, just keep walking, and look like your struggling with that cart, they may ignore you then.

G: Looks a bit odd, they have someone on a rope.

V: My eyes ain't so good. But looks like more bloody trouble. I wonder who it is this time?

As they approached within fifty metres of the Roman soldiers they witnessed a group of bandits ambushing them.

V: Ooohh, turn around and quietly get out of here. I want nothing to do with it.

They could hear the yells from a distance. There must have been about ten men whilst the Romans did their best at swinging their swords from horseback. The tethered man was cut loose but the centurion was fatally wounded with a spear.

V: Run, and keep running. They will pass us soon.

G: But who are they?

V: Are you that naive? Some of us don't like Romans. They are cold-blooded murderers.

G: But I thought things were good here?

V: They are, that is until a Roman abuses a local. Now run!

And the two of them fled in the direction they came. They abandoned the cart in the same place.

Ju: Flavius, guard my rear! On the count of three drive straight through them. and keep going until you reach Tarraco. Tell them that the country is littered with bandits, to bring support urgently.

Flavius charged a group of about six of them. Two lay dead whilst Justin dealt with the other two. The centurion had fallen and was now a trip hazard to the horse, who jolted and reared in all directions trying to avoid the body. Justin thought quickly how he should seize the fallen man. He swung the horse around in circles knocking both bandits to the ground. With this rammed into the back of the remaining group after Flavius had smashed into them. At least another three had fallen and struggled to regain their attacking stance. With another final turn Justin charged back into the direction of el Perelló to get support. He ripped past the cart and the two hiding figures of Gwyn and the vendor in the undergrowth. The bandits decided not to pursue and quickly fled the scene.

Gwyn pulled the vendor from out of the bush.

G: Are they likely to attack us also?

V: No, they are common folk, but I want no dealings with them. The Romans will soon catch them up and kill them all.

G: Then let's get going to the house of Jesus, it can't be that far.

## Act3 Scene 8

Jesus had gathered together the household for a meeting. He felt that the Roman incursion was an act against God and that for the first time his protective homestead and its attendants had been broached with ill sentiment. He needed to comfort everybody and ensure that there will be no repercussions. Dinner was served and prayers of thanksgiving were said. Mary sat next to her husband with Yeshua between them. The new babe sat on Mary's lap. To the right sat the young boy and the old man, and to Mary's left Nazifé the housemaid. Ishmael placed himself at one end of the table, and five shepherd/gardeners faced the holy family. One place was always kept open.

J: What we have just witnessed is a portent. When the innocent bring trouble upon themselves then it is their responsibility to ensure nobody else gets falsely accused. We must consider it like a test of integrity. We should come out the stronger here if our ways and methods are correct. We will take our lesson from this. But I must prepare you for what might be forthcoming. Mary, would you like to say something?

M: Since our arrival on the boat we have witnessed a series of events which are unusual by our standards. Can anybody at the table bring forth any reason why we have encountered these experiences?

The old man muttered something under his breath, whilst Ishmael twiddled his fingers.

M: Speak Michael. Don't be shy.

He muttered again, and everyone looked at him.

Mic: It came with your boat...

M: Come Michael, speak up.

Mic: Your ill fortune. It is obvious why.

M: Are you referring to Ishmael?

Mic: All of them. You took a favour from the fishermen and now you are paying for your generosity.

M: But Michael, this is a way of life. The signs were good when such a fisherman made himself available to us.

Mic: But it doesn't come free, does it? They were Romans and to allow such in your company is asking for trouble. They have brought blood on your name. The local villagers talk about you now. And everybody misses Eliza....She was inno...

He broke down and sobbed in front of the entire meeting. Mary lowered her head and a tinge of sadness came over her. Michael got up his strength for an outburst.

Mic: They were child thieves I tell you! They traffic around anything they can get their hands on.

Ishmael twitched his fingers again.

Mic: Thy must have seen you coming.

