

**THE GREEN  
BRONZE  
MIRROR**

**by Lynne Ellison**

*With Illustrations by Philip  
Smiley*



*“It was an old mirror”*

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# Table of Contents

Chapter	Page
I.....	5
II.....	9
III.....	16
IV.....	22
V.....	31
VI.....	39
VII.....	46
VIII.....	55
IX.....	64
X.....	71
XI.....	79
XII.....	89
XIII.....	96
XIV.....	103
XV.....	110

## *List of illustrations*

<i>“It was an old mirror”</i> .....	2
<i>“ ... female slave, fifteen years, property of Duillius Rufus, decurion of the sixth cohort of the ... ”</i> .....	20
<i>‘At night Rome was not quiet’</i> .....	45
<i>‘I, of course, was put to the oars.’</i> .....	52
<i>“The driver of one was speared through the chest, but the warrior took a clear leap into the back of his opponent's car and hacked his head off.”</i> .....	60
<i>‘Nobody really knew where the fire started’</i> .....	74
<i>‘The passages were getting narrower the farther she went, and very dark.’</i> .....	87
<i>‘When she was near enough Kleon caught her wrist and hauled her up with remorseless strength’</i> .....	108
<i>‘MATH-GIDDON STROKED HIS BEARD REFLECTIVELY’</i> .....	111

# THE GREEN BRONZE MIRROR

by

**Lynne Ellison**

*Illustrations by Philip Smiley*

## I

THE SEA ROLLED MAJESTICALLY ON TO THE BROAD, FLAT sands, and the breeze blew a sharp salty tang into Karen's face. She felt a burst of energy drive through her, and started to run through the shallows with the wind behind her. The cold water splashed her bare legs and made dark splotches on her shorts, but she didn't care. How could she bother with boring things like wet shorts when she was on holiday by the sea with nobody else at all on the beach, except a few people collecting shells half a mile away?

She ran faster and looked down, seeing her own bare feet striking the clear, rippled water and sending silver drops to right and left.

At last she slowed to a walk and looked about her. She was down at the far end of the bay now, where the picnickers rarely came, and the dunes, crowned with long grass like tufts of hair, rose on her right. She went towards them and struggled up the soft, dry sand, and lay on her stomach to see over the top.

Inland the ground was flat, rising gradually to hills in the distance. Tiny, white-walled farms stood out clearly in the early-morning light. Grey, twisted roads wound between them, and here and there were areas of dotted woodland. Away on the headland rose the ruins of an old Norman castle.

Karen snuggled deeper into the sand and watched the postman ride past on the road below, steadily pedalling his old red bicycle. In her imagination he turned into a Turkish troop-train, and she was Lawrence of Arabia waiting to blow him up. Behind her lay the wild tribesmen of the desert, their Arab horses tethered at the bottom of the dune this was a dangerous venture. Just a little bit farther ... now! Boom! The wrecked train heeled on to its side and she raised her arm to start the charge.

'Karen! Kaa-ren!' Her sister came running along the seashore, yelling at the top of her voice. She flung herself down on the dune, panting.

Anne was ten, five years younger than Karen. She had light brown hair in two short plaits and a freckled snub nose. She was a pleasant child, and Karen was fond of her, but like most younger sisters she could be irritating when she was not wanted.

She was not particularly wanted now.

'You spoiled my daydream,' said Karen with mock sorrow.

'Oh dear! Was it a nice one?' Anne laughed. 'So this is where you were. I've been looking all over for you. What are you doing down here by yourself?'

'Just running about. I like being by myself. When will you learn that?'

Anne ignored the last remark. 'I'm going to the shops to get a postcard for Gran. Coming?'

'No thanks. I hate those ghastly little trinket-places. It's so much nicer here-good and lonely.'

'I'd rather be with people. It's nine-thirty, you know. Mum'll be wondering where you are.'

'Is it really? I still don't think I'll go back yet, though. Goodbye.'

Anne ran off, dismissed.

There was no point in continuing the daydream now. The postman, alias Turkish troop-train, had long since vanished. Karen got up and stretched. The hair blew into her eyes and she turned round so that it trailed behind. It was too long, she thought; it needed cutting.

She went slowly down to the sea again, and finding a piece of wood brought in by the tide, she drew a horse in the firm wet sand; a good horse, because she'd been drawing them a long time, galloping along the ground with its legs in an interesting position. The position was correct, though; she had studied photographs and knew just how a horse's legs behaved when it galloped.

There was a sort of science in it.

Looking at the horse-drawing, she felt an itch to gallop herself, and turned to go farther along the beach.

About a hundred yards away she saw that there was a large section of sand cut off from the rest by a deep channel. Along this the sea water flowed fast, pushed through by the current from the other side of the bay.

Smiling to herself and wondering which would be the best place to cross, Karen walked along one bank, but as the channel didn't seem to get any shallower she waded in. The water soon came up to the hem of her shorts, and she had vague ideas of turning back, but it came no higher so she continued. The current pushed hard at her legs, and the water didn't look or smell too nice. She thought of sewage, especially as it was a pale yellow colour; then decided that as she was two-thirds of the way across it was silly to go back.

Although the other bank shelved steeply and smoothly, she scrambled up easily enough, and now the whole island was hers!

It was wide and flat, marvellously lonely and beautiful in its solitude, and well suited to the mood she was in. There was absolutely nothing on it except a few gulls standing by the distant gleam of sea. The sky overhead was a sweep of wind-driven clouds, accenting the loneliness, and high up a lapwing mewed plaintively.

Karen's feet sank slightly into the sand, leaving wet puddles when she moved them; it was not as hard as it looked. Hoping there was no chance of its being quicksand, she started to run. The brisk sea air seemed to give her boundless energy, and she sped on, leaving silvery tracks behind her that gradually filled with water, and then sand again. The gulls standing by the sea saw her from a long distance, and flapped heavily away. When she reached their former stance, all that was left were a few triangular prints and some bird droppings.

But there was something else, Karen soon realized, something almost buried in the sand. It was a greenish colour, and looked like the handle of some object. Karen stooped and touched it out of curiosity. It seemed to be made of metal, and she knelt down to dig it out of the sand.

It was an old mirror- a flat disc of metal about six inches across, set on to a decorated handle. The whole surface was covered in grit, and the handle was eroded, as though it had been there a very long time. Karen stared and wondered and then went and washed the object in the sea. Under the sand and the dirt the metal turned out to be bronze, a beautiful green, presumably owing to age. Strangely, the flat mirror part was completely smooth and untouched, whereas the handle was pitted and partially eaten away, although the design of delicately twining leaves was still visible.

Karen wondered who had dropped it, and then the idea came to her that it might be an ancient relic-Norman, Saxon, or perhaps even Roman. Suppose she had found something of real historical interest!

'I wonder if I could still see myself in it?' she said aloud, and took out her handkerchief to rub it. It took time, but gradually she worked up a shine on the metal, and as she did so a curious tingling came to her from the mirror, almost as if the metal were coming to life. Karen distinctly felt it vibrate and examined her tingling hand, but there was no mark on the skin. She glanced into the mirror, slowly.

## II

SHE WAS LYING ON A GRASSY SLOPE WITH THE SUN WARMING her cheek. Her head ached violently, and she sat up slowly, trying to think what had happened. When she looked down she saw that she was still clutching the mirror, and that reminded her. She'd found it on the island, and looked into it. Yes, that was right, she thought; the last thing she'd done was look into the mirror, and she couldn't remember anything after that, just a second of time and she was here but where was here?

Karen jumped quickly to her feet and looked for the village, but it was nowhere in sight. Could she have got somewhere else without knowing it? No! She recognized the shape of the headland, although there seemed to be something missing. After a minute's reflection she realized that the old Norman castle had disappeared.

She scratched her head, puzzled. The very shape of the beach was different. Surely it had been broader than that? Where were the island and the dunes? The heath swept right down to the thin, half-moon curve of white sand, with no dunes anywhere.

Karen was completely mystified. She wondered if she was dreaming and pinched herself, but the sun shone down brightly still, and the little brown bees buzzed to and fro among the furze and harebells. If it was a dream, it was a very real one.

She cast her mind back to the island, hoping to remember something that might help, and then it came to her that it had been a wild and windy day when she had found the mirror, and it certainly wasn't that now.

Could the mirror have anything to do with it, she wondered, and glanced at it as it lay on the ground. 'What have you done to me, you stupid thing?' she cried in a sudden fit of temper; then picked it up roughly, and flung it away as hard as she could.

She never saw where it landed, because just then she heard a tramping of feet, looked to see who it was, and stared, incredulous.

Marching steadily down a track that led to the beach came ten men with an officer leading them. It was their clothes that made Karen stare. They wore tunics coming half way to their knees, intricately bound leather sandals, metal armour around their bodies, and helmets gleaming in the sun.

Each man carried a heavy six-foot spear and an oblong shield, and the officer's helmet was crowned with a short plume of horsehair.

Karen dropped to the ground among the furze bushes and tried to figure out what they could be. She could have sworn that they were Romans, exactly like the ones pictured in 'Roman Britain' which she read in school last term, but the idea was so impossible that she tried to dismiss it. How could there be Romans in this day and age? Unless... unless the mirror had taken her back-about two thousand years. But that was preposterous. Perhaps the men were just part of some sort of advertising gimmick. Still, that didn't explain the disappearance of the castle. Maybe the men would explain that to her. She'd ask them.

