

Ab Initio (The Beginning)

It was AD 120, and was an unusually cold day in Rome. In fact it was more like the kind of weather you see in Britannia.

At number XV Via Vulgaria, Generous the slave was busy preparing food for the owners of the villa, Amnesia and Absentmindedus Now, these people were just about the worst kind of people to have as your employers. For a start they were extremely lazy, being rich enough to lounge about all day doing nothing. They also had no fashion sense whatsoever, and that's even worse. When you are rich, you can afford to wear the finest clothes Rome has to offer. But to go out wearing last season's toga...oh dear!

Amnesia and Absentmindedus also had a horrid daughter - six year old Amica, a spoilt brat if ever there was one! To her gormless parents, little Amica was a true angel who could do no wrong. And she was even a child prodigy. Her father was fond of telling neighbors how Amica was quoting Socrates before she could walk.

In actual fact, Amica was none of these things, but try telling that to her parents. Anyway, back to the story. Poor old Generous was working his fingers to the bone trying to get everything ready for the evening meal, or *cena*. Not that he ever earned much for doing so, just a few measly denarii here and there!

"I'm too nice, that's my trouble," he would say to himself. How right he was!

"Slave!!" Amnesia's shrill voice bellowed. "Get in here!"

"Coming at once!" Generous replied, rushing into the main room. Amnesia was wrapped in a thick blanket and shivering rapidly.

"I am cold," she announced. "I am very, very cold! I am deeply uncomfortable. Why am I so cold?"

"Well, er, there does seem to be some very unseasonable weather at the moment," Generous said. He never felt the cold because he was always rushing about helping his master and his wife.

"I know it's cold outside," Amnesia shouted. "But why is it cold in HERE?"

Generous stared at the floor. "Oh please, I do beg your humble pardon, but the er, hypocaust isn't working. You see, the flue pipes have become blocked..."

"What? Well get down into that cellar and UN-block them!" Amnesia screamed, flecks of froth forming in the corners of her mouth. "And when you've done that, you can read Amica her bedtime story, then go down to the cellar and bring us a nice amphora of wine for my husband and I. We're expecting company later, so make yourself scarce. don't want you hanging around lowering the tone..."

"At once," Generous replied. He had little choice but to obey. Now some slaves get a pretty good life and are treated well. Some are employed simply to stand around looking good! Generous, however, was not so fortunate. He longed to visit his parents again. They lived far away from Rome, in a quiet country villa in the north of the country.

"I will see them again one day," Generous sighed as he reluctantly prepared to unblock the hypocaust flues. He hated doing this, but he hated reading Amica a bedtime story even more.

"Little brat, she treats me like dirt, mind you so does everyone else in this villa...and this city. You'd think I'd have one friend since I'm always so nice to everyone. I keep trying to impress Prestonia, but she never takes me on."

Prestonia was a young woman who was lucky enough to own and run a prospering fruit stall in the busy streets of the city. She took no nonsense from anyone, be they slaves or Praetorian guards.

"Well I can always dream that she'll be my girlfriend one day," Generous said. "At least I have my dreams!"

After doing a dozen or so other jobs, including cleaning the latrine, Generous was shut up in his room while the guests arrived. He didn't really mind, he was so tired and was ready for an early night.

His room wasn't up to much. There was a single square window at the far end, and a thin bed and old table were the only pieces of furniture to fill it. But a good slave never complains, and Generous was a good, honest slave indeed.

He must have dozed off, for some time later Generous was awoken by a strange commotion coming from outside. Yawning and stretching, he rushed over to the window to see what was going on. As he peered through it he noticed that a large crowd of people had gathered and were staring at the sky. There was some odd kind of activity up there. The citizens of Rome wondered what it was.

"Have you ever seen anything like it?" they wailed. "The gods are putting on a display for us! They're creating stars with tails!"

Other people weren't so happy. "I don't like this," one man said. "Bad things may be about to happen. Remember when that fire mountain destroyed Pompeii?"

A fire mountain, is of course, a volcano, dear reader. But that word hadn't been coined during Roman times and the people didn't understand what caused volcanoes to erupt. But they did know that they were dangerous! The thing they were witnessing now was none other than a comet. It blazed across the sky, causing much uproar among the crowd.

Generous had never seen anything like it. "Great Jupiter! It's a moving star! It must be one of the gods riding a chariot across the

sky!"

Now I don't know what happened next, but there was a sudden flash of lightning and, all at once, the crowds fled, fearing a torrential downpour was imminent. The lightning flash was so bright and the thunder so loud that Generous nearly jumped out of his skin and lost his balance. He fell and banged his head on the table...

When he came round, he had a Jupiter sized headache.

"Ugh, I feel like I've just battled with some beastly tribes of Germania!" he groaned.

"I'm not surprised you do," a voice answered him. "That was one heck of a tumble you took! Do forgive me for causing that. Your place wasn't the easiest to find. This is number XV Via Vulgaria isn't it?"

Generous rose to his feet with a start. "Who said that?" He looked all around, but couldn't see anyone standing in the room with him. There was nobody at the window either and no-one standing outside the door.

"I'm over here!" the voice said again.

"Where?" Generous looked worried. "Amica, are you playing tricks again?"

"Down here! On the table!"

Generous looked down, and was not prepared for what he saw. Standing before him on the table, was a miniature human being. On closer inspection, he was dressed as a miniature Julius Caesar, complete with gold plated laurel wreath, boots and toga.

"What...who are you?" Generous gasped. "No, wait, you must be a Lar. Are you a Lar?" (*The Lares were the Roman gods of the home, and consisted of Vesta, Janus and Penates*)

The miniature Caesar was standing as straight as he could, making the most of his three and a quarter inch height. "No, curious mortal, I am not a Lar. My name is Julius Quasar and I am a sprite, sent from Quasar 2659 to be your friend, advisor and to generally improve your miserable life."

"Um, don't you mean Caesar?" Generous said.

"No, Generous! Quasar! A quasar is a celestial body, that is to say, something found in outer space. It has a very large red shift...oh, but I won't bore you with all that information, as you wouldn't understand it anyway. But later civilizations will actually travel into space..."

"Wait a minute...you came from outer space?" Generous spluttered.

"Yes. That's what I just said! As your personal advisor sprite, I can only be seen by you. No other mortal can see me. So I guess others will assume you're talking to yourself!" Julius stopped to laugh a little.

"So, you have special powers?"

"Hmm, well, compared to you humble mortals, yes. For a start I'm

immortal, but that doesn't mean I don't have weaknesses. Everybody has weaknesses, including sprites. Your weakness is that you are too kind and helpful, so people take advantage of you. As for me, well, my weakness is food...if I don't get plenty of food, I can't use my special powers. And what good is being a sprite when you can't float in the air..." He clicked his fingers and began to rise off the table.

"That's amazing!" Generous said. "Do you float all the time?"

"Not as much as I'd like to," Julius Quasar replied. "You see, it can be rather tiring. Much easier to cadge a lift off a mortal...you! As I am without any wings, one has to use special energy to fly without wings. Not that I'd want wings of course, ugh, ghastly. They really wouldn't suit me..."

"Erm, no I guess not. Are you really going to help me? Because what I'd really like to do is..."

"Become a Roman soldier, get Prestonia to be your girlfriend, live long and prosper..."

"How do you know all that?"

"That's another of my special talents. All sprites can see into the future and, to some extent, read the minds of mortals. I can only read minds when mortals are asleep though. Not that I make a habit out of snooping on people's thoughts. I do respect people's privacy. However, I had to find some things out about you, as I have been assigned to help you."

"Gosh! This is amazing! I can't believe this is happening! If you can see into the future, can you see into the past?"

"Of course. From the dawn of time to the present day, I've been watching activities on this planet for some time now. But only now has a person in need of such help called me. That person is you."

Generous felt a bit ashamed. "But surely other people out there need your help more than I? People who live on the streets and are starving?"

"And they shall get help, Generous, never fear. I'm not the only sprite in existence, but I'm the only one called Julius Quasar! Your Julius Caesar was a great man. He was so successful he was murdered - hmm, well the less said about that the better. But it's amazing to think that a thousand years from now, people will still be talking about him and watching shows about him on television..."

"Television? What in the name of Rome is that?" Generous asked, looking perplexed.

"Oh, that's a long story," Julius said. "I'll tell you some other time. Right now, you need to get some sleep. All kinds of adventures lie ahead for you. First of all though, I'm starving...where's the food around here?"

"Well, you should know, you've got the special powers!" Generous laughed.

"Yes, but I'm hungry and my powers are weak!" Julius replied.

Generous fetched him some wine and a couple of sweet bread rolls, or panis dulcis.

"Much obliged, good mortal!" Julius Quasar replied, adjusting his laurels. "Generous, things are about to change for you!"

"Yes. I think they are. Hail, mighty Quasar!"

Chapter 2

Disappearing Horses

Generous awoke with the early morning sun in his eyes. He yawned and looked around his tiny room. There was no sign of Julius Quasar anywhere.

“A dream,” he said. “I knew it could not have been real.” But just as he was about to head upstairs to prepare breakfast, a voice made him jump.

“Awake at last, young mortal Generous!” It was Julius Quasar and he was standing on the window ledge. “Did you think I was just a dream?”

“Err, well, sort of!” Generous said, relieved to see the sprite again. “Where did you go to? I didn’t see you.”

“I didn’t go anywhere, Generous. I was here all along, fast asleep on this window ledge. You just didn’t look hard enough. I arrived in your miserable little life and I’m not going anywhere! Got that?”

“Oh yes. I’ve got it. What you were saying about seeing into the future and all that...can you tell me what the future holds for me?”

Julius adjusted his laurels again. “Ah, well. You see, I sort of told a white lie there. I can’t see everything that happens in the future, I sort of get these visions and dreams of it. I don’t have a vision every day, just occasionally. The things I see are of really great achievements that mortals shall make in centuries to come, such as aeroplanes, televisions, spacecraft...but I can’t see what’s going to happen to you in say, next week’s time.

Generous was perplexed by all of this. “So you don’t know if I’m going to achieve my dream of becoming a legionary, then?”

“Well, sorry, no. I’m a sprite, not Jupiter. I don’t flit around like some blooming’ butterfly either or hang around in soppy old flowers. I don’t grant wishes. That’s the kind of stuff best left to graceful, dainty fairies. I’m something different altogether. I’m here to help you to achieve your goals. At the moment you’re getting nowhere. But with a little bit of applied magic...and initiative, things should start going your way, Generous.”

“Oh, that sounds like fun!” Generous said. “I suppose it really would be boring if you could see every little thing that was going to happen in the future, wouldn’t it? Me, I like surprises!”

“That’s right!” Julius said. “Now, how about some breakfast?”

“Coming up. I’d better go and prepare breakfast for Absentmindedus. He always has the same meal every morning... bread and fruit...and far too much wine. He’s always moaning that I

don't bring him enough wine."

Julius folded his arms. "Well well, how very ungrateful. And all the hours of toil and struggle you put in here...I think I could help him get all the wine he needed!"

"Ooh, what are you going to do?" Generous asked.

"Don't ask too many questions, mortal!" Julius Quasar said. "You'll soon see!"

"I do have one more question though," Generous interrupted. "Do you have a family?"

"Of course," Julius replied. "My parents are also sprites. They too have a mortal each to advise, just like me! I shan't see them again for a very long time though, because I've got a full time job working for you." He produced a small scroll. "Here's my job description. It outlines all the things that are required of me."

Generous sighed. "I haven't seen my mum and dad for years. You see, they live a long way from here. I left home to find work and ended up here as a slave." Generous recalled his childhood in Sardinia, where he was born. "My parents live in the north of this country now... still too far from here."

"Cheer up, Generous!" Julius Quasar said. "We may be able to change that!"

Suddenly the booming voice of Absentmindedus disturbed their conversation.

"Slave!"

"That's not your name," Julius remarked.

"He never calls me by my name." Generous said.

"Get up here and fetch me my wine!! I need more WINE!!!"

Julius was not amused. "Such insolent behavior I'll give him wine!" The little sprite leapt off the window sill and floated across the room.

"Open the door please," he said, and Generous obeyed.

"Hey, where are you going?" he shouted as the sprite shot out of the room. "Come back!!" Generous had forgotten that only he could see Julius Quasar.

Absentmindedus had finally managed to drag himself out of bed. Apart from dressing himself and eating, there was little else he and his wife did. They specialized in lounging around the villa all day. They were so wrapped up in their silly little lives that they had no idea what was going on in the real world. They certainly hadn't noticed the absence of any horses in the city that morning!

"Oh there you are, about time!" Absentmindedus shouted as Generous came racing up the stairs. "Where's my wine?"

"It's coming, Master!" he panted, looking around frantically for Julius

Quasar. Then he saw him, standing right on top of Absentmindedus' head!

"The wine certainly is coming!" Julius sniggered as Generous gave the amphora to his master. The little sprite snapped his fingers.

Suddenly, the wine began to overflow out of the amphora!

"What...how much have you put in here you stupid...hey, what's happening here?!" Wine started gushing out from under the doorframes, and soon the whole room resembled a swimming pool. Absentmindedus leapt onto the chair - he was petrified about ruining his new sandals - but the wine just kept coming...it was already three feet deep!

A shrill scream echoed from upstairs. Amnesia had woken up!

Julius Quasar was laughing his head off. "Well, that will keep the troublesome trio occupied for a bit, won't it!" He turned to Generous. "Come on, let's go outside. You can give me a guided tour of Rome."

"Right on!" Generous smiled. He really enjoyed the sight of Amnesia frantically thrashing about in the sea of wine, yelling all kinds of insults at her husband. And neither she, Absentmindedus or Amica noticed that their slave had gone.

Generous strolled down Via Vulgaria and onto the main road, or Via Principalis. But the commotion inside the villa was nothing to the commotion in the city.

"They've all gone! Gone! Thieves! We've been robbed!"

"Someone's taken all our horses!"

Julius and Generous looked at each other. "Now who would want to steal all the city's horses?" Julius Quasar wondered.

Generous thought hard. "It must be the Emperor, I can't think of anything else. And it's his birthday today. Something terrible always happens when it's his birthday."

"What on earth would he want with so many horses?" Julius asked.

"Search me. But then again, you don't know the Emperor, do you?"

"Sadly no," Julius said. "I've seen your master and his wife and thought that nobody could be worse than them. I guess I was wrong!"

"Everyone says that Emperor Delirious is a nutcase. He's crazier than Caligula, nuttier than Nero. And his wife...she's the stuff of nightmares! You wouldn't want to be married to her! Neither of them ever do anything decent for the citizens of Rome. They introduce the most ridiculous laws! Still, at least they haven't gone so far as to ban chariots yet. I don't think anyone could be THAT stupid..."

"Don't be so sure," said Julius. "Anyway, get a move on, we've got to get to his palace and find out where he's keeping those horses."

"Don't be silly Julius, I can't go into the palace! I can't even get near to it! It's guarded day and night by the Praetorian guards. How could I

get past them? Only senators are allowed to enter.”

“Hmm. Well, make like a Trojan horse then!”

“What?”

“Hide in that big basket over there. It’s being taken to the palace. That guy over there just said so.”

“But...are you sure? I could end up in awful trouble!!”

“We’re in awful trouble already, Generous! If the peoples’ horses aren’t returned, how are vital supplies going to get in and out of the city? It only takes a few hours for things to be thrown into chaos. Quick! Someone’s coming!”

Generous leapt into the basket, which was full of hay. Hay to feed horses?

“Julius...where are you?” he whispered.

“I’m standing on top of the basket. Someone has to keep a look out, you know.”

“But you’ll be seen!”

“Generous! I’m invisible to everyone but you. Don’t you remember?”

“Oh yes. Sorry, I forgot.”

Moments later, two Praetorian guards arrived to collect the basket.

“This is completely against our job description,” the first guard moaned, whose name was Ridiculous. “This is slaves’ work, lifting heavy baskets. What does he need all this hay for anyway?”

“It’s to feed the horses, isn’t it?” the other guard replied, whose name was Ludicrous. “He sent the entire lot of guards out last night to kidnap all the city’s horses. Delirious likes horses. He wants to see them all arranged in the Coliseum so that they can hear his birthday speech...that’s what I heard.”

“I didn’t know he liked horses so much. Is it his birthday or something?”

“Of course it is, you ding-dong head! That’s why all the horses have been collected!”

Ridiculous thought for a moment. “Uh, did the Emperor ask if he could borrow everyone’s horses?”

“No, he didn’t. He never thought to.”

“Oh dear,” Ridiculous sighed. “I bet everyone will be so worried and upset, what with all their horses gone, won’t they?”

“Most likely, yes. And the Emperor will be upset if we don’t deliver this basket to the palace. So quit your talking and give me a hand!”

“I’m starving,” Ridiculous moaned. “All this hard labor makes you hungry, doesn’t it?”

Ludicrous sighed. “How, in the name of Rome did I get stuck working with you? I used to have prospects. I had dreams. I am

worth so much more than what I have become..."

"How much were you worth, then?" Ridiculous interrupted, who as you've probably guessed dear reader, was a trifle gormless. "Sesterces? Denarii?"

"OH, SHUT UP!! Phew, this basket seems heavy though."

Generous gulped!

"Don't move a muscle, Generous!" Julius Quasar shouted to him.

"Humph, easy for you to say, you're invisible!" Generous whispered back. "I heard that!"

Ludicrous and Ridiculous arrived at the luxurious palace of Emperor Delirious.

"We got more horse feed, sir!" Ludicrous announced.

Emperor Delirious nearly jumped out of his skin. "I do wish you wouldn't shout like that," he babbled. "I am of a nervous disposition. I dislike sudden noises!"

"Sincere apologies!" Ludicrous said. "Most awfully sorry to have upset you."

"Put the hay in the courtyard with the rest of it," Delirious said. "I have 1500 horses in total now...that should be enough."

Actually, Delirious hadn't managed to obtain EVERY single horse in the whole of Rome, but 1500 horses was quite a lot and they were all in top physical condition. All of the sick, poor quality horses had been left behind.

A citizen named Conscientious had lost his entire prize thoroughbreds and he was distraught.

"I'll never be able to deliver these togas to Ostia in time! The ship to Britannia leaves tomorrow! There goes my business down the drain!"

Conscientious was very proud of his textiles business, and without his horses he'd really be in trouble. His new range of togas were selling like hotcakes. He could barely keep up with demand.

Meanwhile...Generous was still in the basket of hay in the courtyard of the Emperor's palace.

"It's safe to come out now," Julius announced.

Quick as a flash, Julius leapt out of the basket. "Air! I need air! Phew, it was horribly stuffy in there. I could just do with a quick swim in the Tiber..."

"If you don't hurry up and find somewhere to hide, you'll be thrown in the Tiber!" Julius shouted.

"But where do I go? This place is so big! I've never seen anything like it! Look at all those statues! Why, there's Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius, Nero, Vespasian..."

“Generous! Are you listening to me?”

“I am now,” Generous said, “because those guards are coming back! Let’s get out of here! I wonder where the horses are?”

Where indeed were the horses?

Emperor Delirious came strolling into the courtyard, flanked by his Praetorian guards. They never left his side because he was afraid of everything, especially horses!

“Horses have never liked me,” Delirious muttered. “They show me no respect whatsoever, they are most insolent creatures, but today they shall obey me! Everyone must hear my birthday speech....even horses!”

Julius Quasar watched the Emperor carefully.

“Look at him, he’s got no right to be Caesar. Hadrian is the rightful Emperor. Delirious had him tricked and sent off somewhere and said that he’d died. But I tell you, he’s still alive...”

Generous looked confused. “But Hadrian’s dead! He went off to Carthage and got eaten by crocodiles. What a tragedy!”

“What a load of lies!” Julius Quasar shouted back. “Shh, listen!”

Delirious looked around the magnificent courtyard, admiring the marble statues, the ornate fountains and so on.

“Ah, spending money, especially other peoples’ money, is one of life’s greatest pleasures, don’t you think so, Ludicrous?”

“Err, oh most definitely, Caesar,” the guard replied quickly, although in truth Ludicrous didn’t care much for material possessions.

“My life is just about perfect!” Delirious continued. “I can’t believe how easy it was to trick Hadrian into going on that stupid mission to Carthage! He thought that the locals wanted him to build them a wall. Ha! A wall! Mind you, he had this bizarre obsession about building walls, didn’t he?”

“Oh yes, Caesar,” Ridiculous interrupted. “He said that one day he would build a great wall across northern Britannia, marking the furthest frontier of the empire...”

“Complete and utter nonsense! There are better things to do than build silly old walls in damp, dreary countries like Britannia. Things like entertaining, eating and relaxing!”

“One couldn’t have said it better, Caesar!” the guards said, nodding furiously.

“They thought he’d been eaten by crocodiles,” Delirious went on, reveling in the story. “And I cleverly stepped in and became Emperor of Rome!”

Ludicrous rolled his eyes. “I thought things were better under Hadrian”, he whispered. “Since he went, we’ve taken one pay cut after another...”

“Are you guards whispering behind my back?” Delirious said, turning round to face them. An expression of fear and bewilderment spread across his face.

“No, Caesar, of course not, we...”

“Silence! Nobody speaks unless I ask them to. You know how it unsettles me, hearing hushed voices. People could be plotting against me...oh! Perish the thought! But you, my loyal Praetorians, would never turn against me, would you?”

“We shall serve you to the ends of the earth, mighty Caesar!” Ludicrous said.

“Oh, thank Jupiter for that,” Delirious said with relief. “I couldn’t bear it if nobody liked me. I couldn’t bear it. Loneliness, that’s the bottom line. I was never happy as a child. I used to feel insecure. I still do! ...”

Generous was trying hard not to laugh at the Emperor’s lament.

“For goodness’ sake,” Julius groaned, “get me a bucket, I’m going to be sick! Just listen to this guy!”

Delirious continued, “People think that being the Emperor is an easy job. It’s no easy job. Why, I have the weight of the world on my shoulders!” He burst into tears.

“Oh there, there, Caesar, don’t upset yourself,” Ludicrous said. “Today is your day, and the citizens of Rome are waiting to wish you happy birthday!”

Delirious composed himself. “Yes, it’s my birthday! I can be happy! I shall be happy, I...”

“DELIRIOUS!! WHERE ARE MY NEW EARRINGS??” The shrill and screeching voice of his wife Nausea shattered the peace.

Delirious went pale and became a quivering wreck. “Erm, on the bedside table, my dearest loveliest flower of the west...”

The formidable figure of Nausea came marching outside. She was a few inches taller than her husband, with flaming orange hair, and made Boudicca look like a shy, quiet girl. Nausea treated those who served her like horse manure and believed that she could rule the empire, through her weak, neurotic husband. She was frightening. She was mean...even the Praetorians trembled when she entered the room. Nausea believed she was beautiful...nobody dared to disagree with her...not within earshot anyway. She also was very fond of sculpture, and was forever designing statues of various past Emperors in her own unique style. Now, many years later, her style would be known as 'abstract'. To the Romans, they were just plain terrifying!

“If you’ve accidentally thrown those earrings away I’ll snatch those laurels and stuff them down your throat!” Nausea yelled, her face beetroot red.

Delirious gulped. "Oh no, please not my gold laurels!" he wailed, clutching at them. "Don't worry dear, I shall help you look for them straight away!" With that, he hurried after his wife back into the palace. The Praetorians, silent and dignified but desperate to laugh, followed him.

"She's worse than him!" Generous said from behind the statue of Tiberius. Rome's doomed if her and Delirious stay in charge!"

"You're right, Generous. That's why we've got to restore Hadrian as the rightful ruler, and as soon as possible!"

Generous stared at the sprite. "Huh? We???"

"That's what I said. Hadrian is alive and well...but I have a feeling he's not in Carthage anymore. More likely Iberia."

"You're certain about that?"

"Well, no, but I just have this hunch. Now come on, we must get to the Coliseum. We have horses to rescue!"

With the help of the sprite, Generous slipped out of the palace unnoticed and headed to the great amphitheater, which was just a stone's throw away. Now when you've got someone like Julius Quasar to help you, it's really quite easy to sneak into the Coliseum without paying...

"Well, that was easy, wasn't it!" Julius Quasar said as he surveyed the vast crowds.

"Easy for you, nobody else can see you but I could be discovered at any minute! I've never been here before, it's so noisy! Can we leave soon?"

"I wish you'd stop moaning, Generous. I'm trying to think. I'm going to have a word with those horses and tell them to change their performance for the Emperor!"

"Talk to the horses?" Generous said. "Did I hear you correctly?"

"Loud and clear," the sprite replied. "You see, I can communicate with animals and they can talk to me. They can see me, whereas humans can't. Animals have this sixth sense. It's all rather clever. Horses are very intelligent animals. If I ask them politely, they'll do what I ask of them."

"What's that?"

"Wait and see. Now lie low while I carry out the task! When I return you've got to open the gate down there so the horses can escape."

Generous looked aghast, but before he could reply Julius Quasar had disappeared!

"I hope that sprite knows what he's doing!"

The horses were lining up, and as they walked calmly into the arena Emperor Delirious was just getting comfortable in his chair. Nausea, having found her missing earrings, was busy combing her hair.

“This is going to be the most exciting birthday ever!” Delirious said. “What do you think, dear?”

“I think you should grow up,” Nausea snapped. “I had to sacrifice a good shopping trip to come here and listen to your stupid speech. There was a luxurious designer stola I wanted to buy. I bet it’s been sold now!”

Delirious did his best to pacify her by promising to buy all the stolas in Rome. That seemed to work. For the time being...

As the announcer introduced the celebrations, Senator Genius, the Emperor’s advisor, made his way towards the imperial box.

“Oh mighty Caesar!” Genius panted, inching his way past the Praetorians, “do forgive me for being so late but I was working on my latest invention for you.” He handed an enormous wooden sign to Delirious.

“What is this??” Delirious shouted.

“A wooden thumbs up sign, sir! I thought it may be more noticeable from a great distance! Of course, it can be rotated to give the thumbs down!”

“Ah, now I see! Most ingenious, Genius!”

Julius Quasar was down in the arena. The horses looked up as he floated towards them, nodding their heads.

“My fine equines, would you be so kind as to...” he whispered to them.

Now when the Emperor watched excitedly for the horses to arrange themselves, they were facing the other way, with their bottoms facing him!

“WHAT??? What is the meaning of this? What an insult!!”

The crowds burst out laughing. In the uproar, Julius returned to Generous and helped him to sneak down and open the gate. In a flash there was a mad stampede of horses charging out of the Coliseum and through the streets of Rome. People dodged hooves in all directions, diving for cover and shouting!

Generous managed to escape amid all the confusion.

“Was that okay, Julius?”

“A job well done, mortal!” the sprite replied. “Now I think you’d better head back to Via Vulgaria. You’ll just be in time to prepare for cena. I think Absentmindedus will have had enough wine by now!”

And so the citizens of Rome were reunited with their beloved horses and Emperor Delirious had been well and truly humiliated.

Back at the palace, Delirious was fuming.

“Somebody sabotaged my birthday celebrations!” he blazed. “And

when I find the miserable little so-and-so who did it, there will be TROUBLE!!!”

Chapter 3

The Roman Road to Nowhere

Things had been pretty quiet in XV Via Vulgaria after the wine incident, which had been caused by Julius himself. Although Absentmindedus and Amnesia did their best to try and pin the blame on Generous, they had to admit that the wine flooding could only have been caused by “forces beyond human control.” In other words, it was an act of the gods. Life for Generous hadn’t been too bad since then, and his ghastly owners had been somewhat subdued. This made Julius Quasar’s job easier, but they both knew that it wouldn’t last.