M: But we are not the judge of these things Michael. Everything must run its course, and many children go running from the family. We live in times of war. And besides, can you imagine how traumatised she may have become if she witnessed the death of her mother. At least we know that she is alive somewhere. And besides Michael, Isa would not have stayed around too long. She would have followed her sisters.

Mic: She be sold and profaned as a slave, like all this filth the Romans have brought to our simple lives.

J: Eliza brought her own fate into her hands. She may have been a loving person to us but she was a woman of this world; she easily mixed with foreigners and class. Don't throw the blame for you will allow these Romans to create you in their own image. You saw how they blamed you, but then withdrew that blame. They are a mixed bunch, and good is to be found in everybody. What is important is that we maintain an environment of truth and kindness if we are to impart the love in our hearts.

Mic: But Master, we lived for years in peace and now you take the Roman into your household.

M: Ishmael is not a Roman Michael. He served his own master before he was abandoned. What were we to do in this situation, but only show compassion?

J: Ishmael, can you appease the old man?

I: It is true Michael, I had no place to go and everything told me to follow your master. I served a Roman, true, but he has forfeited his duty to me as his master by abandoning me. He may be guilty of crimes for which justice has not been applied, but I served him unquestionably as you should. You should be thankful that your master allows you a voice, for mine did not.

M: Thank you Ishmael. So you see Michael, we all lost a friend in Eliza and she will be missed. Likewise Isa may one day return in search of her mother, to her gravestone.

Mic: But the illness is still upon us.

J: What do you mean Ishmael by 'crimes for which justice has not been applied'?

I: The old man is right about some things. Solomon was a lot more involved with the Romans than you may know about. Halamul, his right-hand man, was his personal guard.

J: And...?

I: Solomon had contact with the cream of the Empire. His boat was a gift.

J: I see.

I: Look, I haven't mentioned it yet but that trouble that started with the boy. The boy knows something.

Jesus looked at his now cleaned face and spoke to him.

J: Conejo, how did you get on that boat and escape the Roman inspection?

The boy did not reply.

M: Yusefino, has he said anything to you?

Yusef just nodded his head in negation.

J: Come Conejo, we are looking after you now. You must join into our honesty.

The boy played with the remains of his food on his plate.

J: You mentioned something about a holy man, referring to another person.

The boy shied from talking.

M: Conejo, what is your real name.

The boy then looked up.

B: Boran.

M: Okay Boran, we don't call you by any other name again.

Mary smiled up at Jesus.

B: He said he would help my mama.

M: Who did Boran?

B: The soldier.

M: What soldier Boran?

B: He brought me to the boat.

J: Decius!

Mary pulled out the copper amulet.

M: He gave you this amulet Boran?

B: Yes.

M: And your mama needs help?  
B: Yes.  
M: Would you like to see your mama again?  
B: Yes.  
M: Okay, we will do everything we can. Just help us with a few facts.  
J: What instructions did he give you Boran?  
B: To find out what you do, where you live. I am to talk to a Roman who will take me back to my mama.  
Mic: Romans, Romans, I am sick of them!  
J: Come Michael, the boy is brave.

Just then the sound of scuffling came from outside the house. Nazifé immediately got up and went to the door in the reception room. Everybody was listening to the new voices coming from that area.

N: Carlós, what brings you with such haste?  
C: We have just seen a Roman murdered on the road.  
G: Bandits.  
C: This man claims to know the Master Jesus.  
N: Come in, come, wait here.

Nazifé ran back into the Room.

N: My lady...  
M: We heard, Nazifé, bring them through.

Gwyn and Carlós stepped through. Jesus immediately got up.

J: Gwyn, you made it. Well done. But where is Petr?  
G: It is a long story sir. I fear he has been captured by the Romans.  
Mic: Oh for God's sake, do not mention them again. All we have had is news of them this morning.

Everybody stared at Michael, waiting for him to continue.

