

Armenia, 259 AD, 1012 AUC

“So Emperor Caesar Publius Licinius Valerianus the faithful, lucky, and unconquered Augustus. It seems you’re not very lucky now, and you are definitely conquered,” Shapur I, the king of Persia of the Sasanian line, maliciously crowed. I, Valerian I, looked around my dingy cell, although there wasn’t much to look upon. I noticed the shackles around my arms and legs, and the miniscule barred window—a good six feet from the dirt floor. The ceiling was another three feet above the window and the whole cell was about eight feet wide. Spacious was my prison. I roused myself from my dazed state and icily remarked to the king, surrounded by his 15-person guard:

“So you think yourself a wit. Well, I may be in dire circumstances, but at least I don’t kidnap my enemies like the cowardly woman that you are.” Shapur’s eyes narrowed and his fingers tightened around his scepter. But suddenly, as if reminded of the position of his captive, Shapur relaxed and smiled cruelly again, although not without effort.

“I will let that comment pass since it may be your last. And perhaps I would just like my enemies to be...close. Oh, and as I know you’d like to know, there hasn’t been any word from your *loyal* son, so I suppose I can do anything with you I wish. I’m sure I could think of something *amusing*,” Shapur said and walked out of the cell. I clanged my shackles in frustration, and thought I heard Shapur’s laughter waft back into my prison. The last comment sent a shiver down my back, and a chill fear crept into my heart. Curses! When would Gallienus come and rescue me? But then, with all of the uprisings, and the trouble with Ingenuus, the governor of Pannonia, it could take months. All of the other governors might follow also, in which case Gallienus might never come.

I began to think of my life, and that of all Roman emperors. Almost all of the recent ones had to seize the empire by force, only to be assassinated by the very soldiers who had proclaimed them emperors to begin with. The whim of the soldiers, nobles, and governors ruled, and many self-proclaimed “emperors” died within weeks of their ascendancy to the throne.

I myself in fact had been a consul and a princeps senatus when I mediated Senate approval for the usurpation of Gordian I to the Roman throne in 991 AUC (238 AD), at the age of only 38. Under Decius, I was chosen censor and governor of the Rhine provinces Noricum and Raetia in 1004 AUC (251 AD). I fondly remembered this promotion, for in 1006 AUC (253 AD), Trebonius Gallus, the asserted emperor at the time, asked me to crush a revolt made by Aemilianus, with my own troops from the region. I arrived in Italy to find two things. First, Gallus’ troops had defected and killed him to join Aemilianus and hail him emperor, and second, upon hearing of my arrival, all of Aemilianus’ soldiers deserted him to join me. Thus *I* became emperor. The Senate was only too happy to declare Emperor one of its own, since I was descended from one of the most ancient senatorial and Etrurian families, the Licinii. I was sure I remembered the founder of my family mentioned in the *Aeneid*, somewhere, when I read it in school, but if it was not, I could still always boast that my founding father had been born at Troy. Not only did the senate welcome an ancient noble family into power, since I was the first emperor from such a family ever, but they also elevated my son Publius Licinius Egnatius Gallienus to the throne. I recalled the meeting with my son to tell him of my intentions to make him Augustus of the western part of the empire.

“Gallienus, you and I both know that this opportunity is dangerous and marvelous for both of us. We both know it is impossible to rule the whole empire alone. That is why I intend to announce to the Senate tomorrow that I wish to make you my co-emperor.” I had proclaimed. Gallienus had not looked very shocked over this statement, for he had known that if I lived long enough to declare an heir, it would be him.

“As you wish, father. I will do everything in my power to still any uprisings that may occur. But how shall we split up the empire?” Gallienus had inquired.

“Loosely into east and west; there would be no real boundary, but perhaps you could rout the Rhine rebellions and I will trounce the invaders from the east.”

“Of course father. Know that I will support you in all things, just as I know you will support me.” I knew that Gallienus had been soliciting my promise to forgo the imperial disagreements that seem to come continually between co-emperors. That was why it surprised me in 1010 AUC (257 AD), when Gallienus argued with me on the Christian issue.

“What have they done to you? Absolutely nothing. They are probably your more loyal subjects,” Gallienus had contended.