She stood up and faced them resolutely, waiting for them to come level with her.

The officer saw her first.

'Halt!' he bellowed, and beckoned imperiously to Karen. 'Come here!'

Karen stood before him, feeling rather foolish in her shorts and striped T-shirt. What if they really were Romans? And if they were, how on earth had she been able to understand what he said?

'Who are you and what are you doing here?' asked the officer, in a tone which implied that he wanted a prompt and businesslike answer.

'N-nothing,' said Karen, trying to think what to say. 'Only taking a walk.'

Golly! she thought. I think they must be real Romans. She wondered with a growing sense of panic how she could explain that she was from the twentieth century. The man stared at her suspiciously from under thick black brows. 'Only taking a walk, are you? Where are you from?'

Karen shut her mouth defiantly. 'I won't tell you!' This was the easiest way of getting out of it.

'Oh? And why not? You wouldn't be a runaway slave, would you? If you were, you'd not tell me, naturally. But there are ways and means.'

Karen's eyes widened. 'I'm not, really! I swear it!'

'Then you'll be a sensible girl and tell me where you live!' he snapped.

'And if you can't, you'll be coming back to the fort with me.'

Karen still said nothing; she could think of nothing. The silence became more and more unbearable, until mercifully one of the soldiers spoke.

'Excuse me, sir-there was a trading-ship called in not half an hour ago. She's probably given them the slip and walked off, if you ask me- the cheeky little-'

'That's enough, Calvus!' The officer turned to Karen. 'Well? Is he right or isn't he? I'm inclined to believe him myself. You know what happens to runaway slaves? You could be crucified.'

She stared in horror, eyes beginning to swim with tears of desperation. 'But I'm not a slave!'

'Now don't start that again; I'm not a fool. However, I'm a kind man-when I want to be. Officially you're the property of the state, but I can soon fix that with the commander. You'll come and live with me in the fort!'

Karen, almost struck dumb, opened her mouth to protest, then thought better of it and turned to run. She had only gone a few steps when something hurled her to the ground with an agonizing thud. One of the soldiers had thrown his spear, shaft first, in such a way as to knock her down but cause her no injury, beyond a bruise. The officer ran after her and jerked her roughly to her feet.

'You ought to be grateful,' he shouted. 'I could hand you over to the authorities. You'd not get off lightly then, you know. Now, come on with you. Quick march, men!'

Karen tried to hang back, and nearly asked if she could look for the mirror, but then decided not to. She probably wouldn't be allowed, and anyway, she thought bitterly, what was the use? She was in a big enough mess as it was, without looking into the rotten thing again and landing somewhere in the Ice Age!

In the fort the decurion, Duillius Rufus, had a very comfortable couple of rooms which he shared with another man of the same rank, Veturius Grassus. Veturius had an old male slave to serve him, but Duillius's servant had died recently so he was glad of Karen. When they arrived at the fort he left her in the charge of the old slave, and told him to get her what he called 'some proper clothes.'

The man eyed her disapprovingly. 'You are dressed oddly,' he said, pursing his lips, 'Who are you, anyway?'

Karen sighed 'You wouldn't believe me if I told you. But my name's Karen; what's yours?'

The man said he was called Davus, if it meant anything to her, and then stumped off in the direction of the buildings, telling her to follow.

He went around the back of the barracks-house, and Karen looked about with interest. So this was a real Roman fort! She had once gone round the ruins of one, on a dreary school-organized tour, but the real thing was far more interesting.

It was neatly and geometrically divided into square blocks, and the larger buildings were made of the local grey stone. The roofs were tiled in the Roman manner, looking like corrugated brick. The biggest building was the granary; it was made without windows, but Davus said that the floor was supported on stone piles, to let air in to ventilate the corn. Apparently this was also the place where the soldiers arranged to meet their girls.

Suddenly a thought struck Karen. If these people really were Romans, then they must be speaking Latin, yet she understood them perfectly, and the odd thing was that she heard them as though they were speaking English. She felt that she couldn't very well ask Davus outright about this; she didn't want to be thought insane. The Romans used to send mad slaves to the salt-mines, or so she'd heard. She silently worked out how to phrase her question.

'When did you learn to speak Latin, Davus? You're not a Roman, are you?'

Davus shook his head. 'I'm a Greek,' he said, and the words were slightly blurred. 'Don't ask me where I learned this accursed language. Everyone learns it now- it's the language of the conqueror.'

Karen realized that she had reminded him of his slavery, and tried to undo it. 'I'm sorry, Davus. I didn't mean to make you remember.' He looked round and smiled vaguely. 'It doesn't matter now. I'm an old man- fifty, sixty, I don't really know. In here.'

He dived into a low doorway and hurried along a passage thick with the smell of cooking. The air hung heavy, and Karen was glad when they came out in a spacious kitchen lighted by a row of windows near the ceiling.

A huge fire was roaring in the hearth, and a whole ox's body rotated slowly on a spit, turned by a sweating slave-boy. A small, thin woman with iron-grey hair was chopping vegetables and when she saw Davus she smiled and stopped her work.

"Well, now," she said in a bright, chirpy voice, "What can I do for you, eh?" She cocked her head on one side; she was like a little bird with bright eyes.

"This young lady wants some clothes, Cordella," explained Davus.

"This is a girl?" Cordella inspected Karen more closely. "I took you for a boy!" My dear, where did you get those extraordinary garments?" She gave Karen no time to explain, but went on. "They're indecent! Come with me." She led off down another passageway- the whole building was a maze of passages, Karen soon noticed- and into a square room with a bed in the corner and a few smaller articles of furniture. Opening a large brass-bound chest, she rummaged around inside, and extracted a dress of brownish woollen material.

"Try this for size," she ordered, and Karen removed her shorts and shirt, and dropped the dress over her head. Cordella shook hers. "Extraordinary underclothes!" she muttered. "You're an odd child altogether, I swear."

Karen reddened slightly and tied the belt; at last something pleased Cordella, for she smiled and nodded.

Karen asked whether there was a mirror anywhere. Cordella produced one and held it up at the far end of the room so that Karen could see most of herself in it. She had to admit that she looked very nice. The rather dullish brown set off her dark brown hair, and the simple lines of the dress suited her. The length was right too: just down to the knee.

"By the way," remarked Cordella on the way back to the kitchens, "I suppose you are a slave?"

Karen decided that she might as well say yes and not start an explanation that would only make matters worse. "I'm the new slave of the decurion."

'Which one, dear?'

'Er ... Duillius Rufus.'

'Oh yes? He's not a bad man, but if I were you, dearie, I'd do my work well. He's very particular. That's a piece of good advice for you.'

Karen thanked her.

'Oh, and there's another thing,' Cordella went on. 'You needn't worry about anything else; that man's got no use for girls except as house-cleaners. With most of the legionaries it's another matter- lawless disreputable thugs with no respect for anyone but their officers, let alone a girl. So I've warned you, if you needed it.'

Karen nodded dumbly. It's all real, she thought. They're real Romans in a real fort, really speaking Latin, and I've gone and got myself back amongst them as a slave, and who knows what'll happen to me? I wish it were all a dream. I wonder why it sounds like English when they speak. Still, it's as well it does, because I was never much good at Latin. What year can it be? I must find out if Rome's an empire now.'

'Who's emperor now?' she asked Davus when they were walking back along the main street. She'd look a fool if it was still a Republic, but when she thought back Britain hadn't been Romanized till after the last dictator, Julius Caesar, so they were bound to have an emperor.

Davus stared, his grey brows raised incredulously. 'Where have you been, not to know that?' he said, and Karen felt a country bumpkin. 'Nero, of course- may the gods bless his soul.' The last words were spoken in a tone which implied that the gods had better, because nobody else would.

Karen's eyes widened. 'Nero!' she said in a tone of horror; she'd read a good deal about Nero and his deeds. '

'Why do you speak of him in that tone?' inquired Davus, and Karen covered her confusion by saying she'd thought it was someone else.

'How old is he now?' was her next question.

After a thought Davus said twenty-five. There had been a great celebration on the occasion of the emperor's birthday and he still had the scar on his ribs where a drunken soldier had attacked him and tried to carve Nero's name with his dagger. Karen did some quick reckoning. In her Latin lessons at school she had done some Roman history, and the date A.D. 54

stuck in her mind as being the year in which Nero had ascended the throne at sixteen years of age. So if he was twenty-five now, that meant he had been emperor for nine years, and the date should now be A.D. 63. Furthermore, judging by the flowers that were out at the moment, it was safe to assume that it was still late spring, about the time of school half-term.

She had no time for further reflection for Davus put her to work as soon as they returned to the decurions' rooms, and the men came in themselves an hour later. Cordella cooked the officers' meals in her kitchen, and Karen's job was to fetch and carry the trays. She lost her way twice, and had to ask a couple of leering soldiers, one of whom slapped her bottom, but at last she found the right doorway.

Coming back with the tray of faintly steaming plates, she again met the soldier who had slapped her behind- she recognized him as Calvus, of Duillius's ten- and he tried rather meanly to trip her up. When she told him what she thought of him, the lazy smile left his fat face and he ordered her not to speak to him like that because she was only a slave-girl.