“They’ll soon be back to their conceited, nasty selves,” he said, enjoying a grape or two.

“I know,” Generous replied. “That’s why I’ll enjoy their nice behavior towards me while it lasts. Hey, save me some of those grapes! For such a small guy, you don’t half eat a lot.”

“Well, we sprites need to keep our strength up,” Julius replied, stuffing more grapes into his mouth.

“Hey, I noticed that you’re wearing a different outfit today,” Generous remarked.

“Oh yes, I do like to mix and match. Today I decided to wear gold, white and red. I have the comet motif on all my outfits though.”

Meanwhile down in the palace, Emperor Delirious was still plotting revenge on the person he believed had sabotaged his birthday celebrations in the Coliseum.

“And when I find that person...why I’ll make them rue the day they crossed me, the great Delirious Caesar!”

Nausea was more than bored with her husband’s ceaseless rant.

“Why don’t you send a couple of legions to Gaul to build a nice, straight Roman road? Forcing them to work their fingers to the bone always makes you so happy,” she said wickedly, knowing full well that that would make her husband even more despised. The legions were always being sent out on pointless missions, usually to the remotest corners of the Empire.

“Yes, I believe that would make me happy,” Delirious said. “One cannot have enough Roman roads. These barbarians don’t realize how brilliant they are. Why stroll along a dirt track when you can stroll down a Roman road? Gaul needs a new road that will stretch all the way to Germania, a road that will turn heads...”

“A flyover, your highness!” Senator Genius interrupted as he rushed into the room. “Do forgive my interruption Caesar, but I have a design

here for something truly unique. Chariot congestion will become a thing of the past..." He handed a scroll to Delirious. "It's a flyover. Do you not think it is most colossal?"

Emperor Delirious did appear to be impressed. "Most remarkable, Genius," he said.

"It can be built anywhere you wish, Caesar. It passes right over the existing Via Principalis, wherever that may be." Genius jumped up and down with such enthusiasm that his toga billowed like the unfurled sail of a ship.

"That's it then!" Delirious shouted. "I'll send Legio LX Breakus Windus to Gaul straight away...they are going to build this flyover thing...it is to be called the Caesar Junction..."

Legio LX Breakus Windus were to be dispatched to northern Gaul the very next day. Unfortunately, being led by Centurion Fastidious, it was very likely that they would get lost. The problem was that Fastidious had no sense of direction. He often confused sinister with dexter. He couldn't tell north from south. One thing he was good at was bossing his long suffering soldiers about, and when you've said that, you've said it all.

To be certain of success, Emperor Delirious had produced a map showing the exact route that the legion was to take.

"I'll put the scroll safely here in this box," he said. "It will be safe here until tomorrow morning when the centurion comes to collect it," Delirious yawned. "Gosh, it's so tiring being the most powerful man in the world...I think I'll have an early night."

"Oh no you won't!" Nausea's shrill voice piped up. "I want your opinion of my new sculpture!" she said, grabbing him by the arm and dragging him into the next room, which she called her art studio.

"Oh, yes dear, right away," Delirious replied. "Anything for a quiet life."

The room was left deserted and nobody else knew where the secret scroll was...except Julius Quasar!

Now Julius had been feeling a little bored and had decided to go exploring. And he liked nothing better than exploring the Emperor's residence. Besides, Generous was asleep, so his time was his own.

"It's just as well I did come nosey-parkering around here," the sprite remarked as he overheard the plans for the Caesar Junction. I must intervene and scupper the Emperor's plans. The sooner he's out, the better Rome will be. Besides, those poor Gauls have only just recovered from Project Aqueduct! The barmy Caesar forgot to make the thing watertight...he flooded a whole town!"

So Julius opened the box and had a good read of the scroll. "Hmm,

a straight route to northern Gaul, and the flyover is to be built across the Germanian border. I think it would be better in Iberia myself,” he chuckled, reaching for a quill pen. Then he drew a new line which diverted the route to Iberia. Using his feet, he rubbed out the original line!

“Ah, if only they’d invented permanent ink and combination locks!” he laughed. “Whoops, someone’s coming back!” He rolled the scroll and quickly replaced it back in the box. Then with a click of his fingers he floated into the air and headed home.

“I can’t wait to hear ‘mughty Caesar’ explain this one!” he laughed.

Legio LX Breakus Windus was dispatched the next day to build the Caesar Junction. And Centurion Fastidious had his route map...so nothing could fail, could it?

“Never forget,” Fastidious said as he marched his troops northwards, “that a legion is only successful if it is led by a successful leader. I happen to be a successful leader. My incredible rise through the ranks proves my talent. Therefore, you can be sure of a successful outcome when you’re with Centurion Rufus Rebellious Fastidious!”

“Yes sir,” the troops groaned. They really wished he’d shut up.

“Onwards to Gaul then!” Fastidious yelled. “Sin, dex, sin, dex...er, whatever!”

After an hour or so, Fastidious stopped.

“Curse these ingrowing toenails! And these lousy sandals! I knew they’d give me trouble.” Then he ordered his men to adopt a testudo (tortoise) formation, placing their shields above their heads.

“Sir, why are we doing this?” the optio Quartus asked. “We’re not under attack!”

“No we’re not, but my poor feet are! Now do as you are told!” He climbed on top of the shields. “Ah, that’s better! Why didn’t I think of it sooner!” The soldiers just sighed in despair!

Generous was preparing food in the household as usual when Julius, looking rather sleepy, floated across the room and crash landed into the fruit bowl.

“What on earth’s the matter with you?” Generous asked, picking up the sprite and placing him on the table. “Didn’t you sleep well?”

“Not really,” he said. “Didn’t sleep a wink actually. “I was busy in the...err, dreaming. Never mind, I will sleep soundly from now on!”

“Hmm, is there something you’re not telling me, Julius?”

A few weeks later, Emperor Delirious received a message from

southern Iberia.

“Dear Delirious Caesar, Imperator of Rome, the people of Iberia wish to thank you for sending Legio XL to build the Caesar Junction. However, as we are in dire need of an aqueduct, we have decided to convert it for this purpose. We thank you sincerely for this ingenious design.”

Emperor Delirious tore the scroll into lots of tiny pieces.

“What the...but I was certain that I’d drawn out a route to Gaul...not Iberia! This just can’t be happening! Oh, why does nothing ever go right for me?”

“Actually Caesar, I believe that the junction will serve just as well as an aqueduct,” Genius said, trying to pacify him.

“Oh, shut up and leave me alone!”

Later that day, Generous was heading home after doing some errands for Amnesia.

“I say, Generous, wasn’t it nice of the Emperor to send the legion to Iberia to build a nice new aqueduct!” said Julius, who was sitting on his shoulder.

“Why yes...but, wait a minute...has that got something to do with you?”

“Maybe,” Julius replied. “Just maybe!”

Chapter 4

The Emperor's New Sandals

"Absentmindedus! Have you seen this?" Amnesia shouted, thrusting a flyer into her husband's face one morning.

"Ooh! Chariot racing in the Circus Maximus! It's Benny's Barbarian Horde vs. Malevolent Marcus! We've just got to go and watch that, it'll be terrific!"

"And we have the Emperor to thank for it," Amnesia replied. "It says here that he organized the games and he's invited us to join him, saying we are 'excellent citizens of Rome!' I guess that's because we spend so much money! I think we should buy him a present to show our gratitude. You never know, it could work in our favor; we could become his close friends. Think of the possibilities Absentmindedus!"

Amnesia was already imagining life in the palace. "If I ruled Rome, I'd put on fashion parades every day of the week! The latest style in stolas!"

"A wonderful thought, dear. What should we buy him?"

"Hmm, how about a statue?" Amnesia suggested. "A statue of one of the gods? I suggest Mercury."

"Brilliant choice dear, as always." Absentmindedus threw his head back and yelled, "SLAVE!"

"Oh, what is it this time?" Generous moaned to Julius as he put down the cup of water he was drinking and rushed upstairs.

"I bet it's something and nothing," Julius Quasar replied. "I've never known anyone as dependent as those two. Some people can't do anything for themselves, can they? Amnesia's dulcet tones wake me up every morning. It's very distressing. I need plenty of sleep, you know."

"Oh yes, I'm sorry about that, Julius. Perhaps I could build you a soundproof box to sleep in?"

"Hmm, no thanks! I'm claustrophobic. And besides, I might suffocate!"

"Oh, I never thought about that! Hang on, how could you suffocate if you're immortal?"

"I don't want to actually put that to the test, Generous! You shouldn't tempt fate!"

"Ah, there you are, you poor excuse for a servant," Amnesia said, when Generous came running into the living room. "Now pay attention. Absentmindedus and I have decided to buy a statue for the Emperor. It's our little way of thanking him for inviting us to these chariot races."

“Oh, that’s...nice,” Generous said through gritted teeth.

“There’s a name for that sort of behavior,” Julius whispered, “only I couldn’t possibly say it, as my dignity forbids it.”

“Listen slave,” Amnesia continued, “you are to go down to that market stall owned by that decent chap Conscientious. He’s been busy recently promoting his latest designs...”

“But I thought he only sold togas!” Generous interrupted.

“Don’t interrupt me, you insolent lout! As I was saying, he recently started making statues...they’re ever so good. The most expensive one is a statue of Mercury. It’s worth 1000 denarii. So far, nobody has bought it! But as we are so fortunate to be rich, caring people, we have decided to buy that for our darling Caesar. You are to go and buy it. And don’t you dare think of running off with that money because we’ll track you down!”

“Y-yes, your ladyship,” Generous uttered. He was required to call Amnesia this at all times. “Erm, how will I be able to carry it?”

“That’s not my problem,” Amnesia replied. “Just bring it back here in one piece!”

Generous reluctantly headed down the Via Principalis in search of Conscientious’ stall.

“This is utterly absurd, how on earth am I going to carry an enormous statue? I’d need to borrow a horse and cart or something.”

“Cheer up, Gen,” (as Julius now called him). “It won’t be that heavy...honest!”

The centerpiece of Conscientious’ statue collection was a six foot sculpture of the god Mercury, messenger to Jupiter, and famous for his winged sandals.

“Look at the size of it!” Generous groaned. “It would be impossible to carry that!”

“Your owners are impossible, Gen. They’re obviously out of their heads, wanting to buy a present for Delirious.”

“Well, he has personally invited them to sit with him and watch the chariot races.”

“My point exactly. Birds of a feather flock together!”

Generous paid for the statue.

“I take it you don’t want it wrapped, do you?” Conscientious asked, counting the bag of money Generous had given him. “Because it’ll cost you!”

“Uh, no thanks. Erm...how am I going to get this back to the villa?”

“Well, my horse and cart would do the job, but as I said earlier, it’ll cost you.”

“Oh forget that,” Julius said, jumping on top of Generous’ head. “It’s time I exercised my powers. I shouldn’t really do this, but here goes...”

he snapped his fingers. "To Generous my mortal, be it so, strength of Hercules, to him go!"

Generous suddenly felt a little strange. "Uh, Julius, what did you just do?"

"I gave you the strength of Hercules. Now pick up that statue and let's hurry back. The powers will only last an hour and I can only grant it once."

"So you can grant wishes!" Generous smiled, flexing his muscles.

"It's not a wish Generous! You didn't wish for it. As I said, I can't grant wishes...I just help out when help is required. Uses a lot of energy, that does."

"Do you often have a conversation with yourself?" Conscientious interrupted, wondering why his customer was staring up at the sky.

"Oh er, no. Sorry, I was just thinking out loud!"

"Thinking about how to get the statue to your house?"

"Oh, not now. I've decided to carry it back."

"What? Are you mad? Three men couldn't lift that, it's solid marble!"

Generous bent down and picked up the statue, lifting it above his head.

"Great Jupiter!!" Conscientious gasped and he promptly fainted.

"Let's get out of here!" Generous yelled, racing up the road with the statue. People looked on in disbelief as he did so. They couldn't believe their eyes!

"Out of the way, guy with a statue coming through!" Julius yelled, though of course nobody else except Generous could hear him.

Meanwhile...down at Caesar's palace, Emperor Delirious was enjoying his favorite meal...Caesar salad, washed down by lots of wine. He was also preoccupied with his new sandals.

"Aren't they the most remarkable footwear ever! They make me look ever so dashing! Not that I wasn't dashing to begin with, right dear?"

Nausea gave a half smile. Hardly the kind of man a woman dreams about, she thought

"They really do make a change from those boots. I'm sick of wearing boots. And I don't want people to think I'm turning into Caligula or anything."

He paced up and down in the sandals. "Ooh, they squeak! Actually, I don't mind that. Everybody will know I'm coming. Right, we'd better head down to the Circus Maximus! I can't wait to meet the guests I have chosen to sit with me, Absentmindedus, Amnesia and their little girl, Amica. They sound like such nice people! I only invite the best

people to sit with me!" Then he looked in the mirror in dismay.

"Oh dear! This will never do!" he exclaimed.

"You're right," Nausea replied. "You are too ugly..."

"It's my laurels! They need pruning again!"

"Why aren't you wearing your gold plated ones?"

"I like to mix and match, dear! These laurels have real leaves. Only thing is, they won't stop growing! You know there's been a lot more rain than usual and they're starting to sprout new shoots!"

Senator Genius came rushing in. "You hoo, Caesar!" He was carrying a massive pair of garden shears.

Delirious looked worried. "What are you doing with those?"

"I've been out trimming the hedges in the gardens, like you asked," he replied. "You told me to shape one of those bushes into the shape of a horse, so I did. It looks rather good, if I do say so myself. You should come and see it."

"Yes..well maybe later, Genius. I'm getting ready to go to the Circus Maximus and meet some important people, so if you could just give my laurels a bit of a trim..."

"Certainly, Caesar! Now do you want a short back and sides?"

"I don't care, just don't cut my hair by accident!"

Generous arrived back home with the statue of Mercury.

"There, that wasn't too difficult, was it?" Julius said.

"Terrific! Hercules had it really easy, didn't he?"

"Ah, there you are," Amnesia said, marching into the hallway. "Yes, that statue will be perfect for the Emperor. He'll love it. Now you can carry it to the Circus Maximus. It's time we were going...and we mustn't be late for our meeting with the mighty Caesar, must we?"

"Does that mean I'll get to see the chariot races too?" Generous asked.

"Certainly not! You are required merely to carry the statue to the Emperor. After that, you can get back here where you belong! Slaves do not sit with the Emperor! How low class!" She looked as though she were about to faint!

"Don't worry, Gen," Julius whispered. "You'll get to see the races. And you'll see something else too!"

Absentmindedus, Amnesia and Amica arrived at the Circus Maximus, with Generous following behind carrying the statue.

"I must say, I can't understand how he's managed to carry a big thing like that all the way here," Absentmindedus remarked.

"Well, he's a slave, isn't he? Slaves are supposed to carry heavy things! Now shut up while I show the ticket man our special pass."

"Mummy, they're selling honey cakes and chariot rides over there,"

Amica piped up. "I want a chariot ride and a honey cake."

"In a minute, dear," Amnesia replied. "Daddy has to show the man our special pass first so we can bypass all these common folk and sit with the Emperor."

"I WANT THEM NOW!!!" Amica screeched at the top of her voice, making everyone stare.

"The Emperor will probably give you a pony of your very own," Amnesia smiled, desperate to pacify her. That seemed to work.

"We're here at last," Generous said. "Thank heavens. An hour has nearly passed, and these powers will soon be gone!"

"Set the statue down there," Amnesia ordered, and Generous did so. "Now clear off!"

"Yes, your ladyship," he said obediently.

Julius Quasar rubbed his hands together. "Right, come with me," he said. "We're going to a secret hidey hole that's right next to the Emperor's box."

Emperor Delirious was most delighted with the statue he had been given.

"Why it's almost as handsome as me!" he said.

"Almost, mighty Caesar, but not quite," Amnesia interrupted, sucking up as much as was possible. "May I say what a great honor it is to be sitting with you this afternoon. My husband and I are so humbled to have been chosen by you out of so many..."

"Good people are hard to find, my dear Ammonia...it is Ammonia, isn't it?"

"Erm, no, Amnesia, but you can call me whatever you want! Oh, and this is our daughter Amica! Now say hello to the nice Emperor, darling."

Amica stuck out her tongue.

"What a delightful child!" Delirious smiled. "Truly delightful! They're such characters at that age, aren't they! Now, shall we go and sit down? I have to tell you that I'm wearing my new sandals today and, well, they are starting to pinch a little..."

"Oh dear, mustn't get blisters and bunions, Caesar," Amnesia said.

"Did he just say new sandals?" Julius whispered as he and Generous hid behind a curtain.

"I believe he did. What are you up to now?"

"I have an idea," the little sprite replied. "Thanks to Mercury, I have an idea!"

"Oh Julius, you're not going to do what I think...are you?"

"Of course! Let's have some fun!"

Emperor Delirious sat down in his imperial throne, a smug grin on

his face. "Ah this chair empowers me," he said. "Just look at me, I'm so powerful..."

"Indeed you are," Absentmindedus replied as he, Amnesia and Amica sat beside him.

"Oh, and this is Nausea, my beautiful wife," Delirious said quickly as she appeared beside him.

"Charmed, I'm sure," Nausea groaned, reluctantly shaking their hands. "Is this your new thing, mingling with rotten Roman citizens?"

"Ssh, dear! I'm trying to boost my reputation as the 'Peoples' Emperor'!"

Meanwhile...the statue of Mercury was being guarded by Ludicrous and Ridiculous.

"You wouldn't believe it, would you?" Ridiculous said.

"Believe what?"

"That there are people out there daft enough to shower him with gifts!"

"Uh, no, I guess not. Makes a change from hate mail though, doesn't it?"

"Did I tell you about the time I fought 200 barbarians single-handedly?" Emperor Delirious told his honored guests.

"How brave of you!" Amnesia said, spellbound. Of course it was a load of old cobbles. If there was one thing that Delirious was truly good at it was telling blatant and extravagant lies!

Suddenly, the horns sounded.

"Oh good! The chariot races are about to start!" Delirious said, and the crowds began to cheer.

Nearby, Generous was hiding.

"This is my first visit to the Circus Maximus!" he said. "I just hope nobody notices me here!"

Marcus the Malevolent came thundering into the arena, urging his horses to run faster.

"They go so fast, it's like they're flying!" Delirious shouted.

"Flying!" Julius said. "That's the magic word I was trying to think of!" Jumping over the wall that separated the Emperor's box from the rest of the seats, he headed towards the Emperor's feet.

"What are you doing?" Generous wailed.

"Let's see how we can liven these sandals up," the sprite said, clicking his fingers. Almost at once, they sprouted WINGS!

"As I was saying," Delirious continued, "I fought tribes in Germania and..."

"Caesar! Your sandals!"

“How dare you interrupt me!”

“No, it’s your sandals!” Amnesia wailed.

“What in the name of Rome is wrong with my sandals? WHAT THE...AGGGH!!!”

Emperor Delirious was powerless to stop as he soared out of his chair and over the heads of the crowds!

Nausea was astonished. “Well I never! I’m glad I didn’t decide to go shopping after all! I wouldn’t have missed this for the world!”

“WAAAHAAAAA!!! GET ME DOWN AT ONCE!!!” Delirious screamed as he shot through the air, the winged sandals flapping furiously.

The crowds couldn’t believe their eyes. “Is that really the Emperor flying up there?”

Then they all started cheering “Go Caesar!!”

Delirious did a couple of incredible loop the loops, then barrel rolls, then went into a steep dive.

Ludicrous and Ridiculous were watching intently.

“Ooh, I bet all the blood’s rushing to his head. I wonder if he’ll be able to breathe when he dives like that?”

Delirious soared past Marcus the Malevolent, who almost lost control of the chariot. All eyes were now fixed on the flying Emperor and not the races. After a couple of near misses with tall statues, buildings and pillars, the sandals finally decided they’d had enough of Delirious and unfastened themselves from his feet! They flew off into the wide blue yonder, while the hapless Delirious plummeted down to earth...

But luckily he didn’t get smashed to smithereens. He landed right in the middle of a big pile of horse manure just outside the Circus Maximus, that had been maturing nicely in the midday sun.

He landed with such force that manure splattered everywhere... quite a sight.

“Oh dear,” Julius said. “That didn’t quite go to plan. I had wanted him to be dumped in the Tiber.”

Amnesia and Absentmindedus looked at each other nervously as the furious Emperor stormed back to confront them, a swarm of flies buzzing above his head and manure dripping everywhere.

“You two infidels sold me a statue that was cursed! Look what happened to my beautiful laurels! These were my best pair! I want that statue destroyed! You sent Mercury to play a trick on me! Thought it was funny, did you?”

“Oh mighty Caesar, we had nothing to do with it, honest! We really can’t understand what happened...please forgive us!”

“Get out of my sight, and take your odious offspring with you! If I

ever see or hear from you again, I'll feed you to lions...I'll cut off your heads...I'll string you up...I can do all of this because I'm the Emperor of Rome!"

Absentmindedus, Amnesia and Amica didn't wait to hear any more! They were running, running as fast as they could back to Via Vulgaria.

Generous of course had already made his way back there, along with Julius, and was innocently sweeping the floor when they came rushing in.

"You're both back soon," he said as they collapsed in a heap on the floor. "Did you enjoy the races?"

"Shut up and get us some wine! We've all had a very bad experience and we may never recover from it!"

Julius Quasar watched their reactions carefully. "Hmm, another success. I think I may safely congratulate myself. You know, in years to come, people will say that the first men to fly will be the Wright brothers. But I can tell you that it was Emperor Delirious Caesar!"

Chapter 5

Amica's Adventure

"Do you know something, Julius?" Generous said one morning. "Since you came along, my life really has got so much more interesting!"

"I'm glad you agree," the sprite replied. "There's still a long way to go!"

Absentmindedus and his wife really had been subdued since their disastrous encounter with the Emperor. They had been terrified of leaving their home for fear of encountering the Praetorian guards! However, they continued to take all their frustration and anger out on Generous. They now forced him to work twice as hard, as it made them feel better!

"I'll be worn out if I have to carry these heavy flagons of wine much longer," Generous groaned. "Can't you grant me the strength of Hercules again?"

"Sorry Gen, that was a one off!" Julius replied.

"SLAVE! Get up here!" Amnesia yelled.

"Uh-oh, duty calls!"

"Absentmindedus and I have decided to brave the outside world and do a spot of shopping. After all it has been a week since that little accident...I'm sure Caesar is too busy to be worrying about it now!"

"I'm sure you're right, dear," Absentmindedus said. "So we're leaving you in charge of Amica."

"Oh no...anything but that!" Generous sighed.

"And if you don't take good care of her...then you're going back to that slave market! And I shall demand a full refund from that rotten merchant Devious."

Generous actually thought that returning to the slave market wouldn't be that bad compared to the horrid existence here.

"Please, don't worry about a thing, I'll do my very best! Nothing shall go wrong! Nothing at all!"

"It had better not," Amnesia replied, prodding his nose with her incredibly sharp fingernail. "We'll be back in time for cena...I'll be expecting a decent feast waiting for us when we return, or there'll be serious trouble!" And with that, they both left.

Generous took a deep breath. "Right, Amica, fancy playing a game or something?"

"What a rotten job," Julius Quasar sniggered. "Babysitting a most unpleasant mortal like that!"

Amica, who five minutes ago had been sitting on the couch looking

as innocent as an angel, had now disappeared!

“Hey where’s she gone now?” Generous said. “Probably sneaked off into her room. I hope she isn’t pulling down those curtains again. I got the blame for that last time...as usual!” He rushed up the stairs calling her name.

“Amica, are you hiding up here? Of course, we can play a game of hide and seek if you want to...”

She wasn’t in her room, or any of the other rooms for that matter.

“She’s not here! Where has she gone?” He went racing back downstairs, and to his horror noticed that the back door was wide open!

“Oh no...I’m in big trouble now!” Generous wailed. “If she’s gone wandering around the busy streets of Rome, she could be lost forever! I’m doomed. My life won’t be worth living when Absentmindedus and Amnesia get home. I think I’d better run away!”

“Oh no you don’t!” Julius shouted, floating right in front of him. “That’s a coward’s way out. Besides, where on earth would you go to? You’ve no money, no food, no other clothes...”

“Oh yes, I never thought of that.”

“Now listen. Amica has most likely headed to the Via Principalis. That’s the main road. I think the best thing to do would be to go there and ask if anyone has seen her.”

“All those chariots and horses, and crowds and carts!” Generous said. “Oh, she could so easily get trampled! Let’s go!”

And what had happened to Amica? Well she had certainly no intention of being babysat by Generous, so had decided to go and have an adventure all of her own - in the bustling heart of Rome! Having learned how to prise the locked back door open with a spoon, she easily sneaked outside!

Down the busy Via Principalis, Prestonia was busy working at her thriving fruit stall, which she owned and ran. Prestonia was proud of her stall, which boasted fruit that was 'a cut above the rest'. Presently, Amica came wandering along. Seeing the ripe juicy apples on display, she strolled over and grabbed two before continuing along!

“Hey!” Prestonia shouted. “Don’t you know that to take something without paying is stealing? Where are your parents, child?”

“My parents are out shopping,” Amica replied, taking a bit out of one apple. “I’m on my own.”

Prestonia was appalled. “What a thing to do, leaving children at home on their own. I’d better take you safely home then.”

“No way!” Amica shouted. “If you do that I will scream and scream at you and my mummy will come back and feed you to lions!” She

stuck out her tongue and ran off.

“What? Well really, what dreadful manners! Some children seem to do as they please!”

Generous was frantic. He raced down the road looking for the missing girl, calling out her name.

“I think you could help me out here,” he panted to Julius. “Can’t you use your special powers to find her?”

“I’m doing my best!” he replied. “Just keep heading south and then turn onto Via Lupus, then down onto the Coliseum road...”

“That leads right to the forum and the Emperor’s palace! Surely she hasn’t gone there!”

“Well, keep going and you’ll find out!”

Prestonia had just rearranged her fruit when Generous came past.

“Hi Prestonia,” he gasped. “Business not going too well today?”

“Well it would be better if I didn’t have to endure rude children stealing from my stall,” she replied angrily. “Anyway, what are you doing charging down the road? Are you late for something? Are you in trouble with those odious owners of yours again?”

“No, but I soon will be if I don’t find Amica. I don’t suppose you’ve seen her, have you? She’s a little girl, blonde hair, pink stola...”

“And somewhat cheeky? Yes I’ve seen her. And she’s stolen two of my apples! She went that way, some time ago!”

“Thanks Prestonia!” Generous replied. “I shall personally worship you forever!” And he raced off once more.

“Forever?” Prestonia smiled. “He’s one silly slave! But he’s also a really nice person too.”

“Ah, that was so sweet,” Julius teased. “I’ll worship you forever...I’ll worship you forever...woo hoo! That’s a big promise to fulfill!”

“Oh, shut up!” Generous snapped. “Anyway, don’t you like anyone?”

“That’s classified information!” the sprite replied.

“Ah, so you do!”

“No I don’t!”

“Do!”

“Don’t!”

“Do!”

“Mind your own business! You’re supposed to be looking for Amica, remember?”

And meanwhile...down on the forum, Emperor Delirious was addressing the senators on important matters of state...hang on, no he wasn’t, he was about to show them his new toga...except that it had

mysteriously disappeared!

"Where's my new toga?" he exclaimed. "I left it right here on this wall, all neatly folded up."

"It's probably flown off somewhere, like those sandals of yours did," one of the senators said, to which there was a huge roar of laughter.

