





**Seed of Fury:  
Zolia's Revenge**

**by: Joe Antony Sebastin**

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## Let Us Unite all Genders

A friend was driving me to the Miami Airport when talk on AM radio turned to abortion and abused women. The commentator cited a list of Bible passages “proving” God chose everyone from the womb: Galatians 1:15, Isaiah 44:24, Jeremiah 1:5, Psalm 139:13-16, and Job 31:15.

My friend, hearing this, switched the channel. “Sorry about that,” she said. “I do wonder, though, how we could possibly address an issue as nuanced as aborting the fetuses of abused women.”

“It seems to me,” I said, “that God forfeits His decision by allowing rape in the first place. Most of the talk, like the radio there, is thoughtless bluster. It is a mother’s choice. It is her body that was so cruelly abused; she should have full say over how she recovers. No other soul in the universe has any authority over the abused woman and the child she carries. There must be rules and consistency, even for God.”

The argument occupied my thoughts during the flight. I realized it was a much bigger problem than I’d originally thought. How can we stop abuse in the first place, for all genders and regardless of age?

Eventually I came to a conclusion. Perhaps a mason or a nurse would find a different solution, but as a writer, I know we can change minds through our stories. I was determined to stop abuse through a story.

I decided to create a friend, someone the reader would grow with and love. In this way, we make abuse immediate. We make it something that must be stopped whether it happens to woman or man, young or old.

Suffering anywhere ultimately hurts us all. We can only end abuse and its fallout through the realizations that we are all humans on Earth and the things that separate us are nothing more than invisible walls.

Gender, sex, age, and ability; none of those things divides us as much as life connects us. When we lift up those who are abused, those who suffer, those who are judged to be less, we lift ourselves up as well.

Seed of Fury is four separate novels, set in different times and studying different situations. Each one shows the lessons we've learned from abuse and its fallout.

We start with a famous atrocity of the classical world: The Rape of the Sabine Women. The Romans were at the height of their power when this happened, and their wanton and hideous treatment of the women they abducted has drawn focus to the abuse of women ever since.

This story, though set in the midst of an actual historical event, is fiction. But it is my hope that, through the lens of fiction, we can lift our spirits and create a better world for our fellow humans. Even if you feel it's good story and nothing else, I pray that the light of the sisters in this novel, Ronica and Zolia, will live on within you.

— Joe Antony Sebastin

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Ronica



Zolia





## Introduction:

### **Ronica's Oath to Destroy the Roman Empire**

Do you hear the cries of the Sabines? Do you hear our desperation? The forest is cold from the night and filled with driving rain that washes away the filth of the Romans, but does not cleanse us of our agony.

Are they ahead or behind us? Our tormentors are everywhere but nowhere. Every sound is theirs. Our tears and the falling rain make the path away from Cures more treacherous with every step.

I hold hands with my younger sister, Zolia, until she trips, gashes her head, and falls to the wet ground. Her motionless form is but a few feet away when lightning flashes across the sky and my painful memories sweep over me.

\*\*\*

When the Romans came, we were dragged to the square where a gathering swelled. I was tied to a stake, my tunic ripped from my back. Each lash cut to the bone. The scorching pain set my skin afire. When I fainted, the next strike snapped me back. Sheer agony followed every snap of the whip.

After the ten, they cut the ropes. I crashed to the ground. My back was all I could feel. A pregnant woman covered me and helped me to the side.

Like a warrior, Zolia stood to the post. As the soldiers tied her, the Crusader did not resist. Her body squirmed with each snap of the whip, but her mind seemed elsewhere. The Crusader never looked away from Romulus or his stooge rapist. Her eyes welled but she would not cry. The rapist and his king saw Sister would not surrender.

After thirty lashes, her legs caved and the ropes could not support her. Her peeled flesh lay on the ground around her. The warrior raised herself. "Roman whips are as weak as the penis of pirate Proculus. Finish it!"

