

LONGINUS



BOOK I OF THE MERLIN FACTOR

A NOVEL

STEVEN MAINES



My duties put me in charge of one hundred men. It was nearly a thousand years into the existence of my beloved Republic. It was no longer a Republic, however. Rome was now an Imperial State, with the façade of a Republic in the guise of the Senate. My title or rank was Centurion, and my name was Longinus. Centurion Longinus.

To recall it now, in my present state of existence, in the memory of my soul, my spirit, is to relive it again in the flesh.

You see, the memory of the soul is not memory as we think of it when we are in human form. It is not a conglomeration of images and sounds and feelings impressed on the pathways of the brain. Instead, when one truly recalls an event of the soul's existence, it is instantly relived, or lived all over again in what you would call *real time*.

When I truly recall, or relive a life, I am going immediately again to that place and time. Of course, time does not exist, per se. But, as humans, we tend to internalize this no-thing we call time, so for the sake of argument, I will use it here. All Time and thus all Creation, exists at once, on or at different dimensional aspects of the Universe. By tapping into my soul's memory, I can travel back to any point in time in my soul's history or past. In other words, when one taps into an event in the soul's memory, one becomes the participant-observer, destined to play out the drama again.

But enough of that. This is about my life as Longinus at the time of the crucifixion of the Christ.

Some have cursed me down through history. Some believe that I became a devout and learned Christian, and even sainted me. Some think that I left Rome and her Legions and traveled to Gaul with the mindful intent to join the Celts and Druid sects. Still others believe that I was condemned to walk the earth forever, never being allowed to die, ever to walk in my own living hell for my act, my so-called sin. They are all wrong. And, they are all correct. Except this last one. How absurd. I laugh at it now, but did not find it at all humorous at the time.

In this life, I am Centurion Longinus, formally known as Gaius Cassius, Centurion in the Emperor's Legions; Centurion of the Roman Guard in Jerusalem, circa 0033 of the Common Era. I am not to be confused with General Gaius Cassius Longinus, who conspired against the great Gaius Julius Caesar some seventy years earlier, or the other Gaius Longinus, who was a Greek philosopher two-hundred years later. I was Gaius Cassius Longinus, Legionnaire and Centurion. I remembered nothing of my True Merlin Nature in this life until the event that changed it forever, and even then, it took many years for me to be open to it and remember it, or realize it. The event I refer to is the one for which many others cursed and condemned me.

My *sin*? I am he who pierced the side of the Christ while he hanged from his cross.

It was a simple thing, really. My orders were to accompany King Herod's palace guards to the site of the crucifixion and to stand guard myself -- not to have a mere

Legionnaire, a common foot soldier, for this duty -- to stand next to this crucified one and keep his followers at bay until he died.

Hours and hours had passed. People had come and gone all day, weeping and wailing and gnashing their teeth with despair at the sight of their "Savior" and his two companions spread out and dangling upon their wooden beams. The sky had become grotesquely dark and ominous at one point, instilling a palpable fear among the mourners and the curious who had gathered. I, too, felt a twinge of irrational foreboding at first, but quickly dismissed my dread as ridiculous. I was simply witnessing an unusual weather-storm for this time of year. That this man was being crucified at the same time was mere coincidence. And, I believed that. Until, that is, the Earth shook.

It only lasted for a moment, the shaking. But, it left no doubt in my mind that it was directly correlated to this dying man on the cross.

In that moment, I looked up at him. Though the sky behind his body was dark with clouds, there was a beautiful, unearthly glow emanating from around his slumped head. He muttered something then. Something like, *they know not knowing what they do*. Though somewhere deep within me, I knew this man to truly be a Holy man, connected to a power -- perhaps, to The Power above us all -- my heart was still the hardened stone of a soldier of Rome, impassionate and immune to all but death and orders. My orders here included staying with the doomed One until he was dead.