"Hey, you're right!" another said. "And wasn't it nice of Caesar to pay us a flying visit...get it? FLYING VISIT? What will mighty Caesar do next? Will he grow wings?"

"Enough!" Delirious yelled, rattling the column of the forum. "I am the Emperor! I don't have to endure your insolence!"

He was interrupted by Senator Sagacious, a wise old man with his face virtually obscured by a long white beard and mustache, who entered the chamber.

"Ah, great Caesar and fellow senators," he trembled. "I regret to interrupt this meeting, but I bring ill tidings. The Forum is haunted!"

"Haunted?" Delirious paled. "B-by who and w-why?"

"She claims to be the ghost of the mighty Boudicca, Queen of the Icen! And she is asking for you!"

"M-me? Why me? What have I ever done to her? I am innocent! It was Claudius who invaded Britannia, not me! I've never been to Britannia! Besides, she's been dead for decades!"

"Something has disturbed her eternal slumber!" Sagacious continued. "Oh, 'tis a black day for Rome! I predict terrible events occurring!"

"Wahhh!!! I'm too talented and attractive to die!" Delirious sobbed, cowering under a table. "I haven't done anything to deserve this!"

"You'd better go and speak to her then," Sagacious said. "As a wise old senator once told me, never keep a spirit waiting!"

The 'ghost' was wandering up and down the long corridors of the forum when Delirious reluctantly arrived.

"There it is!" Sagacious shouted. "Be polite!"

Delirious inched a little closer. "Err...h-hello, oh great spirit of Boudicca, this is Emperor Delirious Caesar speaking. Y-you asked to see me?"

"Mighty Caesar, you promised me a pony, but you never gave me one!" the ghost shouted, flapping its white sheet furiously. "My mummy said so!"

"Pony? You can have as many ponies as you wish, just don't HURT me!!"

"One pony, a really nice white one, and I want you to apologize to the people who live at XV Via Vulgaria..."

"Not the ones who brought me that dreaded statue!"

“Yes those people! And you shall do as you are told, because Boudicca has spoken!! Woo! Woo! Woo!” The ghost ran off down the corridor.

“Pony...apology...right,” Delirious said, wiping sweat from his brow. “I must go and do this right away!”

Meanwhile, the ghost, which was Amica all along, had got bored with pretending to be a ghost and had decided to make a hammock out of the sheet she had been wearing, which was none other than the Emperor’s new toga! She tied it round two pillars and jumped in it.

“Oh no, that’s not right!” she said, jumping down again.

Suddenly, a group of Praetorians came rushing down the hall. They didn’t notice the hammock in time and went flying head over heels, shields and helmets too!

“I’m bored with this,” Amica said. “There are too many annoying people here, I think I will go back home.” With that, she unfastened the toga and headed towards the edge of the high perimeter wall and jumped off! But no, she wasn’t injured, because the toga acted as a very efficient parachute and she floated to the ground rather gracefully, landing right on top of Generous!

“Amica! There you are! I’ve been looking everywhere for you! Where have you been?”

“I’ve been to see the Emperor,” she replied. “And he promised to send me a pony and to say sorry.”

“Oh...right, whatever you say. Let’s just get you back home before your parents get back! Where did you get that sheet from?”

“I don’t know, but it’s been fun to play with,”

“I’ll just leave it here,” Generous said, draping it over a table. Then he took Amica back home.

“See, I knew she’d be here,” Julius said, as they headed back. “And I’m pretty sure she met the Emperor too!”

Delirious had just about recovered from his encounter with the ghost and was preparing to visit Via Vulgaria.

“Excuse me Caesar,” Genius said, “but I think this belongs to you.” He handed him a rather crumpled toga.

“There it is! How on earth did it get in such a state?”

“Well, I found it on a table, so I guess someone thought it was a tablecloth!”

Later that day, Absentmindedus and Amnesia were enjoying their evening meal. Amica was in bed, having been exhausted by her day out. Generous was busy clearing up in the kitchen, having not got into trouble, and Julius was stuffing his face with salad.

“Well I must say, Amica must have had a productive day while we were out,” Amnesia said as Generous brought her more wine.

“Oh yes,” he said quickly. “We played all kinds of games - legionary, senator and Emperor...gladiators!”

“Hmm, good. Tell me all about them!” Then there was a knock on the door.

“Yes, your ladyship, I’ll just go and answer the door first though.”

He opened it and was surprised to see the Emperor standing there with a huge bunch of flowers in his hand, a gold vase and, behind him, Ludicrous and Ridiculous...with a pony in tow!

“The great spirit of Boudicca has ordered me to present the owners of this villa with an apology and this pony,” he prattled nervously. Err, are they in?” Generous could barely keep a straight face! “Why yes, Caesar, I’ll go and get them!”

“I think little Amica had quite an adventure today!” he chuckled.

Chapter 6

The Chariot Ban

Emperor Delirious had been traveling around Rome, visiting different people so as to reinforce his reputation as the Peoples' Emperor.

He had decided to do so after his encounter with the ghost of Boudicca, which of course had been Amica all along! Few people were convinced by his visits, but at least it made him feel better!

"I feel my popularity amongst citizens will be rising rapidly!" he said as he traveled along in his imperial chariot, which had a bit of a dodgy left wheel.

"Faster, horseman!" Delirious shouted. "I have many engagements to complete and..."

Suddenly, the chariot rounded a corner a bit too quickly, the wheel went flying off and Delirious also went flying! He somersaulted into the air and landed with a colossal thud in the middle of the road.

"Oh dear oh dear," the horseman wailed, trying to calm the terrified horses, which were rearing out of control. "Caesar, are you alright?"

"YEEEOWWWW...no I am not! My ankle is killing me! I think it may be broken! And my nerves are in tatters...oh, what a calamity!"

"That's shoddy workmanship, that is. That chariot wheel was just asking for trouble. Whoever built this thing should be fed to the lions..."

"Will you shut up, you blithering idiot, and get me to a doctor? I am in total agony!"

Doctor Smilax was the most trusted medic in the whole of Rome, well, as much as a Roman doctor could be trusted. "Nobody amputates your limbs quicker!" was his motto.

Emperor Delirious was carried into his 'surgery' by Ludicrous and Ridiculous.

"Be gentle with him, doc," Ridiculous said. "He's the Emperor and he is of a nervous disposition."

"I shall do my very best with him, never fear!" Dr Smilax said, flexing his long, bony fingers and giving a toothless grin to the terrified Caesar. He knelt down to inspect the injury. "Right, sir, just tell me if this hurts," he said, whacking it with a vine stick.

"AGGGHHHHHHHHHHH!!!!!" Delirious screamed, which was enough to wake the dead. Even people in the Coliseum stopped to listen.

"What are you going to do to me, you rotten torturer?" he yelled. "Do you know who I am?"

"Oh yes, quite, quite so," Smilax replied, not agitated in the slightest.

“Don’t worry, we’re here for you!” Ludicrous said, holding the Emperor’s hand.

“I shall never see my beloved palace again!” Delirious wailed. “Or my lovely Nausea!”

“Do calm down, sir,” Dr Smilax said. “What you have here is a classic closed fracture of the ankle, which should heal perfectly well in about a month. I shall make you a cast and wrap some bandages round it...you’ll be right as rain in no time, Caesar!”

“A month! A whole month of hobbling around like this!” Delirious looked as if his world was crashing down. “Right, you two guards shall carry me wherever I go!”

“What?” Ludicrous and Ridiculous looked aghast.

“Are you complaining?”

“No, Your Highness, of course not.”

“That’s settled then,” Delirious continued. “As soon as I get back I’m going to write up a new law. A law that bans all use of chariots...and horses!”

“Horses? Oh come on Highness, isn’t that taking things a little too far?”

“Certainly not! Look what happened to me! Next time it could be my neck that gets broken!”

Generous, meanwhile, was enjoying his afternoon off, strolling down the road and observing the sights and sounds of the busy city.

“I tell you Julius,” he said to the sprite who was sitting on his shoulder, “I wish I had more time off! There’s so much to see in Rome and I keep missing it because I’m always slaving away.”

“Too right,” Julius said. “But things are looking up, aren’t they?”

“Oh definitely. At least I have someone to moan to - you!”

Julius pulled a face. Suddenly, their conversation was interrupted by the sight of the Emperor being carried out of the doctor’s surgery.

“Great Jupiter, what on earth has happened to him?” Generous said. “He looks as if he’s just done a couple of duels with a gladiator!”

“Ssh, listen!” Julius said. “Hide behind that cart. He’s saying something important.”

The two of them listened intently as Delirious outlined the new law banning chariots and horses.

“I shall write this scroll as soon as I get back, and I shall read it out to all the citizens of Rome tomorrow morning!”

“What misfortune!” Julius said. “We can’t allow this to happen!”

“I’ve got to get that scroll!” Generous replied. “But of course, I’ll need your help to do it.”

“Well, what are sprites for? We’ll go in the dead of night...”

Night fell and most of Rome was asleep except for patrolling guards, the odd stray dog and tramps. No, wait, there were two more, Generous and Julius!

“Do I look like an old beggar?” Generous said, wrapping a blanket around himself.

“Of course you do. Now stand still while I attach this fake beard. It was difficult to make. I hope you appreciate it.”

“You know I do,” said Generous.

And so, the hunched figure of a 'tramp' made his way carefully through the shadowy passages of Rome. The only light was from the moon and the occasional oil lamp.

“The lamppost will be such a useful invention,” Julius said as he carefully guided Generous through the darkness. “However, we need the darkness as a cover.”

Ludicrous and Ridiculous were still on watch.

“I tell you one thing, I’m seriously thinking of asking for a transfer if this goes on much longer,” Ridiculous said.

“Don’t be ridiculous, Ridiculous! Praetorian guards are supposed to stay with the Emperor at all times! Where could you go?”

“Well, I could become a centurion in the army instead.”

“No thanks. Marching across horrid countries, facing fierce barbarians? Ooh, that gives me the shivers. Give me Rome any day.”

Generous sneaked up to the gates. “Ha, those two are in a world of their own,” he whispered. “They’ll never see me!”

Emperor Delirious had just finished writing out the new law on the scroll. He was reluctant to go to sleep because his bad ankle kept itching and he couldn’t scratch it! Even more frustrating!

“This place isn’t very well guarded, is it?” Generous said to Julius. “Seems like just about anyone can wander in here.”

“Cut the chat Gen, we haven’t got time to admire the architecture. We must get that scroll. Up here, quick!”

The scroll was on the bedside table of the Emperor’s room. Delirious wasn’t in his bed though.

“Oh brilliant, where is he? He could come back at any time!” Generous whispered.

“There’s the scroll!”

“Well, I suppose there’s only one chance!” Generous raced in and snatched the scroll, but just as he was about to leave, who came back through the door, carried by the two guards, but the Emperor!

“Uh oh!” Generous gulped.

“Caught red handed!” Delirious yelled. “Who are you, and why are you in my room? Speak now, you filthy little maggot!”

Generous’ fake beard suddenly fell off!

“Wait a minute - I remember you! You’re that servant who answered the door when I went to visit...AGGH! Not those people again! Will they ever leave me alone? Give me that scroll right now!” He made a grab for Generous and the guards promptly dropped him!

“I’m sorry Caesar, but I cannot allow you to implement this new law. You don’t realize how damaging it will be for Rome.” With that, he darted between the two guards and charged down the staircase as fast as he could.

Delirious was terribly vexed. “Don’t just stand there, you two halfwits! Get after that thief immediately! Summon all the Praetorians! Catch him!”

“Yes sir!” Ludicrous and Ridiculous said.

Generous raced out of the palace. “Can I stop running yet?” he gasped.

“I think so, I can’t see anyone following us,” Julius replied. “But you know that you can’t return home now. The guards will most certainly come and search there first!”

“Oh no, I’m homeless! What am I going to do now?”

Julius looked round and, to his horror, saw the full army of Praetorian guards heading towards them - on horseback!

“There he is!” they yelled. “Charge!”

“We’re in trouble, Generous!” the sprite gulped. “Run!”

Generous fled down the road. “I can’t outrun horses! They’ll catch me in seconds!”

“Turn left here,” the sprite ordered, and Generous ran down an alley.

“I hope this isn’t a blind alley!”

There was a shed further down the alley. Generous raced inside, hoping that he could hide in the bales of hay stored in there. He got the fright of his life when he came face to face with a startled horse.

“Yikes! Can things get any worse?”

“Relax Gen, I’ll talk to the horse. This animal may prove to be a very useful ally...”

But the Praetorians were getting nearer, dear reader, and things were looking increasingly desperate for Generous. If captured, it would certainly be the end...

Chapter 7

Fugitives

Generous and Julius had taken refuge in an old shed as they desperately tried to escape from the Praetorian guards. Will the guards capture Generous? Read on and find out...

"Whoa! Steady there, nice horse, nice horse!" Generous shouted, trying to calm the frightened animal. Julius decided to speak to the horse. Floating up, he politely introduced himself.

"My name is Julius Quasar and I'd be most pleased if you'd just stop rearing up like that. It's most unnecessary. My friend is in a spot of bother, you see, and you might be able to help us."

The horse stopped jumping about and stopped to listen.

"Gosh, you can talk to me!"

"All sprites can communicate with animals," Julius said. "We're so much smarter than mortals! What's a proud animal like you doing in a ramshackle shed like this?"

"Abandoned! Abandoned!" the horse lamented. "I belonged to a senator. I was the happiest horse in Rome, and three years loyal service I gave him! Then one day he decides he's had enough of me, so he dumps me here all on my own! Why?"

"That really is despicable," Julius replied. "Doing that to such a loyal beast. But my friend Generous isn't like that. He's a truly honest, nice guy and he's in big trouble. These Praetorian guards are after him!"

The horse stamped his feet angrily. "Praetorians! Why, those rotten guards chained me up once. They left me without food or water all day. Ooh I hate Praetorians! I'll gladly trample them!"

"What's he saying?" Generous asked.

"He's saying he'll trample the Praetorians!"

"Oh good!"

"Listen, horse," Julius continued, "would you like Generous to be your new owner?"

"Oh yes, of course!" the happy animal replied. "I am at your disposal!"

"Brilliant. By the way, do you have a name?"

"Oh yes. My name is Equus."

"Generous, meet Equus. He's your horse now. His previous owner abandoned him, so he'll faithfully serve you."

"Wow!" said Generous. "I've never had a horse of my own before. I've never even ridden a horse! Don't worry Equus, I'll take good care of you!" He patted him on the nose and was rewarded with a big lick.

Suddenly, there was the sound of voices. The guards were outside the shed door!

"You have ten seconds to surrender!" they yelled.

"Get on the horse quick!" Julius ordered.

Generous climbed up and Equus was ready. "Right, I'll teach these lot a thing or two!"

"We're waiting!" the guards said again.

With an almighty crash, the door shattered as Equus came smashing through. The guards' horses reared up in shock, throwing their riders off!

"He's on a horse! He's got a horse! Stop him!"

Julius stood on Equus' head. "Where can I take you?" Equus said.

"As far from the city as possible, my friend."

"Tell Generous to hold on tight then, because I run like the wind! Oh, it's so great to be wanted again and to have someone I can talk to!"

Equus thundered down the road. He soon left the guards' horses trailing in his wake. They were loaded up with heavy armor, shields and spears. Equus didn't stop running until Rome was far behind and there was nothing ahead but open countryside.

"We'll rest here," Julius said as they stopped under a tree. "I'm sure no-one will bother to come this far out. They'll have given up by now. Besides, it's so dark and we're all tired."

And so, the three of them fell into a deep sleep, overcome by the day's activities. At sunrise Equus was woken by the sound of approaching horses. He nudged Julius, who was asleep on his back.

"Hey little buddy, wake up! We've got company!"

"Uh oh. I guess I was wrong. The Praetorians are back! Wake up, Generous!"

Generous woke with a start and looked in horror as the guards drew nearer.

"Well, well. Thought you'd get away, did you?" they laughed.

"This is a desperate situation, Generous. Only one thing for it. Get on the horse quick!" Julius yelled.

"But there's no point running!"

"Just get on the horse!"

"He's nuts," one guard said. "He's talking to his horse!"

But as soon as Generous had climbed on Equus' back, Julius clicked his fingers and to everyone's amazement, Equus began to fly!

"Whoa! I'm flying without wings!" Equus shouted.

"Well, you're not Pegasus, are you?" Julius replied. "Just relax and let me do the flying. Are you okay, Generous?"

"Umm...as well as can be expected, given that I'm flying through the

air on a horse..."

"In the distant future, people will fly in aeroplanes," Julius said, holding onto his laurels.

"Where are we going?" Equus asked.

"To the port of Ostia. It's a great big place where merchant ships sail from."

The Praetorians could only look on in awe as the horse flew off into the sky and finally disappeared.

"Now what do we tell the Emperor?"

"Uh...we just say he fell into the Tiber and drowned. Nothing we could do. Simple as that."

"I think it's best that we don't mess with him, as he obviously has the power of the gods! He can make his horse fly!"

"Maybe he is a god!" another guard added. "We should show him some respect!"

All the guards dismounted and fell to their knees. "Oh hail the mighty flying horseman!"

Julius enabled Equus to fly all the way to Ostia. As the huge port grew nearer, the horse suddenly began to lose height.

"Hey, what's happening? I don't want a crash landing!" Generous screamed.

"Sorry, but it can't be helped. I'm so weak from lack of food, I can't sustain this magic anymore," Julius said. "I'll try and land somewhere nice and soft...just hold on tight!"

Generous closed his eyes. "Please don't let us ditch in the sea," he groaned. "And everyone will see us!"

"I think an audience is the least of our problems," Equus said to Julius.

Directly below them was a huge merchant ship being loaded up with cargo ready for her long voyage.

"Look out below! It's a big boat!" Generous yelled.

"I can see that," said Julius. "I'm afraid we're heading straight for that big open cargo hold..."

"Yikes!"

CRASH! Equus nose-dived into the cargo hold but luckily for everyone, the hold was filled with bales of straw so nobody was injured.

"Uh, my head's going round and round!" Generous wailed. "Will somebody stop the horse please? I want to get off! Hey, where are we?"

"We're in the ship's cargo hold," Julius replied, dusting himself off. "How fortunate that all this straw was here!"

"Fortunate indeed!" Equus said, delightfully munching some. "It's the first proper meal I've had in ages and it's delicious!"

"We've got to get out of here," Generous said. "This ship could be due to sail at any minute! But how are we going to sneak off without being seen?" He stared up at the open hatch.

"Err, I don't know," Julius said, weakly.

"Hey, are you alright, Ju?"

"I think I just need some food and some rest. I've used a lot of my power making Equus fly."

"It was brilliant, that, I bet I'm the only person in the world who's flown through the sky! As soon as we're out of here, I'll get you plenty of food and..."

The door of the hold was slammed shut and the three friends found themselves trapped!

"Oh no! Now what are we going to do? We're trapped!"

"Ssh, don't make a sound! If they find you, they'll think you're a stowaway! They might try to kill you!"

"I'm scared Julius! I may never see Rome again!"

"Yes you will, Generous. Things will turn out alright in the end, you'll see. But I think we could be in for a long voyage!"

And so dear reader, our three friends find themselves trapped onboard a giant merchant ship which, unbeknown to them, is about to sail to Britannia, far away. What is to become of them? Julius is powerless until he gets some food and Generous knows that if he is discovered he could be in even more trouble. Find out what happens in the next chapter of Julius Quasar

Chapter 8

Journey to Britannia

"Err, when will this torture end?" Generous groaned as he paced up and down the hold for the millionth time. "I feel so ill!"

"You're terribly seasick, aren't you?" Julius replied. "I must admit, I'm not feeling too good myself. If only I had some food!"

"You ought to eat some of this straw, like me!" Equus said.

"Err, no thanks Equus, I draw the line at that!"

Generous had turned a light shade of green. "Er, will you two excuse me for a minute?"

"Where's he going now?" Equus asked.

"He's going to be sick again. Can't blame him really, this is one heck of a rough crossing and I have a bad feeling about it."

"What do you mean, Julius?" the horse asked.

"As a wise sprite once told me, never tempt Mother Nature! I sense a storm approaching..."

Generous returned. "I've managed to find three apples which were rolling about on the deck! They're very bruised, I'm afraid. I don't like the look of the weather at all. It's getting more violent by the minute. It must be difficult to row in these waves."

"Hmm, I share your concerns, Gen. I think I'd better take a look myself. First, please give me one of those apples!"

Julius took a bite. "Yuck, worm infested apples!"

"Actually they're not too bad if you pick the worms out," Generous replied. "I once ate some weevil infested biscuits. They gave me indigestion for a week but Amnesia never did offer me much in the way of food."

"Weevil infested biscuits?" Equus perked up. "Yum!"

Julius and Generous headed up to the deck to see the worsening weather. "Equus, you'd better stay here and keep a look out," Julius said.

"Yes sir!" the horse replied.

As soon as they were out on the windswept deck, Julius could see for himself the horror that was approaching. And the other crew members had noticed it too. In the chaos that followed, nobody noticed the stowaway slave as he saw the great typhoon draw nearer. The sky had turned as black as night and rain lashed against the ship.

"This is bad," Generous said. "I've never seen the weather as bad as this before. The gods must be really angry."

"Stark raving furious, more like!" Julius replied. "We'd better get back down into that hold and pray that we don't sink!"

"You mean this ship could sink?"

"Of course it could, and probably will! Nothing can match the raw power of Mother Nature when she's angry!"

The two of them raced back into the hold, slamming the hatch shut and securing it. Equus was cowering in the corner.

"Oh, you're back," he said. "I don't like this; the boat won't keep still!"

"It's okay Equus, we're here now," Julius said, patting his nose. "Just brace yourself. We may get thrown about a bit."

It seems like what Julius had said was true. Never tempt Mother Nature. And she had indeed been tempted, for the storm that had sprung up was now raging out of control and the once great ship was feeling the full force of it. Waves taller than buildings rose up and smashed against the hull, while the fierce wind rent its fury. The vessel was being tossed about as if were no more than matchwood. Its crew could do little but hold on and pray.

Down in the hold, Generous, Equus and Julius were being thrown about all over the place!

"Watch out!" Julius said as a huge barrel full of grain came crashing towards them.

"I'll be black and blue if this carries on!" Generous shouted.

The ship's timbers were groaning terribly and everyone wondered how much longer it could cope with the forces being inflicted on it. The waves continued to pound the vessel and as the hammering got worse, Generous began to wonder if he would ever see land again.

Suddenly, there was a deafening crack and water came surging through the hold.

"Oh my goodness! We've sprung a leak!" Generous cried as freezing seawater swirled around him.

Equus began to panic and once more, Julius had to calm him down.

"Listen to me, both of you, we have to stick together and not panic. We're going to get out of here alive."

"Easy for you to say, you're immortal!" Generous yelled. "Equus and I aren't!"

"Yes, and if I let you two die, then I'll have failed in my duties as a Quasar Sprite. I would be banished from the academy. That is something that every sprite dreads. So quick! Let's get out of this hold! It's filling up rapidly!"

"The ship is going to sink, Julius! What are we going to do?"

"I don't know yet! Just move!" He jumped on top of Generous' head, clinging tightly to his hair, while he and Equus swam towards the door.

"I can't open it! I locked it, remember! And the water pressure won't let me open it!"

"We'll have to escape through that big hatch where we first entered then. Just let the water rise a bit more and we'll float up to it! Keep swimming!"

"I can't swim!"

"Equus can. Hold on to him!"

As the water continued to rise, Generous pushed the hatch door with all his might but it wouldn't budge.

"It's stuck! Or locked!"

"Let Equus have a go," Julius said.

The horse rammed the door as hard as he could. In a flash it burst open and a blast of cold wind shot in.

"Let's get out of here!"

The three of them crawled onto the deck. They could see for themselves the trouble they were in. The ship had sprung a leak below the waterline and was listing dangerously. The crew were working frantically to save their stricken vessel but there was little they could do. Then, all at once, a great tidal wave sprang up out of nowhere and struck the ship, capsizing it. Generous, Julius and Equus had no time to think as they were swept into the icy sea with a splash.

As soon as he was in the water, Generous began to thrash about wildly.

"Help! Help me!" he yelled. Equus was there for him and swam towards him. Generous climbed onto his back.

"Oh, well done," Julius said. "We must find some kind of flotsam to cling to. Look! What's that over there?" Nearby was a huge chunk of the deck and an empty barrel.

"Head for that!"

Equus plowed on through the water, urging himself on. He simply wasn't going to let his new owner drown.

The barrel was dry and floating high in the water. Generous climbed into it, praying that it wouldn't capsize with his weight, but it remained upright, bobbing up and down.

"What about Equus? What's he going to cling to?" Generous said in horror as the horse swam round and round.

"That big piece of wood over there," Julius shouted. "Equus! Go for it!"

The horse obeyed and, summoning his last remaining strength, managed to pull himself up onto the makeshift raft.

"There's some rope around this barrel," said Generous. "If I tie it to the wood, Equus won't drift away from us."

"Good thinking!" Julius replied, flopping down into the barrel in exhaustion.

"We're safe at last," Generous said. "But what about those poor

crew members? Oh, if they've all drowned...how horrible!"

"There's no sign of them anywhere," Julius said sadly. "I'm afraid I fear the worst. We may be the only survivors."

"Can things get any worse than this?" Generous sobbed, his head in his hands. "All this, just for a lousy scroll!"

"I know it seems hopeless Gen," Julius said, trying to reassure him. "But you and Equus are still alive. Look, the storm has passed. The sea is becoming calmer by the minute."

"That's one problem over, but look at where we are! Right in the middle of a vast ocean! There's no sign of any land! We could be drifting here forever, or at least until the two of us starve."

"I've already told you, Generous, I won't let the two of you die. We simply may just have to wait a bit longer. I'm sorry I can't be of more help." He tried to summon some kind of magic. "I'm sorry...I'm just too weak...I can't. Perhaps I am a failure in the history of sprites."

"No you're not," Generous said. "I wouldn't have survived without you, Ju. And I would never have met my new friend Equus! You okay, Equus?"

The horse gave a whinny.

"He said yes," said Julius.

"Julius, if you don't eat for more than two days, what happens?"

"As I said, I won't die because I'm immortal. But I would lose all my special powers forever, so I'd be useless to anyone as a sprite. But that's nothing compared to you. A mortal cannot last for more than three days without water to drink. I fear that thirst is more of a concern."

Hours passed and the dark clouds gave way to bright sunshine, a welcome relief from the rain, but as time went on it beat down hotter and hotter. For Generous and Equus, it was torture.

"Water...water everywhere, and not a drop to drink! Ooh...is that a big amphora of wine I see before me?"

"No Gen, you imagined it."

"I think I may just drift off to sleep..."

"No!" Julius yelled, slapping his face. "Don't, whatever you do, drift off to sleep. You can't lose consciousness!"

"Land...I see land..."

"No Gen, it's a mirage!"

"It's land...look! Over there!"

Equus began to neigh loudly. "It is land!" the horse said. "We're saved! We're saved!"

Julius and Generous strained their tired eyes to look. And sure enough, not more than a mile away, was land! The sight of it seemed to re-energize Equus.

"Get on my back!" he called.

"He said get on his back," Julius said.

Generous needed no encouragement. What a relief to be out of that barrel! As soon as he was on his back, Equus began to swim furiously towards the land. And with every wave-pummeling stride, the welcome shore grew closer and closer.

"I've never seen anything like it," Generous said as he noted how green the land was. "What country do you suppose this is?"