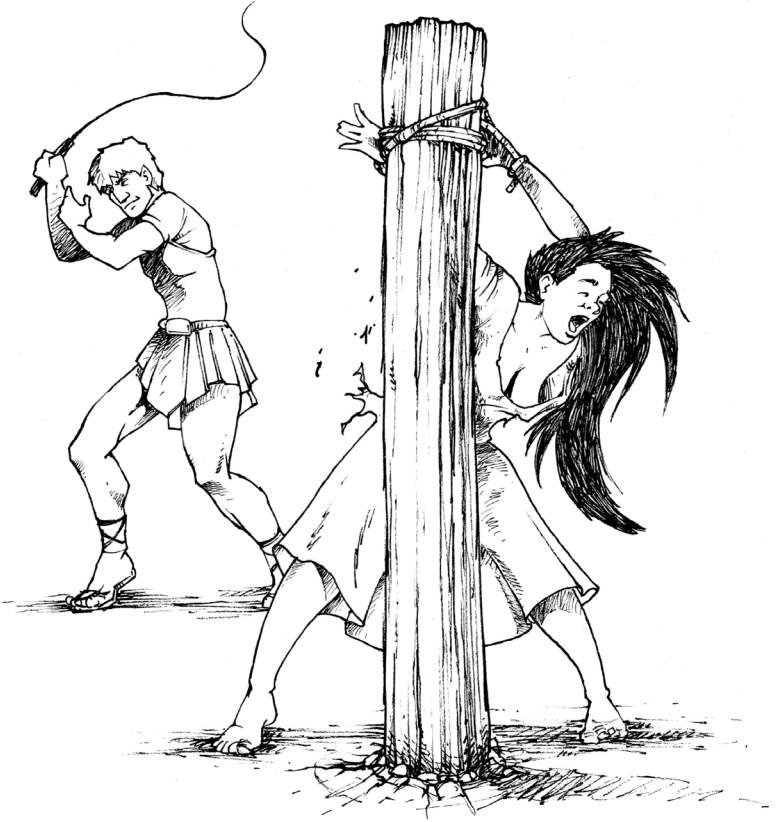
The executioner stared at her filleted back and handed the whip to another slave driver. No person wanted to administer the last ten lashes. Roman men and women turned away from the sight.

One Roman slave driver administered the final blows and cut Zolia free. Sister lay on the ground, scarred and drenched in blood. A woman passed her a covering. The Crusader lifted her head to Romulus. "I spit on Rhea Silvia's womb. Her son shames all men!"

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In the here and now, I pulled Zolia into my arms and held her to keep her warm. The Romans' rain, Jupiter's thunder, and Quirinus's lightning stole her breath. I force air and hope into her mouth but she remains unconscious.

## Cruelty



I looked up into the skies and made a promise to the goddess Minerva. “Neither my sister nor I will die today,” I swore. “Vengeance will be ours!”

The thunder argued back, confronting us with disfigured hallucinations of the faces of our Roman tormentors. With rage seething through my body, I swear: “Lord Quirinus, hear your daughters’ cries! We will live to vanquish Roma. Strengthen us to fight and destroy their king!”

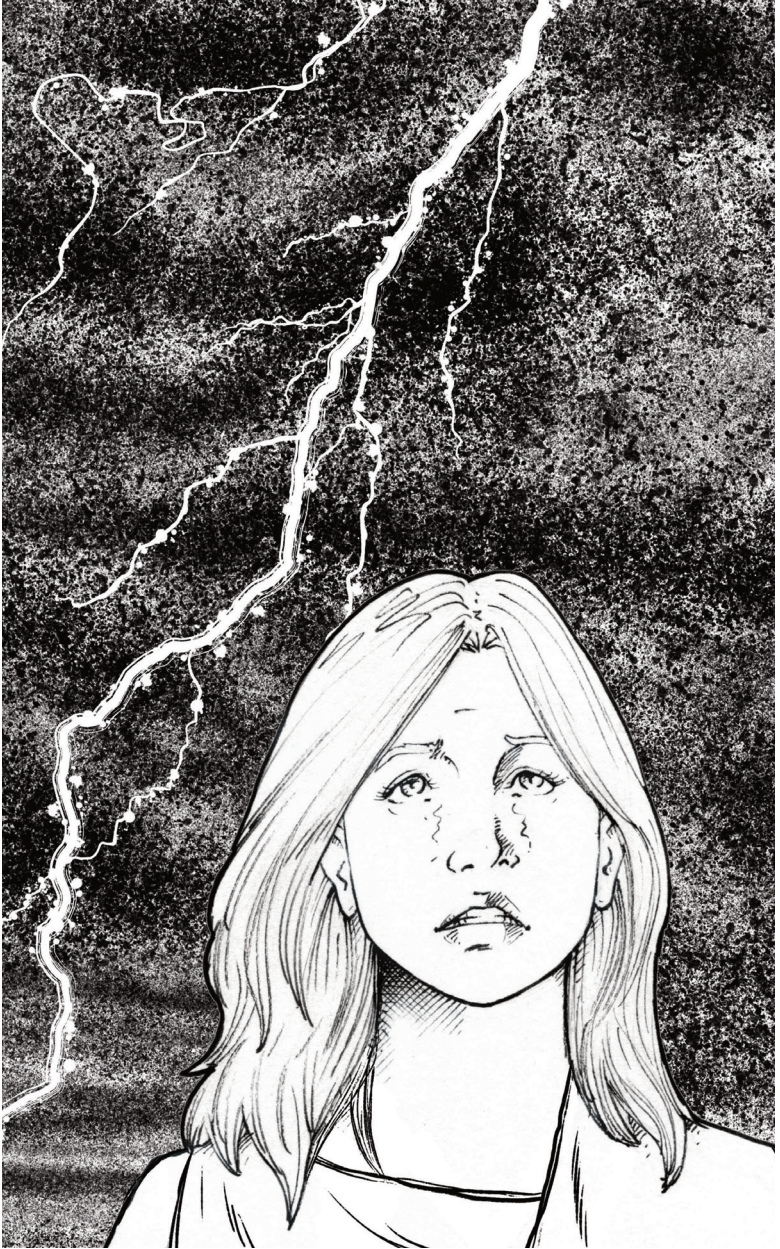
The skies hear my voice. The thunder and lightning stop. The vanishing rain marks our first victory. We have quieted the fury from the Roman skies. We are away.

