

ARTHURIAN TALES:
ARISE
PENDRAGON

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Erie Harbor Productions
Pontiac, Michigan

Arthurian Tales: Arise Pendragon

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For The D-Man –

I will love you forever even
though you thought Stonehenge
was just a bunch of rocks.

Note from the Author

Arise Pendragon is this author's continued attempt to present a historically plausible, "World-Restorer" scenario for King Arthur while utilizing a vast majority of the sources in a synchronized manner.

Note from the Narrator

The hot summer in the consulship of Augustus Marcian and Adelphius saw the Huns sweep into Gaul. Still though, the seed of this tale took root years ago when Senator Lucius' co-consul had revolted in Africa, the Church condemned free will, and Gaul stewed in chaos. Within that turbulent year, two royal bloodlines merged. From a moment of shared love, Empress Placidia and King Adaulphus conceived a set of twins. A divine omen marking a pivotal point in time, some would say. The following year Empress Placidia gave birth to her sons, Ambrosius and Euthar, months after King Adaulphus had married her.

Moments of glory, tragedy, and love filled the many years of their lives. Still, death overtook the twins as it does anything living. First, the poisonous hands of treachery snatched away Euthar Pendragon nearly ten years ago while barbaric rage brought down Ambrosius of Aureliani a few days back. Now, the son of Pendragon, Artorius—a young man of thirteen, followed me, Merlinus—a man a half a century old.

CHAPTER 1

I felt numb. Empty. I was never an emotional man. Stone cold, some would say. What little heart I had was gone, shattered. A man I had treated as my son had breathed his last breathe only days ago. There was no tomorrow for Ambrosius. I had left him to die alone in the woods near our villa, a short distance from the Gallic city of Aureliani. And now, his young nephew Artorius and I wandered westward, fleeing from the invading Huns.

Already my promise to save Artorius weighed on me. I felt more grey hairs creeping out of my head. Nearly all of the black in my hair and beard had faded out to the color of smoke during the years I spent guiding Ambrosius through his life. For all the good that I had thought I had done, I was wrong, dead wrong. Now, I just wanted to crawl into a cave, seal myself off from the outside world, and stare at the wall. Even thinking about caring for Artorius was a burden. I feared that I would simply lead him to a tragic end as I did Ambrosius.

“Merlinus, shouldn’t we keep moving?” Artorius asked as he placed his hand on my shoulder.

A worried look consumed the young teen’s face. I had lost myself once more. At that moment, I had no clue where Artorius and I were. Well, nothing specific, anyway. We had departed three days ago on horseback and taken little with us. It was the same day Ambrosius had died alone. Now, pausing in front of my horse holding its reins, I stewed in my discontent. As I did, Artorius’ dark eyes scanned the brushwood.

“Merlinus, are you feeling all right?” Artorius asked.

“I’m fine,” I replied as we began, once more, to walk our horses through the forest. “I was just taking a moment to rest. I’m not as young as I used to be. Back in my younger years, I could walk for days and days with little rest. That’s when I walked to the eastern ocean.”

“Yes, yes, yes. You’ve told me that story several times,” Artorius stated, rolling his eyes.

“Does that mean you don’t want to hear it again?” I replied.

“That’s what it means,” Artorius answered. “I’ve heard it so many times that I could tell it. Why don’t you tell me something that I don’t know?”

“Like what?” I asked with a casual glance.

“I don’t know,” Artorius replied, but then quickly added, “Yes, I do. Tell me about my parents.”

Anxiety seeped through me as he waited for my response. I did not want to tell him about his parents. I knew little of them and some of what I did know, I did not like. I couldn’t avoid the conversation, though. He had every right to ask. I tried to gather my thoughts into the proper words.

“What was my father like?” he asked.

“He was...” I paused, mentally groping for something I could say that was true but still kind.

“A proud tyrant?” Artorius finished as he stared at me. “Was my mother a whore? Did she not conceive me when she was committed to another in wedlock? What kind of parents did I really have? What kind of a person does that make me?”