G: Well it looks worse old man, for there was a guard on the road who was ambushed and forced the soldiers to seek reinforcements. They will scour this area soon enough.  
J: How long ago?  
G: Not one hour.  
I: It seems your warning may have taken form Jesus.  
J: Did you recognise the dead man?  
G: No, but the horse soldier who charged past alone back to el Perelló had colours on his arm.  
J: Ishmael, that is the same man isn't it, Justin was his name?

I: The man you addressed had colours.

J: Okay Nazifé, help Carlos to some food and comfort. Everybody listen carefully, you need to prepare for what is about to happen.

M: My love, I will feel much easier if you tell us one of your stories. I think everybody here has dealt with the Romans before in their lives.

Jesus looked at her and smiled. He calmed his thoughts and meditated.

J: This is the tale of the gardener who kept a well-maintained garden.

Jesus closed his eyes. A vision came up in his mind. It was that of the Kingdom of God, of a garden full of food in plenty. He hesitated.

J: This garden was natural; every plant had been relocated from the wild when it had been threatened by man's desire to keep building cities. So he would take these plants and put them in a space behind his own house and bless each one. Soon this space became so big that the authorities in the city ganged up against him and threatened to build on his garden. In response the gardener offered to give the city his garden and that they should promise him they would protect every tree. Thinking themselves astute they agreed to such a promise believing the gardener would replant his trees elsewhere. Of course, when the time came to build on his garden the gardener refused to move the trees. "You have promised to protect my trees" he told them. "Yes, but you must remove them to another location" they told him. "Then you must give me land in your city if you intend to protect the trees". The authorities were rebuffed by the gardener's quick wittedness. So they called a meeting and thought together how they should deal with this contentious person. Some said that they should just cut down the trees, but this would have been a desecrating act against God for the gardener was holy. Others said they should remove the trees to a far away location so that it should never interfere with their plans to make the city bigger. But this would cost too much money to maintain and protect the trees. So in the end they decided to extend the city amongst the thousands of trees he planted. This forced the planning authorities to space out their buildings so that trees grew amongst them laden with fruit and greenery. They called it a park. Over the course of time people naturally came here to ease themselves of the stress of working in treeless environments and even sought to live here amongst the trees and being so close to work. The authorities of course gave no credit to the gardener but only patted themselves on the back for making such a good planning decision. One day there was an earthquake and the buildings shook horribly. In the treeless part of the city there was no place to run and many people were killed by falling buildings. Whilst buildings fell in the precinct of the park many people there survived by running out into the open. When the time came to rebuild the city the planning authorities extended the park so that any new buildings fitted in with the existing trees. Of course, everybody forgot about the gardener and God's Creation because the original garden had been lost to development.

I: Are you saying Jesus, that we must protect the wilderness?



G: More than that I think. We should be aware of what the Romans are bringing to us.

J: There is an optimum size beyond which humanity cannot operate within God's will. So long as we keep the vision of the Kingdom of God in focus we should not veer from our paths and our relationships. Each tree is sacred, but to take from nature means we must give back to it otherwise we remain as unfulfilled human beings. In order that we all become sons and daughters of God we must always keep a vision of the original garden in focus and design our lives according to what is given freely. Let us share a drink and break this bread amongst us given from the fruits of this earth.

A quietude fell over the group as they indulged in an after meal blessing. It was only then broken by Carlós.

C: And the Romans?

Everyone shifted their gaze up, but it was the innocence of Yusef that responded first.

Y: They are coming.

M: Yes, I think we need to keep faith!

## Act3 Scene 9

Justin stormed into el Perelló and headed straight for the outpost station. When he got within earshot of it he could not help himself blurt out an immediate demand.

Ju: Reinforcements! I need reinforcements.

The wooden gatehouse opened its doors to allow Justin passage. He headed straight to the officer's mess.

Ju: Sir, we have been ambushed, yet again! There is a dead guard lying in the middle of the road and I took the liberty to send Flavius up ahead into Tarraco to call reinforcements. I hope that you forgive this decision. We were jumped by at least ten bandits.

