

School #52

Luke F.

Age 12

I lifted the large pack of medical supplies on my back. It is the fourth day since my freedom from my master, Apius Gaisus. He is a doctor in Rome, and I was his servant and his apprentice. He freed me when I successfully treated a dangerous infection to his eye called cataracts. When I had taken the tissue off that had fogged his eye, he granted me my freedom, a purse of one hundred sestertii and a small gold aureus. When Gaisus gave me the coin, he also wound a piece of twine through a small hole in the center of the coin. He looked at me in the eye and said, "Gullus, this coin was given to me by my father, and his father before him, from the coin maker Titurius Sabinus. I am an old man with no heir. I give this to you. Never give it away for it has always brought me and my family good luck. The goddess Fortuna watches over its bearer. Keep it well."

The coin that he gave me is gold, a tarnished color. The face on the front is of King Tadius, a well-bearded man with a sharp nose, prominent eyes and a bead-like ring encircling the coin. Inside the ring is a word that I can't read. Otherwise the first side is as plain as the reverse is decorative. The reverse has two soldiers with their shields covering their upper bodies. They are dressed in the early armor of the republic. They are surrounding a woman with an animal at her feet. She is kneeling and has long hair. Her arms are spread outward like she is flying. The soldiers seem to be guarding her. There is the bead-like ring encircling them, and they are standing on a word that I cannot read.

As I said it has been four days. I am traveling from the city of Rome to the city of Moguntiacum. From there I will travel north to Treviri. From there I will travel south, to the place where my tribe has immigrated from across the Rhine River. It is a long distance away, where my people the Ubii have settled in their little farming city.

The roads of Rome are well built, but they can be infested with bandits. I am proud to say that I was not attacked. So on the twelfth day of my journeying I arrived at Moguntiacum. It was a crowded city, brimming with people. To me, the city was small, but to the barbarians it probably was huge. (They were wearing pants. How barbaric!) It was small because I was used to the two million plus population of Rome.

My stay in Moguntiacum was short: three days where I stayed in a cheap hotel. Everyday I went to the public baths to wash off the dust of my journey. While I was there, one of the important citizens had come back from a skirmish with some Germans (I being German was shocked to learn that there were still people resisting the glory of Rome.) He had gotten a severe cut in the leg, and the wound was badly infected. He had gone to other doctors in the city, but all they said was "Drink cabbage juice" or "eat goat fat." The good man wanted a cure other than stuffing his face full with food that he already ate, so he came to me.

I rubbed my hands around the surface of the coin. I hoped that this operation would be successful. This wound was life threatening. I felt again the heavily bearded man, the two soldiers, and the heavily robed lady. I raised the saw to cut. The man screamed and groaned. I imagine that this hurt a lot. It is not a very pleasant thing to have your leg cut off with a saw. The cutting took only five minutes, and then I cleaned the leftover skin off with a scalpel. In advance I had told the man that he would have to buy a wooden leg. They could get very fancy, and he got one inlaid with gold. I set the wooden leg in the cut-off part of what remained of his leg. Amputating could go very wrong. I thanked the goddess Fortuna for my good luck. I was

paid a handsome reward of twenty denarii. The next day the man was fit and up on his wooden leg. I could finally leave Moguntiacum.

I traveled south through rolling hill country. It was green and fresh, the farms were like something out of a myth when the world was young and men did not fight. However, in the midst of all this paradise there was evidence of a newly captured country. Hundreds of times I must have gotten off the road to let legions pass by.

Once I saw five barbarians fighting a Roman patrol of twenty men. I marveled at the difference between armor. The Romans looked as if they were on parade, their bright armor and polished swords glinting in the sun. The barbarians were wearing pants. Barbaric! They were almost naked with only a cloak and pants on their bodies, their large shields covering them as well as the Romans' larger red shields, their long spears thrusting above the swords' reach. The Romans cut the five to ribbons. I was ordered to help the two dying soldiers and one injured soldier recover.

Two hours later I turned off onto a dirt path, past some wheat ripening in the yellow sun, and into a village. The village was small, maybe four hundred women, children and old men. There were no men between the ages eighteen and forty-four years. When I asked why, they said, "They have gone to serve Rome." That was the only reply.

I must look as funny to them as they do to me. I am wearing a tunic with no pants. They are wearing no tunics. The small population also amazes me. I have been in a big city called Rome for most of my life. I have not yet found my family, but the inhabitants here think that I look like someone who has gone to serve our legions.

Their housing is different than ours in Rome, too. They are just sticks and wattle and daub houses, only one story high. In Rome, the central parts of the city were eight stories high, not one. Their larger houses are as small as the down floor of an apartment building, and they have no public gladiator fights or chariot races.

They still mistrust me, but my time to prove my worth to them has come. One of their village elders is becoming blind. I have examined him and decided that his eye is being clouded by a tissue. I think that it is a cataract. I am walking to his hut now. I have everything I need to take out the tissue. I run my hand around the coin now as I speak, feeling the familiar man, the same lady and soldiers.

I scraped the tissue away using a finely pointed needle tool. It was very tedious and more than once I underestimated the thickness of the tissue. I have had to scoop the tissue out with a needle, and it took a long time. It was worth it. My tribe finally trusts me and I have taken on an apprentice. I dread to think how my fellow tribesmen would have tried to cure his blindness. Would they have danced and said a few prayers for him, or would they have gouged out the eye, or let it stay? I do not want to know the answer to that question. Life has been good to me. What more can I say, now that you know my story of how I came to be back with my tribe?