Where does our story begin? It matters not. Our tale will end in misery, for the Romans have already abused and tortured and maimed us.

My tale is told in my own words. There were some things I did not learn of until later, though I relate them to you as they happened. Listen, now, to the story of the Sabine Women from one who was there.



## Tragedy









## Part I:

### Chapter 1: The Enemies on the Other Side

For more than three hundred years, the Sabini managed peaceful and productive cohabitation with neighboring Latin and Etruscan tribes. The despicable Romans were another matter. Driven by an unquenchable thirst for wealth, fame, women, and ego, Romans constantly initiated wars, conflicts, and subterfuge.

In Cures, we came to understand that Roman culture, politics, and governance were encapsulated in the monumental events surrounding the most beautiful woman in the world: Helen of Troy. We learned Helen was actually Helen of Sparta, the daughter born to Leda... Leda whom Zeus raped while he was in the guise of a swan. The two Athenians who abducted Helen – Theseus and Pirithous – triggered a chain of events that would scar the world for hundreds of years.

I believed that Helen was similar to all women, a victim of male ego and lustful desires and empowered by an overriding need for revenge. But my sister Zolia saw Helen differently: as a conniving seductress who used her body and her sexuality to control men and determine her fate. Also, my intelligent sister viewed the entire Trojan War as a myth and hoax. She believed it was the gods who sent the Sea Peoples to destroy the Trojans.

By the end of the ten-year war between the Spartans and the Trojans, the wondrous city of Troy was burned to the ground, her last king was dead, and his army was destroyed. A single Trojan leader, Prince Aeneas, the son of mortal Anchises and goddess Aphrodite, survived.

Aeneas hoisted his father Anchises on his back and escaped the kingdom with his young son, Iulius, and a flock of followers. After years of scavenging the world, the survivors discovered Laurentum, home to several Latin tribes. Aeneas named his new land New Troy after his native land.

The Trojans took to plundering crops from their neighbors, a breach that so infuriated native farmers that their king, Latinus, was forced to respond. Latinus quickly discovered that his forces were overmatched by Aeneas and his army of battle-tested Trojans. After a short fight, Latinus was assassinated, his army was slaughtered, and the citadel was seized.

Aeneas immediately assumed sovereignty over all Latin tribes. To solidify his reign, the Trojan leader married Lavinia, daughter of Latinus, who was attracted by the conqueror's legacy as a fallen prince and avowed son to goddess Aphrodite.

We were taught that Aeneas was driven by the prophecy of a sow that had farrowed a litter of thirty pigs. According to the prophecy, known as *The Three, The Thirty, and The Three Hundred*, Aeneas's New Troy would collapse in three years. This prophecy was fulfilled when the Trojans united with Latin natives to form Lavinium.

After thirty years, Iulius founded Alba Longa, a new kingdom surrounded by lakes and a mountain ridge and

resting on the plains close to the Tiber River. Iulius colonized thirty towns of the old Latin confederacy that would be ruled by Trojan descendants for three hundred years. During this time, Alba Longa prospered and continued to expand its territory.

After nearly three hundred years, King Procas sired two sons: Numitor and his younger brother, Amulius. Kind and generous, Numitor fathered two children: Prince Atys Numitor and Princess Rhea Silvia. By that time, Alba Longa had become home to rough, independent hunters, shepherds, and warriors, whom Numitor found to be lawless and distasteful barbarians.

Rather than rule a mob, the king preferred life on his ancestral farm with its lush gardens and flocks of plump sheep where he was surrounded by servants he could trust.

Unlike Numitor, the self-serving Amulius was vicious, greedy, and ambitious. He used inflated credentials to degrade his brother and gain favor with the people of Alba Longa. And though aware that Amulius conspired against his rule, Numitor remained aloof, uninterested in conflict, and unwilling to shoulder the task of civilizing his kingdom's barbarian culture.