1<sup>st</sup> O: Heavily armed?

Ju: Pikes, spears, and swords. We took down at least four of them.

Ist O: Take ten men and scour the area. Send a messenger ahead to ensure Flavius reaches his target. Give him this letter of authority from high command.

On returning with reinforcements the centurion's body laid blood-splattered, with various parts of his armour removed. But no bandits remained in the area.

Ju: They must be hiding their bodies! I maimed at least two of them. Spread out and search the trail!

Justin sounded exasperated and decided to think twice about the order.

Ju: Wait! There are too many. Spread out. If you find their bodies gather them together. Use that cart back there and take them back to camp. Grab the centurion's body and take him back to camp. No-one is wander far from this spot. Just search for the bodies.

They spread out in the thick undergrowth but there was no sign of anybody, or any dead body other than the centurion's.

Ju: Four of you follow me. The rest should go back to camp. See if you can find out who that cart belongs to. I noticed it before. Search it and take it in also. It looks too suspicious.

They mounted the centurion on the cart whilst half the group followed Justin back in the direction of Jesus' house. This time they would enter from another direction.

## Act4 Scene 1

The emperor's personal guard had a private meeting regarding new information that had come through his network of spies.

PG: Your honour, news has reached us that there has been the death of a Roman soldier further south.

E: And what is particular about it?

PG: It involves the holy man, or at least concerns the vicinity in which the holy man lives in.

E: Ah, so it begins.

PG: Your honour?

E: What else did you find out?

PG: There is a Roman by the name of Justin who is conducting an investigation on the matter. It seems a local villager was murdered also.

E: Who is responsible for killing the Roman?

PG: The rumor goes that it is bandits.

E: Nothing new. I am concerned for the holy man though. Ensure reinforcements are sent their way. This Justin is to file a report immediately. Get me a copy.

PG: Yes your honour, I will personally see to it myself. I will lead a troop in that direction.

E: Locate this Justin and ask him to report to central administration here in Tarraco. I need to impart special orders. Under no circumstances is the holy man or his kin to be disturbed any further. Ensure that a special guard is set up to monitor the house's movements; all its residents. Once I have the soldier's report I can ascertain how much damage has been done. There would have been a platoon leaving from that direction originally travelling from Valencia. I gather the officers will bring news of the affair?

PG: Sir, it seems they have already marched north towards Gaul.

E: Without reporting the incident, unless of course....? Locate my personal advisor and ask the honorable man whether he also has no notification of the incident. Mention it to him, and make haste, for I can surmise that the situation is looking a little messy. In fact, arrange a dinner appointment for tomorrow at high noon here. In the meantime you are to leave on the moro and return with the soldier Justin.

## Act4 Scene 2

The platoon had now reached Narbonne and were expecting to join up with a legion stationed at Nimes. Further troops were expected from Lyon. Troops had been amassing in various parts of the western empire and a push north was paramount in the emperor's mind. His generals were conscripting recruits from the peasantry. Decius was called to an officer's meeting to await further instruction. There was to be a gladiatorial contest in which Decius was asked to attend the general's company. It seems the general had made a special visit south in view of the importance the emperor's personal advisor had given to the occasion. The original message from the high priest had reached Lyon whilst the bungled messenger sent to intercept him had,

incidentally, fallen foul from a horse accident that had him thrown off whilst traversing a steep precipice in the Pyrenees mountain range. By the time he was discovered the third messenger had caught gist of the situation and informed the officers at the mountain pass of the aborted mission. Albeit the high priest would not discover this until later and he took it as a good luck portent granted by Juno and Jupiter.

The normal air of excitement accompanied such gladiatorial sports with many animals brought in from the ports accompanied by slaves. Betting and harlotry were also rife for the occasion with lots of money changing hands. Decius avoided such contact, still reminiscing of his once religious background. The general looked him over from their position on a high balcony surrounded by guards.

