

The Eternal and Everlasting

My dear owner, Emperor Vespasian, recently died on June XXIII of the year LXXIX, here at Aquae Cutiliae. It greatly saddened my heart that he has left me, but I am pleased because he has been deified. He was a renowned leader, a brilliant man, a compassionate owner, and now a divine god. He raised me from the time I was a little chick. Vespi (my nickname for him) said I was the most beautiful dove because I have the whitest feathers, which is very true. He named me Diana, after the divine goddess. From the time I could flit about from place to place, Vespi taught me how to send messages. He would write on a small piece of cloth, papyrus, or those horribly heavy wax tablets, and then tie it around my leg. At first, he only sent silly little jokes to some of his friends. Then as he grew more mature, he would send me on errands to the forum, or have me fly love letters to his latest sweetheart. Those were my favorite days. There is nothing more romantic than a love letter sent by airmail. The girls would always ooooooh and aaaaah while they read the sweet message and I cooed melodiously in the background, waiting for an even sweeter reply to return to Vespi. Those were the best days of my life. I watched him grow, develop relationships, have an affair with Caenis, excel in politics, marry Flavia Domitilla, have three kids (Titus, Domitian, and Flavia Domitilla), witness the death of Flavia (quite sad, she was very sweet to him), have another affair with Caenis, go to battle, become Emperor, and finally die. Now Vespi's favorite son, Titus, has taken over the role of Emperor; however, I am not quite sure how successful he will be. Vespi raised him to be kind and generous, but is he? Some past events lead me to question his compassion for others.

It was about twelve years ago when Titus and his father were staying in Jerusalem in order to control the rebelling Jews. Although the Jews opposed my master, I enjoyed staying with them in their homeland. They were generally kind people. Unlike Vespi, Titus, and the other Romans, the Jews only believed in one god and lived to serve His will. That was the main difference I could see between them and the Romans. They were still people, and just as honorable as the Romans, if not more so. They did not hold gladiator fights, chariot races or any other brutal competitions for fun. What I loved most about them was that they always treated me well, for they believed that doves were a sign of God's forgiveness.

I stayed in Jerusalem for a while, but then I left for Rome with Vespi when he was crowned Emperor. I was so proud of him and all of my bird friends were so jealous. But I didn't get to bask in his limelight for long, because he decided to send a message, by way of me, to Titus. He told me that he couldn't trust anyone else to get it safely to him, although this trip was by far, farther than I had ever flown before. But Vespi needed me and so I couldn't let him down. Off I went back to Jerusalem with Vespi's message asking Titus how things were doing. It was a long flight of course, but quite interesting. I visited the thriving Greek City of Corinth and took a short stop at the island of Delos, before arriving in Jerusalem three days later. After I had given Titus the letter I was surprised by how fiercely Titus wrote back.

Titus Flavius Sabinus Vespasianus salutem dicit Vespasiano Imperatori patri.

The Jews have begun to rebel even stronger now. We must do something. They have to be destroyed as soon as possible or all hope of conquering this land will be lost. Please send some more troops so that we can plan an attack. *Vale.*

Worried about my friends in Jerusalem, I flew around the city to ask one of my friends what happened. I found Sapphira, a gregarious bluebird, and asked her about the rebellion. She said that there was a small Jewish uprising, but nothing too unusual, just enough to evoke gossip. Relieved that no one was hurt, but worried about Titus' intentions, I flew off towards Rome once again. When I had arrived in Vespi's study and he relieved me of the letter, I gazed up at him and watched his face be overtaken by a distressed expression as he finished reading the letter.

“Well, I suppose he must need some backup,” Vespi said, then looked up at me and sighed. “I’ll be sending some troops down there, but I’m also going to send you down there, Diana, so that he will be able to send a message to me whenever necessary.” Then it was my turn to sigh. I didn’t want to have to leave my master. I already had enough of Titus on my last trip, but I supposed it was my duty to obey the Emperor’s bidding. I flew back down to Jerusalem and within a few weeks, the troops that Vespasian sent had arrived. I grew fearful that my Jewish friends were in danger. Relations between the Jews and the Romans were growing increasingly vicious. I tried to warn my Jewish friends that they should leave Jerusalem, but they were too stubborn and too proud to leave. They said that their Sabbath was coming in a few weeks, and they needed to stay there. From that point on until the Sabbath, more and more Jews were congregating on their side of the wall, awaiting their holy day. At the same time more and more troops were gathering in the military camps on the Roman side of the wall. It was the first day of the Sabbath when Titus decided to attack and break down the outer wall of Jerusalem with his huge heavy artillery catapults. They were bigger than any weapons I had ever seen. Capable of throwing 130 pounds of stones a quarter of a mile, they could easily kill many people. I was more horrified now than ever before in my life. Yet even with these great machines, Titus’ troops were met with heavy Jewish resistance. He wasn’t sure what to do next and so he sent a letter with me for his father, asking for help.

Titus Flavius Sabinus Vespasianus salutem dicit Vespasiano Imperatori patri.