Some versions of my duties, or what took place next, proclaim that I was a hero; that my next act actually saved the Christ's skull from being crushed. It was the custom at that time in this particular region that one who was hanged from the cross would remain there until dusk only. No prisoner was to be left on the cross overnight. If he had not died by dusk, his skull would be crushed by a soldier standing guard, thus insuring death. It was brutal, yes. But nothing I haven't seen in many a battle. Besides, by that time, there was no feeling left on the part of the condemned, as he long since would have passed into unconsciousness. But instead of having his skull crushed, this man that hanged before me had another fate. Here is what really happened.

His eyes closed, his chin on his chest, the Christ appeared to be in the state of eternal sleep, his spirit departed. The only way to be certain that he had passed on was to reach up with my spear and prod. This I did, to the gasps of horror of the remainder of those present, which included his mother and another woman to whom she clung. What did I care? I had my orders. I pierced his side, between his ribs. A sickening moan came from his mouth as blood and body fluids seeped down the length of the protruding blade and shaft from his ribs. Some of it even splattered on my face and into my eyes. Contrary to what some believe, however, my poor eyesight was not suddenly and miraculously restored to normal at the touch of the Christ's blood and body fluids. In subsequent years, however, my eyesight became nearly perfect the older I got, instead of degenerating with age, as is usually the case.

Before I could withdraw my instrument, I felt a vibration come from the body on the cross. It came down my spear and into my own body. It paralyzed me. The air around me instantly filled with a static tingle, like a localized lightening charge. I felt as though I were floating. A man's voice then whispered to me, saying, "What have you done, my child? What have you done?"

An Otherworldly fear overtook my mind and with all my strength, I cursed and yanked on the spear, finally pulling it free of the body. I spun around to see who had said the words to me. But no one was close enough to have whispered and be heard, save for the two women, and, as I said, it was a man's voice.

Confused, I looked back up at the man on the cross. His now vacant, dead eyes stared at me from a corpse no longer occupied by the spirit. Or, so was my assumption, until I had heard what had happened three days later. But for the moment, I gave the orders for him to be removed from his death-perch. His loving, weeping mother and a few others moved forward to take him away.

I stood there for a few moments, staring at his mother and then staring at him. The voice once more whispered in my head, and I found myself saying out loud, "What have I done? By the Gods, what have I done?" I felt a tear roll down my cheek, though inwardly, I felt no emotions. But, again, somewhere inside of my being, I knew who this Man truly was; an emissary from God or the Gods. Nevertheless, I convinced myself that I had followed and executed the orders given to me with my usual exemplary proficiency. Commendations would be forthcoming, I was sure. However, my conscience and spirit would show me something else.

That night I was able to keep sleep at bay for a long while. I knew that if I gave into slumber, I would have to face my conscience, my fears and truths of the day's events, and this, of course, I could not allow. So I spent the night in the arms of the local whores. When one would tire, I would find another to play with. This went on throughout the night. I spent nearly half-a-year's wages that evening. I was possessed, so to speak, by the gods of sex. I could not be satiated. I had the virility of ten bulls. I would no sooner spend my seed in one woman, when I would rise and swell again. On more than one level, I hoped the night would never end.

But it did finally end. As dawn approached I drifted off into a strange slumber in the arms of the two women sharing my bed. Unwillingly, as my eyelids began to close, I found myself glancing in the direction of the corner of the room. There, propped up against the wall, was my spear. Though I had thoroughly cleaned his blood from the blade -- actually, I had cleaned the blade three times, the last one especially being quite unnecessary -- the blade now gleamed crimson with blood once again. Impossible!! It must be the light within the room! But nay, it was clearly blood that dripped down the blade, seeping along the shaft as well. I tried to disentangle myself from the limbs that lewdly entwined my body, but found that I was paralyzed, as I had been momentarily on the field of crosses the previous day. My eyes, though I endeavored to keep them open, closed of their own accord.

Images thrust themselves at me in my mind's eye. Horrifying images of death and destruction, of torture and foulness beyond human comprehension; of wars and rumors of wars being fought on the planes of the heavens, as well as of earth; of Evil reigning in the minds and hearts of men the evils that he can and will inflict on his fellow man. The visions showed the fall of my beloved Empire and the rise of another; then the fall of that one and the rise and fall of another, then another, and so on. They showed the swift boats going to new lands and the killing and torture of humans unknown. They showed men flying in great machines that rained down fire and death. They showed flying objects that carried no man, but delivered swift and massive destruction and fates

worse than death. They showed bodies alive but burning, screaming for their very souls. Could this all be true?