Karen stared hotly, colour rising to her cheeks, and then stamped on his foot really hard with her sandal before she hurried away as fast as she dared with the wobbling plates. Hearing him bellow with pain and start to hobble after her, she was horribly frightened, but in spite of her fear she very much wanted to giggle, because it was like an old comedy film. After that Calvus treated her with more respect.

Apparently Cordella cooked only for the officers, who had better fare than the legionaries' food which was cooked in a larger communal canteen. Tonight Cordella had done them proud with chicken and white sauce, though Karen couldn't help wondering if they would have liked potatoes with it. She herself, like the rest of the slaves, ate the stew which was on the soldiers' menu and was hungry enough to enjoy it.

That evening old Davus polished the armour, and Karen washed the dirty clothes, while Duillius wrote a long letter to his sister in Capua, and Veturius went out. Later, Karen slept on a couple of old blankets in the corner, wondering miserably if she would ever see the twentieth century again, and cursing the green bronze mirror.

### III

DURING THE NEXT WEEK KAREN SETTLED INTO HER NEW life, although she found it depressing having to work all the time. She could never reconcile herself to behaving with the proper servility, and anyone seeing her going about the camp would not have taken her for a slave.

Duillius was amused at her attitude, but made no attempt to change her nature. As far as he was concerned, she did no harm to anyone; besides, he never really thought of slaves as being human. If she did not come up to his required standard he would sell her. It was as simple as that. This state of things did not last however. One afternoon Duillius Rufus came in scratching his head and staring at a letter he had just opened. Karen was washing clothes on the doorstep and moved aside to let him pass.

Wondering what the letter was about, she kept her ears open in case he said anything important to Veturius, who was lying on the bed.

Sure enough: 'I've been to headquarters, Veturius. Just look at this.'

There was a silence while Veturius read the letter, and Karen waited agog on the step. A woman passing winked at her as she saw her so obviously listening, and she guiltily fell to squeezing and thumping the sweaty tunics again, although still listening. It was so hard to get anything clean without soap. She wished that Veturius would hurry.

At last he spoke: 'Hmmm! When'll you be going, then?'

'Three days.'

'That all? You'll have to get a move on. I'll tell Davus to help you.'

'Thanks. What I must get is a good strong British slave to come with me.'

'You know, I thought it wouldn't be long before the Welsh made trouble again. If they think they can follow Boadicea's example they're wrong!'

'About two years ago, wasn't it? Well, no matter. You know that cock-fight on tonight? People are saying ...'

Karen went to rinse the clothes. So Duillius was being sent somewhere else, was he? To Wales. Huh! She hoped he'd like it there. And meanwhile, what would be done with her?

When she had returned and settled down to scrubbing the step- Duillius was particular- the decurion himself came out.

Karen tugged the hem of his tunic. 'Oh, sir--'

'What do you want, girl?'

'Well, I couldn't help overhearing you just now, and-' He frowned and looked at her very hard.

'I couldn't. I was washing your clothes ...on the step. She just stopped herself from applying an uncomplimentary adjective to her master's garments. 'Anyway, I heard you were being sent to Wales. Please, what are you going to do with me?'

He looked at her in some surprise. He could really be very supercilious at times.

'What! You didn't think you were coming, did you?'

She gazed at him, speechless.

'I can't take a girl with me. It's impossible. You'd only be a hindrance. There's an auction the day after the next fort up the coast. I'll buy a man there and sell you. Now, I've no more time to waste. Get out of my way.'

Karen moved slowly, her mind a blank except for one word. Sold!

The day of the auction came all too soon, and Karen went to say goodbye to Cordella, who patted her arm comfortingly.

'I'm so sorry you're going, dearie,' she said, 'I've taken quite a liking to you, I must confess. Now, don't you worry. Just take things as they come, like.' She watched Karen mysteriously for a minute, and beckoned. 'Come on. I've a mind to give you another present.'

Karen followed her to the little room she had visited before. The present was another dress, this time bleached white, with a border of Greek design.

'It'll fit,' said Cordella. 'It's another of my old ones, same as the brown. It used to be my favourite. Like it?'

Karen smiled through her melancholy and gathered the dress to her. 'Yes,' she said. 'Oh, thank you, Cordella!' She sighed again. 'I must go. The decurion'll be searching for me.' She couldn't bring herself to call him 'my master.' Not yet.

The only other goodbye was to old Davus. He gave her a parting hug; then she hastily wiped a tear from her eye and reluctantly followed the waiting decurion on foot, while he rode a grey cob. He had wanted to tie her

hands, but had refrained when she had promised not to run away; she was prepared to promise anything, if only he wouldn't humiliate her like that. She looked back once and waved to Davus.

It was a journey of five miles to the next fort, along a dreary cart-track, and the day was hot. Soon Karen was streaming with sweat; it made great dark patches on the dress, especially under the arms, and added to her misery. She lagged farther and farther behind, until Duillius reined in the stolid grey and impatiently helped her up behind him. Shyly, she held on to his waist.

Once she was on the horse's back the slight breeze fanned Karen's hot face; she began to feel better, and looked around her.

The green downs swept to the sea in gentle curves, at this time of year covered in flowers. Insects buzzed among them, and high up a lark warbled sweetly. Karen noticed the absence of walls dividing fields from one another; to one who was used to cosy farms everywhere, it made the scene look wild and untamed. It didn't look like England- dear, peaceful England- but then, this was Roman Britain.

Karen knew how to ride, so she was in no danger of falling off, and soon she began to feel drowsy. The sun's heat and the buzzing flies added to her sleepiness, and besides, the view of the straight cart-track, with its uniform stripe of scrubby grass down the middle was always the same, so there was nothing to divert her. When she asked Duillius if it was much farther, he said in a tone of impatience that they had come about half-way, and Karen once more settled into boredom.

After another half hour the fort came into sight. It had much the same appearance as the other except that it was larger- a cluster of stone buildings strongly protected with a rampart and ditch. The guard at the gateway asked their business, and when the decurion told him, he waved them on and told them where to find the scene of the auction.

The area was crowded with people, soldiers, merchants, dealers- all waiting to buy or sell- and, of course, slaves. They were lined up along the far wall; some to be sold in groups, some singly, under the eye of a watchful slave-master who carried a vicious whip coiled in his hand. Duillius left Karen at the end of this queue and went to see the auction-master.

The slave-master eyed her sullenly and she felt very uncomfortable.

'I wonder if we're allowed to talk,' she thought, and resolved to try. She stole a glance at the slaves next to her, but they didn't look as if they would respond to friendliness. They all had an air of complete hopelessness and misery, as if nothing in the world mattered at all. However, just at that moment, another one was joined to the line, and Karen turned to him. She guessed him to be seventeen or eighteen, and she thought him rather nice-looking, though very tired. He had dark hair down to the nape of his neck, a high forehead, brown eyes, and a straight well-shaped nose.

His hair was in a tangle over his brow and, smiling faintly, he pushed it out of his eyes when he saw Karen watching him. As he did so, she noticed a brand on his arm, in the rough shape of an eagle. It was quite recent, being still red and peeling. Karen immediately felt very sorry for the slave; she thought how awful it would be to be branded.

'Did it hurt?' she asked.

'What? Oh, the brand; Yes. It was only done a month ago, to show I was army property.' He sighed. 'Now I suppose my new owner- whoever it'll be- will cross it out and do another. I'm not looking forward to that!'

'Oh dear, I'm sorry for you, though it won't help. Perhaps whoever buys you will only cross it out and not do another. I hope they won't brand me!'

'They don't do it to women nearly as much, so you needn't worry. You're a funny girl; one wouldn't take you for a slave. What's your name? I'm Kleon.'

'Mine's Karen. Are you a Greek?'

'I was, originally. I've travelled a good way; with the army, you know.'

But recently they found that one or two of us had slipped off, so they branded the rest to make it more difficult if we did get any notions of freedom--' He broke off suddenly. 'Quiet, I think they're starting.'

The auctioneer stood on top of a platform, and as he called out the particulars of each group they were made to stand in a cleared space in front of the buyers, and the bidding started.



*'... female slave, fifteen years, property of Duillius Rufus, decurion of the sixth cohort of the ...'*

As the line moved slowly on, Karen became more and more nervous.

'I do hope someone nice'll buy me', she said to herself. I should hate to go to one of those hatchet-faced merchants. At last the sad group in front of her had gone, and she heard the auctioneer call out her lot number before the slave-master thrust her into the cleared circle.

She stared around at the ring of men, like a trapped animal. They seemed to be all eyes, critical, examining eyes that bored right through her.

'... female slave, fifteen years, property of Duillius Rufus, decurion of the sixth cohort of the ...'

Property! Of Duillius Rufus! For a moment Karen was furious, but she knew her anger was of little use; after all, when she reflected on it, she was his property- personal property, like a piece of furniture. It was funny to think she belonged to someone else, but after all it was only in body. These calculating old men could not buy her soul for all their money. She raised her head, self-assured.

Several people had already bid, but the auctioneer was trying to push the price up.

'Twelve hundred sesterces,' said one of the watching legionaries at last; then there was a silence. Karen looked for the man who had said it; he might well be the one to take her, but he was hidden behind a great fat merchant in long robes.