I am not sure what I should do next. Our troops were met with heavier Jewish resistance than I had anticipated. These stupid Jews won’t give up. They cannot bear the fact that they are less powerful than we are. Although I hate their existence here in this land, I do not necessarily want numerous deaths on their side or ours. However, we will encounter this problem if my troops continue head on. Please, Father, what should I do? *Vale.*

As I soared over the Mediterranean towards my dear Vespi, bothersome thoughts ran through my head. I, a dove of the gentlest nature, should be a carrier of Love not of this Hate that I was carrying. I was still confused when I reached my master. Once Vespi had read the letter, he just sat there, staring at the ceiling for what seemed like hours, pondering in his head what he should do. This whole time my nerves were jumping around, until finally, with a small smirk on his face, he wrote a message on his parchment and tied it to my leg.

Imperator Vespasianus salutem dicit Tito Flavio Sabino Vespasiano.

Titus, here is my plan. Stop tearing down the walls, and instead keep them up and don’t let anyone come out of Jerusalem. Soon they will starve and hopefully surrender. *Vale.*

I was still very troubled as I flew back to Titus. Now I was bringing a plan of war against the innocent Jewish people, not a promise of peace, as it was once believed a dove would bring. I felt my insides going numb inside me. Why was I doing this? Why was I carrying this message? I still couldn’t figure it out, by the time I reached Titus. He gratefully took the message, and quickly set his troops to work. Exhausted from the constant flying, I rested in the Roman camp. When I awoke I could hear the shouts of angry and exasperated Jews as they tried to break out of the gates of Jerusalem. Sadness swept over me. I had tried to help them, but they didn’t listen to me. Should I have tried harder? Did I not fulfill the responsibility that is given to doves? I was so confused. So many questions were mobbing my little birdbrain. I decided to go hide myself in a small forest a few miles outside of Jerusalem, where no one could find me, and where I could block out the existing dilemma from my mind and reminisce about the old days. Here I

remembered how I had enjoyed those days of sending love letters to Vespi's girlfriends. For the next two weeks, I stayed in my hiding spot while hiding my true anxiety, but soon realized that I was wasting my time. I decided that I should try to help the Jewish people. There had to be a way of helping them. First, I needed to go see what Titus was up to. Finally I found him. He had the most appalled look on his face as he stared down into a valley. At first, I couldn't figure out what he was looking at, but then I flew closer. My gut felt like it was wrenched from my body as I stared down at hundreds of thousands of dead Jewish bodies rotting at the bottom of the valley. I was so sickened by what I saw; I turned my head away from it, never wanting to look back. I flew away as quickly as possible, and passed by Titus as he spread his hands to the sky and called God to witness that this was not his doing. That gave me one short breath of relief. At least Titus was not wicked enough to have done such a mortifying action. However, nothing could have prepared me for what I experienced next as I flew into the city of Jerusalem. Skeletons, they appeared to be, but when I looked closer I realized that there was skin stretched across their thin bodies. These were my friends, the innocent Jews who I had stayed with and befriended. I saw hardly any women or children except for the ones lying dead in the top stories of buildings, or the ones curled up in the corners of streets. The people that were alive were stealing things and eating anything they could grasp with their feeble, emaciated fingers. Tears streamed from my eyes as I saw some of my old friends dragging themselves along the ground trying to find any morsel of food on the floor. Then I flew down lower to ask my friend if I could help him, but he did not recognize me. However, when he saw me, he frantically tried to snatch me out of the air. Alarmed I flew away, but he cried in a hoarse voice, "Get the bird, the food, food". Then all of a sudden ten others ran to ensnare me, but I flew up beyond their reach. They acted like I was a piece of meat. Once they said I was a sign of God's forgiveness, but now I was just meat, which they desperately needed. But then I saw something I will never forget. A mother was eating her own child. I was more terrified than any other time of my life. I fled from the once thriving city, now a city of death. I went back to the Roman camp, but I did not feel safe here. These Romans were the people who killed the Jews. I didn't know what to think anymore. So I did what was easiest for me to do. Not think. I came to Titus the next day; he gave me a letter and sent me off to Vespasian.

Titus Flavius Sabinus Vespasianus salutem dicit Vespasiano Imperatori patri.

Father, I am informing you that we have successfully conquered Jerusalem after a CXXXIII day siege. Although over one million Jews died either by starvation or by our sword, six hundred thousand Jews have been captured. We will be returning to Rome in the near future. *Vale.*

I was so glad to be back home, in the comfort of my dear Vespi, and so glad that I was never to go back to Jerusalem again. For a while I put Jerusalem out of my head completely and only thought of simple day-to-day life. However I was internally troubled. Finally I let the memories of those horrid days of the Jewish persecution once again occupy my mind. I mourned the deaths of my dear friends and of their families and of their friends. Then I logically tried to figure out why all of this happened and why I, a pure white dove, was part of it. I finally realized that it was not logical. However, everything I stand for, Love, Forgiveness, and Peace among Men, existed within all peoples and still exists within them. These things cannot be killed nor conquered. They are eternal and everlasting. My only hope is that Titus as well as future Emperors of Rome and leaders of all parts of the world will realize this and actualize it, by acting compassionately to all people.