His brown eyes welled up into churning pools of emotions. First, I saw sadness. Then, his cheeks flared red from the rage of abandonment. He winced and squinted, struggling to hold back his tears. I could only imagine he felt worse than I did. All of the security he had was stripped away when Ambrosius died. I had to say something. Artorius wasn’t taking simple answers. He wanted truths about Euthar and Ygerna that no one could supply. Still, he needed a new foundation so he could carry on.

Finally, I found my voice.

“I cannot answer whether or not your mother was a whore. On the other hand, maybe she simply enjoyed the carnal pleasures as much as most men do. I cannot even say, for certain, that she loved your father. I believe she did, but these things are beyond me. I can’t answer these questions. If this is what you seek, I suggest giving up the futile task. Besides, you are not them.”

With pain in his eyes, he replied, “Am I not my father’s son?”

The young teen looked so much like Euthar and Ambrosius. He could have been son to either one. His shades of brown hair and brown eyes, his stocky frame, and the shape of his wide face matched theirs and

made it indisputable.

I rested my hand on his shoulder and stared into his eyes. Artorius stood still, waiting for me to answer. I could honestly say that he didn't behave like Euthar, but that wasn't what he needed to hear right now. Artorius needed something that could comfort him when he was alone with his thoughts.

"You are only your father's son in face and nothing more," I assured him. "If you didn't look like Ambrosius when he was younger, I would have said based on your demeanor that Gorlois was your father, and not Euthar Pendragon."

"Is that it? What about my father's heart? His courage?" Artorius asked.

Looking at Artorius, I remembered him as a boy riding out from the villa and confronting Lord Goar several years back. Euthar's fearlessness was in Artorius' eyes that day.

"For all things righteous, tell me what you do know. You can do that much, can't you?"

"Yes, Artorius, I can do that much," I answered. As I began walking west once again leading my horse through the thickets, I added, "I will tell you what I can remember. Though I remember you were born on the seventh day before the calends of March in the consulship of Faustus that was almost fourteen years ago so bear with me on the details."

"I understand," Artorius replied with a light smile as he followed me through the woods.

CHAPTER 2

“Merlinus, when are you going to start?” Artorius called out. “Merlinus, are you listening? Merlinus?”

As I thought about the time in Britain, I remembered the remnants of Rome and civilization being swept from the island. Euthar’s high-handedness undercut trust, and peace languished.

How can I tell Artorius this? How did I get sucked into it in the first place? Love. That’s how. Or, at least, lust draped in the illusions of love.

“Merlinus.”

“Yes, Euthar,” I replied in the past to Artorius’ father. “I heard you. You love Ygernia. You can’t live without her. Still though, how do you know that Ygernia really loves you? Is she not married to another man?”

“I know her heart,” Euthar replied.

“I can’t accept that,” I said. “You are willing to risk all that you have achieved as High Commander of the Council of Britain? Citizens in the south to peasant kings of the north defer to your judgement. You are Pendragon of this island. And you are willing to sacrifice this for what? Honestly, what do you know? How do you know she loves you?”

“I know...” Euthar faded away. After a moment, he added. “When I look into her eyes, I know. There is only her and I, then. There is no world. She breathes life into me as we breathe as one.”

“You haven’t even kissed her,” I told Euthar.

“Love goes beyond the flesh,” Euthar declared in a confident tone.

“You didn’t just say that,” I smirked and shook my head.

“What?” he said with a surprised look.

“You know what I mean, Euthar,” I fired back. “Now, you are the philosopher king? I’d expect this from Ambrosius, not you.”

“You have a point, but it’s true. We’ve connected on a higher level,” Euthar said. “The little time we spent together has been a lifetime.”

“She’s not manipulating you through lust, is she?” I questioned.

“No, it’s not like that,” Euthar answered. “Ygerma holds my heart.”