“You can’t know that. Besides Macrianus has said that there have been reports of insubordination to the throne and treason to the empire from the Christians. And you can’t deny they refuse to worship the gods, and assert that their god is the one true god. Macrianus says that if this doesn’t sto-”

“Macrianus! Why do you trust him, father? Some sources say that he is just waiting to cause dissention in your part of the empire, so he, his sons and other traitorous people can secede from the empire,” Gallienus had reasoned.

“Until you can find actual facts, Gallienus, I will continue to trust Macrianus, for I have seen no hint of a traitor in him.” Gallienus had seemed annoyed and had ended the conversation thus,

“Mark my words, father. Macrianus will help put you in a position where he will have free rein to disaffiliate from the Roman Empire, and you will not be able to stop him. I will have to pick up your pieces.” However, what was I supposed to do? Although in that year, I removed the Persians from Antioch, Goth invasions kept me busy. I could not have Christian uprisings, in addition. I tried to be kindly, by just sending the clergymen into exile. But as Macrianus, who did nothing traitorous, piled more and more evidence against the Christians, and there were more and more internal disturbances, I had to take harsh measures, which sometimes included death.

This year has been the worst since my control of the empire of Rome. I tried to defend Edessa against Persian attack, but plague deteriorated our armies. I sued for peace and met at Shapur’s home, unusually urged by Macrianus, but apparently it was a trap to capture me. The door to my cell opened and a soldier, carrying clothes, sneered,

“Fine clothes for a fine king. You’re no better than me, o *king*,” and spat on the clothes.

“How am I supposed to put them on,” I questioned, and pointed to my chains.

“Well, *your Augustness*, I am sure a king of your intelligence can figure it out. That is, if you have any.” He chuckled and left me and the clothes to the darkness of my cell. About an hour later, as far as I could tell, another soldier unlocked my cell and entered.

"Well, the king demands your presence, *emperor*, in these princely clothes. I shall unlock your chains, but don't think of running...my friends will see that you don't get far." In the doorway behind him, I could see four other soldiers with distinctly malevolent gleams in their eyes. I decided not to try to run. After I was unlocked, I put on the clothes. They *were* princely and made of fine silk with purple, red, and blue dyes. However, in the back of my mind, they reminded me of some line in the *Aeneid*: "Beware the Greeks bringing gifts," or something, supposedly because the Greeks couldn't be trusted. I was sure I couldn't trust Shapur to bring me a peace offering, not after the perfidious way I was captured. Something horrible was in store for me outside my cell.

"Hurry up," one of the soldiers prodded with his whip. After I was done, they all herded me to the front court of the palace with pushes much harder than they needed to be. The front court was a beautiful display of the flowers of the area, and I saw the most spirited Arabian steed waiting in the drive, with a golden mounting box waiting next to it.

"Well isn't it our lovely guest!" Shapur was saying, amid the jeers and taunts thrown my way. "I hope you know that as we speak, you procurator and praesitor, Macrianus, is stealing all the money from your treasury to secede from the empire. But besides that, I was wondering if you couldn't help me with my riding problem. I seem not to be able to use my mounting block, so..." he paused as raucous laughter broke out, I assumed, at my expense. It was a while before I understood exactly what he was asking of me.

"No," I shouted, as I was pushed near the horse. I, Restorer of the East, the Human Race, and the World, refused to be humiliated this way. I was an Emperor of Rome. They had no right. Suddenly, Shapur spoke.

"Look around you, *o emperor*. You are not in your precious empire. You are not in one of your fine palaces and you do not have your realm to protect you. Your own son has not ever *asked* for your release. You are in my hands now, at my whim, and on my land. *You Will Do As I Say!*" and he gave an almost imperceptible nod. The sudden crack of a whip brought tears to my eyes, and my hands and knees to the ground. I heard a sarcastic "Thank You," before I felt the weight of a boot pressed upon my back. Now, mounted on his horse, Shapur stated,

"When you are dead, your skin will make me the perfect showcase...stuffed with straw of course." I shuddered and could only hope that Gallienus would put a stop to the endless civil wars, bloodshed and unremitting invaders. Sadly, I knew that this impossibly immense empire would crumble and Gallienus would just become another expendable emperor in the chess game between the Greed for power and the Madness unleashed in war.

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