This and more I saw in the sleep of that dawn. Then the voice, the whispered voice from the field came to me. "Fear naught," it said. Even so, terror infused my being. I tried to speak, but found that I could not. I continued to see the horrific images play out in front of my mind, as the voice continued: "This and more shall you see, for I tell you now that you have been chosen. You will not leave here until this world is consumed. Until this world has run its course, shall you wander and learn and teach. You will long to leave, for death, on many an occasion, but true death will never come, because it cannot. Ah, you think this to be punishment, but it is not, not at all. There is nothing for which to be punished. It is your *desire*."

At the ceasing of the words, the words which came from I knew not where, nor from whom -- though, much later, I would come to realize it came from the depths of my own being, the eternal, ever-present Oneness of all within, and not from anything at all external -- I realized that my fear was of this world. That was all.

At the ceasing of the words, the images increased in speed and ferocity until all I could see was the earth from the vantage point of the stars. She was now a very old and very dead planet. I was not completely aware at the time of what I was looking at, but knew, nonetheless, that it meant the utter annihilation of all existence as I then understood it.

In the trance state -- the dream state -- I screamed. With my entire being, did I scream. A silent one at first, but it grew, and it grew.

I heard the scream far off in the distance and tried to move away from it. But instead, of moving away from it, it simply grew closer. As it did, I realized that it was my own voice; my own scream emanating from my own body. A bright light exploded in front of me, and I found myself in the bed, swimming in a pool of my own fetid sweat. The two women were trembling at the foot of the bed, staring at me as if I were the foulest of Demons. I sat up, breathing hard and looked at the spear, the blood now dried as if it had been there forever.

I looked back at the women and, in unison, they jumped back as if I were going to pounce and devour them in one-felled swoop.

"What do you stare at?" I bellowed.

"I...we...you became violent, thr...thrashing at us as if the devil was in you," squeaked one.

"Truly," moused the other.

I rubbed my head, trying to make sense of the vision or dream I had just had, as well as what these women were saying.

"Leave me," I finally mumbled.

Slowly, the women backed away toward the door. Just before they passed through it, though, one of them, Irena, a beautiful, green-eyed, dark-haired, Roman-Hebrew woman whom I had known since first being stationed at this hole of an outpost, stopped and boldly brought up a fact. This was her...house, so to speak, after all.

"Longinus, there is one other matter..." she hinted.

Ah, Irena. She was ever the business woman. Her eyes always conveyed a strength and confidence that were accentuated by the high cheekbone structure of her lovely face. If I was meeting her for the first time, I would assume she was noble born.

But, I knew better. I nodded to the clump that was my clothes and armor near the spear. “There is coin in the bag on my tunic. Take what you will.”

She did as she was bade. But then, curiously, as she stood from retrieving the money, she stared at the spear as if transfixed by enchantment. She had not been on the field of crosses on the previous day. She could not have known how I had used the instrument, nor had she been a follower of this so-called Anointed One. Yet, there she stood, under the spell of the spear. She reached out to touch it.

I exploded, leaping out of the bed. “No!” I screamed, violently grabbing her arm and throwing her across the room back onto the bed with the strength of three men.

She bounced off of the skins of the bed, smashing her head against the wall.

“Do not touch it,” I snarled at her, caring not whether she had died from the impact. She had not. She lay clutching the back of her head and whimpering, blood oozing between her fingers.

Irena then looked up at me weepily, yet angrily. I suddenly felt like the ass that I was. I tried to mouth an apology, but nothing came out. Irena’s green eyes flashed a mixture of disbelief, fear, and above all, defiance. Irena. I so loved her boldness. With as much dignity as she could muster, she collected herself, stood, and walked toward the door. Taking the other still trembling woman, girl, really, by the elbow, they both left me alone with my apparent dementia.