“Yes, that’s what I am saying. She has bewitched you with her beauty and molded your heart to her will. Is she not an enchantress?” I asked.

“Yes but—” Euthar started.

“Is she not a mistress of the sacred grove?” I cut in. “I’ve heard of her counsel, her stunning looks. Someone like her could woo anyone.”

“Watch your tongue, word wizard,” Euthar barked.

“Even if you cut loose my tongue, it will not free you of a suspicious mind,” I replied.

“That’s not her way. Ygerma is pure as freshly fallen snow. And, yes. She is the mistress of the sacred grove. She’s my Egeria,” Euthar said. “And, I am her Numa.”

“Oh,” I laughed. “Now, you are the king of the Romans.”

“Just wait until you meet her,” Euthar said, “then you will see her as she is and you will know what I already do.”

“I hope you’re right,” I replied doubtfully.

“Oh, I am. Just wait. You’ll see,” Euthar finished, smiling.

“When did this happen?” Artorius interrupted my tale.

“About fifteen years ago in Britain. It was in the consulship of Sigisvult.” I answered. “It was after Litorius captured Tibatto.”

“Who captured who?” Artorius asked, puzzled.

“Never mind. That’s not important. I just got sidetracked,” I said. The path in the woods opened up and we stopped to mount our horses.

“All right,” Artorius replied as our horses started a light walk, “but what did you think of my mother when you first met her?”

“She was not what I expected,” I told Artorius. “And your father was right. She was special and did have an eye for him. But...”

“But what?” Artorius asked.

“She was married,” I answered, paused, then added, “Even with her wisdom and uncanny perception, she shared your father’s reckless abandonment for love. We are all a slave to it when it holds our heart. Your parents shared something special. I had doubted Euthar’s reading of Ygerma, but upon seeing them together, I saw the love growing between them. And, because of that, your parents showed me a reason to help.”

“So, you found her beautiful?” Artorius asked.

“Oh yes. She was a pretty, little nymph of the forest. Thick blonde hair streamed down past her shoulders. She was more than just pretty; she possessed a personal charm that overcame anyone she met. With a single glance and a few words, she could disarm anyone she wished.”

“That’s what I remember about her, the flowing blonde hair, bright smile, and blue eyes,” Artorius replied. “Was Lord Gorlois a bad man?”

“No. No, he wasn’t,” I replied. “Artorius, I wish I could say he was a bad man, but he wasn’t.”

In fact, he was a better man than your father, but I’m not going to be that honest with you, Artorius.

“Merlinus, the details seem so few and fleeting that it feels like I barely knew my mother. Or my father, for that matter,” he stated.

“Just picture...” I started, but stopped as the image of Ambrosius lying on the ground bleeding arose unbidden. I reeled a little, almost slipping off my horse.

“Merlinus, I think we are in trouble,” Artorius said quietly as he reached out to steady me.

“No, I’ll be all right,” I replied.

“I’m not talking about you. We’re surrounded,” Artorius murmured. With a slight motion toward the thick brushwood, he added, “There are soldiers in the woods.”

I blinked, examining our surroundings more carefully. Though not noticing the soldiers before, I saw them now. There were a lot of them.

“Oh, don’t stop your story now,” one called out. “It’s just starting to become interesting.”

“No sudden movements,” I told Artorius, switching to Gothic.

“That would be wise,” another soldier answered in the same tongue.

“Well at least they don’t talk like they are Huns,” Artorius replied with a light smile.

“We can only hope they’re not,” I replied in common Latin.

“We are not, but why are you fleeing?” the first soldier asked as he moved his horse into the clearing. His men followed suit and suddenly twenty horsemen surrounded us. The lead patrolman appeared extremely young, so much so that he seemed no older than Artorius. He lacked any sign of facial hair though this might have been because his hair was a strawberry-blond. In spite of his apparent youth, he handled his steed

well. He looked to be a nobleman's son just coming of age. He had stern eyes for his apparent age, though, like those of a battle-tested soldier.