"I think it's Britannia," Julius said. "This is where the ship was heading. They say Britannia is a green and pleasant land, and it's certainly green!"

The shingle beach grew closer and closer. Finally, Equus felt the pebbles against his hooves and pulled himself onto the beach out of the sea, where he collapsed.

"We've made it..," Generous gasped. "We've actually made it..."

And so our three friends find themselves on the shore of a new and unknown land - Britannia, which is part of the Roman Empire. Generous doesn't know it yet, but this is just the start of another adventure, which may bring his dreams a little closer to becoming reality. But for now, we leave him resting on the Sussex beach, which many years later will be known as the seaside resort of Brighton.

Chapter 9

Holiday in Deva

Generous lay on his back on the shingle beach. He rolled over and half opened his eyes.

"What an experience," he groaned. "Not one I want to repeat! Hey Ju, are you there?"

"I'm...still...here..." the sprite replied in a weak voice.

"Oh dear, I must get you some food. Come to think of it, we all need some food! Right, Equus?" The horse grunted in agreement.

"I think we ought to check out that building at the top of that hill. Maybe it's a restaurant. Then again, perhaps not! I hope we don't meet any hostile barbarians!"

"Relax Gen, I'm sure we won't. Britannia is part of the Roman Empire. Most of the inhabitants seem to have accepted Roman rule rather well. In the south, at least. Not too sure about those Picts though," Julius said.

"Picts?"

"The tribes that live in the north. Anyway, we're a long way from the north."

"And you're certain we're in Britannia?"

"Pretty sure. Look how cold and wet it is. So instead of shivering here, let's head up to that building!"

The three of them headed up the shore towards what they thought was a large house. It was in fact a Roman fort. And who do you think was inside? Why none other than Centurion Fastidious and Legio LX Breakus Windus! They had been sent here a week ago by the Emperor with orders to build something called a conservatory onto his villa in Deva.

"Honestly," the soldiers complained. "This stinks. "What does he need a blooming conservatory for?"

"Well he said he wanted it to sit and relax in when the sun is shining."

"But over here, sunshine is something inhabitants have only dreamt of. It's always cloudy and raining!"

"Then it will keep him dry when he comes over, won't it?"

"Oh yeah...never thought of that. I still think it's a stupid idea though. And that sea voyage was awful."

"Come on you lot, enough of the chit chat!" Centurion Fastidious bellowed. "The Emperor is certain to be wanting a report of how his new conservatory is coming on. Remember, it has to be rectangular, with arches underneath."

"Huh," a soldier mumbled. "Conservatories indeed. They'll never catch on! Why can't he have another villa like normal people?"

Suddenly, there was a knock at the door.

"Oh bother," Fastidious said. "If that's another salesman selling togas I'll lose my temper! I don't even wear togas!" He opened the door. "You'd better not be selling more tacky ornaments!"

"Erm, no sir," Generous replied. "Actually I've survived a horrendous sea voyage and ended up here in this foreign country. My horse and I haven't eaten since the ship capsized and..."

"Well well, what a happy little coincidence!"

"Excuse me?"

"That rotten chef of ours did a runner the night my legion and I were due to sail here. He claimed he was afraid of water! But now you've turned up so our troubles are over!"

"What do you mean sir?" Generous asked.

"I mean lad, that you are going to be my new chef! I take it you can cook?"

"Err well yes. As a matter of fact I used to cook for a family in Rome..."

"Excellent! Well you'd better get inside then and rest a bit. We have a long journey coming up!" Fastidious replied.

"A journey? To where?"

"To the fortress of Deva! It's one of the major Roman forts in the whole of Britannia. My legion and I have been drawing up plans to build a new conservatory for our great Emperor, Delirious. It is to be built at his villa in Deva, a kind of extension I suppose. Now, building is hard work, and my men will need lots of nutritious meals to keep them active. Got that?"

"Yes sir. I've got that," Generous replied.

"Good, good. I must say, you're a polite and obedient chap who knows how to address a military officer. What's your name?"

"Generous sir. And this is my horse, Equus. Please let me keep my horse, I've only owned him a short time."

"Yes, yes of course you can keep the horse. After all, someone will have to carry all your pots and pans, won't they?"

Equus did not like the sound of this!

"Hmm, I don't think he likes the idea of being loaded up like a mule," Julius whispered.

"I don't think he has much choice!"

Generous reluctantly followed the centurion inside.

"Your horse can stay in our fine quality stables around the back," Fastidious said.

"I'm starving," Generous said. "I hope you don't think me rude, but I

really do need some food!"

"Too right!" Julius piped up.

"Very well, anything for a quiet life," Fastidious replied. He promptly fetched a large bowlful of thick, sludgy stuff and offered it to Generous.

"Eww, what's this revolting stuff?" he said.

"Porridge," Fastidious replied. "And it isn't revolting. That's the kind of grub that'll build you up and put hairs on your chest."

Generous took a spoonful with a distinct lack of enthusiasm.

"Hmm, it doesn't taste that bad actually."

"Sweetened with honey, it's rather nice!"

"And it's all you're getting until you prepare a decent meal for me and my men tonight," Fastidious said. "I expect it to be good! The journey to Deva will take three days of solid marching!"

"Marching?"

"Of course, Generous. How else will we get there?"

"Oh. It's just that I didn't travel much in my old job. I guess marching is what all good soldiers do?"

"Exactly! Myself? Well I'm troubled with these ingrowing toenails...these rotten sandals cause it! That's the last time I buy second hand sandals!"

"You know, I'd really like to be a legionary," Generous sighed. "If you'd let me prove to you..."

"You've yet to prove that you can cook! Besides, I can't just take on new soldiers like that, I have rules to follow. There are tests that new recruits have to carry out, such as obstacle courses, teamwork, building skills, all skills a good soldier needs! Do you honestly think you could do all that?"

"Oh yes sir. I've faced some pretty tough things in my life!"

"That's the spirit, Gen!" Julius whispered, eating more porridge.

"Are you willing to risk your life in battle, perhaps even lose your life for the good of Rome? I only accept fearless fighters. No wimpy types who'll desert!"

"Yes. I would be willing."

"Hmm, well for the time being, you'll work as a chef. Are you a citizen of Rome?"

Generous knew that he hadn't been born in Rome, and as a slave he hadn't any rights at all.

"Erm...well sir I was born in Sardinia, and..."

"Sardinia? Wonder where that is?" (Fastidious had a terrible knowledge of geography). "Oh well I suppose it doesn't really matter where you come from as long as you demonstrate your courage in battle. Non Romans usually end up in the Auxiliary. If you say you've lived in Rome, I suppose that's good enough. Make a good effort with

meals and I may decide to test you in future."

"Oh thank you sir!" Generous said.

"It's a step in the right direction!" Julius said, eating more porridge. "Your dreams are moving closer to becoming reality. Stay on the right side of Fastidious, he's not bad compared to most centurions, even if he is hopeless when it comes to directions. You've got to show him how good you can be if you want to join the legion."

"Yes Julius. I intend to. Feeling better now?"

"Much better. I have to say, this porridge stuff is really filling!"

Generous spent his first night in a proper bed. It felt strange to be sleeping on a soft mattress and under warm blankets. This was a world away from the tiny little room he'd stayed in at XV Via Vulgaria.

"I'm really getting spoiled!" he murmured.

"Shut up and get to sleep," a voice from the shelf above said. "You need to be up early tomorrow!"

"Oh yes. Sorry Julius!"

Next day, the journey to Deva began. Equus grumbled a bit as he was forced to carry a load of pots, pans and other utensils.

"Cheer up Equus. I know it's heavy, but when we get to Deva, I'm sure you'll be able to have a good rest. I may be accepted into the legion sooner if Fastidious sees what a well trained horse I've got."

That made Equus feel slightly better, although he still hated being loaded up.

"Don't think I'll ever get used to this rotten British weather," Generous moaned as it began to rain again. "We're not even halfway there yet. How do the inhabitants stand it?"

"You just have to get used to it, Gen!" Julius said, who was having the easiest time of all, sitting on Equus' head. "It would be just as hard marching in boiling hot weather, like in Rome."

"I wonder what Amnesia and Absentmindedus are thinking right now? I bet they're furious! And I bet Emperor Delirious is too!"

"Most likely, but who cares? They're miles and miles away, aren't they? And if you ask me, Delirious had better watch out, because I don't think he'll be Caesar for much longer."

"What do you mean?"

"Let's just say, Hadrian is closer than you think...I just know he is."

Days passed and the landscape changed and began to get more rugged. Eventually the sight of buildings appeared in the distance as the legion reached the top of a hill.

"There it is! Deva, the walled fortress by the River Dee! We've made it!"

"The steep walls surround the entire fort," Julius said. "That's what makes it so secure."

"I've never seen anything like it," Generous said. "That's a superb example of Roman architecture! I think I'm going to enjoy my holiday in Deva!"

"Correction, Gen...working holiday!"

Chapter 10

Hail, Mighty Generous!

Generous was settling in to life as chef in Deva. Having produced an array of delicious meals, Centurion Fastidious was most impressed. It had been raining constantly all morning but Generous was busy preparing more culinary delights.

"Luxury Caesar salads, smoked ham, fish cakes, beef burgers, bread rolls and grapes, plenty of wine...hey, I'm getting pretty good at this!"

"You've surpassed yourself this time," Julius added. "They say an army marches on its stomach and I'm sure they'll be marching better than ever when they sample your fine cooking!"

Centurion Fastidious came marching into the kitchen. "I have to admit, Generous, these meals are excellent, well done. As of today I shall be paying you a proper chef's wage and you may have the rest of the afternoon off."

"Thank you very much, sir!" Generous replied.

When he'd left, Generous turned to Julius and said, "Isn't this brilliant? I've never ever had money of my own before! And I've got the afternoon off! We can go exploring!"

"It's great, Gen! Come on, let's go and get Equus!"

As the two of them headed towards the stables, they overheard the soldiers talking. They were moaning about how bad things were under Emperor Delirious.

"Ssh, let's listen to what they're saying," Julius said.

"I really don't like to eavesdrop."

"This is important."

The legion certainly wasn't a happy one. Since Delirious had taken control, things had gone from bad to worse.

"I tell you, Marcus, things were brilliant under Hadrian. Why did he have to go on that stupid trip to Carthage? Now we've got that rotten Delirious in charge, Rome is facing her darkest hour. I wouldn't trust him to run a toga stall..."

"I share your loathing, Cassius, but what can we do? Hadrian is dead..."

"Hmm, and there's something funny about that. I mean he just sails out there and mysteriously disappears. Almost the next day, Delirious is sworn in. What's it all about?"

"Seems like it was a plot all along," another soldier said. "If you ask me, his wife Nausea was behind it all. She's poison. I wouldn't like to get on the wrong side of her. I hear she has many spies who frighten

even the Praetorians."

"She's very clever, that's for sure. And dangerous. And that savage dog of hers...it's like a tiger!"

"Bet she trains it to attack anyone who annoys her!"

"Like her husband?" Everyone burst out laughing.

"I'm pretty certain of one thing though," Marcus continued, "if Hadrian was to return, the Praetorians would return to him at once. They had great respect for him. Delirious would be abandoned at once!"

"But he's dead!"

"No he isn't," a voice interrupted them. It was Centurion Fastidious.

"Sir, what are you saying?"

"I'm saying, Cassius, that we've come here for another reason. That reason is to reinstate the rightful Emperor to the throne."

"Us? How? And where is Hadrian?"

"He's right here in Deva. For a long time now he's been staying here in a secret location. But soon we will be able to return him to Rome."

And so, Generous and Julius listened intently as they heard the story of how Delirious had become the ruler of the Roman Empire.

Emperor Hadrian had come to power, and life in Rome and the Empire was very pleasant indeed. But a plot was being hatched to get rid of him by an ambitious rich Roman woman named Nausea. She wanted her weak husband Delirious to rule, but planned to rule the Empire through him. Nausea could make her husband do most things, as he was so afraid of her - come to think of it, most people were afraid of her, even gladiators! Anyway, Nausea persuaded a group of senators and guards to carry out her plan, promising them great fortune if they obeyed and terrible punishment if they didn't. Being so afraid, they did as she said, and Hadrian was persuaded to visit Carthage in Africa. He was supposed to be building a wall, as he had a hobby of building walls. It was all a trick of course, and Hadrian was imprisoned before he even got to Carthage.

The other guards and senators not involved in the plot were told that he had drowned in tragic circumstances, and Nausea wasted no time in getting Delirious to the throne as the new Caesar. Not a word was said, as Nausea was so feared. But Hadrian was aided in his escape by Centurion Fastidious, who helped him to get to Iberia and then Britannia. Now Hadrian was preparing to make his grand return to Rome...

"I can't believe it! I never thought Fastidious would be this involved," Generous said.

"We'll have to help them, Gen," Julius replied. "They won't do it on their own. When we do get back to Rome, we'll have to give Hadrian a bit of a helping hand...a little applied magic perhaps?"

"Definitely. Shall we go for a ride and mull things over?"

"Good idea."

Equus was glad to be out of the stable and with Generous again. There was certainly plenty to see in Deva despite the cold weather.

"They have an amphitheater and some baths!" Generous said. "Personally, I think I'd like a hot bath. What do you think? I can pay for it now I have some money!"

"No thanks, Gen. Equus and I are going to eat some more and think up a plan. You go and enjoy yourself. We'll be waiting by the amphitheater for you later."

"Oh, okay then. Bye for now!"

"Now Equus, what kind of tricks shall we play on Delirious? The winged sandals again?"

"That sounds funny!" the horse replied. "I wish I'd seen that happen to a few Praetorians!"

"I'm sure that can be arranged...with practice...and lots of energy."

Suddenly, there was a flash of light in the sky.

"Ooh, what's that?" Equus said. "Is it another storm? No, it's a falling star!"

Julius looked up at the sky. "No, We're receiving a visitor! Another sprite! Who can it be? Hope it's not the boss, checking my progress."

"Julius, you silly...it's me! Don't you remember?"

"Cleopatra?"

"Huh? THE Queen of the Nile?"

A diminutive figure the same height as Julius Quasar floated down and landed on the horse's back. She was, as her name suggested, a three and a quarter inch Cleopatra, the famous Egyptian queen. Like Julius, she had a comet logo on her outfit. And like the real Cleo, she was very beautiful.

"I thought she was taller," Equus said, totally confused.

"I'm a sprite!" she replied. "Julius, you never told me that your mortal was a horse!"

"Err...no this is Equus, my mortal's horse. He's having a bath."

"Huh, can't keep a track of him then?"

"Of course I err, can! Hey I can't believe it's actually you! I've not seen you for ages!"

"Well I am a career woman, you know. I'm so busy advising young Egyptian mortals all the time. How are you doing?"

"Well, Generous has been through a lot recently, what with the shipwreck and stealing the Emperor's scroll. But that's nothing

compared to the trouble the Emperor will soon be in!"

"I know. I heard all about it. Word travels fast among sprites."

"How could I forget?" Julius said, then he blushed. "You know, Cleo, it's so nice to see you again..."

"Pardon me for interrupting you two lovebirds," Equus said, "but Generous is coming!"

"That's your mortal?" Cleopatra said.

"Yes. He's a good, honest chap who dreams of being a soldier."

"Hey Julius! Are you talking to Equus? And why has your face gone so red?"

"It hasn't! Anyway, I was talking to Cleopatra..."

"Cleopatra? Where?" He looked around.

"She's standing right next to me, silly! She's a sprite like me, but you can't see her because you're not the mortal she advises. Only an Egyptian girl named Nava can see her."

"That's what you think!" Cleopatra said, and with a click of her fingers, she became visible.

"There you are!" Generous said. "Salve! So this is your secret girlfriend, Julius?"

"Erm..."

Cleopatra frowned at him. "I don't remember saying that I was your girlfriend, Julius!"

"Well I'm very pleased to meet you," Generous said politely. "Can you fly like Julius can?"

Cleopatra folded her arms. "Mortal, anything he can do, I can do better! I can lift things a thousand times mortal men couldn't. Watch this!" She leapt off Equus and walked over to a huge quern stone (*a quern stone is a device used by the Romans to grind grain*) and picked it up with one hand!

"Amazing!" Generous said.

"All in a day's work!"

"Humph, you're just showing off, Cleo!" Julius muttered.

"Oops, do I sense a bit of jealousy there? Maybe it's just because you're in love!"

"Oh be quiet, Gen!" Julius snapped. "That's the trouble with mortals - they never know when to shut up!"

Cleopatra laughed. "I like your mortal, Julius, he knows how to wind you up! Anyway, my girl is visiting her family for a few days so I thought I'd have a holiday and see what other sprites are doing. I think I'll stick around for a bit. I hear you're planning to help Hadrian get back on the throne?"

"That's right," Generous replied. "What a shock it will be for Delirious!"

"Well, two sprites are better than one," Cleopatra replied. "Right, Julius?"

The happy conversation was interrupted by the sound of shouting and screaming.

"Fire! Fire in the bakery! Help us, help!"

"Good heavens," Generous said. "I'm going to help!"

"Wait, Gen! Be careful!" Julius shouted.

"Blimey, he's not afraid of anything, is he?" Cleopatra said. "Way to go!"

"He can be quite impulsive!"

An oil lamp had been knocked over in one of the rooms of the bakery. But unknown to Generous, Hadrian was living in a secret room upstairs!

Flames soon engulfed the building and the baker and his family...and Hadrian were trapped inside! People tried desperately to reach them but were beaten back by acrid smoke and fierce heat.

"This is terrible," Generous said. "I must rescue those people!" Without a thought for his own life, he climbed up a tree which had been planted between the two buildings. From here, he leapt across and grabbed hold of the window shutters.

"Yikes...I hope these don't break off...or I'll fall!"

Astonished people looked in amazement.

"Look at that man, he's actually going inside! He'll be killed!"

Julius Quasar saw it too. "I think we'd better help Generous immediately," he said. "Right, Cleo?"

"Too right! Fire doesn't bother us! Let's go!" They floated up into the air and through the blazing window.

All Equus could do was stand and watch helplessly outside.

Inside, the heat was intense. Generous could see the baker, his wife and child cowering in a corner. Putting a rag over his mouth, Generous ran to them, but how on earth could he get them out?

"We're here, Gen!" Julius shouted as he and Cleopatra came flying through the flames.

"Leave this to me," Cleopatra said, raising her hand. "Fire control is one of my specialities. "Back, flames! Back!"

As she commanded them, so the flames began to recede, allowing Generous to help the baker and his family to the window.

"Somebody help us!" Generous shouted.

Immediately, people gathered down below to catch them as they jumped. Generous was about to follow.

"Wait! I can hear somebody else!" he shouted. He raced towards a bookcase. "There's somebody trapped behind here!"

"My turn," Julius said. "With a click of his fingers, the bookcase

floated away to reveal a secret passage! A rather bedraggled man came running out of the gloom.

Generous recognized him immediately despite the long hair and torn clothes. "Great Jupiter...it's Hadrian!"

"Hurry up and get him out of here!" Julius shouted. "We can't hold back these flames forever!"

"This way, sir!" Generous said. even in this desperate situation he showed respect as he led him to safety.

"Kind sir, I am forever indebted to you," Hadrian said as he breathed clean, cool air again.

"Think nothing of it sir," Generous replied modestly. "You are the true Caesar."

"I am most grateful for your loyalty," Hadrian replied. "I take it you know of Rufus Rebellious Fastidious?"

"Oh yes sir. I work for him. And yes, I know all about the 'plot'."

But Generous didn't have time to say anymore, for the soldiers and citizens of Deva had crowded round him and were hailing him a hero for saving four people's lives!

Julius and Cleopatra calmly floated out of the blazing house and landed on a convenient wall.

"There's one brave mortal!" Julius said proudly. "And he's my mortal too! Of course, it was a team effort," he said, shaking Cleopatra's hand. "I really must learn to control fire like you do!"

"We work well as a team, Julius!" she replied, smiling and giving him a big kiss.

"Oh you do care after all!" Julius smiled. He was extremely happy now. Generous was a hero in the eyes of the people, Hadrian was alive and well and Cleopatra still had a soft spot for him. Of course, there was still a long way to go but for the time being, Generous enjoyed the attention being directed at him.

In the barracks that night, the cries of "Hail, mighty Generous!" were still being chanted.

"Well Generous," Centurion Fastidious said that night, "what you did today what nothing short of heroic. In fact it was the bravest thing anyone could have done. You risked your life there. And not only that, you saved the life of the true Emperor! My brave friend, I think you may get to be a legionary sooner than you think!"

Equus nodded in agreement.

"See! Even your horse agrees!"

Well reader, things do seem to be on the up for Generous, Equus and Julius, don't they? Generous is a national hero, Equus' life has never been better since acquiring his new owner and Julius has met

up with his old flame Cleopatra. But a big challenge lies ahead - just what will happen when Hadrian returns to Rome? Find out in the next chapter of Julius Quasar!

Chapter 11

Domum Sweet Domum

"The scene is set. We leave at dawn," Fastidious said. "Now, do you all understand the plan?"

"Yes sir," the soldiers replied.

"Excellent. We travel down to Portus Dubris, where we shall board the ship back to Ostia. From there, we make our return to Rome and Hadrian shall make his triumphant return. The citizens won't believe their eyes. We plan to make it so spectacular, Delirious will be well and truly defeated!"

"And Cleo and I plan to make it even more spectacular," Julius whispered to Generous.

"What are you going to do?"

"Just wait and see. It'll involve a lot of magic...so we'll both need to build up our strength - with lots of food!"

"Do you really think we can succeed in this?" Generous said. "It all sounds so risky! Suppose it all goes wrong!"

"Hey Gen, relax! I have a good feeling about this! We can get Hadrian back to Rome!" Julius replied.

"I hope Hadrian is as confident!"

Meanwhile...back in Rome, Emperor Delirious was troubled by nightmares. He'd woken up in a cold sweat for the fourth time this week. He sensed that something terrible was about to happen...

"I don't like this! They're all out to get me!" he wailed, much to the annoyance of his wife.

"I wish you'd shut up!" Nausea shouted. "How on earth can a woman get any sleep with you around? Beauty such as mine needs to be reinforced with lots of beauty sleep..."

"Yes, dear. I know, dear, do forgive me. But can't you see what a tormented soul I am?"

"You're getting on my nerves, Delirious! Just shut up and go to sleep or you'll find yourself sleeping outside...on the balcony!"

"On the balcony? B-but you wouldn't...would you? I'd freeze to death!"

"Don't be a twerp. This is Rome, not Britannia!"

Delirious looked extremely worried!

"Very well, I won't force you to sleep outside. But if you wake me again, I'll set Vicious on you!"

"I can't stand that dog of yours. He shows me no respect whatsoever!"

“Exactly! That’s why I like him so much. He’s a good judge of character!”

The night passed, and Generous could barely sleep as he was so excited and nervous about what was going to happen. At first light Centurion Fastidious woke his troops and rallied them.

“Is everyone here?” he bellowed. “Anyone who isn’t here for this roll call goes down in the Optio’s little book!”

Everyone was present and correct, including Generous, who since saving the life of Hadrian had seen his status soar and now commanded respect from everyone, even though he felt he didn’t merit it. Such praise was so unusual to him, having been treated like dirt for such a long time.

“Best get used to all this adoration Gen,” Julius Quasar told him. “Just wait until you get back to Rome!”

“That’s what I’m worried about,” he replied. “There are a lot of people who’ll want to get me when I get back. Like the entire lot of Praetorians, Amnesia, Absentmindedus...”

“The Praetorians will have forgotten all about you by now,” Julius said. “And besides, when they see Hadrian again, they certainly won’t be concerned with capturing you! They’ll be worshipping you!”

“He’s right there,” Cleopatra interrupted. “Looks like you could soon be the hero of Rome!”

“The hero of Rome? Just what is going to happen?”

“Patience, Gen,” Julius replied. “Right now, we have to return to Dubris to board that ship!”

“Another sea voyage? Oh no!” Equus didn’t look too happy either!

And so, Legio LX Breakus Windus returned to Portus Dubris three days later. Generous boarded the ship with apprehension.

“At least I don’t have to hide in the hold this time!” he said to Julius. “Hadrian has asked me to be his personal bodyguard!”

“Well, why not? You did save his life...with a little help from Cleo and myself...of course, he doesn’t know that!”

The great ship *Jupiter* set sail for Ostia. The voyage this time was a calm, pleasant one, and the legion passed the time playing backgammon and telling stories, whilst Centurion Fastidious polished his armor and bored other crew members with his tales of bravery. Equus slept most of the time, and Hadrian got to know more about Generous.

“So you used to work in Rome?” the great man said. “Do tell me all about your previous job.”

“Hmm, well err, not really a brilliant occupation. You see, I was a slave. Just an ordinary person.”

“Ah, there’s no such thing as an ordinary person, my good friend! am forever grateful for what you did.”

Generous felt compelled to tell him everything that had happened, including stealing the Emperor’s scroll and fleeing from the Praetorians.

“Ha! I would have given anything to see Delirious’ face when he fell out of his chariot! And to steal a scroll from right under his nose, escape the wrath of the guards...gosh, you are an incredible person, Generous! You deserve far greater things in life. If I return to power, I would grant you whatever you wished. What would you desire?”

“Well sir,” Generous thought carefully. “All my life I have wanted to be a soldier in the Roman army, serving Rome well, and learning lots of interesting skills.”

“I see. Tell me, how would you like to be a Praetorian guard? Not just any Praetorian guard you understand, but my personal bodyguard?”

“Oh what a great honor that would be!” Generous gasped.

“Neither name nor rank is important to me,” Hadrian continued. “I have seen for myself your bravery. Of course, you’d be able to learn as many things as you want - mosaics, building...I have an interest in building walls myself. I have this vision to build a great wall across Britannia one day. It will be a triumph of Roman engineering...I hope that future civilizations will marvel at it!”

“That sounds incredible sir. What would you call it?”

“I would call it Hadrian’s Wall. I think that’s straight to the point.”

“Hadrian’s Wall. Yes, that sounds good!”

The *Jupiter* arrived in the port of Ostia and Generous was heartened by the sight of familiar shores again.

“Ah, sunny weather!” he said. “What a pleasant change from the weather in Britannia! Although I rather enjoyed my time there.”

“It’s good to be home, isn’t it?” Julius Quasar interrupted.

“Yes. But there’s a few days march back to Rome, though. Is Cleopatra still with you?”

“Absolutely,” she replied. “I’m not missing this for the world!”

“But don’t you have a mortal of your own to advise?”

“Yes, but Nava is a smart girl who can take care of herself. Whenever she needs me I sense it and go to her immediately!”

“Hmm, fair enough!” Generous said.

Equus was relieved to be off the ship and back on dry land.

“I don’t think I’ll ever be a sea horse,” he said to the sprites.

“Can’t blame you really, the first ship sank!”

As soon after everyone had rested accordingly, Hadrian and the

legion headed towards Rome. And what had Amnesia, Absentmindedus and Amica been up to since their slave had deserted them? Little did they know that he was returning to Rome, not as a slave though but as a future bodyguard to the rightful Emperor!

"I knew he was no good the moment I first laid eyes on him," Amnesia grumbled.

"Yeah, but I never thought he'd go and run away like that. I mean, we gave him a good existence here, didn't we?" her husband replied.

"Of course we did! He was spoilt! Some slaves sleep outside! Just wait until I see that rotten merchant Devious...I'll give him a piece of my mind! And poor little Amica has been distraught ever since he left. Who's going to baby sit her now?"