~II~

I sat in the deafening silence of the room for over an hour, staring at the spear against the wall. Aside from, or because of, the apparent permanent blood stain on it, it now looked like any other spear of a Legionnaire. But I knew otherwise.

I finally came to my senses and began to put on my clothing, my uniform, my duty regalia. I did so as though in a fog, as if my body was detached from my very essence; as if I were watching someone else donning his uniform. *It doesn't matter*, I kept telling myself. *What's done is done*. The soldier in me was clearly trying to reassert himself.

But it did matter. Nothing would ever be the same again. Ever. I reverently approached the spear, half fearing it might come to life. But ultimately, that's not what I began feeling from it. I paused, sensing its... what was it? Divine energy? It seemed to glow. I finally shook my head, nonsense, plucked it from its resting place, and departed the stuffy room.

The sun beat down harshly as I stepped outside. Curse this region! Perhaps if I asked the General for transfer to the homeland, I thought. The gods knew I deserved it. Yes, a transfer would not be too much to ask.

A crowd had gathered at the far end of the street. They seemed to be watching something, or someone. I couldn't really hear anything. Two of my platoons were there as well, milling about, apparently not too concerned with whatever was causing the crowd to gather. Still.

A Legionnaire trotted by, oblivious to me, clearly quite intent on joining his comrades down at the end of the street.

"You there!" I yelled at him.

The young man stopped and looked at me. Recognition appeared on his face, and his eyes grew large. He trotted up to me, saluting fist to chest much too hard and crisply, clearly trying to impress his Centurion with the polished moves. *Green, this one is*, was all I thought. My thoughts, however, quickly returned to the reason why I had stopped him. I nodded toward the crowd. "What goes on down there?" I asked.

"The people..." his voice cracked.

Inwardly, I had to smile. This lad couldn't have been more than fifteen summers. He cleared his throat, and tried to deepen his voice with age and authority.

"The people," he began again, "are listening to someone speak, Centurion. I believe it is one of those who followed the Jew-King that was hanged yesterday." This last part, the lad spat with sardonic contempt.

"Hold your tongue, boy, or I'll have it on a platter!" I bellowed angrily, though I must confess that I wasn't sure why I was angry. "You know nothing of this man."

The boy-soldier before me began to tremble, fearing my wrath and clearly confused as to what possible transgression he could have committed.

"Dismissed!" I barked.

Again, his crisp, forced salute. He almost fell over his own feet in his flight away

from me. I watched him run toward the crowd; and then I turned toward the tavern next to the place where I had spent the night of debauchery, now intent on finding food.

But something stopped me. I slowly turned and found myself looking back down the street at the crowd once again. The next thing I knew, my feet were moving, seemingly of their own accord, guiding me forward toward the crowd.

A string of thoughts and voices went through my mind. *Why am I going there? What do I care what one of His followers has to say? Well...what if this person speaks against Rome? No. He never did, did he? I heard tell that he even said, 'render unto Caesar, that which belongs to Caesar,' so why would a follower of his say otherwise? Besides, his own people condemned him to death.*

My inner dialogue, or argument, went on like this as I walked toward the crowd. "Silence!" I finally declared out loud, apparently none too quietly, for two women stared at me from a nearby doorway as if I were mad.

No matter.

The voices stopped. I decided to go check on the situation anyway. It was my duty, after all, to investigate any impromptu gathering. *I am a Roman officer here, I reminded myself.*

The lad whom I'd stopped a moment before saw me coming and alerted his comrades, all of them snapping to attention as I approached. I simply gave them a curt nod and maneuvered my way into the crowd to get a better look at the cause of it.

A man, a Jew by the look of his unkempt beard and Levite robe, stood on a table in the center of the crowd. He was talking to a couple of other men in a normal, though slightly raised, conversational tone, a combination of awe and reverence laced into his speech. The crowd here was pressed tight, straining to hear what this person had to say.

The dirty, sweating bodies around me began to become oppressive. But it didn't seem to matter, as I found myself drawn into this moment, to hear what this man was saying. Though I could only pick up snippets, he was clearly talking about the man hanged the previous day -- his, Teacher, he was saying.