"Who are you and why aren't you traveling on the road? Are you fugitives or runaway slaves?" the young Roman questioned.

"No, we're not. It's safer in the woods," Artorius said sharply.

Turning, I gave Artorius a hard stare. His mouth closed and his gaze dropped from mine.

"If you are not fugitives or runaway slaves, then why would the woods be safer?" the squad leader inquired further.

"Huns are the main reason," I replied. "We've been driven from our home by them."

"Where do you call home?"

"My villa is southwest of Aureliani," I answered. "We fled three days ago and have been moving west ever since."

"Why don't you join in the fighting? Surely, you know that Lord Aëtius moves to engage the Huns," the Roman stated.

"We're not soldiers," I snapped back. Feeling the sudden angst of my reply, I tried to release the tension in me.

"For this battle, every able person is needed," the young Roman declared. "The boy looks old enough to wield a banner or beat a drum."

I glanced at Artorius so he held his tongue, then turned to the officer and said, "When did it become necessary to coerce free Romans into military servitude?"

"You should be honored to serve the empire," he replied.

"I have," I said. "Now I'm protecting my son as best as I can."

A Goth that sat back in the ranks began to laugh, and nudged his horse forward. The soldiers parted out of his path. The older man sat tall on his mount. The dark lined features of his chiseled face revealed a lifetime of riding in all weather, and the greying locks of long black hair showed the years he had endured. The young Roman officer gave the Goth space, shifting his steed back to let the Goth come forward.

"That young man is not yours," the old Goth said as he moved up closer. "He's a Goth, like me. And you are an Alan. Your long skinny face gives it away. You're tall and thin while he's short and stocky. And, your black and grey straggly hair does nothing to help hide the fact."

I kept my silence as he fixed at me with a keen stare, his eyes glaring like a bird of prey. I met his gaze without flinching though it rattled

my nerves.

Still, I calmly replied, “Though not through blood, this young man is my son all the same.”

The old Goth held my eyes with his own, he let his horse take a couple steps forward. I held my own horse steady.

“What are your names?”

“I am Budicius and the young man is Marcellus.”

Following a light nod, the Goth turned his gaze to Artorius.

“Well, young Marcellus, you are wise to travel the woods. Small squads of Huns scour the countryside. It is as if they are in search of something.”

“Or someone,” the young Roman cut in.

From a glance by the old Goth, the young Roman officer fell silent and pulled his horse further back from us. Turning back, the Goth studied us. He looked at what we wore and where our hands rested. Our fingers weren’t inching toward any weapon. At that moment, we had packed our swords out of sight for easier travel. His eyes returned to Artorius and he studied him further.

The Goth appeared to come to a decision.

“You must be hungry. Let us eat and talk further. There will be someone interested in meeting you two.”

“Do we have a choice?” I asked.

With a slight smile, he shook his head.

“Then, lunch will do us just fine,” Artorius said.

Shaking my head, I smiled at Artorius and stated, “Yes, something to drink and eat will suit us well.”

“Good,” the old Goth replied. “Cai.”

“Sir,” the young Roman answered, coming to attention.

“You will be returning with us back to camp. The patrol will finish its route and return later,” the Goth ordered.

“But I was leading the squad, today,” the young Roman replied. “You said—”

“What did I just say? Circumstances have changed. Adapt,” the old Goth barked. The other horsemen pulled away from us to continue their patrol. The young Roman slumped on his horse, but stayed with our smaller party.

CHAPTER 3

We rode to the Gothic camp in silence. It sat east of the direction we had been going. The enormous camp bustled with activity. Sadness soured my stomach as I thought of bloodshed and violence that would soon follow. As Artorius took it all in, a concerned look formed on his face.

“Look at all of these people,” Artorius said quietly.

“It takes more than just soldiers to keep the war machine running,” I replied.

“There is no lie in that,” the old Goth stated.