Sure enough, the auctioneer asked in vain for more bids and the hammer fell. Karen's hands were tied behind her back and she was told to sit down at the back of the platform. She did so with rather a bump and consequently grazed her knuckles on the rough stone. She was then so uncomfortable that she wriggled about until she was able to bring both bound hands underneath herself and round in front of her. She only achieved this after a great struggle that was witnessed with interest by one of the sad-faced group sitting to her.

'That's a good idea' he said, and did the same, though it was easier for him because his arms were longer. When the slave-master came round and saw them sitting there with their hands demurely in their laps, he stared suspiciously and frowned, scratching his head. Karen tried not to laugh.

Although she looked out for Kleon, Karen did not manage to see him before the legionary who had bought her came to fetch her away, and she was dragged off down the street clutching the brown dress in a bundle.

After a while her new owner said, 'You'll be wondering why I bought you?'

'Not particularly.' She was determined not to care. He looked at her curiously.

'Pretty little so-and-so, aren't you? But that's not the reason I paid twelve hundred for you. You're my surety- an investment, you might say. You can work in the kitchens until the ship leaves.'

'Ship?'

'For Rome. We're going back at last, and it can't be too soon for me, I can tell you 'That's what I mean about your being an investment. I've put my money in you and I'll get it back with interest in Rome. You're coming back to the city with me.'

## IV

IT WAS ONLY THE THIRD COHORT THAT WAS GOING, although that was six hundred men. They were squeezed into eight troop-ships with two faster war-vessels to guard them.

It was a miserable wet morning when they embarked, with mist obscuring everything, and drizzle pocking the waves. Everyone got very wet and cross before they were on board and in the dry.

Karen was put in the cook's charge and told that she was to help him with the meals. Several of the other soldiers had slaves, so there were several girls on the ship. With the work divided among them it was easier. The male slaves were set to the oars.

Karen was appalled at the terrible life these galley-slaves led. She had read one or two novels about Rome, in which the Roman ship-system had been described, but the real thing was so much worse. The rowers underneath the deck were at least dry, but the air in the belly of the ship sometimes became almost unbreathable, especially if the hatches were closed. Walking about the ship, she could see them through the square hatchway, heaving and straining at the oars, their bodies covered in sweat. They were treated exactly like savage dogs, chained and beaten, with their food thrown so that they had to fight to get any; and savage dogs they became.

On the first day out, the cook,- who was a hasty, fat, man with a red face- flew into a temper with Karen because she dropped a saucepan of beans on his newly washed floor. He stamped and fumed, to Karen's secret amusement, and finally said that for the rest of the trip she could feed the rowers as an extra chore.

Karen was not unduly upset at the task; instead she resolved to give it to them individually so that at least they would have a fair share. Then she climbed down the ladder for the first time and started along the gangway, saddened to see them all slumped in misery over the oars. The first man looked up in some surprise as she thrust a lump of stale bread and a little meat into his hand. They were all puzzled by her attitude, but as some who had never managed to grab much before now got a proper share, they were

grateful. Looking at their sad, bearded faces, with the eyes dead, like stones, Karen wondered how people could reduce their fellow men to a state like this.

As well as feeding the slaves, she had to help distribute the legionaries' food. They were fed in three shifts, at several long tables in one of the cabins. On the whole, the food was good, for one of the girls was imaginative at cooking and so managed to vary the menu now and again.

Karen didn't mind feeding the rowers below deck, although it made her feel depressed, but she hated dishing out soup and fish to the legionaries. They used to make passes at her, and comment on her figure as though she were a statue. It was like going on show every mealtime. The only one who never made remarks was Marius, the man who had bought her in the first place. One drunken soldier actually seized her round the waist on one occasion as she passed; but she managed to throw him off, furious, before he could kiss her.

Two days went by with cooking in the hot little galley, cleaning, and tidying up. No sooner had one meal been finished with and cleared up after, than it seemed to be time to start on another. However, Karen still found time to take some interest in the journey.

They disembarked on the French coast, somewhere near Boulogne, she reckoned, and they walked from there to the Mediterranean more or less due south by the regular trade and military route via Lugdunum, which she knew became Lyon in later history. The soldiers marched ahead in a long column, and the slaves travelled behind with the baggage-waggons.

They had only been on the road for one day when Karen suffered a mishap. It was a silly little accident. She had been riding on the tailboard of a cart and when they halted for the night, she had jumped down and put her foot in a rut, falling and twisting her ankle agonizingly. The driver of the next waggon pulled up his mules to avoid trampling her, and hauled her out of the way. She sat miserably propped up under a tree, nursing her ankle, and the other girls brought her something to eat. Later that evening Marius wandered over and inspected her ankle, now badly swollen. She gave him a withering look when he asked if she could manage to walk.

'I'll arrange for you to ride in a cart then,' he said.

He kept his word, and for the next week she lay flat on her back in the creaking cart, surrounded by boxes and sacks, with only the sky to look at unless she tortured her ankle by sitting up; and then she could only see the long trail of carts following, pulled by mule-teams, and the slaves walking by the side. At intervals soldiers rode alongside, to see that no slave ran off into the woods and fields by the well-paved highway. One of them was friendly, and talked to Karen if he were riding near her waggon.

The first few days after she was on her feet again tired Karen hopelessly, but she gradually became hardened to it and needed fewer rides on the cart.

She was content now to go along with events and see what would happen to her. From what Marius had said about being his surety, she knew that he meant to sell her at a profitable price in Rome. She gathered from the other girls that this was quite a common practice- a sort of guard against losing money, which was much easier to lose than a slave-girl.

As they neared the south of France the country became less wild and forested. Quite a number of soldiers lived in the country round about, for this was the Provincia- modern Provence- which had long been Romanized. As the train progressed, the soldiers gradually dropped off along with their possessions, amongst them the owner of one of Karen's friends among the girls; the parting was sudden because the girl had not known she was to go until the last minute, and Karen missed her for a while.

The road lay long, straight and white ahead of them, bordered by rows of shady trees and great farming-estates, or latifundia. As the really scorching heat had not yet set in, the flowers by the road were fresh and pretty. The sounds of the mules' jingling harness, the measured tramp of the legionaries and the creaking of the wooden wheels were in Karen's ears all day long.

When they reached Massilia- the modern Marseilles- Karen felt quite a thrill of fascination for the Mediterranean, and even as they trailed wearily towards the barracks near the harbour, her heart gave a leap as she caught a

glimpse of glittering blue sea between the narrow houses. She had been to Spain and Italy on various tours, and there was a definite atmosphere- every time one arrived- of bustle, hot sun, and dust. Here now, two thousand years in the past, it was present again; and the range of smells was the same- grease, salt water, fish, and various odours, probably from the houses. It was vastly different from an English harbour-smell.

It was mid-afternoon, and the soldiers were not due to start out again until the following day; so they were to stay in barracks. In actual fact most of them scattered, vanished in the maze of streets, intent on 'having some fun' while the opportunity presented itself.

Karen and three other slave-girls were sick of marching down endless empty roads; so, finding themselves unsupervised, they slipped off as well to see the town. There seemed no harm in it, although Neanthe, the eldest, prophesied a beating.

'Nonsense,' said Vitria, a vivacious little blonde. 'Nobody told *us* to go anywhere in particular, so what can they say?'

Karen noticed that their self-confidence had improved during the journey; at the beginning they would never have dared to speak like that. It was because they were following her own example, but she knew that they would hide behind her at the first sign of trouble, so it was up to her to take the blame.

The town was full of people, jostling and swearing at each other, and the girls were pushed from pillar to post. Finally they came out in the market-place, crammed with stalls, and wandered to and fro, trying to see everything.

There were fruit-stalls, piled high with oranges and lemons, with great bowls of black and green olives at the front: there were meat-stalls, with gory hunks hanging from the framework and attracting flies: fish stalls- Karen loved looking at the interesting and colourful species, but she could never feel sorry for the fish; they looked so stupid- :clothes-stalls: and many more.

'Hungry, dear?' bellowed the great, jolly woman who presided, goddess-like, over the fruit, and she threw Karen an apple.

The girls took a bite each in turn until it was finished, and Karen presented the core to a donkey drooping under panniers of washing.

The four truants were so engrossed in walking round the market that they failed to notice the lengthening shadows, or the area gradually emptying, until the fruit-woman said to Karen 'Hadn't you better be going, dearie? Your parents'll be wondrin' where you are.'

They will indeed, Karen thought sadly for a moment, then she said 'Neanthe! It's late- we'd better go. They'll be looking for us if we're not careful!'

Neanthe clapped a hand to her mouth and her eyes widened. 'I said we'd get a beating,' she said. 'Come on!'

They ran back as fast as possible, scattering hens, dogs and children in all directions, but they soon lost themselves in the tangle of narrow, winding streets. However, there was a group of soldiers not far away who seemed to be going back to barracks, and Vitria suggested following them.

'Let's hope they don't see us,' Karen said, but unfortunately one of them turned round at the wrong moment and did.

'Hey, you!' he bellowed. 'What d'you think you're doing, creeping behind like that? Don't think I didn't know you were following us all along.'

Feeling sheepish, the four girls ran to catch up. The man looked at them sternly.

'You'll get into trouble, you will,' he said, and Karen hated him for stating the obvious. 'Your owners have been searching for you all over. Off to see the sights, were you?'