"But he told us! I'm speaking the truth!" he insisted.

"Impossible!" said another. "No one rises from the dead!"

"Did he not command Lazarus to come out of his tomb?" countered the first man.

"So it is claimed, but, I was not there to see it."

"I was. And I tell you, *that* happened. So shall this. On the third day," declared the man on the table.

My heart began to thump. "On the third day?" I found myself saying out loud.

The crowd turned to me in unison, fear suddenly spreading on the face of the two men who had been conversing. Clearly, they had mistaken my reason for saying the words.

"No, no," I said. "I sincerely wish to know. For myself. Not for any other reason. Not for State reasons, certainly. Please."

The two men looked from one to the other. They were Hebrew. The first, the one on the table, stepped gingerly down to the ground, all traces of fear evaporating from his craggy face. He was older than the second by far.

He then stepped forward and looked me squarely in the eyes, peering into my soul, I felt. Apparently satisfied that my inquiry was of a true and sincere nature, he spoke. "So said my Lord."

He continued to look at me, assessing me. I suddenly felt vulnerable. I could have arrested this man for the way he dared to look a Roman in the eye, for the way he was inspecting me at the moment. But I simply stood there. He then looked at my spear and his eyes grew wide.

"You!" he said. "You are the Centurion who pierced my Lord's side."

A murmur rose from the crowd. I stood my ground. *Where are my men*, I found myself thinking. But I needn't have been concerned. The man reached for the blade of my spear. I jerked it back out of his reach.

"Please," he said. I looked closer at him. Covering the lower part of his craggy, aged face, he had a scraggly grey beard. He wore an old and tattered robe -- though of which tribe I could not tell -- its hood covering most of the top of his head, though I could see wisps of thin grey hair hanging limply near his temples. His eyes were kind and full of depth. Still, he was just an old man. That's all he was. He was harmless.

I felt myself compelled to put the blade of the spear within his reach. He touched it tenderly with his hand, caressing it almost lovingly. A tear rolled down his cheek and he put his lips to the metal, kissing it respectfully. I felt a moist drop descend my cheek as well. I was moved beyond words, though I knew not why.

"Thank you," he said, looking into my eyes. Slowly, he turned and walked into the crowd, the people moving with him. Soon, I found myself standing in open space, the crowd having dispersed.

"Sir?" a voice said. I looked up to the source of the voice. It was my young legionnaire, along with his fellow soldiers. "Are you well? You've been standing here for a while now," he said hesitantly.

I blinked as if waking from a dream. "Quite well, soldier," I said smiling. I looked from his face to those of the others. Boys, all of them. They could not have been more than sixteen summers. "Come," I said. "Let's find food." We began to move off, and I took one look back at where I had stood with the crowd and the man who had kissed the blade of my spear.

I looked at the weapon myself, cradled in my hand, feeling the power it held. Something was moving me, beginning to shape my destiny. I could feel it, but denied it in that moment. Sometimes, the Universe will move us whether we acknowledge it or not. Destiny will not be denied.

That night, true sleep was a foreign thing, kept at bay by the deep thoughts, voices and images within my mind. I saw many things in my tumultuous dreams. Again, as before, they were things that were violent and seemed to be off in the future. But there were also things that were pertinent to the present, to me. One voice in particular, came through.

It was familiar. It was *his*, the One from the Cross.

"Longinus," he said to my dreaming mind. "Longinus, I will see you again. You will see that I live. In heart, mind and body, I live. All will see that they, too, will live forever -- that they have always lived, always will."

I knew not then what he was saying. I now know, however. It is a wondrous

thing. Why do we not give in to these Truths? We spend millennia and then some, hearing these things, but not listening -- not listening to the Spirit within which houses all Truth, houses our very Truest Self.

I awoke in a sweat and more fatigued than when I retired the previous evening. I looked at my surroundings. I was in the same room as on the night of His death; the same room of debauchery; now two nights ago. For an instant I was confused.