The old warrior led us through the camp. As we passed, people moved out of our way. He took us to a large tent that sat under some tall trees at the edge of the field. It reminded me of the tent in which we met King Goar years ago.

“Dismount and stretch your legs,” the old Goth said climbing off his own horse. “Cai, see to their horses. Then return here immediately. You will be needed.”

A heavy frown hung on the young Roman’s face as he gathered our horses’ reins. Without a mumble, he led the four horses away. The Goth watched the young Roman until he was quite some distance down the aisle to the corral.

“He has the makings of a good soldier. Just a little stubborn, though,” the Goth stated then turned back to us. “I am Safrac, one of the commanders in King Theodoric’s army. That young Roman is Caius. I just call him Cai. The young man is the same age as my son, Sagremor.”

“Does Cai’s father watch over your son as you do his?” I asked.

“No,” the Goth answered as he walked toward the tent. “His uncle Paulus, a Roman count, has my son. We and others like us had to exchange our sons as hostages to ensure a peace treaty. Soon though, Cai, Sagremor, and the other hostages will head for Rome as part of the agreement. All of them shall attend a collegium located on the Palatine Hill in the heart of the city. And when they complete their military training,

all of the sons will return to their families. These were the terms of a treaty between the Romans and Goths in the consulship of Festus. It was hoped that such stipulations would help draw our two societies closer.”

“That was over ten years ago,” I said.

With a solemn face, the old Goth nodded his head and said, “My son, Sagremor, was only four years old at the time.”

“Hey, Cai is just a little older than me,” Artorius chimed in. “Does that mean I could be a squad leader?”

“Hah, don’t be too anxious for patrol—few like it once they are on it. Its glory wears off quickly,” the old Goth said, smiling at Artorius.

Pulling open a section of the tent, Safrac motioned for us to enter. The tent was empty aside from some cushioned benches and couches. A few attendants waited unobtrusively along the wall.

“I will return shortly,” Safrac said, and exited the tent, leaving us to wait.

Artorius drew closer to me with his back to the nameless attendants and whispered, “Do we make our escape?”

“And how do you suggest we do that, my young emperor?” I replied. “Even if you think you can outrun a squad of horsemen, I know I can’t.”

“What about our. . .” he started but grimaced as he recalled that our horses were no longer under our control. “Well, what if we slip into the woods and just keep moving.”

“It’s a possibility but I imagine they have dogs to track us.”

“What about the river? It’s nearby. Can’t we use it to throw off the hounds?”

“All right, I can go along with that. Still, we have other issues.”

“And what are those?”

“The attendants standing behind you,” I whispered. “As soon as we leave, they will say something to someone. You will have to kill them.”

“Me?” Artorius hissed then added. “Why wouldn’t it be us?”

“Because this is your crazy idea.”

“Well, one of us has to think of something and you haven’t offered a single solution. What say you, grand consul?”

“I say we do nothing.”

“Nothing?”

“Yes, nothing,” I stated. “It’s plain to see that we can’t fight our

way to our horses. At this point, the only possible escape would be the river. I doubt that we could reach it unnoticed, though. And if we can't do that, then we lose the reason for heading for it in the first place. We have no boat waiting. Any failed attempt will draw more unwanted attention to us and sour any prior good intent the king might, otherwise, have."

"How do you figure that?"

"If he is forced to give chase, the king won't be able to shield your presence and I worry that some Goth might see your grandfather in you. There is no telling how his men would react. Some may see you as a threat to the established order. More trouble in an already troubled time. This, in turn, could compel the king to treat you differently. And that is why we are going to do nothing, for now, my young emperor."

The tension in Artorius' shoulders dropped along with his gaze as he gave up hope of any glorious escape. Artorius struggled with the idea of doing nothing. I tried to make him see that we had no real option except to let the current moment play out a little further.

Several minutes passed as my anxiety grew, and Artorius paced. He stopped abruptly and we turned toward the opening of the tent as we heard footsteps outside. I expected Safrac, but Cai appeared instead.