G: The reports show you to be a good Roman soldier, but you are a little inexperienced in the field. I have been informed from high that you are to conduct a special operation that requires great sensitivity. Are you married?

D: No sir.

G: Well that makes it easier.

D: Easier?

G: Well, it means you don't have to come back.

D: Oh, I see. Where exactly am I going?

G: To Britannia. It's wet, cold during the winter but pleasantly green and forested. You are a Jew of blood yes?

D: Yes sir.

G: All your needs will be catered for, including women.

D: Sir, with all respect I serve the Empire whole heartedly. But are you sure I am the correct person for the job?

G: I didn't choose you. As I say, orders from high. You speak the Jewish tongue?

D: The common tongue, but not Hebrew.

G: That's just fine. You know there are Jewish settlements along the trade routes that go to the furthest reaches of the empire?

D: I have heard of such, yes.

G: We are to plant you in Germania and you are to travel into Britannia posing as a holy man.

Decius nearly choked on his glass of wine. As he coughed and spluttered a cheer went up as another gladiator lost his head to a Roman.

D: You have got to be kidding!

Decius could barely get his words out.

G: Why should I be kidding?

D: I can't even speak Hebrew let alone read the scriptures!

G: You don't need to. Message has come from on high that you are to preach a different type of Judaism.

Decius got up, wondering if this was for real. Even though he was fully informed of the Jewish festivals he thought the whole plan a madman's joke. Decius blurted out.

D: A different type of Judaism!

G: Keep your voice down! And gather yourself. I have full instructions for you.

D: So there is no chance of having a family, a wife? I would like to grow crops, you know, such things are granted to those who serve the Empire admirably.

G: You need to cut your teeth before such privileges come your way, and if you serve us well then undoubtedly you will be rewarded. If you survive that is, although I mean this sincerely. It is a difficult task but you will have everything to hand that you need. We already have spies in their Jewish ranks. We need to find out about the threat of an insurrection in Judaea.

D: And this Judaism, what form shall it take?

The sarcasm in Decius' voice was obvious. The general gave him a longer stare than usual which condescended to make Decius embarrassed.

G: Messianic. You are to preach to the Jews that their messiah was crucified.

D: There have been many false prophets. What makes this one any different?

G: This messiah survived. I have been informed by the emperor's personal advisor that a particular prophet came to the forefront of Jewish insurrection. The event largely went un-glossed in Roman eyes but he informs me that a strand of Judaism has begun spreading like wildfire from one synagogue to another. Every Roman city has its own particular form, yet they preach this one messianic figure as having been resurrected on the third day.

D: And his name?

G: Christ.

D: The anointed one. I am to support this new brand of Judaism?

G: Yes, why not? You cannot consider yourself a true Jew anymore, but here is a halfway house. You will receive personal training regarding the role of a Jewish preacher. The synagogues will not suspect but may readily expel you from their precincts for heresy. You will be followed by other preachers expounding the name of Christ. We know this from the reports coming from the east, Damascus, Antioch, Philippi, even as far as Rome. Yes these Christ followers are attracting much attention from slaves. They cause dissension in the Jewish ranks, which obviously benefits our cause. You are to stay ahead of the pack so that your authenticity is always retrospectively confirmed. Is it making sense?

Decius gave a glum look.

D: I suppose I am to go by another name, a Jewish one?

G: You have one do you not?

D: Thomas.

G: Thomas? Already it suits you.

D: They will kill me if they suspect I am a Roman.

G: You have a few months. We will march you to Germania and there you will mix with the locals. You will have learnt your story of having travelled from the Mediterranean port of Aquileia. As I say, you will be fully informed of your fabricated background. But listen carefully. You are to become, and I mean to believe, that you are a Christ follower.

D: How long do I have until I must go north?

G: A couple of months, with all the pleasures that a faithful Roman citizen can accrue. A personal assistant will be granted you.

Decius turned his gaze inward.

D: Can I take a woman?

G: You mean the harpist?

D: What, you have been observing our relationship?