Karen nodded dumbly. She'd be sure to get a beating now. Marius did beat her, and it was both humiliating and painful, but at least he didn't try to undress her for it or break the skin. Still, it was shaming for Karen, who inwardly considered herself free, and she was very depressed next morning.

The excitement of setting out for Rome again soon diverted her, however. The men lined up on the quay in their hundreds, some grumbling at having to stand for hours in the hot sun waiting to get on the ships, others telling them to stop moaning and remember how glad they had been to get out of rain-washed old Britain. Far better now to stop grumbling and enjoy a bit of sun when they got it.

They were taking ship for Ostia, Rome's seaport at the mouth of the Tiber. The weather on the trip was very hot, and the air in the cooks' galley oppressive, so Karen used to slip out on deck whenever she could, and watch the coastline moving past, for the convoy kept in sight of land all the time.

She found on arrival that Ostia was a busy port, full of foreign merchants selling all sorts of outlandish things from all corners of the empire, and arranging transport for their cargo up the river to Rome. The soldiers, however, had no transport; they just kept on marching through country that was wooded in parts and hilly, and occasionally relieved with gay market gardens visible from the road. By the time they arrived in Rome it was the middle of July and really hot. When they were finally inside the great city Marius fixed himself up with a room at an inn. It was an old, crumbling place called 'The Three Birds', with a thin, hawk-like innkeeper, who suspiciously demanded to see Marius's money, then grudgingly showed them up to a dingy back room, and said a meal would be served in half an hour.

Marius dumped his pack on the one bed and sat down with a sigh. 'Well!' he said. 'Here we are, back in good old Rome at last. Ever seen it before? No? What d'you think of it?'

'It's hot and noisy,' said Karen. 'And dusty, so I didn't see much. But the buildings are so ...white and high. Until you get into the back streets, of course. I think sometime all these houses will just collapse.' She looked around the dismal room. 'Couldn't you afford any place better than this? I know you've got *some* money on you. And this is hardly luxury, is it? Except for the fleas maybe.'

Marius laughed. 'Cleaned meself out buying you,' he said, and laughed again. 'Anyway, what do you expect? Anybody'd think you were the Empress Poppaea herself, the way you talk! You needn't worry, though; you've only got one night to sit out here. I'm taking you to the market tomorrow; we'll see if I can sell you for more than I paid in the first place. Then I'm off down south to visit my parents.'

'Oh. Where do they live?'

'Along the Appian Way for twenty miles, turn left along another smaller road, and ten miles up there you come to the estate of Marcus Banco. Dad's a freeholder on his land.'

'Freeholding's not supposed to be a very profitable business, is it?'

'Well, that's what I keep telling Dad, and Mum tells him too. "Go to Rome," she says; "you'll make a better living there, like." But he won't. Dad's a real country-lover. Me, I think he's mad. Give me the city any day! You don't seem to be a bad kid. I might almost keep you for myself; still, you'll fetch a good price, I don't doubt.' He looked her up and down appreciatively. 'Not bad,' he said. 'Still, you can sleep on a blanket in the corner, if you'd rather.'

Karen nearly drew herself up to a formidable height and said she would most certainly prefer to sleep in the corner, but then she thought that if she spoke like that, with chilly emphasis on the 'certainly' he would take it as a personal affront when she really had nothing against him. So she just blushed slightly and said that she would sleep alone.

'Pity,' he said. 'Still, this flea-bitten bed ain't even big enough for one, let alone two.' A bell tinkled downstairs, which apparently meant that the meal was ready, so they went down.

The main room of the inn was already crowded, but they managed to find a table against the wall where there was room for two on the narrow bench. Marius ordered cold ham, bread, arid wine. Sitting at a table nearby was a group of very rowdy revellers, roaring bawdy jokes at each other and repeatedly calling for more wine. As the room filled and the air thickened, they became progressively drunker and there looked like being a noisy brawl. Anxious to escape, Karen finished her meal quickly and said that she would go upstairs. Marius nodded.

As she threaded her way past the tables, one of the revellers, a great red-faced man seized her and pulled her on to his knee. She fought to get away, but he held her in a grip like iron and started to run his hand round her waist, laughing into her face as his comrades egged him on.

'Let-me--go!' she gasped, and reached out to scratch his face as a last resort. He grabbed her hand just in time and held it back.

'Now then, darlin', he roared, 'what d'ya want to leave a nice feller like me for, eh?' By now everyone in the tavern was looking, attracted by the noise, and the landlord hovered anxiously in the background.

It was Marius who took action. He rose quietly to his feet and said 'Leave her alone,' in a steady voice.

The big man stared at him for a moment; nobody else in the room made a sound, but some began to edge towards the door, not wanting to be involved in a fight. Then the man grinned and started to pull Karen even closer to him.

Marius said nothing; just stepped forward and knocked the troublemaker right off his stool and on to the floor with a single crashing blow on the jaw. As he fell, his grip slackened on Karen and she slipped out of the way, then someone caught her by the elbows and pulled her backwards to safety. Marius was now busy defending himself against three of the revellers, with a bystander helping him, though the drunkards were at a disadvantage because they couldn't see straight, and kept lashing out at Marius or each other and missing ludicrously. In addition, the landlord soon appeared from the kitchen with a couple of hefty slaves, and the five revellers were thrown out amid derisive jeers from the rest. The tables were put back, and the broken crockery cleared away; soon order reigned again, and Karen went on upstairs.

She heaved a sigh of relief- that had been a close shave. For a minute she had thought the landlord would throw Marius and herself out too, but fortunately Marius had argued successfully in their favour and he had decided to let them stay.

She lay down on the blanket with the brown dress as a pillow. It was convenient having two dresses, she reflected; one would have presented difficulties where washing was concerned. She could hardly have sat round naked waiting for it to dry, so she would just have had to wear the same one, and a nice state that would have been in by now.

It was rather a long time since Karen had bathed. The last occasion had been when the whole cohort and its attendants had been organized to wash in the sea, and that was over a week ago. She was now feeling distinctly itchy again, and she had a deadly fear of getting lice, but still, there was nothing to be done about it. Most people here had lice, it seemed. Perhaps tomorrow she would be bought and her new owner would give her a bath. She hoped so.

The noise from below was not conducive to sleep, so she lay awake thinking about her parents and her home in the twentieth century, and her life there which had been so abruptly ended by that mirror. She could think of no rational explanation for it, so she was forced to conclude that it was magic. After a while she stopped thinking on these lines because it only led to more hopeless puzzles and worry; instead she listened to the sounds coming up from the floor below. The clink of tankards, snatches of conversation, and the sound of people tramping to and fro half hypnotized her, so that they all merged into a gentle wave of sound that gradually sent her off to sleep. She did not even hear Marius when he came banging in much later, having had a long conversation with another soldier, for, seeing her asleep, he climbed quite quietly into bed.

## V

'WELL,' SAID MARIUS, 'YOU'VE GOT TO ADMIT THAT she's pretty.'

The merchant stroked his beard and looked Karen up and down depreciatingly. 'Pretty, yes,' he said, 'but hardly unusual. And it's the unusual they want, nowadays. I *know*. Still, I'll take her. With her hair brushed she might almost merit a block of her own. How much do you want for her?'

'I paid twelve hundred sesterces,' Marius said, 'so I'll want at least fifteen hundred.'

'Fifteen hundred sesterces!' The merchant looked horrified. 'My dear fellow, what do you think I am? I can't possibly give you that price for an untried slave-girl when I don't even know what she can do ...'

Now Karen liked Marius, because he had stood up for her in the tavern last night, and she determined to get herself sold for as good a price as possible.

'I can write,' she said helpfully.

The merchant flung up his hands, and his manner changed instantly. Now he wanted Karen, because there were not many slaves- especially girls- who could write.

'You never told me that!' he said to Marius, accusingly.

'She never told me.'

'I'll give you sixteen hundred for her.'

'Done!' They shook hands, and Marius stowed the money away in his tunic.

He walked over to Karen before leaving, and whispered, 'Thanks, kid. Can you really write?'

'Yes,' she said, and he looked surprised.

'Well! It's just as well you can. I hate to think what sort of temper the merchant'd be in if he found you couldn't!'

He walked off jauntily, and was soon lost to sight among the milling crowds.

'Now,' said the merchant, turning to Karen, 'It's the fourth hour already, or not so long before it. We'd better get you fixed up.' He led her over to a large canvas tent which had been temporarily erected in the square. Inside were rows of women slaves standing patiently.

'Who's got the comb?' he asked, and when it was produced he looked at it quizzically, knocked some of the fluff and hairs out of it on a tent-pole, and handed the object to Karen.

'Spruce yourself up a bit, my dear,' he said. 'That's not a bad dress you're wearing-no, not bad at all. You might as well keep that on. It'll save me digging out my best draperies for you.'

Karen dragged the little bone comb through her hair. It was a struggle, and she lost her temper with its pulling, but she managed to make the hair curl up slightly at the ends. She tossed it back off her face.

'There!' she said. 'Is that better?'

The women smiled and murmured to one another. One of them reached out and stroked Karen's hair gently, running a strand through her fingers. 'It's very pretty,' she said, 'You'll have to be careful, or the merchant will keep you for himself.'