Amica was upset, but for a different reason.

"Generous was easy to make fun of and play tricks on!" she wailed. "Who am I going to tease and get in trouble now?"

Over at the palace, Emperor Delirious was not happy on receiving news that the Praetorians had been unable to capture Generous.

"You lot are a load of useless idiots!" he bellowed, pacing up and down as he named and shamed each guard in turn. "I place all my trust in you, give you twice the wages of ordinary soldiers, ask you to perform a simple task, and you can't even do that! You can't catch one thieving slave! I'd have more luck if I recruited gladiators to be my guards! A bunch of barbarians could do a better job! A tiger could do a better job than you lot!...ooh I am TERRIBLY VEXED!!!"

"You should have used my new sniffer dogs," Senator Genius piped up. "I reckon sniffer dogs are a great idea for tracking people down."

"Don't be stupid," Delirious snapped. "Dogs aren't clever enough to track people down!"

The Praetorians hung their heads in shame.

"Hadrian wouldn't have treated us like this," Ludicrous muttered.

"What did you say?" Delirious said.

"Uh, nothing Caesar! Nothing at all!" Ludicrous said quickly, suddenly becoming very worried.

"You liar! What have I told you? Never ever mention that name in my presence! I AM THE EMPEROR! I AM CAESAR! SAY IT!"

"You are Caesar!" they all chorused.

"I think you'd better rephrase that," Genius interrupted. "There's trouble! Big trouble!"

"What do you mean?"

"Look outside and you'll see! There's an entire legion outside... most of Rome too...and..."

Senator Sagacious burst into the room. "By the powers of mighty

Jupiter and Juno, Hadrian lives!”

The sound of jaws dropping was deafening! The Praetorians all looked at each other.

“It’s true! Sagacious tells you no lies! Hadrian is alive and well! And he’s not a happy guy! He’s demanding to speak with you, Delirious!”

“No, no! It can’t be true! He’s dead...he...” Delirious turned angrily to the Praetorians, who were already preparing to abandon him.

“You traitors! You told me he was dead! Which of you were involved in this plot?”

“The only plotter we see is you!” the guards replied in fury. “We were tricked into serving you, a phoney Emperor, while Hadrian was alive all along?” They began to march towards Delirious.

“Nooo! Don’t hurt me, please don’t hurt me!” Delirious wailed. He turned and fled down the corridor, screaming for his wife.

“Nausea! Nausea! We’re in trouble! Hadrian’s back!”

Nausea appeared and she was not amused. There was no chance of running away though, for Hadrian’s voice called out;

“Delirious! Come out and face me, you great coward and impostor! Come and tell the people of Rome how you tried to get rid of me, the true Emperor, so that you could rule!”

Nasty Nausea had no intention of getting caught up in all this, even though the whole plot had been her idea.

“Well, darling, go and confront him!” she said, shoving her husband on to the balcony. “You are, after all, still the Emperor. You’re wearing the laurels!”

Julius Quasar and Cleopatra had been waiting for their chance to shine. Now it was their turn!

“He’s not fit to wear laurels!” Julius shouted, clicking his fingers. “Let’s have some fun!”

“Aye, aye!” Cleopatra replied.

Suddenly, the laurel wreath that Delirious was wearing took on a mind of its own and began to grow! No longer was it a wreath of gold plated leaves but a real plant, spreading out of control with big tangled vines!

“Aggh! What’s going on? What sorcery is this? Get this off me!”

But the leafy vines weren’t going to let him escape and they wrapped themselves tightly round his body like ropes. Delirious was all tied up - he wasn’t going anywhere!

The crowds meanwhile, were cheering wildly. They simply couldn’t believe that their well-liked Emperor, Hadrian, was back! And when the truth about the despicable plot came to light, they were very angry

indeed.

While the game was up for Delirious and he was doomed to be locked up in a prison cell on Tiber Island, Nausea had slipped away. As she and her dog Vicious hurried down a narrow passage, she stopped to look through a crack in the wall.

“It’s Hadrian alright,” she muttered. “What rotten luck, how did he... wait a minute! Who’s that sitting beside him?” she said, looking carefully at Generous. “Why I don’t believe it, it’s the thieving slave who stole my husband’s scroll! He matches him perfectly! Now he’s working for Hadrian? I bet he was behind the whole thing!”

Nausea’s face turned purple with anger, but then a crafty smile appeared on her face.

“Well, I might not be able to stop Hadrian returning, but I can finish off that slave once and for all! I need to find my spy, Enigma. People incur the wrath of Nausea at their peril! Come along, Vicious!”

Oh dear, what is the despicable Nausea planning to do? Could she be about to plan something horrible for our hero Generous? You will find out if you read the next chapter!

Chapter 12

Nausea's Despicable Plan

"This is rather short notice, Nausea," a hushed voice muttered.

"Yes, Enigma, I know. But everything has gone horribly wrong." She told her spy all about how Hadrian had somehow returned.

"But how did that happen? I thought you paid that group of guards and senators to dispose of him!"

"I did!" Nausea bellowed angrily.

"I promised them great things if they would get rid of him. And knowing that some people will do anything for money, they obeyed me. Plus, I can be somewhat intimidating! Someone helped him escape from his squalid prison though. That same person stole a scroll from my husband outlining the new chariot ban. And now, that person is Hadrian's right hand man. He's an extremely cunning slave who goes by the name of Generous. He used to work for some rich folk who live in Via Vulgaria. They presented my husband with this ghastly statue when he invited them to the Circus Maximus. They happened to mention that it was he who they had sent out to buy the statue. Judging from the complaining they did about him, I'd say he is a really dreadful person."

"One man did all that?" Enigma replied in disbelief, her identity hidden, as always, behind her mask.

"Of course it was him! Who else could have done it?"

Centurion Fastidious was of course the person who had rescued Hadrian, but Nausea knew nothing of this. She was certain that Generous had been behind it all along.

"That rotten man! He's had it in for my husband right from the start!" She pretended to cry.

"Please don't upset yourself," Enigma interrupted.

"That is why I am asking you to do one last job for me, Enigma. You've been the best spy anyone could have wished for, bringing me news from the Senate and so on."

"I served you as best I could," she replied. "What do you want me to do?"

"I want you to dispose of Generous once and for all," Nausea said, rubbing her hands together. "I want you to poison him..."

"Poison him?" Enigma looked shocked.

"Why not? It will be my final act of revenge on Hadrian."

"Nausea, with all due respect, I was not employed to murder people, only to spy on them. I will not do this, not for all the riches of Rome. I could never kill anyone."

“You traitor, Enigma! After all the money I have paid to you! Now you are turning your back on me? You are despicable!”

Enigma tore off her mask and threw it aside. “No, Nausea, it is you who is the despicable one. You and your useless husband have brought Rome to her knees with your absurd laws, shameless wasting of money and so on. Life for citizens has become so much worse, everyone’s paying too much tax. Your husband is hopeless as the Emperor. But you knew that, didn’t you. You wanted to secretly rule, didn’t you. You’re the one who makes the decisions, aren’t you?”

“Splendid deduction, Enigma, just splendid. That’s me completely!”

“I’ve had enough. I’m not working for you anymore, Nausea,” Enigma continued. “I’m going to go and work for decent people and make a decent living. Goodbye!”

She stormed off.

“Fine, do what you like,” Nausea snapped, fiddling with her hair in frustration. “I’ll do it myself. If nobody will help me, I’ll do it! If you want something doing right, do it yourself! I can disguise myself just as well as Enigma could, right Vicious?” The fearsome looking dog barked in agreement.

“There. I know you’re my true friend. My precious pet! Biting all those nasty senators!”

Vicious growled. He hadn’t frightened any senators for a while now.

In a secret place, Nausea formulated the perfect, despicable plan. She began to pour the contents of a small phial into a bottle of wine. It contained poison.

“Might as well make it nice and strong for our dear friend Generous, eh, Vicious?” She tipped all of the poison into the wine and stirred it thoroughly.

“There. No-one will be able to detect it,” she laughed. “Quite a lot of Romans have fallen victim to this trick! Well, for Claudius it was poisoned mushrooms, if my history is correct.”

Disguised as a kindly old woman, she headed to the palace, where Generous was certain to be. Vicious followed closely behind her.

“No no, you stay here, they’ll recognize you!” she shouted at the dog.

Vicious whined in dismay. He sadly sloped off all by himself, but decided to enter the palace via a secret passage that only a dog would know about. It was a narrow tunnel which led right inside the palace.

Hidden behind the statue of Emperor Nero was the tunnel.

“Aha, it’s still here,” Vicious said to himself. “I have a little unfinished business of my own to take care of...”

For the first time in ages Julius Quasar and Generous were able to relax. Everything had suddenly got so much better!

"I guess that all the adventure is over now, don't you think?" Generous said to his diminutive friend who was enjoying some of the delicious food Hadrian had provided.

"Hmm, not yet," Julius replied, his mouth full of bread and fruit.

"It's rude to talk with your mouth full," Cleopatra told him. "Didn't you learn anything at the Quasar Sprite Academy?"

Generous laughed. "You two are always bickering! Hey, what will happen to Delirious?"

"They'll lock him up and throw away the key," Julius said.

"I can't wait to start my new job...as a Praetorian!"

"I bet you can't. Anyway, for the time being, make the most of this food!"

Suddenly the door opened and Ludicrous and Ridiculous entered.

"Great Generous of Sardinia," they cleared their throats, "we have come to give you a message..."

Julius pulled a face. "Great Generous? Oh please, you didn't tell them to call you that?"

Generous read the message. "Hmm, it says that an admirer has brought me a present and she wishes to see me right away! I bet it's Prestonia! I'm so excited! Do you think it could be her?" Generous said.

"Would you like me to go and see? It'll take you ages to get ready."

"Yes please!" Generous replied.

"Right then. Are you coming, Cleo?"

"No thanks. I'm staying here to sample some of this food, which you've eaten far too much of."

"Please yourself. I'll be back in a minute!" He floated off.

Nausea was holding tightly to the bottle of wine as she waited for her victim to arrive.

"He won't be long, madam," Ludicrous said.

"Fine, fine. I'll just wait here then!"

"There's something familiar about that old lady," Ludicrous said as he walked away. "Don't you agree, Ridiculous?"

"Sure do. She reminds me of someone, but I can't think who. Oh well, never mind. How shall we spend our afternoon off then? Shall we go out to the tavern and celebrate?"

"Absolutely! We can sing that new song that all the guards are singing. It's really catchy. It's called 'Delirious is History!'"

Julius Quasar took one look at the mysterious woman in the entrance hall and his face fell in shock.

"Great Jupiter! It's Nausea! Now why is she bringing a bottle of

wine for Generous? I'd better go and see!"

But he didn't need to, for Nausea was muttering to herself. Unbeknown to her, Julius could hear every single word.

"She's going to poison Generous!" he gasped. "I must go and warn him immediately!!" He flew off so fast that his laurel wreath went flying off his head. "Oh those stupid laurels!" he groaned. "I must get a smaller size! Where're they gone?" He landed on the tiled floor and looked around in despair.

"Oh forget it, I haven't got time to waste looking for the stupid things. I have to save my mortal, Generous!" Then he saw something glinting on the floor behind a large statue of Julius Caesar.

"Ah there they are!" he said with relief. "Right by the statue of my idol, Julius Caesar! How appropriate! Thanks, mate!" he said to the statue. As he bent down to pick them up, he failed to notice Vicious sneaking up right behind him.

Julius placed his laurels back on his head. "That's more like it."

He turned round and, to his horror, came face to face with the snarling dog.

"Whoops," Julius said, but before he could fly away, a great big paw pinned him to the ground. Then Vicious spoke to him.

"Caught you at last, you annoying little elf!" he growled.

Julius fumed. Steam almost shot out of his ears.

"Alright, you unpleasant *Canis Familiaris*, if you're going to insult me, do it properly. I am a sprite, not an elf. And not just any old sprite. I am a Quasar Sprite!"

"I don't care if you're King of the Fairies," Vicious growled. "You were the one who ruined things for me and my owners. I know you've been helping that slave, Generous. I saw you with him when he stole that scroll. I saw you talking to the horses in the Coliseum too. I know you can talk to animals. I know that other humans can't see you. But what you didn't know was that I was watching you...all the time. You didn't see me sitting next to my mistress Nausea at the Circus Maximus or the Coliseum, did you?"

"No, I have to admit you were well hidden," Julius replied. "So what are you going to do with me, dog breath? You can't kill me. I'm immortal. So now what are you going to do?"

"I can still eat you, can't I!" Vicious laughed, drool spilling from his mouth.

"You dare eat me and I'll give you the most horrible stomach pains ever!"

Vicious found this highly amusing and howled loudly. Suddenly, the sound of people screaming made him listen.

"Run for your lives! A tiger has escaped from the Coliseum! Run for

your life! Tiger on the loose! Lock all doors!”

Atrocious of Britannia was a gladiator who was supposed to have been fighting in the arena. However, he wasn't the most successful of gladiators due to the fact that he was always so homesick for his beloved home, Britannia. He was also afraid of most things!

“I'm sorry!” he wailed. “I just couldn't fight the tiger! I had to free him!”

The citizens of Rome weren't that happy! They didn't want to be eaten!

Vicious turned to Julius Quasar again, who was still struggling under the weight of his paw.

“Heh, humans are such a strange lot. All those people scared of one tiger! One lousy tiger! I'm not scared of a tiger!”

“Look behind you, Vicious!” Julius shouted.

“Don't be daft, sprite! I'm not falling for that dumb trick!”

Then there was a loud roar behind him. Vicious turned round to see an enormous tiger standing right behind him!

In a flash Julius escaped and went straight back to Generous. But he didn't need to warn him after all about the poisoned wine, for as soon as Nausea saw that the tiger had eaten her beloved Vicious, she dropped the bottle on the floor, where it smashed. As its lethal contents trickled away through a crack in the floor, Nausea broke down into floods of tears.

“Oh Vicious! My dearest dog! Gone! Gone!” The wig she was wearing fell off.

With all the commotion, Hadrian, Generous and all the guards came running to see what was going on. They were confronted with a contented looking tiger, a sobbing Nausea, and a broken wine bottle.

“What's she doing here?” Hadrian shouted. “Arrest her at once! Praetorians!”

Generous watched Nausea being dragged away. “Aww, I've missed all the fun,” he sighed. Julius was glad it was all over.

“I never want to smell a dog's breath ever again!”

Nasty Nausea's horrible plan has failed, dear reader. And she can never again pose a threat to our hero, Generous. Now he looks forward to starting his new job, what exciting things await him? Oh and if you were worried about the tiger, worry not. Its life was spared when the senators revealed how grateful they were that it had eaten the horrible Vicious!

It looks like Julius Quasar's work is done. What happens now? Find

out in the final chapter of Julius Quasar!

Chapter 13

Farewell, Quasar!

“Hooray Generous!” the legion cheered next day as he received his new Praetorian guard uniform. And the whole of Rome cheered too when they heard about the brave things he had done.

Emperor Hadrian addressed his people once again.

“Friends, Romans, Countrymen...”

“Hey, he forgot to mention sprites!” Julius shouted.

Prestonia was amazed when she heard the news.

“I can’t believe it, Generous! Did you really do all that? Saving the true Emperor’s life?”

“Well yes, I did. I’m sure anyone else would have done the same as me.”

“I’m really proud to know you,” she said, flinging her arms around him and giving him a kiss. “Rome is a better place now that dreadful Delirious has gone!”

“Yes, it is. Erm, Prestonia, I was just wondering...would you like to come with me and watch a chariot race or something?”

“Why yes, I’d love to! As a matter of fact, I’ve been wanting to go out with you for a long time, just, well, I never got round to asking you.”

Julius Quasar smiled as he watched them.

“I guess everything’s turned out nicely then,” he said to Cleopatra.

“You’re going to miss him, aren’t you?” Cleopatra said.

“Yes, terribly. He’s been one of the best mortals I’ve worked for. It’s been such fun. Generous is my best friend now, I can’t bear to say goodbye.”

“I’ll miss Nava too when the time comes for me to say goodbye. But that’s the law of the Quasar Sprites. Once we’ve helped one mortal, we go and help someone else. We could end up anywhere. As long as there are mortals, there’ll be little sprites waiting to help their dreams come true.”

“I know, I know. I knew this day would come. I never imagined it would come this soon though, all his dreams coming true.”

“You did a great job in advising him, Julius.”

“Nah, he did most of it all on his own. Generous is that sort of person, honest and caring. He just didn’t realize that he could do all these things. I helped to show him.”

The streets of Rome were bustling with happy people. Conscientious had upgraded from a toga stall to a large store with an upstairs home furnishing department.

"I'm going to call this a department store," he said proudly. "I think this new style of shop will really take off. People will flock from Gaul and Germania just to see my new line in ornamental glassware and fine sculptures!"

Prestonia had decided to branch out with her fruit stall business too.

"You know what I'm going to turn this into?" she told Generous.

"What?"

"A series of chain stores! They'll be on every Via Principalis in the Roman Empire."

"Sounds great!"

"That's an idea that will really work," Julius said to him. "In the distant future, chain stores will be big business! By the way, Generous, I need to have a chat with you about something important."

"Okay Julius. Just give me a minute."

Julius took a deep breath. "I'm going to go and tell him, Cleopatra."

"I can't believe you're doing this!" she replied. "Be brave!"

"Where are you going, Generous?" Prestonia said as he hurried off.

"Just have to check on...er, my horse, Equus. Won't be long!"

Generous arrived at the imperial stables, where Equus was enjoying the luxury of being a Praetorian horse.

"Okay Julius, what did you want to speak to me about?"

"Well Gen, the time has come for me to say farewell. You have everything you've ever wanted now. You've got a brilliant job, a wonderful girlfriend, the respect of everyone in Rome, and you've restored Hadrian to the throne. Your life is pretty much sorted!"

"I couldn't have done it on my own, Julius! What about when you made Equus fly?"

"A bit of magic here and there," the sprite replied. "But you just couldn't see your true spirit, could you? That's why I was sent to help you. I saw that you were a person of great potential, Generous, and look what you've achieved!"

"Yes, I am truly happy now. But are you saying that you're leaving?"

Julius sighed. "Well, us Quasar Sprites have a mission in life. To help mortals wherever they may be. Once we've helped one person, we have to go and help another, that's the way it is. My boss, Sprite Superior, usually selects someone for me to help."

Generous looked utterly crestfallen. "But Julius, you're my best friend now, not just some little guy who fell out of the sky all those months ago. It's all been such fun having you around. I can't bear it if you leave!"

"I know, Gen...that's why...I've decided to...STAY!"

"What? Do you mean it?"

"Yes, I certainly do. Working for you has been the most enjoyable

part of my life, and I'm not missing out on the sights and sounds of Rome!"

"Yes, and someone's going to have to keep an eye on him," another voice interrupted.

"Why Cleopatra, where did you come from?"

"I've been here all the time, listening to your little conversation. was invisible!"

"Are you staying too?" said Generous.

"No, I'm afraid I must return to Egypt. Nava is waiting for me and I've got work to do. But don't worry, you haven't seen the last of me. I'll be popping back to see you both every couple of weeks or so, depends on my hectic work schedule. So in the meantime Julius, don't make life too hard for Generous, will you?"

"Me? As if! What did you say that for?" Julius shouted.

"Here we go again!" Generous and Equus thought.

"Because I love you, Julius Quasar!" Cleopatra replied, giving him a big kiss. "Be seeing you!" And with that, she clicked her fingers and disappeared!

"Goodbye Cleopatra," Generous said. "Thanks for your help!"

Julius floated into the air and did a couple of loop-the-loops.

"Did you hear that? She loves me! Yippee! I always knew she did, deep down! I'm so happy!"

"Glad to hear it, Ju," Generous replied. "But I'd better get ready to go to the Circus Maximus. I did promise Prestonia that I was meeting her. Hey, do you want to come? No making people fly this time though!"

"Of course not!" Julius replied. "I promise only to use magic when it is desperately needed!"

They both laughed.

"Come on, Equus!" Generous said, climbing up. "Time to go! Tomorrow is my first day as a Praetorian guard. So let's celebrate tonight!" Equus neighed in reply.

"He agrees," Julius translated.

And so, that brings us to the end of Julius Quasar. We've followed the adventures of Generous, the slave who became a Praetorian with the help of his very special friend. But wait a minute, what happened to Delirious and Nausea?

"I could have been immortalized," Delirious wailed from the confines of his prison cell. "I could have gone down in history!"

Nausea did not answer him.

"Nobody understood me!" he went on. "Rome never gave me a chance!"

“Delirious!”
“Yes dear?”
“SHUT UP!!!”

Julius Quasar Scroll II Adventures in Britannia

Chapter 1

Salve, dear reader. Do you remember what happened at the end of our previous story? Our hero Generous achieved his ambition to become a Roman soldier. In fact, he did even better and became a Praetorian guard to the Emperor Hadrian - rightful ruler of the Roman Empire. And since the dreaded Delirious and Nausea were ousted from power, things in Rome have never been better.

A whole year has passed since those events and Generous now lives with the love of his life, Prestonia, whom he is engaged to, in a luxurious country villa just outside Rome. Also living there are Equus, his loyal horse, Ferocious the tiger and of course, the sprite Julius Quasar!

Life as a slave is but a distant memory for Generous and he hasn't seen Absentmindedus, Amnesia and Amica since, but they are still living at number XV Via Vulgaria, probably with a new unfortunate slave to boss around.

Things seem pretty much settled now but as is always the case in Rome, it isn't quiet for long! Many new and exciting adventures await Generous...and Julius too, but now, on with the story!

Prestonia stepped outside of the villa and savored the warm morning sunshine.

"Another glorious day," she smiled. "How perfect. I have to go and open another new shop in Rome today. This one is on the banks of the Tiber. I do think that was a good idea of mine, if I'm not being too big headed. People can sail leisurely up the river and stop to shop!"

"Yes, the possibilities are endless," Generous replied, putting his arm around her. "I don't think there's ever been a businesswoman to match you. How many shops do you own now?"

"Seven. Two in Gaul, three in Rome (including this new one), another one in Germania and one at the port of Ostia."

"Hmm. Seven is a lucky number!" Generous said.

"But I haven't managed to crack Britannia yet. Maybe that cold wet climate you keep saying it has is hampering my plans?"

"Seems ideal for an orchard though, all that rain and stuff. Just keep trying. They don't know what they're missing! If at first you don't succeed, try again. And remember what Julius Quasar said. Vini, Vidi, Vici - I came, I saw I conquered!"

"Quasar? You mean Caesar, don't you?" Prestonia interrupted.

"Oh yes! What on earth was I saying?"

Julius Quasar had just woken up. He'd made his home in the new lararium - a cupboard in the form of a miniature temple. This was where the household gods lived.

"Talking about me, were you?" he said, floating through the air and landing on Generous' shoulder.

"Hello Ju. Did you have a good lie in?"

"I'll say. That lararium has all the modern facilities, and I fixed up a nice four poster bed for myself."

"Really, Julius! Don't you think you're being a bit disrespectful to the Lares by living in their house?"

"Oh no, they don't mind at all!" the sprite replied. "We've become good friends. Janus always has loads of gossip - mind you, he has two heads so he talks a lot more than other people. Penates, well he tried to stop me sneaking any midnight feasts so I did this deal with him. I said I'd teach him how to float in the air like me, in return for some food. As for Vesta, she's got a great sense of humor I must invite Cleopatra to come and stay with me here, she'd love it. Ah, I haven't seen her for a while, how I miss her!"

"You two are a right pair of lovebirds!" Generous teased. "Imagine if there was a sprite named Mark Antony to complicate things..."

Julius froze as that name was mentioned.

"Er...yes. That would be trouble."

Prestonia came back into the room.

"Who are you talking to, Gen?"

"Oh nobody. I was just thinking out loud!"

"Thinking about feeding Ferocious? He's hungry!"

Generous and Prestonia had adopted Ferocious the tiger quite recently. You may remember that he was the one who had eaten Nausea's horrid dog, Vicious. After such a noble deed Generous couldn't bear to let the tiger fight in the Colosseum, so Ferocious was now a much loved family pet. And he was better than a guard dog when it came to security! The tiger loved his idyllic life as a pet. Having Equus and Julius to talk to was even better, as he often got lonely.

Suddenly there was a knock at the door.

"Who's that?" Generous said as he staggered outside with a massive bowl of food for Ferocious.

"It's not the postman," said Prestonia, heading for the door. "We didn't get any important mail today, just the same old junk - scrolls advertising cheap chariots for sale. I did get a letter from a cousin in Ostia though."

"Has the news scroll come?"

“Yes. The Daily Forum is on the table. There’s not much news in that either.”

Prestonia opened the door and was met with one of the Emperor’s messengers.

“Salve!” he said. “Hail! I have a message for Praetorian guard Generous!”

“Right. I’d better go and fetch him!” Prestonia said.

Generous came to the door.

“Oh great Praetorian Generous, you have been summoned to the palace by Emperor Hadrian. He requests that all guards attend as he needs to discuss some important business.”

“I see,” said Generous. “Well I’ll be there as quick as I can, I’ll just get my horse ready.”

“Imperial material,” he said to Prestonia. “Sounds really important. I must leave at once. It’s been too quiet in Rome recently. I wonder what Hadrian is planning?”

“Something good, I hope!” Prestonia added.

“Me too. Now good luck with the opening of the new store. I’ll try and pop round to see it later if I get time.”

“Okay, I’ll see you later then,” Prestonia said, giving him a kiss. “I have a bit more paperwork and some finances to work at before I open it. Now where’s that abacus gone?”

Equus was glad to out of the paddock and on the open road again.

“Off to Rome!” Generous said, climbing up. “Oh it’s great to be doing something for a change! Life was getting too easy!”

Equus neighed in agreement.

“Not leaving without me, are you?” a voice piped up.

“Certainly not, Julius! Come on, I have an important meeting to attend!” With that, Julius leapt on top of the Equus’ head and the three of them headed down the one mile road that led to the bustling center of Rome.

Chapter 2

In the busy streets of Rome, the citizens went about their daily business. Chariots thundered down the roads, shoppers and shop traders haggled over the price of goods, dogs barked and people met up with friends to share the latest gossip.

Meanwhile...over at the Jobcentre, Senator Genius, former advisor to Delirious, was not having much success in finding work. He'd been sacked when Hadrian had returned to power.

"Why did he have to sack me?" Genius wailed as he stared at the large notice board advertising the current vacancies. "I know I was Delirious' right hand man, but I could be the same to Hadrian. He might actually show an interest in my incredible inventions!"

He looked at the board. The first vacancy was for a cleaner.

"Hmm. Cleaner wanted at the Circus Maximus. 50 denarii an hour for shoveling up horse manure...no, I don't think so! What else is there?"

The next job was for a gladiator.

"Gladiator required full time at the Colosseum. Must be fearless, strong, good with a sword and prepared to fight wild beasts and die with honor in the arena."

Genius sighed. "No, I don't think I'm cut out for that sort of thing. I know now why it's impossible to get insurance when you're a gladiator though. I think I need some advice on how I can put my creative skills to good use." Suddenly, he remembered that he was supposed to have attended an interview with a job advisor. Genius headed over to the information desk.

The man behind the desk was a skinny, miserable looking chap called Syntax. He was the chief scribe and spent all day filling out forms, writing letters and doing general admin work.

"Ah, Mr Inventus," he addressed Genius. "You were supposed to attend the interview with Miss Paradox half an hour ago," he said. "She dislikes people who aren't punctual...you'd better go and see her right now."