G: Of course Decius. Get used to it. The matter is of high sensitivity.

D: Is she to be informed also? I mean, can I bring her along?

G: You have two months and then you go alone.

D: Oh, I see.

G: She has been told that your stay here is temporary.

D: Oh, I see.

G: Yes, and you have two months with her only, and then you are off. Can I give you some personal advice?

D: Well, why not?

The sarcasm had returned.

G: Don't fall in love.

D: Oh, I thought such things were granted by Eros and Aphrodite. I am sure they will show mercy upon me.

G: We have your accommodation arranged. You are exempt from all taxes, quite a privilege.

Another cheer went up as a string of animals entered the arena. The bloodshed was awful in Decius' eyes, meaningless barbaric slaughter. Maybe he still truly was a Jew, a different type as such. This new Jewish messianism he would understand as Christianity. He wondered why such an event had passed him by in Judea. He wondered whether he was just being taken for a ride and that the ulterior motive remained beyond his vision. The general left him to ponder his fate, almost giving him a golden handshake. Decius' personal assistant sat to one side, ready to serve his new master.

D: What's your name servant?

A: Anna, my master.  
D: Don't call me that. Call me by my name.  
A: Decius.  
D: No, from now on you will know me as Thomas.

## Act4 Scene 3

Petr arrived at Guild street, it was a hive of activity noisy with chatter. He wasn't that far from the public forum where particular figures gathered pockets of listeners. Just as he made his way in the direction of Gindor the blacksmith, after asking a passerby his location, he suddenly saw a couple of horse soldiers canter into the cobbled street and into the public square. A horn of sorts was blown revealing the colors of the emperor and the former chatter began subsiding leaving a crisp expectant air. One of the horse soldiers dismounted and stuck up a poster on a nearby column whilst the other remained in his saddle.

1<sup>st</sup> HS: By orders of the Right Honourable his Worshipful and Most Holy of the Empire Caesar Augustus it is forthwith commanded that every citizen of Jewish descent is affected under the new census to provide both information for the registration of immediate kin and to declare his earnings in full to the central administration of the Empire. Failure to do so will be considered an act of dissent accruing legible punishable rights. Any citizen of the Roman Empire withholding information of such acknowledgeable dissent is also subject to punishment under the legislative laws of the state.

The huddle of noise picked up again as the horse soldiers moved on in the direction of the next square. Petr had nothing to fear from his Celtic blood but the slave branding on his back seemed to tenderize in his consciousness. He heard the clinking sound of a metal worker in the near distance and continued walking there. As he approached he could see a man dressed in a long leather apron working at his trade in the semi darkness. He tentatively stepped in.

P: Gindor?  
G: Yes, what service can I be?  
P: Ivor sends me here with his blessings.  
G: Huh, news of his antics may well lose you favor young man! His days are not so long if only he could donate one iota of a belief in the goodness of men. Has he sent you regarding an order of spikes? Then tell him to wait like everybody else and make 'til the end of the month.  
P: Well it wasn't about that actually...  
G: Don't tell me he has run out of masonry straps?  
P: No, I wouldn't know without...  
G: Then by Minerva's blessing what in the blazes does he want this time? And when does he intend paying off his accruing debt?  
P: That's not my business...  
G: Then what is your business?

The air went silent as Petr waited for his steam to let out. He blurted out.

P: Tools.

G: Tools? Yes?

P: Masonry tools. Like these.

And Petr pulled out the fine chisel that was tucked into in his holdall.

G: Well do you have an exact order to hand. Let's have a look at that. Umh... I made this, but it has seen its best days.

P: Well, this is just a small request to replace a few duds. If you can show me a selection I will gladly settle the price immediately, trade rates of course.

G: They are in the back. I need some proper authority mind you.

P: Well, it was just to get a few things finished. As I say, to replace a few duds.

G: Well, take a look in the back, make your selection and I will give you a good deal, as ever. 'Ow long you been working for Ivor then?