In my fogged mind, I thought it was the night of His death. I thought that perhaps it had all been a dream: the death, the night of debauchery, all of it. But then I saw my spear leaning against the wall in the corner, dried blood still caked on parts of the blade, in spite of the many times I'd already scrubbed it, and I knew it was no dream. I didn't remember coming to the same room on the previous night, but obviously, I had. Too bad it wasn't all a dream.

Something was rattling around in my brain. Was it something about today? Yes. That was it. But what? There was indeed something about this day that was to set it apart. But in that moment, for my life, I could not remember.

I lay there for some time, soaking in the newness of the day. Or rather, absorbing the newness of my Self, for that is actually how I felt. Inexplicably. After a time, I slowly got up and splashed water on my face from the basin that had been left for me. Then I donned my uniform and breastplate. Taking the spear in hand, I headed out in search of food.

"Ah, Longinus," came the sweet, familiar voice. Something in it this time, however, gave me pause. I turned to see Irena's eyes piercing me with feathered contempt. What could she be angry about? Was it my outburst from the other night? Perhaps. But it wasn't like her to hold a grudge. Still, she was vexed by something. "I demand payment," she blurted out.

"For what? I already paid for my room, gave *you* something for the night. I told you to take what you wanted from my coins, which you did," I said.

"The girl!"

I was confused. "Irena, I was with no one last night, so I don't owe you..."

"...She left. You had us both two nights ago -- all night long. And in the morning, you scared demons out of the girl, myself as well, for that matter. But I know you. I took it as just another of your moods." She paused briefly, calming herself before continuing. "We've known each other a long time. I won't pretend that there's ...something... between us as man and woman, because there's not. It's business. Which means, I don't mind sharing you. But I draw the line when you cause my business to suffer with your temper or anything else."

I did not understand at all what she was talking about. Bewilderment must have splashed across my face.

"She's gone, Longinus! Because of you! She wouldn't take anyone last night, and this morning, she left, saying she couldn't forget the madman."

"Maybe she was speaking of another soldier. After all, if it weren't for the Roman army, you'd probably have scant few customers, my dear," I said in desperation.

"No!" was her emphatic reply. "It was you she spoke of. 'The madman with the spear,' she said."

I forced a smile. "Are you sure she meant my Legion issued spear and not my man-spear?" My feeble attempt at humor only served to incur Irena's wrath all the more.

“No, damn you! You know she meant *this* spear!” She reached for the weapon at my side. Something inside me snapped. Reflexively, I yanked the weapon out of her reach, and violently threw up my other arm to block her from getting to it.

But the force of my block was much more than I had intended, and, for that matter, much greater than I thought I was capable of. With a gush of air from her chest, Irena flew back some ten feet, sprawling and flopping on her back like a child’s straw doll. For a moment she lay motionless and I shuddered. *By the gods*, I thought, *what have I done?*

Since the time I had been assigned here, Irena had become much more than just a bed-companion. She had become a friend. No, even more than a friend. In that moment, I suddenly realized that I cared for her on a much deeper level.

My heart leapt into my throat as she lay before me. “Irena!” I yelled, leaping to her side and kneeling before her. Why had my reaction to protect the spear been so strong? And what of my physical strength in that moment? Where had that come from? I was becoming unstrung; like a damaged archer’s bow, I was quickly becoming useless.

“It is you, is it not, Longinus?”

Her voice brought me back to myself, and my nearly overwhelming concern for her. “Yes, I’m here. I’m so sorry.”

“No, I mean, it is you they speak of,” she said, gaining her strength with each word. Her demeanor had completely changed; no longer angry, as if her anger had been used to cover something else. A fear, perhaps? She sat up and fixed her beautiful eyes on mine. “It is you who pierced the side of the Jew-King, I know it now; the way you protect that spear. Does it hold magic now? Some say that it must.”

I was speechless. What was she saying? To whom had she spoken? A few moments of silence filled the space between us. Irena smiled, a teardrop rimming her eyes. “I’m...I’m,” she stammered. “I’m sorry I yelled at you about the girl. I don’t think she was cut out to be as the likes of me anyway.”

My heart swelled. “The ‘likes’ of you? You’re, well, I’m proud to be your friend. You’re a smart woman, Irena, and more.”