Genius pulled back the curtain and entered the interview room. Miss Paradox was sitting behind a desk and frowned as he sat down in the chair.

"Mr Inventus, I presume," she said.

"Oh yes. You can call me Genius. Sorry about being late. I forgot the time."

"Indeed. Well, for next time, may I suggest that that you buy a reliable sundial?"

"Yes I will."

“Right, let’s check your records. Now according to my scrolls, you’ve been out of work for exactly a year.”

“The Ides of March! I was sacked on the Ides of March! I tell you, bad things always happen to me then!”

Miss Paradox was not amused. “Mr Inventus, please calm down. Have you attended any job interviews in the past 12 months?”

“Oh no. But I’ve tried really hard, honest. You don’t know how demoralizing it is to be unemployed...”

Miss Paradox glowered at Genius. “Actually Mr Inventus I think I do. I have been working here for a long time. But before we do anything, can we please dispose of the word ‘unemployed’. That has a negative impact. We prefer to use the word ‘jobseeker’. It sounds so much better and projects an image of a person actively seeking employment...”

“But it doesn’t make me feel better,” Genius wailed, using his toga to blow his nose. “I can’t even afford to go and watch chariot racing anymore. Oh, if only I could have my old job back!”

“Well have you actually considered asking for your old job back?”

“No I haven’t.”

“Then I suggest you request an interview with Emperor Hadrian before we proceed any further. You never know, he may have changed his mind and will employ you as his advisor, just as Delirious did. What kind of work did you actually do for the Emperor?”

Genius perked up. “Oh...I created things! Most wonderful and practical inventions! I invented a swivel chair, a collapsible chariot, a lift, and roller sandals!”

“Rollersandals?” Miss Paradox said in disbelief.

“Yes! I tested a pair out in Deva last year. They’re just an ordinary pair of sandals, but they have little wheels attached to the soles! I thought they’d be ideal as a new mode of transport, especially for the busy commuter or inhabitant of Britannia. You see, the roads over there are a lot narrower than here because they have less space, and chariot congestion is a big problem.”

Miss Paradox looked decidedly unimpressed. “And you believe that you can make these inventions sell?”

“I do indeed! Inventing is my life!” And with that, Genius hurried out of the room.

Generous had arrived in Rome. “Gosh it’s busy today,” he said to Julius. “Is there a big fight on at the Colosseum?”

“Most likely,” Julius replied. “Hey, don’t stop, you’ll be late!”

“By Jupiter, I am late!” Generous shouted. “Come Equus, full speed, we must make haste!”

The horse thundered down the Via Principalis, throwing up a cloud of dust. With only a hundred yards to go before they reached the palace steps, a chariot suddenly drew up alongside Generous.

“Hey you, stop! Pull over this minute, by order of the Speed Centurion!”

“Huh? What?” Generous said. “Whoa, Equus!”

“I should think so!” said a small uniformed man wearing a big helmet with a bright yellow crest. “Do you know what speed you were going just then?”

“Erm, full gallop if I’m not mistaken,” Generous replied. “I’m late for a...”

“According to my calculations, you were doing forty miles per hour in a thirty mile zone! That’s against the law. I have no option but to fine you thirty sesterces.”

“What? That’s an outrage! When did this stupid law come into force?”

“Today,” the centurion answered. “And you are my first offender! Now if you don’t pay up right now, you shall be issued with a fine for 60 sesterces.”

Grumbling, Generous fumbled in his pocket. “There, satisfied? It’s a daylight robbery is that. And I’m a Praetorian guard!”

“I don’t care if you’re Jupiter. Everyone caught speeding in these zones will be fined. That’s the new law brought in by Senator Dubious.”

“And Hadrian allowed that law to be passed? I can’t believe it!”

“I’m just doing my job,” said the centurion. “The number of chariots that go hurtling down these roads...well it’s dreadful. No wonder our roads are full of potholes. And horse’s hooves do more damage!”

Nearby, Genius was eavesdropping. “This could be my chance to shine!” he smiled. “Now Rome needs roller sandals more than ever!”

Having parted with his money, Generous was in a bad mood. Julius Quasar tried to cheer him up.

“I wish I could reimburse you,” he said, “but alas, sprites do not have the power to make money appear out of thin air. It’s against the rules, you see.”

“Rules, rules!” Generous snapped. “Oh it’s not your fault, Julius. That stupid Senator Dubious! Dubious by name, Dubious by nature! I’ll see what Hadrian has to say about this!”

Senator Genius followed him, excitedly hoping that he would get his old job back.

Inside the palace, Ludicrous and Ridiculous were already waiting.

“Morning, Gen,” they said.

“It’s not a good morning! I’ve just been fined 30 sesterces for

speeding!”

“Oh dear,” Ludicrous said. “Dreadful shame, that is. I’m so glad I walked to work.”

“Me too,” Ridiculous chimed in. “Can’t rely on public transport. waited half an hour for one of those chariots to turn up, and then three came along at once. They’d put the fares up too.”

Genius came rushing in. “Oh, hello Ludicrous, Ridiculous, et al! My old friends! Er, is the Emperor in?”

“Blimey-us! It’s that boffin, Genius! What’s he doing back here?” Generous said.

“I am a jobseeker...” Genius panted. “I am actively seeking employment.”

“He wants his old job back,” Ludicrous said. “Not that he ever did much when he worked here...”

“I just never got the chance to show off my skills!” Genius shouted. “I’m hoping that great, mighty Hadrian will show more of an interest in my inventions!”

The three guards sniggered. “You can wish! Have you ever created anything that is of use?”

“As a matter of fact, yes. Heard about your little speeding incident, Generous! Maybe you should try out my new roller sandals!”

“Roller sandals?”

“Another of his daft ideas,” Ridiculous muttered. “They’ll never catch on.”

The doors opened and a messenger appeared.

“Praetorians and Senators! Hadrian will see you now!”

Chapter 3

Generous and the other Praetorians entered the room.

“My loyal guards and senators,” Hadrian said. “I have called you here to discuss a most ambitious plan...”

“More speed centurions?” somebody muttered.

Senator Dubious shot a mean glance at the guards. “My speed enforcement idea was a good one!” he shouted.

“Ahem, when you’ve quite finished,” Hadrian continued. “I have been planning this project for a long time now. Hadrian’s Wall - a vast 80 mile wall that shall reach from one side of the north of Britannia to the other, thus marking the furthest point of the Roman Empire. It will be a colossal feat, many hands shall we needed, whole legions shall build it!”

Everyone stood there in stunned silence. Hadrian continued to explain his project.

“Along the wall, separated by a distance of one mile, there shall be mile castles, manned by auxiliary soldiers.”

Generous broke the silence. “A most incredible plan if I may say, sir,” he said.

“Indeed it is, Generous. And I intend to actually go to Britannia myself and see my dream become reality. Besides, it will be good for the soldiers’ morale, seeing their Emperor there. Naturally, wherever I go, you Praetorians must follow...”

Generous didn’t like the sound of this at all. He disliked cold wet countries!

“Oh sir,” he wailed. “I’m still recovering from my last visit to Britannia! It was so...cold!”

“It isn’t cold and wet all the time,” said Hadrian. “Britannia has wonderful hot summers just like Rome has. I intend to stay there for a few months so you’ll all be staying at the fort of Vindolanda, with a short stay in Deva.”

“Well it will be nice to see Deva again,” Generous said. “I enjoyed those baths.”

“That’s where you saved my life in that fire,” Hadrian said. At that point, everybody in the room suddenly yelled, “Hail mighty Generous!”

“I wish they’d stop doing that,” Generous whispered to Julius. “It’s so embarrassing!”

Julius just laughed.

Emperor Hadrian stood up. “We leave for Britannia next week, so you’d better all get packing all your necessary supplies! Hmm, but there is one thing I really do need...an advisor to do general tasks and maybe come up with new ideas that will benefit the building of my wall.

Anybody know where such a person may be found?"

Senator Genius burst into the room, knocking the Praetorians sideways.

"That person is ME!" he yelled. "Oh sir, great Caesar! I come here to gravel at your feet..."

"You stupidus maximus, it's grovel, not gravel!" Ludicrous whispered.

"Oh yes. I come here to grovel at your feet! And to plead for my old job back!"

"Ah, Senator Genius isn't it? I remember you. Why did you leave?"

"Erm...well sir, you sacked me. I want you to know that I am no longer loyal to Delirious!"

"Did I? Gosh, I am most dreadfully sorry, of course you can have your old job back. Delirious is history. I have heard a lot about your inventions, Genius. There were a lot of spectacular failures, I believe."

"Oh just minor technical hitches, I assure you. I have modified many of the original designs. My latest magnum opus are roller sandals. I am very proud of them. I did test a prototype out last year during a visit to Deva.

"Yes I remember those wretched things," Senator Gluttonus piped up. "You came hurtling round a corner and crashed right into me! I couldn't eat for a whole DAY...my stomach was so bruised...I nearly starved to death."

"Well you eat too much anyway, Gluttonus!" Genius hit back. "No wonder there's never any food for us around here."

"You just don't appreciate the pleasures of eating! Food is one of life's delights and nobody enjoys it more than I!"

A splendidly noisy scene was building up nicely in the room.

"Quiet!" Emperor Hadrian yelled. "As I said, you may have your job back, Genius. I will inspect these so-called roller sandals of yours later. In the meantime, how about a little more decorum on the forum? Senators shouting at each other; I have no time for that!"

In a corner, Senator Dubious was watching everything carefully. He had big plans too. There were all sorts of laws he wanted to pass - but he would need the Emperor's approval. His speed enforcement idea was now reality, but Dubious wanted more. His main plan was something despicable - he wanted to get rid of Generous!

"He thinks he's so good," Dubious muttered. "He was nothing but a slave and he ends up as a high ranking Praetorian guard! I've been a senator for years and have applied to be a Praetorian many times but never got anywhere."

Dubious knew he would command more respect from Hadrian if he was a guard. Senators had a reputation for disloyalty and...well,

backstabbing, as Julius Caesar found out to his cost! But Praetorian guards swore an oath of honor and to protect the Emperor. They also got better pay.

Senator Dubious rubbed his hands together as he imagined all the great things he could do if he were a guard.

“All that stands in my way is...Generous. How can I get rid of him, without jeopardizing my own career? Well, murder is a definite no-no. I won't go that far. I just need to disgrace him so that he loses his job and I will be ready to take his place. Ha ha! Make the most of your status, Generous, because you won't have it for long!”

Generous' head was in a whirl as he left the palace and prepared to head back home.

“I've been waiting a long time for a new adventure and it seems like I've got it!”

“What is Hadrian's obsession with building walls?” Julius asked.

“I don't know. Everyone has different hobbies, don't they? Delirious' favorite hobby was panicking.”

“There's just one thing bothering me, Gen.”

“Oh yeah? What's that?”

“It's that Dubious fellow. I took one look at him and knew from the start that he spelt trouble. I should watch him if I were you, I seriously worry about what he might do.”

Generous laughed. “He introduced this stupid speed law. What could be worse? That chariot ban that Delirious came up with?”

“Not sure. I've just got bad vibes. I feel it in my laurels. And my laurels are never wrong!”

“Okay, I'll be careful, Julius. But I hardly need to worry when you're around, do I? Come on, let's go home.”

“Good idea! My stomach is talking and it says it's time for prandium* I really am starving!”

What dastardly scheme is Dubious planning? Will he really stick to his threat and ruin things for our hero Generous? Will Julius Quasar stop him? You'll only find out if you keep reading the story...

* *lunch*

Chapter 4

“So you’re off to Britannia again?” Prestonia said when she heard the news.

“Yes, but at least this time I won’t need to hide in the hold of the ship!” Generous replied.

Prestonia sighed. “I wish I could come with you, but being in charge of all these shops is a big responsibility.”

“I won’t be away that long,” Generous reassured her. “I’ll be back before you know it! Right, Ferocious?”

The tiger roared in agreement.

Julius Quasar was relaxing in the lararium.

“Ah, perfect abode, chilled wine, fresh grapes - everything’s just about perfect. If only Cleopatra was here...where is she?”

Suddenly, there was a rattle here, and a shudder there...then a puff of smoke, and the sprite in question suddenly appeared.

“You called, Julius?” Cleopatra said.

“Why Cleo, it’s you - what a surprise!”

So this is your new home?” she said, inspecting the lararium. “Very ornate, I must say...looks very much like a lararium!”

“Er, yes, well spotted. It is!” Julius gingerly admitted.

“Are you a lodger then?”

“Very funny, Cleo.”

“Since I’m here, I’ll help myself to some of these nice grapes. How’s life treating Generous, then?”

“Very well. As a matter of fact, he sets off for Britannia tomorrow. Emperor Hadrian has launched an ambitious wall building project in the north of the country. I am accompanying him, of course.”

“Sounds like fun, but do you think you will be able to tear yourself away from these home comforts? This lararium has a great ceiling.”

“Yes, the tiles are made from the finest ceramics, they’re...”

Before Julius could finish, there was an almighty CRASH and something fell through the ceiling in spectacular fashion.

As the dust settled, they moved closer to see who had decided to drop in.

Julius’ face fell as the figure stood up.

“You! Not you again! I always feared you’d return to cause trouble!”

“Really, I see you are as welcoming as ever to me, the greatest sprite of all, the one and only Mark Antony!”

“One too many...” Cleopatra muttered.

Mark Antony, dear reader, was Julius Quasar’s arch rival. They had

never seen eye to eye, ever since graduating from the Quasar Sprite Academy. And Mark Antony was the sort of person who believed he was superior to everyone else. He considered himself to be better looking, better at problem solving, better at advising mortals, better... well, you get the idea. He was rather good looking though, there was no denying that. Dressed in his Roman soldier uniform, he looked very smart indeed.

But oh dear, he was so egotistical! Imagine having to listen to someone who only ever talked about themselves! If you can imagine that, then you have a pretty good idea of what Mark Antony's personality was like.

"Cleopatra! What are you doing with this loser?" he declared, referring to Julius.

"I see your insults haven't improved with the passing of time."

Mark Antony stood with his hands on his hips, looking even more important.

"Wasn't that a grand entrance I made? Are you not entertained?"

"Entertained?" Julius wailed. "Look what you've done to my mortal's lararium! It's completely ruined! Not to mention how angry the Lares are going to be! And I'll probably get the blame!"

"Inforyou! Inforyou! They've all got it IN FOR YOU!" Mark Antony taunted him. "Some sprites should know when they are beaten!"

"After all this time, why have you decided to come back and cause more havoc?"

"You're still afraid of me, aren't you, Julius?" Mark Antony sneered with a self satisfied grin.

That did it, Julius really lost his temper.

"Afraid? You dare to suggest I'm afraid of an arrogant show-off like you? Grrr!" He flew at Antony, his fists clenched.

Cleopatra was not amused. "Stop this, both of you!" she shouted, but to no avail.

"I said stop this!" She fired two bursts of lightning from her fingers, giving them both a nasty jolt!

"I can only do that when I'm REALLY annoyed," she smirked.

"Agghh! Cleo, you've singed the plume on my helmet!" Mark Antony yelled. "What did you do that for? That wasn't nice!"

Julius found this highly amusing. "Oh dear, what a shame. Poor Ant, he'll never get over such a trauma."

"Now that I've got your undivided attention," Cleopatra said, "perhaps we could discuss more important things?"

"Like going out on a date with me?" Antony interrupted, giving her a dazzling smile.

"No. I mean your current employment. Don't you have some

unfortunate mortal to advise?”

Antony's face fell. “Aha, well you see, I am as you might say, between jobs at the moment!”

“You've been sacked, haven't you!” Julius laughed! “I can't say I'm surprised. You never were any good at helping people I bet your last mortal got sick of you talking about yourself all the time!”

“So what if I was sacked? I hear you quit altogether so you could have an easy life here with Lucius...”

“Generous,” Julius corrected him. “Yes I did, far better than the shame of being dismissed! You see, I actually worked hard at my job.”

“Probably best, Ju. You were getting a bit past it.”

Julius had the awful feeling that Mark Antony was going to be around for a long time. And like it or not, he had no choice but to put up with him.

“Look Ant, since you intend to stay around here, we have no choice but to try and get along, so at least stop all these arguments, what do you say? Truce?”

“Hmmm,” Antony thought. “Call a truce with a lesser sprite than myself? Oh well, just this once. Okay, Julius,” he said, giving an innocent smile, “let's shake hands!”

Julius did and was rewarded with an electric shock!

“You see, my dear Cleopatra, I can also used electricity to my advantage!”

Julius examined his frazzled laurel wreath. “Right,” he thought to himself. “he's not going to get away with that, I'll make sure of it. By Jupiter, I'll get my revenge!”

Chapter 5

As dawn broke over Rome on the first of April, Generous prepared to embark on his long journey to Britannia.

“Are you sure you’ve packed everything?” Prestonia asked.

“I think so, but I always end up forgetting something. I’d better check again.”

“How many times have you checked?”

“Erm...four times I think, uh, I don’t know!”

Prestonia was dismayed when she saw what had happened to the lararium.

“Have you any idea what happened to it? Something must have fallen from the shelf and onto the roof, but there’s no evidence of that.”

“Julius!” Generous muttered under his breath. “Umm, no I haven’t a clue what happened to it. It’s most unfortunate. I do hope the Lares won’t be too upset”

“I’ll get some nails and stuff and fix it while you’re away,” Prestonia said. “Actually, I may build a whole new lararium myself, in the style of this villa. What do you think?”

“Great idea,” said Generous. “Pity you can’t make it sprite proof!” he thought!

Julius Quasar had not enjoyed a good night. Having been forced to sleep on the floor since Mark Antony had taken his bed. He was not in a good mood. Antony had promised to keep to the truce, but only if Julius let him have the bed.

“But that’s my four poster bed!” Julius had protested. “You can’t just barge in here and use it as your own!”

“Correction,” Antony had replied, “this is ABFOBY - A Bed Formerly Owned By You!”

It was useless arguing with Antony - once his mind was made up, trying to get him to change it was like talking to a brick wall. He just switched off completely.

Poor Julius. Antony was starting to wreck his cozy little existence. He’d eaten all the grapes too, and where had Cleopatra disappeared to?

“Maybe Ant’s snoring got too much for her and she left,” he thought.

Julius stood up and rubbed his stiff neck. He had pins and needles in his arms and cramp in his feet.

Mark Antony had finally decided to get up.

“Ah, Hail, Julius!” he sniggered. “I slept like a log last night. That bed is so comfy. I need a full eight hours of sleep to maintain my good looks, which as I’m sure you are aware are legendary.”

“Oh don’t talk such rubbish,” Julius snapped. “I’m not in the mood

for your bragging today. Some start to the day I'm having! Generous is off to Britannia and I'm not even prepared! You've eaten all the grapes, you greedy oaf!"

"Sorry old chap, got a bit peckish during the night. Oh, and by the way, some bloke named Penates wants a word with you."

"What?"

"Hopping mad, he is. I think you're really in for some stick!"

For once, Mark Antony was telling the truth. The Lares were very angry with Julius for the damage caused to their home.

"Now listen here, Mr Quasar, we've just about had enough of this!" Janus shouted. "First your annoying friend Mark Antony decided to visit. Can't you at least teach him to enter through the door and not the roof?"

"He's not my friend!" Julius yelled angrily.

"Don't believe him!" Janus' second head yelled.

"I don't believe him. Anyway Julius, you're pushing your luck. We said you could live in our lararium because you seemed like a decent chap and you promised to teach us how to fly."

"I will, I will, I've just been busy..." Julius protested.

"Oh and that's another thing, your girlfriend Cleopatra used up all the milk...again!"

"Well I do apologize, but she always bathes in asses' milk. I can't persuade her not to! She's very strong minded!"

"You could at least provide some more milk!" Penates interrupted. "I'm supposed to be the guardian of the cupboard. My cupboard is nearly bare! Have you any idea how bad that looks for a god?"

"Yes, yes, I'm sorry, I'll make it up to you. As a matter of fact, Cleo has disappeared."

"Hmm, I can't say I blame her, putting up with you and your friend."

"Mark Antony is NOT my friend!" Julius shouted at the top of his voice. "How many times do I have to tell you two stupid heads?"

That did it. Never insult gods, especially the household gods.

Janus and Penates blazed with anger.

"Did you hear what he called us?" Janus' two heads said.

"Julius Quasar, you are NOT welcome in our lararium any longer!" Penates said.

"Oh please, I'm so sorry, I didn't mean to say that...I'm stressed out!"

"Apology not accepted. Out!"

Julius floated off miserably. Mark Antony had been watching everything with much interest.

"Dear dear me," he said, rushing over. "Great Lares, I am humbled in your presence. Please accept my sincerest apologies for the

behavior of that ghastly sprite. I will ensure he will never do it again!”

Janus and Penates thought for a moment. “Hmm, this Mark Antony fellow doesn’t seem that bad. Let’s get a second opinion.”

Vesta appeared. “In my opinion he’s better looking than Julius Quasar. He should be allowed to stay!”

Mark Antony gave his trademark dazzling smile. “You are wise gods indeed!” he smirked. “Fear not, I shall repair your roof straight away!”

“Very kind of you, I must say,” said Janus, shaking his hand. “Keeping this place in order isn’t easy!”

“It will be nice to have a handyman around the house,” Vesta smiled.

Mark Antony smiled again. “I’ve got my own fan club already. Mind you, that’s hardly surprising. I just have a way with people.”

But Antony had no intention of staying behind to do housework for the Lares. He wanted to go to Britannia with Generous and have an exciting adventure. But he couldn’t - because Julius was going.

“Britannia isn’t big enough for two sprites,” he chuckled, rubbing his hands together. “Therefore, one sprite must be disposed of! Julius could do with a rest anyway. He didn’t get much sleep last night, I wonder why that was? Oh I must excuse myself for giving such a cruel cackle.” He headed off in search of Julius.

“Julie! Where are you?” he teased.

Julius was in the kitchen inspecting the empty food cupboard.

“It’s not my fault that there’s no milk left!” he moaned. “What am I, an errand boy? Why don’t those lazy gods get their own stuff? Can’t they do anything for themselves?”

Mark Antony crept up behind him. “It’s for your own good!” he said, shoving Julius into the cupboard.

“Hey! What are you playing at?” Julius shouted.

“Nothing Ju. Nothing at all!” He clicked his fingers and Julius fell into a deep sleep.

“Dulcis somnium!” Antony laughed, or as we say, sweet dreams! If there was one thing Antony was good at (apart from talking about himself) it was making people fall asleep just by clicking his fingers.

“He’ll sleep all day. Not that it matters. He won’t be able to get out of here when he does, I’ll make sure of that. And I shall take over as Generous’ little helper. I have a job at last, and although obtained by unreasonable means, it is still a job!” With that, Antony slammed the cupboard door shut and locked it! What a despicable sprite he was!

“Whoops, I’d better hide this key or Prestonia will find it!” He hurried outside and chucked it down the well.

“Ha! That’s the end of that!” Antony sniggered. “Result!”

In the garden, Ferocious noticed the sprite throwing the key away.

"Who's he?" the tiger thought. "And where's Julius?"

Generous was all ready to leave for Ostia with the other Praetorians. Just one thing was missing - Julius!"

"Where is he?" he said, looking frantically round the house for his missing friend. "Fine time to disappear! Doesn't he know what day it is?"

"Excuse me, Generous!" a voice replied.

Generous spun round as Mark Antony called out his name.

"Great Jupiter - another sprite! Who are you?"

"Mark Antony at your service, sir," the sprite replied.

"Ha! I don't believe it, there is a sprite named Mark Antony! Makes perfect sense, since there is a Cleopatra. Where's Julius gone?"

"Well that's what I came to tell you, my good mortal. Your sprite Julius has been called away by the... er, Grand Council of Quasar Sprites. He's in big trouble you see and I have been sent to replace him for you."

"Trouble? What kind of trouble?" Generous asked. "I can't imagine Julius being in trouble for anything."

"I'm afraid I can't go into details, it's classified. But the list of things he's done wrong is a mile long, I'm sorry to say. Never mind, I'm here now, so You'd better get a move on. You are still going to Britannia, I trust?"

"Yikes, look at the time!" Generous shouted, looking in horror at the sundial. "It's nearly midday!"

Generous said his farewells to Prestonia and Ferocious before setting off for the port of Ostia. Mark Antony made himself comfortable, sitting on Equus' head just like Julius did.

"Giddy up horsey!" he teased him. "Chop, chop!"

"Julius never speaks to me like that!" Equus muttered.

"Well, my four legged mode of transport, you'd better get used to it because you're dealing with the great Mark Antony now and not Julius Quasar!"

"You took your time," Ludicrous and Ridiculous said when Generous arrived at the palace.

"I'm here now. Where's Hadrian?"

"Just sorting a few things out," Ridiculous said. "His chariot is waiting. I polished it for him. See how it shines!"

"No you didn't, I polished it and you fetched the water," Ludicrous said.

"Didn't!"

"Did!"

“Didn’t!”

“What’s going on here?” Emperor Hadrian said, walking towards them.

“Uh, nothing sir! We’re here, ready and waiting!”

“Excellent. If you’d like to follow me, I’ll give you all a scroll outlining the project that is to be undertaken.”

“It’s dead exciting this, isn’t it?” Ludicrous said.

“Yeah. I hope they serve good food in Britannia too!” Ridiculous replied.

“Did someone mention food?” It was Senator Gluttonus.

“Oh no. Don’t tell me he’s going!” moaned Generous. “He’ll eat all our supplies and we’ll starve before we even reach Britannia!”

“Yoo-hoo! Wait for me!” Senator Genius interrupted, whizzing past on his roller sandals.

“What? You’re coming as well?”

“Yes! I am the Emperor’s advisor. And he promised to try out my new roller sandals! You Praetorians ought to try them out, they’re terrific. However, I have yet to perfect them so that you can wear them while going up and down stairs.”

As Hadrian issued everyone with scrolls, they were interrupted by the sound of someone shouting.

“Attention please, will the owner of a gold plated chariot please report to the front of the palace steps immediately!”

“That’s my chariot!” Hadrian said, rushing outside. “Oh, I hope nobody’s banged into it and dented it!”

The speed centurion was standing next to it.

“Ah, mighty Emperor. I am here to inform you that your chariot is illegally parked and you will be fined thirty sesterces.”

“But I am the Emperor and I can park my chariot wherever I like!” Hadrian replied.

“I’m sorry sir, but the rules on this scroll apply to everyone, including you. You did authorize this new law created by Senator Dubious, did you not?”

Hadrian sighed. “Yes I did. I guess it is parked the wrong way. Okay, I’ll pay up!”

“Thank you, sir. Have a safe journey!”

Generous fumed as he saw Senator Dubious smirking nearby.

“I bet you anything he pockets all that money for himself!” he said to Mark Antony, who wasn’t really interested.

“Are we in Britannia yet?” he yawned. “This is boring!”

So, our hero Generous heads off to Ostia where he will board the ship to Britannia. He is blissfully unaware of the cunning trick Mark

Antony has pulled and poor Julius is locked up in the cupboard, asleep and unable to warn him of Senator Dubious, who like Antony is also hatching a plan - to get rid of Generous!

Chapter 6

After much confusion over the horses pulling Hadrian's chariot, they finally set off for the port of Ostia. Ludicrous was complaining again.

"I don't see why those senators have to come along," Ludicrous muttered. "I bet they just want a free holiday to Britannia. They've no intention of building this wall."

"Neither have I," Ridiculous replied. "Isn't that slave's work? Hey, I hope this ship has all the modern facilities."