P: Well I just got into town on the last march.

G: You a soldier then? Don't dress as one?

P: I have leave from my officer. I am waiting for my papers to be finalized.

G: Well, I 'aven't got all day.

And with that Gindor quenched a forged piece of metal in water giving off a large puff of steam. Petr watched him a moment and when he met Gindor's eyes quickly moved on into the back. He took a selection of about twelve items including chisels, hammers, saws and files. As he ambled back into the front of the shop he laid out the tools on a work top.

G: Not much then, that will cost you one As each.

P: Put it on account?

G: I thought you would settle up now?

P: I haven't change and well, Ivor tells me you might have some digs here also.

G: Oh, I see. So you want a deal on that also, and to include it in the total price. How much money do you have?

P: A few silver pieces.

G: Give me 3 silver denarii. That should cover the tools and one month. Mind you, it ain't pretty upstairs. You'd best 'ave a look first.

P: I'll take it.

G: What, just like that?

P: Yep. I could always move out if I don't like it.

G: Be my guest. Bring your belongings before sunset and I will show you around.

P: I am here.

G: That's all you got?



P: Well, I prefer to travel light, especially since I am on leave.

G: You useful with a sword?

P: Knives actually, my specialist weapon, err... tool.

G: Go upstairs, take a look, and tell me what you think later. It's the empty shack right above this workshop.

And with that Petr smiled and took a look around. He was tired from the proceedings and immediately fell asleep on the wooden floorboards. When Gindor wondered where he had got to he just exclaimed to himself on seeing Petr's slumped body in the corner.

G: Good grief, he must have seen some action.

## Act4 Scene 4

Justin and four horse soldiers ambled their way towards the house of Jesus. Rather than go along the well worn path they decided to cross the spiny thicket.

1<sup>st</sup> HS: If it isn't the flies it is the spine. Can't we just go along the path?

Ju: Spread out, and keep your eyes peeled. And try to keep your voice down. There are bandits here. Make sure you keep everybody within eyeshot. This is no cat and mouse game, if you see an armed man you give the order to halt and be searched, and then sound the alarm. Wait for back-up before you attempt to search him. In the meantime you stay on your horse.

2<sup>nd</sup> HS: But why the thicket?

1<sup>st</sup> HS: Exactly, why the thicket?

Ju: I have seen them in the area. They expect the path.

1<sup>st</sup> HS: But surely they are attending their dead.

Ju: Probably, but don't count on it.

The group split up with a few of the horses balking at various inaccessible points. The first horse soldier started muttering under his breath.

1<sup>st</sup> HS: Curse this stupid idea.

He decided then to head for the path and make his way up to the house which lay about 150m away. As he drew nearer a dog approached him. It lay down in front of him. It showed no animosity. The horse soldier dismounted.

1<sup>st</sup> HS: Hey boy, look at you. You are a beauty.

He stroked the dog and took his eye off the road. It barked once and wandered in another direction as if it were waiting for the soldier to follow.

1<sup>st</sup> HS:       What's wrong boy?

The soldier followed him back into the thicket. After about 20 meters he came across 2 bodies laying in the bush, and next to them a pile of Roman armor. They looked dead. Just as he turned around to sound the alarm from his horn on the saddle he heard the horse whinny and suddenly bolt off along the road. He could see it run in the direction of the house. He cursed under his breath.

1<sup>st</sup> HS:       Isis, show me mercy.

The black dog then moved off further into the thicket and the soldier crept quietly in its direction. He waited about 10 meters from the bodies with the dog next to him. Three men turned up and spoke in an unfamiliar tongue; they argued. One of them looked badly injured whilst another had his hand bandaged. One of the bandits suddenly looked down at the tracks in the ground and peered in the roman's direction. He mumbled to his colleagues and drew his sword. The black dog took a lead here and started off in his direction. The soldier failingly grasped at the animal as it slipped through his fingers. It approached the bandits in the clearing who suddenly grew easier with the acknowledgement. They patted the dog and pointed towards the house. Meanwhile another bandit was tidying up his wound. Taking sections of dried bush they covered the bodies and made off quietly into a dry river bed. The soldier considered his opportunity with 2 badly injured men, but thought better of it without his horse. He quickly made his way back to his own colleagues expecting the black dog to follow, but on turning around it had gone too. 'Never mind', he thought, when he spotted another soldier in the distance he sprinted in its direction.

