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Assimilation

by Garf Collins

Brice choked on the dense smoke from the burning houses and was violently sick as he witnessed the mass suicides of his fellow Numantians. His father – an emaciated skeleton of a man - staggered out of their house with his dagger red with the blood of his wife and daughters.

“It is far better this way. We’ll never be slaves of the Romans.”

Brice tried to wrest the blade from his father’s hand but was unable to prevent him cutting his throat. With a rage against the aggressors, Brice joined the small band of men who had resolved to fight and die. They crawled through a secret tunnel and rushed towards the Roman host. Something hit Brice on the head and he fell down as if dead.

“Wh.. Where am I?” murmured Brice, as he woke up sweating profusely.

Emerging from this recurring nightmare, he remembered that he was the officer in charge of the Roman forward combat base. He recalled how, after the siege, he was taken for a slave to support the Roman legions. He had advanced steadily and by then was a trusted logistics officer in support of Marius’ campaign against the German tribes who were threatening the Republic.

‘I dream as Brice but since my capture I have a Roman name,’ he thought, ‘they lined us up and gave us new names. Of course, I am now Septimus.’

As he went about his business of organising the provisions, Septimus thought about the past years. The proud Celts of Numantia had always repelled the Romans until

Scipio advanced with 30,000 men and blockaded their town to starve them into submission.

After the German invaders were crushed, Marius came to his tent and surprised him by saying, "Septimus. You have been a faithful servant and have been very efficient at your work both here and in the North African campaign with me, I declare that you are henceforth a free man."

"I humbly thank you, Consul," Septimus replied. Although delighted with the advantages, which came with freedom, he felt as if it marked the end of being a Numantian.

When they returned in triumph to Rome, there were many celebration banquets. Emerging from one of these bacchanalian events, Septimus saw a familiar face. It was the youth who had been alongside him when they were taken as slaves.

"Octavius," he shouted as he hugged him, "what brings you here?"

"Is that you Brice? You're looking very prosperous."

"Septimus now, remember? Yes I'm a free man. And you."

"I hope to be soon. I look after the accounts for one of the aristocrats who has a lot of influence."

"I often dream about the old times and the horror of the siege, Octavius. We are a tiny handful of survivors. Rome took over the Numantian lands completely. We grew up in another language but now we speak only Latin. Even our Celtic names were taken from us. They wiped us out. Numantia is no more."

Editorial note:

The story is based on a Roman account of events. No Numantian records survive.