"Where's Lord Safrac?" Cai asked, glancing around the tent.

"He left and said he would return shortly," I answered.

The young Roman grumbled something.

"What did you say?" Artorius asked.

Cai grumbled more loudly but less intelligibly.

"Huh?" Artorius said.

"Never mind," the young Roman said, kicking at the ground as if irritated by the Goth's absence.

Two men talked loudly as they approached the tent.

"Safrac, don't you think this could wait? I have more pressing issues than a man and his teenage son that you happened upon in the woods," an unfamiliar voice commanded.

"King Theodoric, I know you have many things demanding your attention, but this is something you would prefer to handle personally," responded Safrac's voice.

"Hah, I doubt..." Lord Theodoric paused in the tent's open door. His eyes were locked on Artorius. His mouth hung open for a moment as if his eyes played tricks on him. He became tight-lipped the longer he

stared.

“Father?” came another voice from behind King Theodoric, but the king moved no further. A man in his prime stepped to the side of King Theodoric and glanced at us with an inquisitive look on his face.

“What’s your name, boy?” King Theodoric barked at Artorius as he studied him.

“Mar... Mar... Marcellus,” Artorius lied.

“Why do I see my cousin in your face?” Theodoric questioned. “What is your real name you?”

“That’s my real name,” Artorius replied.

“He lies, honorable lord,” Cai declared.

“What? Why are you talking? You have a bad habit of speaking when you haven’t been spoken to,” the old king snapped at the young Roman.

Cai froze, went pale, but then added, “King Theodoric, I led the patrol that picked up these two characters.”

Pausing, the king glanced over at Safrac, who nodded.

“They called each other Artorius and Merlinus before we made our presence known and decided to intercept them.” Cai stated.

King Theodoric glanced at Safrac for confirmation, and the old warrior nodded.

“Their presence was known sooner than they thought it was,” Artorius interjected, and the king turned back to him.

“They tailed us too close, honorable king. If they had stayed further back I wouldn’t have spotted them creeping through the woods,” Artorius said. I glared at him, but Artorius refused to look in my direction.

Again, the king looked to Safrac. The old Goth smiled, confirming Artorius’ words.

Cai began to object, but stopped as he felt King Theodoric’s stare then stated. “Maybe we were too close. But I was trying to hear what the senex was telling the boy.”

“I’m nearly as old as you. So does that make you a boy?” Artorius asked.

“Silence, Artorius,” I commanded. My stomach sank as I realized that I had said his real name.

“So, it is true,” the king said looking at us. He turned back to Cai, “What else was said?”

“Supposedly, the young one is the son of Pendragon. He was. . .” Cai started.

“Euthar,” the old king whispered then added. “Safrac, come here.”

The old Goth drew close to his king and listened to the whispered command, responding only with, “Yes, my lord. It will be done.”

King Theodoric then left the tent after giving a solemn nod to Artorius. Surprised by the king’s behavior, his son looked at me, studied Artorius for a moment, and then followed King Theodoric out of the tent.

Moments later, servants with trays of food flooded the tent. A feast worthy of a king was set up for our consumption.

Turning to Safrac before he too could disappear, I asked, “What is to happen to us?”

“Fear not. You are in the care of a great king,” he replied.

“I don’t doubt that, but we have somewhere we need to be,” I answered.

“Well, you’ll get there, later. Right now, there is somewhere else you must travel to first, unless you were already planning on going to Toulouse?” Safrac finished. My disappointment must have been apparent; the old Goth added, “Rest your thoughts. No harm will befall you where we are going.”

As Artorius glanced at him, between bites, Safrac smiled and nodded. Afterwards, Safrac turned and left the large tent with Cai following him.

CHAPTER 4

As if a woman and a child, Artorius and I rode in the back of a covered wagon on the way to Toulouse. Still, we traveled comfortably. Within a few hours of beginning our journey, though, Artorius had a corner of the canopy discreetly curled up so he could see everything happening on that side of the wagon. The view fed the teen's analytical mind.