Flavius galloped off at full speed. All he could think about was revenge, justice for his dead friend Travian. The fact of a unsolved murder hadn't extended to the baker woman whom earlier he had had forceful sex with. Under the circumstances she could hardly refuse with two burly Romans agitated at the loss of the sailing ship and its crew. With her daughter on board she may have tried to curry favor with them. Nevertheless Flavius believed himself not to have killed her. As the air rushed through his armor he saw himself as the proud upholder of the Roman law, ready to do courage and become the hero. He gee-d his horse on further.

F:       Don't worry about nothing Trav, I will revere your death and mark a stone in your honor. I found out who they were, me, I found out. That holy man was hosting them criminals. We'll teach these peasants the law, we'll show them who has honor. Filthy rats, Apollo give me strength.

He passed the 8km mark stopping only for water. The horse galloped off again. At the 40km mark the sweat ran like rivers through them. Flavius was not an equestrian even though he handled a horse pretty naturally, but an anger had confused his mind. He was in a mixed state of delirium and revenge. So close to Tarraco he decided to miss the last stable stop and galloped off, the

horse giving resistance. But Flavius beat it more, not unlike his prostitute women who fetch him a delirious fix.

F: Go on girl, faster.

Like a river it cleaned the sweat from its eyes, and Flavius beat it further, even faster, so close to his glory and heroic recognition. The horse began to recoil. It whinnied, exhausted, having covered a normal day's journey in half the time. It buckled under Flavius' weight.

F: Come on girl. We are home. Move on.

The horse could not go any further without rest. It snorted and slowly lay down. Flavius could see the city ahead of him on the horizon. He was angered as he hopped off the back.

F: Ahh, just like a peasant woman eh, can't do the distance!

The horse lay half dead breathing heavily and exposed totally to the baking sun. Without knowing what to do Flavius waited to ride a lift into the city from the next Roman who would pass.

Meanwhile back in el Perelló the horse soldier who had lost his horse was running in the direction of Justin. Justin turned in his direction catching the soldiers flailing arms. He started shouting from 30 metres away.

1<sup>st</sup> HS: Sir, I have found 2 bodies and the armour.

Ju: Keep your voice down you fool. Where is your horse?

1<sup>st</sup> HS: At the house. Look out sir behind you.

Justin quickly turned around. An injured bandit came at him with a pike. It was the man who had lost his hand.

Justin swung around, sword already drawn in hand.

1<sup>st</sup> Ban: You murderous filth, I remember your face.

As he closed another 3 metres the man collapsed with his makeshift bandages saturated in blood.

1<sup>st</sup> Ban: You murderers, you kill our kinsfolk.

The man spluttered his words and Justin almost felt sympathy for him.

1<sup>st</sup> Ban: We didn't ask for you. Leave us in peace, take your cities, your roads, your ships. Leave our women.

He crumpled in a heap crying. Justin looked down.

Ju: Her murder will be dealt with legally, I assure you that. Let me take you in and heal you. Come to the house of the holy man.

It seemed to be the final word in the dying man's ear, and the stillness overcame him.

Meanwhile, Flavius lay there waiting. The horse had buried its head and lay even quieter. Flavius decided to give it a short kick; it didn't move.

F: Fucking peasants!

He decided to walk the last seven kilometres, kicking himself and cursing the air as he went along. A cart came steadily by and he jumped on it with barely a request. As he slumped in the back he fell asleep. The driver thought to ask him.

D: Was that your horse soldier?

Only bloody-minded silence responded back.