They giggled, and the merchant roared at them to be quiet. 'Come on,' he ordered.

Each dealer had his own square in the market, and these were arranged with a space between so that prospective buyers could walk up and down and view everything on display.

Karen was shown a little marble block about two feet high and told to stand on it.

She suddenly lost her temper at this and blazed out in rebellion. 'What? Just like a bit of old furniture for everyone to stare at? I won't! You can't make me!'

'Oh yes, we can,' said the merchant smoothly, and he beckoned to his assistant, who came up grinning.

'Being difficult, are you?' he said, and coolly twisted her arm.

'Ouch! Stop it, you--'

'Get up, then, like the boss says.'

Karen climbed up, feeling stupid for giving in so easily, but her arm ached, and what was the use of objecting? The assistant clipped a pair of ankle-rings around her feet and ran the chains through a hole in the block.

'There you are, my beauty,' he said, 'Cheer up. You can sit down if you like. I don't suppose it'll be long before the boss gets a buyer for you.'

Karen sighed and remained standing. She rested on one foot and surveyed the scene.

The market was packed full of slaves; it was a particularly good day from the merchants' point of view. There were Britons and blond Germans, dark or brown-haired Greeks, sallow-complexioned Spaniards; Moors, Jews, Negroes in dozens, and even a few Oriental slaves; frail girls like lilies with polished black hair and slanting mysterious eyes.

Karen sighed again. Now she was one of them and would probably be bought to serve in some great household. Perhaps she would have to look after children-horrid spoilt little Roman children. Perhaps when her buyer found she could write she would be set to work copying out endless manuscripts. That was a dreary prospect! What she really wanted to do was be allowed to help in the stables, but they'd never let her do that. No, she'd most likely have to clean pots or weave. It might be fun to try weaving. She speculated on it for a while, but knew that the novelty would soon wear off if she had to do it all day. She watched the milling throng of people, picking out this one and that, trying to guess what sort of character each had.

That little fat man, now. She guessed he would be hasty, rather particular-little fat men often were, specially if they had red faces. She was sure he would be a magistrate. She could picture him sitting in the halls of the Basilica, dealing out death by crucifixion and life sentences in the galleys.

Then she noticed a young man standing in the portico of one of the magnificent buildings that were scattered around the edge of the market, and took a closer look at him. He was dressed in a toga of pure white, and was engaged in conversation with two friends. His hair was curled delicately over his forehead, and she could see the make-up on his cheeks. As he talked, his hands gestured elegantly; he had obviously been learning

the art of witty conversation, although it didn't look as if he had much wit of his own, because the other men's laughs were obviously faked. They were probably trying to get into his good books and bleed him of a little money at the same time.

Karen smiled to herself. What a fop! The word described him exactly. She could imagine what it would be like belonging to him. She'd have to do everything for him. Bath him, dress him, read to him, sing to him- that was a laugh; back at school in the twentieth century the music mistress despaired of Karen's ever being able to sing. But perhaps he would have special people to sing to him. He'd lie around all day on scented cushions, and she would do nothing except press fruit into his mouth. Good and hard, too! There was a chance it might throttle him.

Her attention was diverted by the arrival of a thin, angular man with a snow-white beard. What was he saying to the merchant. He was Zenocrates, steward of the house of Lucius Domitius Caecina, and the Lady Julia was looking for a likely girl to work in the house. Had the merchant anything that would interest her?

Karen kept an eye on them, wondering if the merchant would suggest her, and, sure enough, he was coming in her direction, past the groups of Africans, and cursing a child that bowled its hoop against his legs.

The man with the white beard walked all round the block.

'Hmm,' he said, 'What is there to recommend her? What can she do?'

The merchant smiled and folded his arms.

'She can write,' he replied, with calculating pride in his voice.

Zenocrates raised his eyebrows.

'Can she, indeed? Write your name on here, girl!' He gave her a tablet of wax and a stylus. Karen wrote her name in capitals and handed it back. The steward seemed satisfied; he told the merchant to keep Karen aside, and he would ask the Lady Julia what she thought.

'Well, well,' said the merchant, when the other had gone, 'The Lady Julia Caecina herself! She'll pay anything I care to ask: you're a lucky girl for me, I do declare. You can sit in the shop until they come for you.'

The House of Caecina was perched on the slopes of the Viminal Hill. It was a huge place; one of the great city mansions, built to the ground plan of a rectangle, with two courtyards down the centre, open to the sky. The first was the atrium, where Lucius received his guests, and the second was a small garden, with flowering shrubs and fountains and little statues. Around these courts were colonnades of pillars, and behind these were the rooms.

Karen was not brought into the house by the main entrance, however. The under-steward sent to fetch her took her in by one of the many side-doors and she was hurried along passageway after passageway, until they came out into the atrium. There she was told to wait.

'What for?' she asked.

'Shhh!' said the man, 'The Lady Julia wants to see you. Stay here.'

The Lady Julia was some time in coming, so Karen explored the place.

If she looked up she could see the edges of the roof sloping in on all four sides, and the evening sky above. Holding the roof up were long rows of stately, slender, white pillars, throwing long shadows across the floor.

She looked at her feet. The sandals she had been wearing when she had found the mirror were almost worn through, and one of the straps needed mending. Originally they had been white, but they were hardly that now, covered in dust and dirt, like her feet. The dirt was right down her toenails, which gave some idea of the condition of the rest of her.

She studied the floor. It was made of tiny mosaic pieces, beautifully set to make a picture. Around the oblong pond sunk in the centre of the room was a wide border of leaping dolphins, with another border of dolphins going the other way round the outer edge of the floor. The rest was taken up with pictures of Neptune and his nymphs and tritons, all in a gay procession with clouds and frothing seas in the background. The main colour was blue-grey, and the people were a lifelike and healthy pink. The backs of the dolphins gleamed navy blue, looking even darker than they really were against the pale yellow basic of the border!

As she admired these, Karen heard a rustling of silk, and looked up from her scrutiny of the floor to see a young woman, who seemed to be in her early twenties, standing in the shade of the pillars, watching her. The woman came forward into the light and beckoned, and as Karen approached, she took a good look at her prospective owner.

The most striking feature was the hair; it was built up around the face in a mass of tiny curls, and Karen could see that its light blonde colour was owing to dye. The woman's face was a perfect oval, but it was plastered with make-up and her eyes were shadowed with blue paint. Large gold earrings swung from her ears; and she had gold rings for her fingers, necklaces, and bangles as well. Her loose dress of rose-pink silk fell to her ankles, and as she came nearer Karen was engulfed in a wave of scent.

'So you're the girl who can read and write, are you?' said the woman languidly. 'How unusual.' Her voice was quiet and purring; she was sleek like a cat, too. Suddenly she sniffed.

'Girl, when did you last wash?'

'A .. about a week ago.'

'Disgusting! You must bath at once. Tiro!' She beckoned to a passing slave-boy. 'Take this girl to the bathroom. And find her some clean clothes. By the way, girl, what is your name?'

'Karen.'

'Karen? Some barbarian name, no doubt. Still, I like it. I don't think I'll change it, or not yet, at any rate.' Go along, then, Karen, or whatever you said your name was. Doubtless I shall forget in a day or two!' She swept off, and the cloud of scent left behind gradually dispersed.

'Come on, then,' said the boy Tiro, and he set off at a fast walk, while Karen trotted to keep up. As they went, she asked him if the Lady Julia often changed her slaves' names.

'Oh, yes,' he replied with a laugh. 'Hardly anyone comes here without her changing his name. I used to be Mikkos once, but she thought Tiro was better. One gets used to it, but it does confuse her husband. He's long since given up calling us anything, he just beckons or says, "You!" '

Soon they came to the slaves' and servants' bathroom, and Karen was delighted to see that it was very attractive, with bands of painted fish around the walls, and the large sunken bath faced with polished stone. It was full of hot water, steaming thickly; and through the next doorway Karen could see a cold plunge-bath.

'Here you are,' said Tiro. 'Get in.' There was a pause. 'Well?' he went on. 'What are you waiting for?'

'I'm waiting for you to leave,' said Karen with some dignity, and Tiro laughed pleasantly.

'I'm sorry,' he said. 'I'd forgotten. All right then; I'll go and get you some clothes and a towel. If you're not out by the time I get back I'll not look, out of respect for your modesty. Anyway, the water's very murky. It's the heat.'

He loped off, and Karen left her clothes in a pile and lowered herself into the water. The flowing warmth caressed her tired body, and she floated on the surface with her hair rippling up and down on tiny waves she made herself. After a while she turned over and swam around the bath; it was just big enough to permit swimming three strokes each way. Then she lay back again, feeling the dirt rolling off her. There was an assortment of sponges and brushes by the side, and she scrubbed her feet and nails.

That's better, she thought; I wish we had this sort of bath at home. It's much more fun. I hope Tiro'll bring me a decent dress. I'd better get my hair dry before he comes.

The sound of sandalled feet approaching heralded Tiro's return. He had a white linen dress on one arm and a towel on the other. He put them next to her other clothes, and beckoned Karen out, turning to the wall.

Karen climbed out on hands and knees, and enveloped herself in the soft folds of the towel. It was not long before she was dry and had slipped on the white dress.

'You can turn round,' she said, arranging the folds of it under the narrow scarlet tie-belt.