Each day when we stopped for the night, we were kept to ourselves. Never did we meet the king's four younger sons. Cai refused Artorius' invitation to sit by our fire. The young Roman preferred to sit alone, it seemed. Safrac occasionally shared our company as we headed for Toulouse. Nameless servants cared for our needs, but refused to speak to us. It seemed that King Theodoric had ordered that no one other than Safrac could keep company with us. This seemed more apparent when we reached our destination, the Gothic capital on the Garonne. While there in Toulouse, Artorius and I waited long days wondering our fates.

Late one afternoon as the sun laid heavily in the clear sky, we sat alone on an elevated patio that overlooked a garden with a large Roman fountain at its center. A lunch platter sat neglected though within reach. Neither one of us had an appetite, with our spirits damped by imprisonment. The joys of court for a hostage had become painfully apparent.

Though we lacked chains and locked doors, we were held captive just the same. Invisible walls of restraint enclosed the garden. Any time we breached the garden's boundaries, armed guards arrived shortly thereafter with threats of placing our heads on tall stakes. Quickly, we realized our limitations.

Some solace came with our isolation. Still though, my thoughts troubled me. So many things to contemplate, it overwhelmed my mind.

What will happen when the king returns? What does he know about Artorius? If King Theodoric knows everything, will he try to use Artorius somehow? What if the king doesn't return? What then?

On and on the questions kept coming.

“Artorius,” I said quietly, “if we hear that tragedy has befallen the king, we must make our escape as quick as possible.”

“Why, Merlinus?” the young man asked.

“Though we are not bound, we are prisoners just the same,” I said. “I have no idea what the king has in store for you.”

“Does he know who my grandparents are?”

“I believe so,” I answered. “Honestly though, I am more concerned if the king’s two eldest sons return without him. The oldest saw how King Theodoric reacted when he met you. By now, that son has to know about your grandfather.”

“That’s not good,” Artorius said with a worried look on his face.

“No, it’s not. That’s why we need to be prepared.”

“What are our options?”

“There seems to be only one. Run,” I said. “If the king dies, we leave the same night we receive the news. I fear for your life if we are still here when his sons return.”

“We won’t be able to take anything more than what we can carry, will we?”

“Right,” I affirmed. “The stealth we need to escape cannot be achieved on the back of a horse. Instead, we will set out afoot and scale any walls that obstruct our way. Once outside the city, we will head for the coast. Do you remember how many walls we passed within the city limits?”

“Yes, three,” Artorius declared. “Only two will concern us. We will need some sort of assistance to scale the estate and the city walls, or risk being seen exiting through the gate.”

“I don’t like that idea,” I replied quickly. “We would have to deal with guards. And, any dead guard would be the end of us if we were caught. No, that won’t do. We will take our chances scaling the walls.”

Not many days later, a rider brought the news that King Theodoric had fallen in battle on the Catalaunian Plains, and we did exactly as we had planned. Taking only what we could carry, we escaped into the night.

Though we might have been able to find a ship heading for Britain, I decided against leaving Toulouse by water. I feared them catching us and I was still leery of going to Britain. So I led us down the Roman road, Via Aquitania, heading southeast toward Narbo.

As we hurried along in the cover of night, Artorius asked, “Why are we going to Narbo? Why don’t we sail to Britain or go the way we came?”

“We definitely can’t do that,” I replied. “The Gothic army and Theodoric’s two eldest sons will be returning soon. They would be coming the same way we did. In regards to sailing, Narbo is a major port. There will surely be someone heading for Britain. Our request for passage will draw little attention there. I fear it would be a different story if we tried here in Toulouse.”

“So, how far is it to Narbo, then?” he asked.

“Not far now,” I said with a quick smile, then added. “I’m not exactly sure, but we’ll get there soon enough if we keep down this road.”

Artorius chuckled lightly, and followed my lead.