"Like what?"

"Well, comfy cabins, plenty of wine and a spacious deck to stroll around would be lovely..."

"Huh," Generous interrupted. "If this sea voyage is anything like the last one I endured, you won't have time to stroll around on the deck because you'll be too busy trying to stop yourself from being swept overboard!"

"And being sick!" said Ludicrous.

"Who's been sick?" Senator Gluttonus piped up. "If they're sick then they won't be wanting their lunch. I hate to see good food going to waste, you know. Any grapes going spare? I'm feeling a bit peckish. Travel always makes me peckish. I haven't eaten a thing since we left Rome."

"But Gluttonus, we left Rome only twenty minutes ago!"

"My point exactly. It's time we stopped for lunch!"

Everyone knew then that the journey to the port was going to take longer than expected thanks to the numerous comfort stops that Gluttonus would demand.

"We'll all have aged by ten years by the time we get to Ostia," Generous moaned. "I can't believe Hadrian invited Genius, Gluttonus and Dubious to come along."

"That's because someone has to do all the admin work," said Dubious, riding up beside him. "Believe it or not, there are some things perfect Praetorian guards like you aren't good at!"

"I never said I was perfect!" Generous replied, rather insulted.

"You were thinking it!"

"Pay no attention to him," Mark Antony said. "A man who thinks he can ride a horse properly while wearing a toga is fooling himself. In my opinion he's getting too big for his toga. Besides, he isn't lucky enough to have me advising him, is he?"

"Er no, I suppose that's true. Listen, Antony, can't we talk about something else for a change. I mean hearing about your life's achievements was interesting but..."

"What could be more interesting than me?" Antony wondered,

adjusting his helmet.

“The Hadrian’s Wall project, anything! Just change the subject!”

Mark Antony thought for a moment. “Hmm, if I was Hadrian, I wouldn’t build a boring old wall. I’d build myself a fantastic palace with acres of gardens, swimming pools a mile long, fountains, marble statues and dozens of slaves at my beck and call.”

“That’s what Emperor Nero did, and that didn’t make him popular with the citizens of Rome. The Colosseum was built on the site where the palace used to stand.”

“Ah I see. He got fed up with the palace and decided he wanted a giant amphitheater instead. How I admire that man!”

“No, Antony!” Generous corrected him. “Nero was long dead by the time the Colosseum started being built. It was Emperor Vespasian who ordered it to be built.”

“All these Emperors...this is all very boring!” Antony yawned.

“But don’t you know about history? I thought Quasar Sprites knew everything! Julius has even glimpsed the future. He told me about something called a television.”

Mark Antony laughed. “Julius talks a lot of rubbish, he doesn’t know half the things he claims. I can tell you everything a mortal could possibly want to know about television!”

“Then tell me! What is it?”

Antony cleared his throat. “I can see it will be difficult for a mortal like you to understand, so listen carefully my slow-witted friend and I’ll tell you nice and simply. The Television, or Canis Nastius, is a fierce breed of dog as big as a house that shall take over the world in the distant future.”

Generous was amazed. “Wha...really? Will it eat people like me?”

“Most likely.”

“Gosh. Well I’m glad I don’t live in the future then! What about the Internet and telephones? Julius mentioned them too.”

“Oh well that’s easy,” said Antony. “The Internet is simply a giant net that will catch fish all by itself. As for the telephone, well that’s definitely a musical instrument that can play by itself.”

Generous found all this hard to believe, but after all it was Mark Antony who was telling him and he was always right, wasn’t he?”

He decided not to ask any more questions for the time being. Hearing about giant man-eating dogs was enough for one day.

“Who were you talking to, Gen?” Ludicrous asked.

“Um, my horse, Equus. I always talk to my horse.”

“Err...oh I see. Does he understand what you say to him?”

“Of course! Horses are very intelligent animals!”

It took three and a half days to reach Ostia and everyone was

relieved to see the billowing sails of the ships and the sparkling sea appear in the distance. Everyone except Equus and Generous!

“Welcome onboard the great ship, *Juno*!” the captain announced when everyone had boarded.

“Looks like it’s going to be a great cruise!” Ridiculous said, admiring the ship. “Some of the best slaves are rowing it, so we’ll almost fly across these waves.”

The week long voyage to Britannia was a pleasant one, mainly because Senator Gluttonus was terribly seasick for the whole journey and that meant that there was plenty of food for the others to enjoy!

On arrival in the port of Dubris, Gluttonus leapt off the ship with the elegance of a rhino that’s just been stung on the backside.

“I’m alive!” he shouted. “I’m back on terra firma! It’s great to have my appetite back!”

Everyone else groaned.

“We’ve arrived, Antony!” Generous said to the sprite. “What do you think so far?”

“Hmm, I’m disappointed, Generous! You gave me a false description of this country! Where’s the rainy weather you were moaning about?”

Yes reader, believe it or not, it was actually warm and sunny in Britannia this time.

“Must be a quirk of nature,” Generous replied. “I hope it stays this way. This is ideal weather for building a wall. The cement will set quickly in the heat.”

Senator Dubious was eager to ride alongside Hadrian’s chariot before Generous caught up to him. Urging his horse on, he decided to gallop ahead and be the first through the port gates. Unfortunately, he failed to notice the sign warning him of a low arch and...bang! Dubious’ forehead hit it, he fell backwards off his horse and into a muddy puddle.

“Dear me, didn’t you see that low arch?” Ludicrous said, riding up. “It says that riders have to dismount before going through it.”

“Did you hurt yourself?” asked Ridiculous. “You’re covered in mud!”

“Shut up and give me a hand, you pair of twerps!” Dubious shouted, red with anger.

“You know what they say,” Generous whispered to Mark Antony. “Pride comes before a fall.”

Mark Antony didn’t understand this. He was always proud and he had never fallen!

Julius Quasar awoke from deep slumber and half opened his eyes. He could see nothing but darkness all around him. Rubbing his eyes

and looking around, he wondered where on earth he was. He couldn't remember anything.

"I feel like I've been asleep for a hundred years," he groaned, trying to stop yawning. "Am I outside at night?" he wondered. "Or maybe I'm at the bottom of a deep hole." Julius stood up and walked a few steps forward and promptly bumped his nose on the inside of the cupboard door.

"Ouch! Okay, so I guess I'm in some sort of cupboard...wait a minute! Now I remember! That rotten Mark Antony! Why, he's locked me in here! Grr, just wait until I get my hands on that sprite! I'll wipe that smug grin off his face!"

Julius tried with all his might to open the cupboard door but Antony's sleep inducing trick had robbed him of all his strength and none of his powers seemed to be working. He clicked his fingers, but only a feeble spark of electricity crackled from them.

"If only there was some food in here," Julius sighed. "Then I'd be able to get out of here!" But of course, the cupboard was bare, just as Penates had said.

"I'm having a bad day!" Julius wailed.

But Julius' plight hadn't gone unnoticed, for Ferocious the tiger, who'd been asleep in the garden, sensed that something was wrong and came lumbering into the villa through an extremely large cat flap that Prestonia had built.

"Who's in there?" the big cat said in his deep voice. "Friend or foe?"

"Friend!" came the reply. "It's me, Julius Quasar! Is that you, Ferocious?"

"Julius? What are you doing in there? Weren't you supposed to be accompanying my master to Britannia?"

"Why? Has he gone already?"

"Gone?" said the tiger in amazement. "He went ten days ago! You're very late to say the least! He'll be there by now!"

Julius threw his laurel wreath on the floor and jumped on it. "GRRRR! I'm going to repeat this sentence three times, so repeat after me, Ferocious!"

"Huh? Are you playing a game?" said Ferocious.

"I HATE MARK ANTONY! I HATE MARK ANTONY! I HATE..."

"I get the idea, Julius," the tiger interrupted. "What in the name of Rome has he done to make you hate him so much?"

"It would take all day to tell you! Where to begin? He's only just about messed up my life in less than a week. Are you sitting comfortably?"

"Yes," Ferocious said.

"Then I'll begin. It all started a long time ago. I remember it as if it

were yesterday. Mark Antony has been causing trouble for me ever since I was at school.”

“Why is that?” Ferocious asked.

“Because...he always has to be better than anybody else. He simply can't bear it if someone else might be cleverer than him. Anything I can do, he can do better. He's so big headed, thinks he's perfect. So perfect in fact that he got sacked. Ha!”

“Ah, so that's why he locked you in that cupboard and threw the key down the well. I saw him do it,” said Ferocious.

Suddenly it all dawned on Julius. “Of all the rotten, sneaky tricks! He's gone to Britannia with Generous, hasn't he? Taken my place and he's probably filling Generous' head with all kinds of rubbish and lies about me! Ooh, now I'm mad...I am so mad. I may have to break something!” Julius fumed.

“Don't even think about it!” Cleopatra interrupted. “Honestly. I came back here hoping for a bit of peace and quiet only to discover that you're shouting again.”

“But I have good reason for doing so! Do you know what Antony has done? He locked me in this cupboard and now he's gone off to Britannia with Generous! What am I to do?”

“That's just like Antony to do something like that,” said Cleopatra. “I have to admit, he's gone too far this time. He's nothing but trouble!”

“I'm glad you agree!” Julius said.

“But...”

“But what?”

“He is good looking!”

“Grrrr!”

Ferocious yawned. “If you two are going to argue I think I'll just pop outside for a nap, if you don't mind. Have a nice day.”

“Calm down, Julius!” Cleopatra shouted. “What you have to do is to go to Britannia and settle the score. It's up to you and Antony to sort this silly feud out once and for all.”

“How on earth can I get to Britannia on my own? It would take me forever! I can't just click my fingers and teleport there!”

“No,” smiled Cleopatra. “But I can!” She clicked her fingers and Julius disappeared, faster than you could say “Strength and Honor!”

“Peace, perfect peace!” Cleopatra said to herself.

Chapter 7

“Ah, this place brings back so many memories,” Hadrian announced when the familiar sight of Deva came into view once more.

“Don’t you remember, Generous? This is where you saved my life!”

“Yes sir. I do remember. I remember as if it were yesterday.”

“And we’ll never be allowed to forget either,” Dubious muttered to himself. “That Generous makes me sick! But he won’t be Hadrian’s number one guard for much longer....I’ll see to that!”

“Did you really save Hadrian’s life?” Mark Antony asked.

“Um, yes. It was nothing really.”

“Don’t be so modest!” the sprite replied “Do as I do and you will not go far wrong in life. Be proud of yourself! Did I ever tell you about the time when...”

“Not now, Antony! I’m exhausted after all this traveling and so is Equus. We just want some peace and quiet for a bit!”

Equus neighed in agreement. He really wanted the sprite to shut up!

“Really! What a bore you are!” Antony replied. “Well, if you’re going to be boring, I’m going off to explore this place.”

“On your own?” Generous said.

“Naturally! I can take care of myself, unlike Julius Quasar!”

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

“Nothing, nothing at all, just a mere slip of the tongue. Anyway, I’ll be off, see you later! I’m ready for Deva, but is Deva ready for me?”

Generous sighed. “I don’t know, I just can’t take to him at all. He’s so different from Julius and has such a big opinion of himself! Besides, he’s been absolutely no help whatsoever. Oh I wish Julius was here. Why was he called away like that?”

Equus gave a sad whinny. He missed him too.

Suddenly there was a flash of light and Julius appeared out of nowhere and crash landed on top of Equus’ head!

“Remind me never to let Cleo do that to me again!” he panted, gasping for breath. “Being transported thousands of miles in a few seconds is very draining!”

Generous was astounded. “Great Jupiter! Julius! You’re...what’s going on? Where have you been?”

“Where have I been? I was treacherously sabotaged! Locked in a cupboard by that rotten Mark Antony, that’s what! That good for nothing sprite took my place! If it hadn’t have been for Ferocious and Cleopatra, I’d still be locked in that cupboard! He even threw the key down the well!”

“I knew there was something funny about him. I knew it couldn’t be true when he said you were in trouble with your superiors.”

“Trouble?” Julius snapped. “Ooh, there will be trouble when I find him!”

“Just tell me one thing,” Generous said. “Mark Antony said that televisions are giant man-eating dogs that will take over the world in the future. Please tell me he was wrong about that!”

“Of course it’s wrong!” Julius replied. “I’ve never heard anything so stupid in all my life. Just like Antony to brainwash you with rubbish like that. I tell you, you can’t trust a word he says, because he doesn’t know anything! I’ll tell you what a television is. It’s a device for entertaining people.”

Oh, that’s okay then!” Generous said, much relieved.

“Antony was a tiny bit right though when he said that it will take over the world. Almost every household will have one.”

“What do they look like?”

“Well in my dream, they were rectangular boxes that plugged into the wall and then you pressed a button and sound and pictures appeared on a sort of... screen thing.”

“Amazing! But where do these sounds and pictures come from, and why are they plugged into the wall?”

Julius yawned. “Oh Gen, they should rename you Curious! Future inventions are hard to explain.”

“Please tell me! This is so interesting!”

“Very well then. But no more questions after this! Do you realize that I’ve not eaten for...over a week because Antony made me fall into a deep sleep?”

“Oops, I’m sorry Julius, I never thought. I have a couple of bread rolls in my rucksack if they’re any use,” Generous said, rummaging in the sack. He took one and broke a piece off and offered it to the sprite.

“Much obliged,” Julius smiled as he quickly took a bite. “Mmm, food at last. Tastes better than anything when you’re hungry. Hopefully my poor laurel wreath will perk up again. Look how it’s wilted! All this stress I’ve been under!”

“Yes, they do look a bit worse for wear, Ju. They’re all crumpled up!”

“Ah, my fault. I shouldn’t have stamped on them three times.”

“By Mercury! What made you do that? Oh, hang on, I know who!”

After Julius had eaten, he told Generous all about the wonderful inventions known as the television, telephone and Internet.

“I feel a much wiser mortal now!” Generous said. “What Antony said really was a load of nonsense!”

Senator Dubious was watching Generous and was bemused by

what he saw.

“He’s utterly mad! He’s crazier than the former Emperor, Delirious! He doesn’t just talk to his horse, he lectures to him!” Then Dubious thought to himself. “Maybe he believes that his horse really can talk! I think I’ll interview him!”

He rode up alongside Generous and pretended to be all friendly.

“Salve, Generous! And how is mighty Julius today?”

Generous froze. “He knows about you?” he thought, staring at Julius.

“Your horse,” Dubious continued. “Everyone’s saying that he can talk! I saw you talking to him just now.”

“Er...I’m sure you must have been mistaken, Dubious! I was merely thinking out loud!” He glanced at Julius; the look in his eyes was yelling “Help me!”

“No, no, I know what I saw,” Dubious said. “You could make a lot of money from a talking horse. Have you ever considered exhibiting him at the Colosseum?”

“Of course I haven’t, he doesn’t talk! I’ve told you once!”

Senator Dubious patted the neck of his horse, Brutus, a large black stallion with a glossy coat and flowing mane.

“Now this is what I call a proper horse,” Dubious remarked. “Brutus is in top physical condition. I groom him every day and you can tell. Look at his splendid coat. He could beat any of those scrawny nags they use for chariot races. I very much doubt that Julius could do that. I hear that you found him abandoned down a grimy side street in Rome.”

Generous reacted angrily. “Firstly, my horse is called Equus, not Julius. Secondly, he was abandoned because his cruel owner had had enough of him. He was a senator, by the way.”

Equus grunted angrily and scraped his hooves on the floor.

Julius decided that his friends were in a desperate situation. “Alright then,” he said to himself. “Let’s see if Brutus responds to my commands.” He floated into the air.

“Do you hear me, Brutus?” he shouted. “If you can hear me, rear up and stamp your feet! Do everything I say, if you please, and you shall be rewarded with great fortune!”

Brutus stared at the tiny man who was floating in front of him and promptly obeyed, rearing up wildly on his hind legs. Senator Dubious grabbed hold of the reigns tightly. He was not going to be thrown off a second time!

“Whoa, Brutus! Calm down! What’s got into you? Hey, stop! Behave yourself! You’re not behaving in the way a senator’s horse should!”

Brutus would not behave. The more his rider tried to control him, the more he reared up, twisting and turning like a mad beast and round in circles. Poor Dubious was being flung around like a rag doll on a roller coaster!

“Goodness gracious me, I thought you said Brutus was a proper horse!” Generous laughed, looking at Julius. “He seems a little...out of control to me!”

Julius was doing his best to give Dubious the ride of his life, ordering Brutus to gallop wildly one minute, then leap in the air and then round in circles again.

“Hey, this is fun!” Brutus said to Julius. “I should behave like this more often! I hope my master is having as much fun as I am!”

HELP ME!!!” Senator Dubious screamed, his toga billowing as he clung on for dear life. The commotion was so great that the other Praetorian guards came rushing over to see what was going on, followed by Genius, Gluttonus and just about everyone else who lived in Deva. They’d never seen anything like it!

“Come and look at this!” the guards shouted. “Looks like Dubious’ horse has gone mad...really mad!”

Generous was enjoying the spectacle. “Thanks a lot, Julius! I don’t think I’ve ever laughed as much in my whole life!”

“No problem! But he will be very angry when he falls off that horse...”

“You mean *if* he falls off...”Generous replied.

“If...hmm. It won’t be long now!”

Brutus stopped rearing up and broke into a gallop, hapless Dubious still clinging on for dear life and his sandals scraping the ground.. His toga had been reduced to rags. The horse thundered past the guards and down the road, leaving a trail of dust in his wake. The astonished citizens of Deva dived for cover just in time!

“I don’t know what they’re feeding these horses,” Ludicrous said. “I’ve never known a horse leap about like that.”

“No, neither have I,” Ridiculous answered him. “It was fun to watch though, wasn’t it? They ought to have games like that in the Colosseum. They could call it a rodeo.”

“A rodeo? Why a rodeo? Is that some word you just thought of?”

“Yeah, I thought it sounded really good,” Ridiculous said, quite proud of himself.

“Nah, it would never take off. The gladiators are much more entertaining,” Ludicrous said, heaving back into the fort.

Ridiculous looked disappointed. “Well, I thought it was a really good idea. I’m never allowed to develop my creative potential!” he moaned.

“That’s because you haven’t any!”

Brutus came to the end of the road and stopped for a moment. Looking round, he wondered where to go next.

"Nice horse..." Dubious mumbled in a feeble voice. "Now just stay still for one minute while I get down....AGGGH!" Brutus shot off again, right into the public baths!

"Excuse me sir, you can't bring animals in here!" the man at the door shouted.

Brutus didn't stop until he reached the frigidarium, the coldest bathing area in the baths. Like a catapult, he hurled Dubious off his back and sent him somersaulting into the air and he nose-dived into the cold plunge pool with an almighty splash! Pleased with this, Brutus calmly turned round and trotted back to the fort. The other bathers broke into a round of applause.

"Tremendous, sir! X out of X for that!"

"Hey Julius, fancy going to the Deva amphitheater to watch Cartwheel of Fortune?" Generous asked after they had stopped laughing at Senator Dubious' horse.

"Hmm, what's that?"

"It's a game show that's really popular over here. The host has three contestants and they take it in turns to spin a big cartwheel, which has different amounts of money written on it. The aim is to then work out a word or phrase that's on a big board as soon as possible. To do that you have to buy a letter."

"Oh, I see," said Julius. "And if you say a letter L for example, the person puts it on the board and you get a prize?"

"Yes. Of course, you might pick a letter that's not in the phrase, so you miss a turn."

"Sounds like fun, let's go and watch."

The amphitheater was always packed when Cartwheel of Fortune was on. Generous got a really good seat at the front.

The music began to play and the host of the show, Marcius Ferox, came into the arena.

"Welcome all, to another Cartwheel of Fortune!" he shouted. "My contestants today are Drusilla from the lovely port of Dubris, Gaius Cornelius from Aquae Sulis, and Verus from right here in Deva! Our top prize this week is a luxury week's holiday in Gaul, sailing from Dubris in a five star galley and staying in a superb villa with swimming pool and full working hypocaust."

"That sounds good!" Generous whispered to Julius, who was busy eating fruit.

"Our second prize is 500 sesterces, a nice amount of cash I must say! Our third prize is a voucher for Deva's brilliant shops, giving you the chance to buy that toga or stola you've always wanted! Oh, and

our runner up prize once again is a bunch of grapes."

After a round of applause the show began. Drusilla was soon storming ahead and solved the first phrase in no time at all.

"When in Rome, do as the Romans do!" she said.

"Congratulations, Drusilla! You're now 250 points ahead of the others. Time for another spin of the wheel!"

"I reckon she'll win!" Julius said.

And she did! Julius was right again! Everyone cheered as Marcius Ferox presented her with the top prize.

"What a great show!" Generous said when it had finished. "I wish they'd hold it in the Colisseum! Oh well, we'd better get back to the fort, we've wasted enough time as it is!"

Chapter 8

While things seemed to be going well for Generous in Britannia, back in Rome Prestonia was attempting to repair the lararium's roof.

"I still don't understand how this came to be damaged," she said. "Never mind, it's better than it was. Time I was off to work, so I'll leave you guarding the villa, Ferocious."

The tiger sat smartly to attention. Nobody would dare to get past him!

"I wonder how Generous is getting on?" Prestonia thought as she headed into the center of Rome. However, when she arrived at her shop all thoughts of Generous disappeared from her mind as she was confronted with her worst nightmare. Someone was opening an identical shop selling fruit and clothing right next door to hers! And to make matters worse, the person opening the shop was none other than Insomnia Paradox, identical twin sister of Verruca, who worked in the Jobcentre.

Prestonia and Insomnia were arch rivals when it came to business. Both of them were very ambitious, but Insomnia rarely played fair and was determined that her shops were to be better than Prestonia's.

"What's going on here?" Prestonia demanded.

"I'm opening my new shop, 'The Finest in Rome!'" Insomnia announced. "Say hello to closure, Prestonia, and goodbye to your cushy lifestyle! My shop is ten times better than your feeble little chain of shops!"

"Feeble? How dare you! I have shops in Gaul and Ostia!" Prestonia shouted.

"There's going to be some competition round here from now on," Insomnia replied. "May the best shop win, and by the way, that will be mine."

Prestonia was aghast. "Everything was going so well! Those dreaded Paradox sisters! Every time they set up shop there's trouble! I remember being interviewed by Verruca at the Jobcentre a long time ago. It was awful. I'd never felt so humiliated in my entire life! Oh dear! I hope Generous is having an easier time of it." Then Prestonia folded her arms and thought carefully. "Right, well if Miss Smarty Pants Insomnia thinks she can outdo me, she'll have a hard time! We'll see who has the best shop! It's up to the customers to decide! The customer is always right!"

Meanwhile...back in Britannia, Julius Quasar had gone in search of the bane of his life, Mark Antony. He was not looking forward to confronting him.

“I’ll issue him with an ultimatum,” he said. “I’ll challenge him to a fight - a showdown to settle the score once and for all. I’ll show him! I wonder where he’s disappeared to? Typical Antony, he’s probably got lost, ha! Well, he can’t hide forever, I’ll find him!”

Mark Antony had been enjoying the sights of Deva, taking his own tour, despite having promised to help Generous.

“Ah, this is the life,” he smiled, stuffing himself full of food. “I can’t understand why everybody says this country is so dreadful. Excellent food, nice sunny weather...hmm, a little chilly now and then and the roads are rather narrow. Not that it’s a problem when you’re a Quasar Sprite who’s only four inches tall! What shall I do now? I know, I’ll just sit on this wall and do absolutely nothing. All this sightseeing makes you so...(yawn) tired. Just one thing is annoying me, though. Why are my feet so cold? It must be this damp air.” Antony laughed to himself. “Hee hee, I bet Julius would love to be in this damp air though. I wonder if he’s figured a way of getting out of that cupboard yet? Nah, of course he hasn’t! He isn’t that clever!”

Julius Quasar landed right in front of him. “Think again!” he said.

“Wahh!” Antony yelled, almost jumping out of his skin, Julius had really taken him by surprise. “W-where did you come from?”

“Surprised to see me, Ant? I scared you, didn’t !! You should always expect the unexpected.”

“I knew it was you all along!” Antony yelled back. “So what do you want now, Twerpus Maximus?”

“The only twerp round here is you, Antony! Did you honestly think you could get away with what you did? Trying to muscle in and get rid of me?”

“I nearly succeeded! There was no way you could have got out of that cupboard by yourself. Someone must have helped you!”

“Naturally. You see, I have friends, unlike you! Cleopatra loves me and not you!”

“Rubbish!” Antony snapped. “That’s just wishful thinking!...ACHOO! Ooh, my poor feet, they’re like blocks of ice!”

“Well you will keep wearing those open toed sandals, won’t you? Anyway, I’ve come to issue you with an ultimatum. Either you agree to a duel tomorrow and fight me or I’ll...”

“I accept!” Antony said gleefully. “I could handle you blindfolded. Just because you wear a gold laurel wreath, you think you’re so good!”

“We shall see! First thing tomorrow when the cock crows, meet me here in this field near the amphitheater...and we’ll see who’s the best!”

“You’re on, Julie! And now, if you’ll excuse me, I’m off to enjoy

myself. I want to keep my good looks in top condition. Vale!”

Antony sauntered off, as confident as ever, leaving Julius sighing in despair.

“What have I let myself in for?” he wailed. “I guess I’ll find out tomorrow. I’d better go back to Generous or he’ll be wondering where I’ve got to.”

Generous was making himself comfortable in the fort when Julius returned.

“I see you’re back. Where’re you been? I’ve saved you some food!”

“Thanks. I’m going to need it! I challenged Antony to a fight at the crack of dawn tomorrow. He accepted! He’s so confident! Er, you and Equus couldn’t come along, could you? For moral support?”

“I suppose so. But I wish you could have settled this some other way. Fighting usually makes matters worse!”

“Don’t remind me!” Julius said, eating some of the fruit that was on the table.

“Oh don’t cry, Julius,” Generous said as the sound of sobbing was heard.

“Huh? I’m not crying!”

“Somebody is, listen!”

“Maybe it’s Senator Dubious!” Julius sniggered.

“No, it sounds like a child. Let’s go outside and see!”

They made their way outside and looked around.

“It’s coming from the stables,” said Julius.

Generous drew his sword, just in case the crying was just a trick to lure him into a trap. “Who goes there?” he demanded. But when he peered inside the stables he noticed a small boy huddled up in the corner, alone and upset.

Generous sheathed his sword. “By Jupiter, who are you?” he asked.

The terrified boy backed away. “Please don’t hurt me or feed me to the lions, gladiator!” he shouted.

“Hey, it’s okay. I’m not going to hurt you. My name’s Generous and I’m a Praetorian guard. What’s your name?”

“Felix, sir,” the boy replied.

“Felix, eh? If I’m not mistaken, that name means ‘happy’, doesn’t it? Only you look anything but happy.”

“Well sir, I’m not. I got lost when I went into the city center with my parents and I can’t find them, and my home is a long way off. I can’t find that either. And it’s getting so late! Oh, why did I wander away from them?” Felix sobbed.

“Please don’t cry!” Generous said, “or you’ll make me cry too! I’ll take you home. Do you know where your home is?”

“I live in a villa on the other side of the River Dee,” said Felix. “But I

can't remember the way back there. My parents always travel in their chariot. It's such a long walk."

"Indeed yes," Generous replied. "But no problem when you've got a horse! Come and meet my noble steed, Equus!"

"I know where the boy's home is," Julius whispered. "Just listen to my directions and you'll soon be there!"

Felix cheered up when he saw Equus. "He's a very nice horse, sir. Praetorian horses are some of the best, aren't they?"