Tiro whistled. 'Some difference,' he said, and swept her a half-mocking bow. He told her to bring her old clothes, and led the way down the corridor and turned left; this brought them to the kitchen.

The kitchen was full of people all bustling about, for it was time for the evening meal. A delicious smell of cooking fish, mixed with aromatic herbs, pervaded the place, and Karen sniffed appreciatively. The cook pushed her out of the way.

'Don't just stand there sniffing like a retriever dog,' he fumed. 'Get me the biggest pot on the shelf. And hurry ... my precious sauce is boiling over. How could you let my fish sauce spoil? And the family will want it in a minute! Hurry up, girl. Haven't you the wit to find that pot?'

'This one?' said Karen, lugging it off the shelf. It was huge and squat, made of earthenware and very heavy. Unfortunately, Karen didn't know just how heavy it was, and when the full weight came down on to her she dropped it straight on the floor. There was a splintering crash, and pieces of red earthenware rolled in all directions like dropped coins. Karen was suddenly afraid of what she had done. 'Good gracious! I ... I'm awfully sorry. I'll clear it up immediately--'

The cook was furious. His face was as red as a boiled lobster, and he breathed through flaring nostrils with his mouth clamped shut. 'You- you *stupid* girl!' He stamped his foot at her. 'Get out! Just get out of here!'

Tiro grabbed Karen's arm. 'Come on,' he said. 'Don't wait to be asked twice.'

They fled.

Tiro took her off to a small room behind the kitchen, which had racks piled high with clean clothes all round the walls.

'This is the laundry-room,' he said. 'You can leave those filthy objects you call dresses here. Sooner or later they'll get washed. Once a week we come to get our clean things and leave the dirty ones. The Lady Julia can't stand for us to be in dirty tunics. Actually, all the clothes are communal, which makes it simpler. You just dig out something that fits you when you need it.'

'Oh.' This all sounded very impressive and well worked out.

A bell rang. This meant that the slaves' meal was ready as well as the family's, so they went to have it in the kitchen.

## VI

THE NEXT DAY KAREN WAS SUMMONED TO THE LADY Julia's bedroom, where she found her mistress sitting at the polished ebony dressing-table, with two girls brushing her long fleecy hair. When she saw Karen Julia signed to the girls to stop.

'Well,' she said with her slow smile 'you look more presentable now. We must find a job for you, must we not? Let me see ... are you any use with children?'

'I used to baby-sit for a neighbour. And I had a younger sister.'

'Baby-sit?'

'Yes ... stay in with the children while the parents went out.'

'Didn't they have slaves for that?'

'Goodness, no. We didn't have slaves at all. They used to pay me two shillings an hour. Something like that.'

'Well, well. I shall never get used to the strange customs some people do have. You haven't been trained as a nursemaid, have you? No matter. From now on your duties are to amuse my little Gaius and Lucilla; keep them clean and out of mischief and put them to bed. They're in the garden at the moment, I should imagine.' She waved a hand imperiously. 'You are dismissed.' The two girls continued with brushing her hair.

Karen wandered about for quite a time, trying to find the garden, and eventually Tiro told her where to go. It was another open square like the atrium, but larger, and the floor was earth instead of tiles. It was a pretty place, a tiny miniature park, with small trees and shrubs, and a circular pond in the centre. All around were colonnades of the same white pillars that held up the atrium.

Karen heard the sound of children laughing from somewhere in the middle, and pushed through the flowering bushes until she came out in an open space of grass where a little boy and girl, both about seven years old, were playing with a ball.

When they saw Karen they stopped and stared curiously. The boy was the first to speak.

'What do *you* want?'

This was not a good start, and Karen felt a sinking sensation. What did *she* want? Pompous little so-and-so. Perhaps she'd work it out of him. She forced herself to smile.

'I'm your new nurse.' she said, 'I'm supposed to keep you amused.' The boy tossed his head and said, 'Huh!' but the girl smiled back and said, 'Come and play, then.'

Karen started to toss the ball to and fro with them.

'You do play in a funny way,' said Lucilla. 'Can't you catch with your left hand like we do?'

'No,' said Karen, 'we never played that way. It doesn't make much difference, really.'

'You're stupid,' said Gaius vindictively, and Karen ignored him. He was only trying to be nasty deliberately.

The rest of the morning passed quite quickly, between chatter and games, and then Karen had to take the children in to clean up ready for lunch. Lucilla was a nice child, obedient and sunny, but Gaius already imitated the ways of his imperious mother. He refused to let Karen wipe his face once in the bathroom, so she asked him if he would rather do it himself.

'No!' he said. 'I'm not supposed to do it myself. You must fetch another attendant to do it.'

Attendant. He'd have picked that up from his mother, Karen thought. So he thought he was going to send her off on a wild goose chase to find someone to wipe his dirty face for him, did he? Well, he'd got another thought coming.

However, she kept a rein on her temper for the moment; there was no sense in fighting without trying to reason first. 'Why won't you let me do it, without dragging other people from their work?'

'Because you're stupid.' He stamped his foot, the perfect picture of the moody child.

'Oh, Gaius,' said Lucilla, 'don't be silly.' She took Karen's hand. 'Don't mind him. He's often like that, but it's because nobody ever told him he was naughty. He is naughty, isn't he?'

'Yes,' said Karen firmly. 'He most certainly is. And what's more, someone's going to tell him so right now.' She turned to Gaius.

'Stop stamping your foot like that! And get your face washed this minute, before I get really angry.'

Gaius started with 'I want an attendant' again, but that was as far as he got. Karen seized him and wiped his face forcibly with the damp cloth, and then rubbed it dry with the towel. He was temporarily obliterated beneath water and towel, and Karen had to grip him very tightly to stop him thrashing about and upsetting everything in reach. When he came up again he was surprisingly silent. He breathed stertorously through an open mouth, and regarded Karen with some awe; for the rest of the day he was very obedient, and no more was said about it.

At last, when she had finally got them into bed, Karen was free to go there herself. As she was going along to the slaves' quarters, yawning, she met Tiro.

'Hullo,' he said grinning, 'How did you make out as nursemaid?'

'Not bad. That Gaius is a little devil, isn't he?'

'You can say that again! Everyone's heard how you put him in his place. Jolly good for you! Let's hope you keep him there.'

They had a few more clashes, but after the first ones Gaius improved. It took time, but gradually Karen could see that he was beginning to like her. One night he asked her to tell him a story, and she told both children the one about the Sleeping Beauty. They had never heard it, because strictly speaking it had not been written yet, but they enjoyed it immensely, and after that they were clamouring for a fairy story every night.

Another time Gaius actually pulled Karen's face down to his and kissed her goodnight. Lucilla always did, but it was a sign of progress for Gaius to do so. And one day he took her by the hand and whispered in her ear, 'I'll show you the puppies if you like,' and took her round the back of the house to the stables, where a handsome hound bitch was sprawled in the straw with a litter of two-weeks-old puppies. Karen shared Gaius's delight in them, and he showed her which one he was going to have.

'I think Lucilla wants one, too,' he said. 'You can share mine.'

Karen thanked him gravely, thinking how much he had changed, and then they both laughed, and rolled the puppies on their backs for the fun of seeing them sprawl in the soft hay.

He's not a bad kid when you know him, Karen decided.

The others told her that he was a positively reformed character since her arrival, and urged her to keep up the good work. He had only been like that because the previous nurses had been slavish-natured women who ministered to his every whim. He had soon found that if he threatened to tell his mother when he did not have things exactly his own way, they would tremble with apprehension and do anything he wanted.

Karen had quickly cured him of this. 'All right,' she used to say, 'go and tell your mother. Perhaps she'll give you another sweet,' or whatever it was he wanted. Gaius knew as well as she did that Julia would never be bothered with his petty complaints, even if she had time for them, and so this floored him. Sometimes Karen thought that the Lady Julia ought to take more interest in her children than occasionally inquiring about their progress, but it was not her place to say so. Besides, for all Julia's casualness, little Lucilla loved her faithfully from a distance.

On the days when the children went out visiting, Karen was given other jobs to do, such as dusting or going down to the market with the under-steward. She had stopped herself thinking about the twentieth century, and instead used to wonder what had become of Kleon. She had several friends now among the other slaves, Tiro being the first. The rest were Rhoda, who was sixteen, black-haired, and one of Julia's personal attendants, Anicetus, a serious man of Jewish descent, who worked in the stables, and Gallus, a very good-looking Gaul, the personal pride of Lucius Domitius himself. Whenever a party or a dinner was being held, it was certain that poor Gallus would be there, dressed to show off his good looks to advantage. He was a sort of Roman symbol of the 'keeping-up-with-the-Joneses', and Karen liked him though others were jealous.

There was also Volumnia, whose task was to keep the women slaves in order and make sure that they weren't hanging around the men's dormitory in the evening. Last thing at night she counted heads in the female dormitory and locked the door. She was no friend of Karen's, or anyone else for that matter. She was tall and straight as a ramrod, with an iron temperament to match. She was continually creeping around the house, in order to catch any gossipers unawares.

'Tomorrow we're going to see the chariot-racing in the Circus Maximus,' said Gaius one evening, 'I want the Reds to win, but I bet the Greens will.'

'Why?' asked Karen, tucking the coverlet over him.