It was then that I felt myself opening up to yet another new sensation. It was the inexplicable feeling that I’d known Irena for a very, very long time, long before I was even born. But how could that be? Yet, something deep within my Being recognized that same something deep within hers. I felt myself drifting in a fog, an ethereal mist. What was wrong with me? I had had thoughts like this before: a deeper recognition of someone, but dismissed them, relegating the thoughts to imagination.

Yet somehow, this was different. Somehow, I knew this feeling to be correct. I knew that I was grasping a deeper Truth, a deeper Mystery.

“Oh, Longinus,” Irena said, once again pulling my attention back to her. “I am your friend?” she asked tenderly.

“And more,” I replied. I gazed at her again, my full awareness coming back to the present; to myself, Longinus, Centurion to Caesar. “Who has told you that it was I who pierced the side of the man on the cross?”

“Two men. And a woman.”

“Who were they?”

“I don’t know who the men were, but the woman, her name was Mary. She used to work in a house a short distance from here. Then she started to follow the man you crucified.”

“Why?” I asked.

“She said his words cleansed her, freed her,” replied Irena.

I thought about this for a moment. Then another thought took its place, one with more urgency. “When did you speak to them last?” I asked.

She pondered the question for a moment. “Two hours ago. They were elated over...” Her voice trailed off as a look of understanding and awe crossed her brow.

“Over what?!” I insisted. But a feeling crept over me, an awareness of the answer that had been there all along.

“Over the ‘fact,’ as they put it, that this crucified ‘Jew-King’, Jesu, I think they called him, had arisen from the dead early this morning.”

Of course. That was it. That’s what today was about. “And they saw this feat?”

“Mary did. And then one of the men, later.”

“And you believe them?” I asked, somewhat incredulous.

She hesitated. I could tell that she wasn’t sure whether she was speaking to Longinus, her friend, or Longinus the Centurion.

“I...no,” she said, but her face betrayed her, as it had a moment before.

Deep within my own being, I knew the truth even then. But Centurion Longinus was in command. I had to check into this. By now, rumor, myth or truth, this would be spreading throughout the city. Things could get out of hand very quickly. Was this the real reason that I wanted to delve into this? No. But in that moment, it was the reason I allowed my mind to believe. The spear in my hand seemed to pulsate in that moment, almost as if it were divining, pointing the way to go.

I ran for the door and was out in the street before I knew it. My heart was pounding. A sensation, an urging, was compelling me to go north. It was coming from the spear. Just as I was about to step in that direction, someone was next to me.

“I’m going with you,” Irena said, her jaw set in that stoic and defiant way that I’d come to love.

All I could do was smile. “Of course, you are,” I said. We set off down the street. We’d gone about a hundred yards when I noticed something odd; the street -- indeed, the whole area -- was empty. No one was about. Irena and I exchanged a wordless, questioning glance.

One of the men, one who had been at the gathering on the previous day, the old man who had so reverently kissed the spear, suddenly and mysteriously stepped out from behind a tree on the edge of a path, one leading northward off the street. The hood of his tattered robe or cloak was up over his head, but I could still see most of his face and knew it to be the same man. But, he was different, somehow, from that moment of yesterday. I stared in amazement, for his face glowed with a light; a light of the Gods; a light of the divine. His eyes, though filled with depth yesterday, now showed even more profoundness. In those eyes seemed to be the knowledge of creation and the awareness of having seen first-hand the Great Mysteries. Our eyes locked only briefly. I had to avert my own eyes, so deep was his gaze.

“Centurion,” he said. “I have seen it, Centurion. I have seen *him*. I have witnessed the Resurrection.”

I knew what he said, but feared it. “What say you, man?” I replied.

“The burial chamber lies empty,” said the old man.

Again, Irena and I exchanged a look. “Do you speak of the one they call Joshua, or ‘Jesu’?,” she asked the man before us.

“Yes, I do.”

“Take us there,” I commanded, the Centurion in me taking control.

The man was about to protest because of my tone, I could tell. But then his demeanor shifted, and he suddenly smiled instead. “Follow me,” he said. He turned and headed up a path. Irena and I did as he bade.