"Absolutely, Equus is one of the best! Now climb up and we'll soon have you back to your villa!"

"Thank you so much, sir!" Felix said, happy again.

With Julius Quasar's expert guidance, Generous found the villa on the other side of the river with ease.

"Is this it?" he said to Felix.

"Yes, sir!" the boy said happily, relieved to be safe again.

Generous knocked on the door and was met with Felix's two worried parents.

"Salve," he said. "I believe you've been missing your son?"

"Felix!" his mother said, running out to embrace her son. "Oh thank the gods you're alright! You must never wander off like that! What did we tell you this morning?"

"I know, mother. I'm sorry. I definitely won't ever do anything like it again!"

"Well you're safe now and that's all that matters, thanks to this wonderful Praetorian guard here. Kind sir, my husband and I can't thank you enough! We are forever at your service!"

"It was nothing really," Generous said modestly.

"Hey, you could use a pair of personal slaves," Julius whispered, elbowing him.

"Shut it!"

"No, we really must thank you properly," the mother insisted, turning to her husband. "Claudius, go and fetch that model villa we bought today!"

"Yes dear!" he said, rushing inside.

Moments later he returned with a magnificent model villa, intricately carved from the finest materials. It had steps made of bone, ceramic walls, gold plated roof tiles and it even had miniature mosaics inside on the walls and floors. It was a perfect scale model.

"This is for you," the husband said, offering it to Generous.

"For me? But sir, I couldn't possibly! It's worth over thirty sesterces! I don't deserve such..."

"My dear man," his wife replied, "you are far too modest! Now I insist that you take this as a token of our gratitude!"

“Thank you very much! And now I really must be going!”

“Do stop by sometime for some honey cakes and wine!”

“Thank you! I will try to!” And Generous was on his way again.

“Yes Gen, you WILL stop by at their villa sometime...I am rather partial to honey cakes! And you are too modest!”

“It’s because of my humble beginnings,” Generous replied. “When you’ve worked as a slave, you always remain humble!”

“If you say so. Let’s get back to the fort and get some rest! Remember, tomorrow’s the big day!”

Chapter 9

“Wake up Generous! Hey, WAKE UP!”

Generous mumbled something and pulled the covers up over his head.

“Oh no you don’t,” Julius said. “You promised to come and watch my battle with Mark Antony...now get out of this bed!” He clicked his fingers and an electric shock blasted Generous out of the bed!

“AGGGH! For Jupiter’s sake, Julius! Don’t ever do that again! I’m not immortal like you!” Generous wailed as he smoothed down his hair, which was standing on end. “You’ll wake all the other soldiers up!”

“You’re the one making all the noise,” Julius replied. “I merely gave you a very efficient wake up call.”

Generous yawned and peered outside. “Oh really, it’s barely light yet! Must you start a fight so early in the morning?”

“Yes, I must! My powers are strongest at sunrise,” Julius said. “Now hurry up, get dressed, grab a bite to eat and get Equus ready! I can’t possibly be late. Knowing Antony, he’ll be there already!”

Equus was none too pleased about being woken so early and was reluctant to leave his nice warm stable behind.

“I’m sorry Eq,” Generous said, “but I promised I’d go and watch Julius fight Mark Antony. You know what he’s like, so impulsive!”

“I heard that!” Julius shouted.

“Just make sure you’ve finished fighting by noon. We’re supposed to be setting off for the North East later today. The Emperor has been addressing the 2nd, 6th and 20th legions that will start work building the wall. They will be returning to their forts across the country when it’s all complete. I must say, he’s got everything thoroughly organized. The auxiliary forces are going to patrol the wall when it’s finished and there are to be small mile castles along the wall, separated by a distance of a mile.”

“Hmm, that’s obvious!” Julius remarked. “I’m surprised that Legio XL Breakus Windus haven’t been chosen to assist in the building work. Centurion Fastidious won’t be too happy!”

“That legion couldn’t build a sandcastle, let alone a mile castle! Fastidious is the most useless centurion I’ve ever known. Everyone knows how bad he is at organizing and reading maps,” Generous replied.

“Yes,” Julius sniggered. “I remember when Delirious sent him to build that flyover in Gaul...and he ended up in Iberia!”

“I think you played a part in that, didn’t you, Julius?”

“Erm...” Julius tried to look innocent.

“I mustn’t be too hard on Fastidious though,” said Generous. “I

mean, he was good to me when we arrived in Britannia for the first time and we had nowhere to go.”

“Yeah, he made you the cook!”

“I was a very good cook too. You never complained! Anyway, where are we going?”

“To that field by the amphitheater I’m ready for anything, I wonder if Antony is?”

They arrived at the field, which was deserted apart from the occasional sheep.

“Hmm, I guess he chickened out! Let’s go back to the fort then!” Julius said quickly.

“Leaving so soon?” a voice shouted. It was Mark Antony.

“Antony! I thought’s you’d...never mind, you’re here and I’m ready for you!”

“Ditto! I see you brought some backup, just in case you give up halfway through!”

“Generous and Equus are here as witnesses to ensure that you play fair! Besides, you know that sprites never fight mortals!”

“Enough chit chat!” Antony said. “He turned to Generous and Equus, who were both munching honey cakes as if they were watching a gladiator fight in the Colosseum. “We who are about to fight, salute you!”

“Um, do you want me to give a thumbs up or down if somebody loses?” Generous said. “Or Equus could give you the hoof!”

“We’ll see who loses first!” Antony shouted, and with incredible speed he lunged at Julius, taking him by surprise and sending him flying thirty yards across the field, scattering terrified sheep.

“Whoa!” Antony smiled. “That was just a warm up! You’ll have to try better than that, Ju! Round one to me!”

While the two sprites fought it out, over at the fort Centurion Fastidious was not happy. Having been told that his legion had not been chosen to build Hadrian’s Wall, he also had to contend with the problem of rising damp in the fort.

“I’m at my wit’s end!” he moaned. “How much more of this can I take? This is the last straw! And how could the Emperor deliver such a cruel blow to us?” he said, addressing the legionaries. “You soldiers are the finest in the entire Roman Empire and you are commanded by a great centurion! Me, Rufus Rebellious Fastidious! Alright, so I failed my XI plus, but when it comes to leadership and discipline, my skills are superior! And you agree, don’t you men!”

“Yes, sir, we do!” they said in unison. They didn’t!

Optio Marcus Serious came marching into the briefing room. “Sir,

about this problem of the rising damp..."

"What do you expect me to do about it?" Fastidious snapped. "It's not my fault that the stupid architects built this fort so close to the River Dee!"

"But we're half a mile from the River Dee, sir. I believe the problem is coming from the drains!"

"Impossible!" Fastidious replied. "How dare you suggest that my judgment is wrong! You are trying to undermine my authority! I counted out how far we are from the river the other day and was able to march a distance of five hundred paces...hang on, that's half a mile!"

The soldiers said nothing, although they were struggling to keep straight faces. Fastidious remained stern faced. "Hmph! What's a few paces here and there? I conclude that the cause of this terrible damp is the climate! The cold, damp British air is the culprit! Good! I'm glad we've got to the bottom of this problem!"

"But sir," the Optio interrupted. "What are we going to DO about the damp?"

"Well, sleep outside, of course! There won't be any rising damp outside because your beds won't be next to the walls!"

Back in the field, Julius and Antony were still fighting it out.

"It's better than watching a chariot race, is this," Generous said to Equus, who gave a whinny of agreement. "COME ON JULIUS! YOU CAN BEAT HIM!"

Julius displayed some incredible Quasar Sprite power, sending bolts of lightning from his fingers and giving Antony some nasty jolts!

"Ha! Beat that, Mr Know-So-Much!"

Antony was furious now. Taking a deep breath, he prepared to send Julius hurtling through the air. "I'll blast you all the way to Rome!"

BOOM! Suddenly there was a flash of lightning and a big puff of smoke which stopped Antony dead in his tracks.

"Hello, what's happening here?" Generous said, halfway through a third honey cake.

The smoke cleared to reveal...Sprite Superior!

Antony went as white as a sheet. "Great Jupiter...it's the boss! She who must be obeyed!"

Sprite Superior was indeed the boss. She was the leader of all the Quasar Sprites. She was very old, very powerful and very wise.

"The leader of the Sprites?" Generous said. "We'd better show her some respect, Equus!" They both bowed in front of her.

Sprite Superior nodded at them and then turned to face the two sprites.

"Enough, both of you!" she shouted, raising her hands. "Mark

Antony, I am extremely disappointed in your behavior, and the same goes for you, Julius Quasar.”

Julius and Antony stared at the ground and coughed awkwardly.

“This rivalry has gone too far, it seems I had no choice but to come and intervene!”

Antony feared the worst, that he was going to be banished from the Quasar Sprites altogether. He burst into tears.

“Oh please, Your Highness! Please have mercy! I’ll be good! Really I will!”

“What a cry-baby,” Julius thought.

“Compose yourself, Antony!” Sprite Superior replied. “I have news for you. I have found you a new job. I have found a mortal who is in need of your guidance and he has the personality which will suit you very well - he’s bossy, self-important and egotistical, just like you!”

“Gosh! I am honored!” Mark Antony said. “Who is this incredible mortal?”

“His name is Rufus Rebellious Fastidious and he is a centurion in charge of Legio XL Breakus Windus!”

Generous was gob smacked. “Well I never! If anyone needs advising, it’s him!”

“Will you accept this employment, Antony?” Sprite Superior asked him.

“Oh yes, Your Highness! I accept! I’m so pleased to have a mortal of my very own again!”

“On one condition,” she said, “that you promise to stop all this fighting with Julius and not to keep playing all these mischievous tricks!”

Mark Antony turned and looked at Julius.

“I’m willing to call a truce,” Julius said, holding out his hand. “A proper truce this time. We could be good friends if we tried.”

“Yes, you’re right Julius,” Antony replied, shaking his hand. “Sorry for locking you in that cupboard and for fighting with you.”

“Apology accepted,” said Julius.

“And I’m sorry I said you were going bald.”

“Hang on, you didn’t say that!”

“You’re right, I didn’t....but I was thinking it!”

“Good. I’m glad you can act like a responsible sprite when you try, Antony!” Sprite Superior said. “Now I must say farewell. My work is never finished and there are many more sprites I must visit today. You are to start advising Centurion Fastidious immediately, Antony. As for you, Julius, in light of the excellent job you have done on advising your mortal...”

“Pardon me for interrupting you, Your Highness,” Julius said, “but

Generous isn't just a mortal anymore, he's my friend!"

"Of course. I'll start again then. In light of the excellent job you have done in advising your friend Generous, I am pleased to award you with the Toga of Excellence!" She waved her Quasar wand and Julius found himself wearing a smart toga with a purple stripe, gold edging and a medallion. And he had a new laurel wreath too!

"I say, very fetching, yes this is definitely me! Thank you very much, Your Highness!"

"Suits you, Julius!" Antony said. "It looks much smarter than my armor"

Julius couldn't believe it. Antony was praising someone else instead of himself!

"Now I must bid you farewell," said Sprite Superior. "Take care, and we shall cross paths again someday."

The four of them watched her float up into the air on a cloud before catching a ride on a passing comet. Then she was gone, off to another place, far away.

"Now that's a fast mode of transport," Generous said. "I wonder if people will travel like that in the future?"

Antony cleared his throat. "Well, Gen, I could tell you about the jumbo jet...but I'll leave it for Julius instead."

"Most kind of you," Julius replied. "Hey, we've got to get back to the fort, Gen! You need to pack all your stuff up ready for the trip up North."

"I'm ready," Generous said. "Come on, Equus!"

"Me too!" Antony said, hurrying after them. "I hope Fastidious is ready for me!"

Chapter 10

The time had come to travel to the North East. Generous was all packed and ready to leave. Julius was reveling in his stylish new outfit, sauntering up and down.

“Do you think Cleo will like it?” he said.

“Who wouldn’t?”

Things were looking up for Centurion Fastidious and Legio XL Breakus Windus. Emperor Hadrian had decided that they should be involved in the building of the wall after all!

“I wonder what made him change his mind?” Fastidious wondered.

“I did!” a voice piped up. Fastidious looked round in surprise and saw Mark Antony standing on the window ledge.

“Salve! I am Mark Antony, your Quasar Sprite, sent to advise you! And believe me, you certainly need it! That tunic you’re wearing...well it’s so last season! And your map reading skills aren’t that clever either!”

For the first time in his entire life, Centurion Fastidious found himself lost for words!

Emperor Hadrian, the Praetorians and the legions were all ready to leave...but someone was missing!

“Where is Senator Gluttonus?” Hadrian asked.

“I haven’t seem him since yesterday,” Genius said. “He went into a restaurant in Deva and never came out again.”

“We’ll have to leave without him! We can’t wait any longer! It will take us two days to reach our destination and time is moving on!”

And so they all set off and Gluttonus was left behind. Not that he cared anyway, as he was far too preoccupied with something else...

Yesterday he had been wandering around the center of Deva, looking for food (as usual). Quite by accident, Gluttonus stumbled upon a luxury restaurant.

“What luck! The gods are smiling on me! All the food I could possibly eat!” Having plenty of money, he decided to go in and do just that.

“It would be nice if I had someone to share my love of food with, though,” he thought.

As luck would have it, he found just that in the form of Claudia Trifosa, the restaurant owner. Gluttonus took one look at her and fell head over heels in love. And the food got the thumbs up too.

“I never did care much for travel,” he said to Claudia as they shared a candlelit meal together, “but I’m glad I came here to Deva! Hadrian can go and build his wall in the freezing North, but I’m staying here!”

Deva has everything - well guarded forts, shops, thriving businesses and of course, excellent food!"

"Yes, I too am pleased that you came here, Gluttonus. I don't think I've ever met a person with such good taste in food. Care for some more wild boar?"

"Yes please, my dearest, loveliest Claudia!"

Two days later, the legions arrived in the bleak, inhospitable countryside of North East Britannia. For the Praetorian guards, who were used to the hot weather of Rome, this came as a bit of a shock.

"By Juno and Minerva!" Ludicrous said. "There are some blue winds blowing up here! Good thing I put my thermal underwear on."

"I don't know how those Brigantes tribes stand it up here! Brrrr!" Ridiculous replied. "I'm sensitive to extreme temperatures. I could freeze to death up here!"

"Why don't you Praetorians stop whining and give us a hand setting up the camp?" the legionaries said.

"You mean do some hard physical labor?" Ludicrous said. "Oh, we couldn't possibly, our job is to guard the Emperor at all times, isn't it, Ridiculous? Ridiculous, are you listening to me?"

"Huh, what? Sorry, I was miles away then. Could you repeat that?"

"I said it's our job to guard the Emperor, isn't it?"

"Oh yes."

"Hmm, seems to be your only job around here!" the legionaries grumbled.

Meanwhile...Senator Dubious was still plotting on how to disgrace Generous. He paced up and down angrily, wondering what to do.

"I'm certain he was behind Brutus' sudden misbehavior. My horse has never reared up like that before. Generous must have spooked him somehow. Thanks to him I became the laughing stock of Deva and my new toga was ruined! That's the first and last time I go headfirst into a freezing plunge pool!"

Genius was still trying to interest Hadrian in his roller sandals.

"Caesar, wear these sandals and your life will be enhanced! You'll never use your chariot again!"

"Really, Genius, I very much doubt that! Suppose I fall over and break my neck - who will rule then?"

"But Caesar, it's all a matter of keeping your balance, and once you've learned that, you can go faster!"

"And how do I stop if I'm going too fast?"

"Oh that's easy, you just steer yourself onto grass or an uneven surface. They don't work so well on uneven surfaces. I've tested them

out.”

Hadrian stood up and unfastened his sandals. “Oh, alright then, anything for a quiet life! I’ll try them out, just this once!”

“Thank you, Caesar! I promise you, this is a life changing experience for sure!”

“Or a life ending one?” The Praetorians muttered. “Hey, if any injury befalls the great Emperor as a result of your stupid invention, we’ll personally feed you to lions, Genius!”

“Fine! I’ll accept all responsibility!”

Hadrian stood up in the roller sandals, a bit wobbly at first, and teetered nervously towards the outside.

“I’ll just have a quick practice run on this nice flat road,” he said.

Outside, the legions were busy making a start on the wall. Centurion Fastidious had never been happier, marching back and forth waving his vine stick in the air and yelling out orders at soldiers.

“Get those twigs out of there and make sure that cement is properly mixed! Little bricks to the left, large bricks to the right! Move it, move it, move it!”

“That’s the spirit!” Mark Antony said, who was sat on his shoulder.

Generous and Julius were watching.

“Antony seems to be really enjoying his new job, doesn’t he?”

“Yes. About time he did something useful....oh, I don’t believe it! Look over there, isn’t that the Emperor?”

“Yes it is. What on earth is he wearing on his feet? Why, they’re Genius’ roller sandals! Oh dear, I don’t like the look of this! Never trust one of Genius’ inventions - they’re nothing but trouble! We’d better go and stop him from having a nasty accident!”

Though he was loath to admit it, Hadrian was actually quite enjoying skating around in the roller sandals.

“Hmm, I think I’m getting the hang of this,” he said, zooming up and down the road. “Perhaps Genius has invented a winner this time. These could really take off. I’ll just go a little bit faster!”

Unfortunately, Hadrian had not yet perfected his stopping technique, and as he picked up speed he realized that while you can make a horse pulling a chariot slow down, with roller sandals...well there aren’t any reins!

“Oh no, how do I stop these things? What did Genius say? GENIUS!” Like a greyhound, Hadrian shot down the road, heading straight for the camp.

“Great Jupiter!” Generous gasped. “He’s going to crash! Come on, Julius!”

Hadrian whizzed past the soldiers, who were so astonished at the sight that they dropped the bricks and tools they were holding. One

soldier dropped one right on Centurion Fastidious' foot!

"Owww!" Fastidious yelled. "My ingrowing toenails! You clumsy oaf!"

"Sir, the Emperor appears to be out of control!" Optio Marcus Serious said. "What shall we do?"

Centurion Fastidious turned to Mark Antony. "What do I do?"

"Stop him, of course!"

"Right! Legionaries! Stop that Emperor at once! He must be stopped by order of I, Rufus Rebellious Fastidious!"

"Yes, sir!" The soldiers immediately stopped building the wall, picked up their spears and chased after Hadrian.

"Erm, perhaps it wasn't such a good idea for them to go chasing after him wielding spears," Mark Antony said.

"Gosh, you're right!" Fastidious replied. "How stupid of me! Hey, drop those weapons, legionaries, I command you! Wait for me!"

Hadrian had reached the end of the road - literally. With no way of stopping, he simply hurtled nose first into the camp and collided with Genius himself.

"Oh Caesar, you're back!" Genius exclaimed as Hadrian nearly flattened him.

"These sandals...they need...modifying..." Hadrian gasped, trying to get his breath back.

"Does that mean you like them then?"

"Ssh, Genius! I can hear someone talking. It sounds like Senator Dubious."

"It is. He's been talking to himself all day. I don't know what he's up to, he won't tell me anything. He's so secretive!"

"Hmm, I think a touch of eavesdropping is called for. I dislike the thought of senators keeping secrets from me. Someone could be plotting."

Hadrian listened carefully and was shocked to hear every single word of Dubious' plot to get rid of Generous.

"By Mercury, he's planning to frame my trusted guard Generous! Time I put a stop to this!" He burst in and gave Dubious the fright of his life.

"So, you intend to frame Generous and accuse him of stealing my money?"

Dubious looked terrified. "Caesar, you heard wrong, I was merely, taking care of finances..."

"I heard everything, Senator Dubious! Tell me, why were you planning to disgrace one of my most trusted Praetorians?"

Dubious was eventually forced to confess all when confronted by the

Praetorians, plus Centurion Fastidious and the legions. With so many swords and spears pointing angrily at him, he had little choice.

“Okay, okay! I confess! I wanted the money for myself! It was the money collected from fining people in Rome! But I needed an alibi, didn’t I? So I decided that Generous would take the blame...”

“An alibi? Why would he want to go to sleep?” Centurion Fastidious wondered.

“That’s a lullaby,” Mark Antony corrected him

“What have I ever done to you?” Generous asked. “I’ve never been unkind to you!”

“That’s just it...I was jealous of you! I always wanted to be chosen as a Praetorian guard...but I never got picked! Instead, I had to watch a humble slave rise through the ranks! I accept my fate that I am now lion fodder...”

Hadrian thought for a while. “I shall let Generous decide your fate.”

“Oh, thanks for nothing, why do I always get these difficult jobs?” Generous thought. He took a deep breath and looked at the cowering Senator Dubious.

“His life is to be spared, due to his honesty, but he can no longer work for mighty Caesar either as a senator or a guard. He is to return to Rome to seek alternative employment.”

“You are indeed merciful, great Generous!” Dubious gushed.

“That is more than fair,” Hadrian replied. “Dubious, thank the gods that Generous lives up to his name. Now leave this camp and never return, and we shall forget that this ever happened.”

“Y-yes Caesar...I shall go at once!”

“What a day,” Generous said later. “Plots against me, the Emperor wearing roller sandals...too much to take in! I had no idea that Dubious was planning to frame me!”

“I told you he was trouble,” Julius replied. “Anyway, you don’t need to worry about him now. All that matters now is your journey back to Rome. Hadrian has said he is returning and will be leaving the legions in charge of building the wall. It’s up to Centurion Fastidious to ensure they don’t fall out of line!”

“Now that’s he’s got Mark Antony to advise him, he’ll be...huh, don’t want to think about that!” Generous laughed. “I am looking forward to seeing Prestonia and Ferocious again!”

“I’m not looking forward to seeing the Lares again. Remember, they think I’m responsible for wrecking their lararium and they threw me out!”

“Don’t worry about that, Ju, you have a new home now - that model villa given to me by Felix’s parents. It’s perfect!”

“Of course! I must give Cleopatra a guided tour!”

“Give me a guided tour of what?” Cleopatra said, having appeared from nowhere.

“I’ll tell you all about it Cleo, fancy coming with me for a tour of the rugged Britannia countryside by moonlight?”

“You surely don’t mean walking, do you?”

“Of course I don’t. I learned this little trick off the Sprite Superior,” Julius said, clicking his fingers and making a small cloud appear. “She uses this mode of transport all the time. It’s very clever. Are you coming?”

“Definitely!” Cleopatra replied. She climbed onto the cloud with Julius and they floated into the air.

“See you later, Julius!” Generous said, waving them off.

“Julius, this is so romantic!” Cleopatra said as they floated under a star studded sky. “And that toga makes you look so handsome, far more than Antony.”

It seemed like Julius Quasar and Cleopatra were finally going to spend a romantic night under the stars...or maybe not, as Mark Antony was watching, and he was planning to play one last trick on his former rival!

“Hee hee, the perfect moment, the perfect opportunity for a bit of fun! I just can’t resist...do forgive me!”

He climbed onto the roof of a villa as the cloud prepared to float past. It was directly over a small ornamental fountain...

“Alone at last,” Julius sighed as he prepared to give Cleopatra a kiss...but he never got to, for a sudden bolt of lightning appeared from nowhere and blasted the cloud to smithereens! The romantic moment was broken immediately!

“Oh no, we’re falling!” Julius yelled as he and Cleopatra plummeted to earth...and landed with an incredible splash in the fountain.

They both surfaced, coughing and spluttering. Julius looked in dismay at his perfect new laurel wreath, which was sopping wet, as was the rest of him. Cleopatra was far from pleased now that her hair was ruined.

“I take it that wasn’t meant to happen,” she said.

Julius blushed. “I don’t know what happened! I’m terribly sorry, erm, that wasn’t supposed to happen!”

Gales of laughter were coming from above. “Ha, ha! You’re all wet!”

“Wait a minute,” Julius said. “I know that voice...MARK ANTONY! I’LL GET YOU FOR THAT!”

Antony landed on the rim of the fountain. “Sorry, Julius, old bean. Just couldn’t resist one final trick, for old time’s sake. You two looked

so funny up there! You must admit, that was a pretty good trick!”

“Hmm, for you!” Julius muttered. “Shouldn’t you be busy helping Fastidious?”

“Oh I am,” Antony said. “He’s asleep now. I just came to say farewell. I know you and Gen will be heading back to Rome tomorrow and I have to stay here with Fastidious while the legions build Hadrian’s Wall. I guess I’ll see you around sometime, friend?” Antony held out his hand.

“Yes. Take care of yourself, and your mortal, Antony! No doubt you’ll continue to play the odd trick on unsuspecting people!”

“Old habits die hard!” The two sprites shook hands.

“Farewell, Cleo, sorry about your hair...no hard feelings, eh?”

“I’ll let you off this time!” Cleopatra said grudgingly. “Take care and good luck!”

Mark Antony said a final farewell and then he was on his way. Julius and Cleopatra watched him go.

“He’s still annoying and he’s still a practical joker,” Cleopatra said, “but...”

“But what?”

“He’s still good looking!”

Julius groaned.

But...he’s not as good looking as you!”

Epilogue

Weeks later, when Generous finally returned to Rome, he found out that he wasn't the only person with lots of news to tell. In his absence, Prestonia had been fighting a battle all of her own.

"It all started when that rotten Insomnia Paradox opened a rival shop next door to mine," she told Generous. "Things were going from bad to worse, then she opened a restaurant on the first floor of her shop!"

"Oh no," Generous said. "What happened next?"

"Well, just as I thought things were all going her way, there's an outbreak of food poisoning at her restaurant! All these guards came and the place was closed down! I've never seen so many irate customers, or queasy looking ones for that matter!"

"Good heavens, sounds like I missed all the fun! What's Insomnia doing now?"

"Last time I heard, she was pleading for a job at the Jobcentre, along with a former senator called Dubious...wonder how he came to be unemployed?"

"Ah, that's a long story, and I'll tell you all about it just as soon as I find a place for this model villa."

"Generous, it's magnificent! Where did you get it?"

"From a very nice family who live in Deva. They have a son called Felix who got lost, but by chance I found him and took him home. They gave me this to say thanks."

"It's fantastic. We'll display it next to the lararium. I've fixed the roof, by the way, so the Lares will be pleased."

They were pleased, and so was Julius, who immediately took up residence in his new villa, along with Cleopatra.

Ferocious the tiger came padding into the room with the copy of the news scroll in his mouth.

"Have you read the headlines?" Prestonia said. "As from today, all the speed enforcement laws are to be scrapped. I knew that daft scheme wouldn't last!"

"Excellent news!" Generous said as he turned to Julius and gave him the thumbs up.

Down at the Jobcentre...there was a queue a mile long. Dozens of speed enforcement centurions suddenly found themselves without work, along with Insomnia Paradox, who was trying to remain unnoticed.

"If my sister sees me, I'll never live this down," she thought.

Syntax the scribe looked carefully at the list of names. "Right, next jobseeker to the front, please!"

Dubious gingerly stepped forward.

“Miss Verruca Paradox will see you now.”

“Now then, Mr Dubious, I hear that you were sacked from your previous job because you were plotting against a Praetorian guard?”

“Um, it’s lies, all lies! The Emperor was merely streamlining the forum and making some random job cuts! I’m a good, honest worker!”

“Correction, Mr Dubious. You are a jobseeker!”

And so ends Julius Quasar II. Everyone is happy, except for Dubious, of course! The legions in Britannia continue to build Hadrian’s Wall, a symbol of the mighty Roman Empire. The wall itself would take ten years to build, but one thing is certain, dear reader, it will last a whole lot longer than that!

FINIS