'Please don't tuck it in. It's so hot at night. Because the emperor backs the Greens. Does that mean they'll win?'

Gaius nodded, and she did not question him further. She had almost forgotten about Nero until Gaius brought up the subject. Yes, the Greens probably would win, or if they didn't the other teams would pay for it.

'There's another bit of news for you,' said Gaius, 'but I'm not going to tell you till you tell me a story! A nice new one. One with some magic in it. I like magic.'

'So do I,' Lucilla giggled. 'Poor Karen. I bet you're dying to hear the other news. I'll tell you before, if you promise to tell a story after.'

'Promise.'

'Zenocrates is taking Hanno to the market tomorrow to sell him and buy a new slave! So there'll be a different one for you to make friends with.'

'I don't know why you're so excited about it, Lucilla,' scoffed Gaius, secretly put out at not having imparted the news himself. 'After all, mother's always wanting the slaves changed.'

Lucilla fell silent, dampened. She was talkative and animated, but easily discouraged by an attitude of scorn, so Karen tried to start her off again.

'How long does your mother keep her slaves usually?'

'Oh, it depends how soon she gets tired of them! But don't worry, she won't get rid of you. She likes you, I heard her say so. Now tell me the story ... !'

'All right. Umm .... Once upon a time there was an old couple who had no children and one day ... .' Her voice droned on, telling the story of Tom Thumb, and the children listened through to the end in silence; but Karen's mind was not on it. She was thinking about the new slave.

When the tale was ended, Lucilla said, 'That was a lovely story. I should like to see a little man as small as my thumb. Goodnight, Karen. Leave the door open a bit; I like to see the light come through.'

Karen smiled as she pushed the door almost to. Being a slave had its compensations.

She walked slowly along the passage-ways, towards the kitchen quarters where she called in at the scullery and helped Tiro and the scullery-boy with the washing-up. Then she continued to the back of the house where the women slaves' dormitory was.

This was a long, narrow room with straw pallets down the length of the floor; in winter the slaves had a blanket each but in summer there was no need. Indeed, in the hot months the very thought of a blanket was sickening, although the window at the far end of the room was always kept wide open.

Karen slipped off her dress and went over to the window in the short linen shift she wore underneath. A black girl with short frizzy hair joined her. Karen sighed.

'Another hot night,' she said, and the black girl agreed, stretching herself until the bones in her shoulders cracked. Outside in the dusk, the swifts were just visible, swooping over the city, and bats fluttered in and out of Karen's view. She rested her elbows on the casement, reluctant to turn back into the warm stuffiness of the dormitory.

The Vicus Longus came straight between the Viminal hill where the House of Caecina stood, and the Quirinal next to it. In the distance Karen could vaguely see a gap in the roofs which was the Forum, and the Circus Maximus beyond. Since the house stood near the top of the hill, there was a good view of nearly the whole of the city, from the elegant mansions on the Quirinal opposite to the towering jumble of tenements down by the river.



*'At night Rome was not quiet'*

At night Rome was not quiet. Anyone wishing to take carts through the city had to do so then, and the clapping of endless hoofs and the slow rumbling of waggons floated up to Karen, not very loud at that distance, but she could imagine what it would be like in the ground floors of the tenements, for they bordered right on to the narrow streets.

A soft step sounded on the floor outside and Volumnia's forbidding shadow was thrown across the room. 'Come to bed, you two!' she snapped. 'You'll not get up in the morning, else.'

'Mmm,' said Karen absently, then straightened up, yawned, and sat down on her mattress. 'Goodnight,' she whispered to the black girl, not Volumnia.

She slept eventually, and dreamed that the new slave was Anne and that they ran away together. Finally they were caught and crucified, but they felt no pain at all, not even when the nails were driven in, and all the people watching were amazed. The expressions on their faces were ludicrous, and she smiled in her sleep.

## VII

'POOR OLD HANNO,' SAID RHODA THE NEXT MORNING. 'WE must say goodbye to him before he goes.'

The two girls were tidying up the dormitory before going to their breakfast. Like all the slaves, they always got up much earlier than the family.

Over the light meal of bread and a mug of wine, Karen asked Hanno if he was sorry to go.

'Not particularly,' he said. He was a red-head from southern Gaul who never said much. Karen could hardly say she would miss him, because she had hardly ever seen him. He was one of the Lady Julia's six litter-bearers, but his red curls did not match the dark hair of the others, and Julia thought him a sour-faced lump, so she was selling him. She had only bought him in the first place because of his rather splendid physique which had temporarily taken her fancy. Zenocrates, the head steward, had been advised to get a slave with dark hair this time.

Later Karen saw Rhoda waiting in the atrium, a basket on each arm.

'Oh, are you going with Zenocrates?' she asked.

Rhoda nodded. 'Yes, worse luck,' she said. 'We're going on to the food market after buying the new slave. I wish I weren't going, though; I've far too many other things to get on with.'

This was a chance for Karen to see a little of Rome, and it was a chance that did not come often. She seized it. 'I'll go for you.'

Rhoda was delighted. 'Will you? Oh, you are a pal! Come and tell me about the new slave when you get back.' She thrust the baskets at Karen.

Zenocrates soon appeared, his beard as snow-white as ever. He frowned when he saw Karen. 'I thought I told Rhoda to go?'

'I'm to go instead. The Lady Julia sent for her,' she said on the spur of the moment; then hoped he would not check up on her story.

'Well, no matter. Come along, girl, I haven't all day.'

It was a long walk to the slave market, around all the network of streets, but Zenocrates seemed certain of the way, striding ahead like an angular crow. Sure enough, they finally came out behind a large, marble-faced building into the noise and bustle of the open square.

'Now,' said Zenocrates, 'the question is, where to look?' He set off, up and down the rows, tugging his beard. 'I never ask the merchants, you know,' he remarked conversationally. 'They start rubbing their hands together and telling lies, and once they're started I know from experience they never stop!'

Karen followed him slowly round the lines of slaves. She looked at them all, sympathizing with the ones who watched prospective buyers with anxious faces; sorry for those who had concealed all behind a blank, uncaring expression.

She heard a voice behind her. 'I don't like that brand. We'll have to do something to disguise it. It's very unsightly for a house-slave.'

Karen turned round, and saw a tall, balding man in a senator's purple-bordered toga. He was speaking to the same merchant who had sold Karen, and had his back to her. The merchant was gesticulating at a slave on a block. The slave's face was hidden from her by the merchant, but Karen was reminded of something by the senator's words, and moved so that she could see.

To her immense surprise it was Kleon, the boy she had met at the auction in Britain, the one who had been friendly. He was looking more tired and haggard than ever, and he was watching the senator arguing about him so that he did not see Karen.

She wondered how he had got here. Perhaps he had been bought by a soldier returning to Rome too. Why, he might have been on the same convoy the whole time. As she realized now that the senator was thinking of buying him, she felt her skin prickle with suspense, for the man looked irritable and harsh, and she wished she could do something to ensure Kleon's getting a decent master. It came to her how awful slavery could be, and how lucky she had really been. Was she now to watch a friend being sold without being able to do a thing about it? She listened, feeling sick.

'Well, have you anything else?' the senator was asking.

The merchant stroked his chin, lost in thought. He slowly shook his head. 'Not in this line,' he said. 'Not at the moment. You see, we haven't had any new stock in for a while.'

'Then I'll go somewhere else,' said the senator shortly. 'Good day to you.'

Karen breathed out; then all at once she had a brainwave.

The House of Caecina wasn't a bad place. Could she possibly persuade Zenocrates to buy Kleon? He wouldn't be too out of place as a litter-slave, surely? What did one look for in a litter-slave?

She tapped the merchant's arm. 'Don't sell him for a minute' she said. 'We were looking for a ... a new slave, and he looks about right. I'll fetch the steward in a second- don't sell him till I get back.'

The merchant smiled patronizingly. 'Don't get so worried, dear,' he said. 'I'll wait here.' He did not seem to have recognized her. She had thought he might, but no. Hundreds of slaves passed through his hands every week; he would hardly remember them, unless he had got an exceptionally good or bad price.

Karen ran through the market as fast as she could, crowding past the rows of slaves. Finally, gasping and breathless, she found Zenocrates looking over a group of Spaniards. She stopped and straightened her dress and hair. She must not reveal that she knew Kleon, or the old man would know she had only picked him because of that.

'Where have you been?' he demanded.

'I'm sorry-I got left behind. Have you found anything?'

'Nothing to satisfy the Lady Julia,' he said gloomily.

'Come over here then, sir,' she suggested. 'I noticed one that looks likely. Do come and see him!'

'Oh, very well. I hope it's worth my while, that's all! Where is he?'

'Here,' said Karen 'What do- do you think?' She stammered in her excitement and hardly dared look at Kleon. When she did, however, he recognized her and his face lit up.

She pressed a finger to her lips, telling him to be cautious, and he quickly shifted his features back into an emotionless mask.

The merchant had meanwhile come bustling up. He bowed to Zenocrates. 'Aha! The steward of the House of Caecina, is it not? Would you be interested in this slave?'

'Yes,' said Zenocrates absently, walking round to view Kleon from the back. He reached out and felt his arm, pinching the muscles.

'Yes,' he said again. 'Would he be suitable for a litter-bearer?'