Seizing the opportunity, Amulius rallied his followers, marched to the citadel, overthrew the guards, and proclaimed himself King of Alba Longa. Numitor's uninspired troops surrendered rather than fight. Amulius quickly assumed control, stationing soldiers at strategic positions throughout the kingdom. Disenchanted inhabitants rushed to Numitor's farm to inform their former king who, to their surprise, seemed relieved.

Amulius so terrorized the land, and so antagonized his subjects, that he feared retribution from Numitor's offspring. To quash this threat, he imprisoned them. When Numitor demanded the return of Atys Numitor and Rhea Silvia, Amulius responded by killing the son and confining the princess to the temple as a virgin priestess to goddess Vesta. With the prince dead and the princess destined for a virgin life, Amulius continued his savage rule unencumbered by worries of rebellion.

Mourning his son and suffering the sequestration of his daughter, Numitor prayed to the gods that his son be resurrected. With his dream of ascension fulfilled, Amulius embraced a life of debauchery and philandering while the people of Alba Longa came to loathe their king.

Seven years after the rebellion, Rhea Silvia escaped in the dark of night. This prompted Amulius to launch a massive inquiry revealing that the princess had been assisted by her lover, a respected warrior and protector of cattle named Silvanus. Once again, Amulius feared for his throne.

Silvanus, whose protective nature led friends to call him "God of Mars," had first met Rhea Silvia at the temple. The couple enjoyed such a powerful physical attraction that the "God of Mars" helped Rhea administer rituals by day and bedded her at night. Their five-year relationship peaked when they escaped for their imminent marriage.

One year later the rivers and lakes of Alba Longa overflowed, flooding the land. As fearful farmers and shepherds rushed to save their cattle, two herders came upon a forlorn woman perched high on a cliff above the Tiber. The shepherds called to the woman to come down; but she ignored their pleas, prompting the men to climb to her.

“Woman, are you Rhea Silvia, daughter of good King Numitor?” called the nearest shepherd.

“For the sake of my father, King Numitor, save his grandchildren in this basket!” cried Rhea Silva, before casting her robe aside and plunging to her death. Discovering twin boys in her basket, the shepherds quickly covered the infants with the mother’s discarded cloak and headed home, all the while fearing Amulius would kill them and their families for harboring his nephews.

After tending the babies for two days, the herders carried the boys to the king. He was stationed at the citadel to better monitor the floods, and there the humble shepherds knelt before him and pleaded for leniency. “Lord, please accept these two newborn boys.”

“Why do you bring these twins to your king? Did the flood wash away their families?” Amulius asked.

“No, master. These twins are your nephews, left by Rhea Silvia before she drowned herself.”

“If you are troublemakers, I will end your lives here and now!” Amulius drew his sword, but when one shepherd tossed Rhea’s cloak at Amulius’s feet the dumbfounded king sheathed his sword. “That is Rhea Silvia’s cloak. How do you have this?”

The shepherds recounted the mother’s suicide and their rescue of the children, whereupon the king shouted, “Remove these evil boys from my sight!”

Amulius ordered his treasurer to reward each shepherd with a bursa of gold. “Loyal shepherds of Alba Longa,” he began, “take this gold in exchange for rendering an important

service. So that their bodies can rest with their mother, drown the boys in the river. This is a necessary service but one you must never discuss with anyone. If you value the lives of your families, heed my words.”

The shepherds packed their gold, placed the cloak and children in the basket, and departed. After they reached the river, they were unable to reconcile ending the lives of two healthy infants. Because their allegiance lay with Numitor and Rhea Silvia, the herders struggled to find a solution until a wooden vessel used to feed lambs drifted through the mist and settled before them. The shepherds cleaned the float, lined it with Rhea Silvia's cloak, enclosed the boys along with several gold coins, and set the makeshift barge adrift.

When the boat disappeared, the shepherds returned to King Amulius with clear consciences. “All of Numitor's seed has drowned in the river. King Amulius and his offspring shall rule Alba Longa for eternity,” they announced.





## Chapter 2: Corrado and Bianca

Our lives began with a melody and a smile in Cures, a town in the Sabini hill country where ancient traditions still prevailed. Neither home nor country, Cures was a paradise filled with integrity, spirituality, hard work, patriotism, and warriors from the gods. Here, we were born to Corrado, a farmer, shepherd, and hunter, and his beloved wife, Bianca, mother of two daughters: Zolia the Crusader and me, Ronica the Revolver.

From the first, we pressed our parents about how they had met and fallen in love. One night after a day in the fields, Father faced the firelight, huddled us on the rug floor, and began his recitation. We basked in his every expression, celebrated his every word. “One day in the market, there was a funny girl trying to sell two puny fish,” he chuckled.

“Was that Mother? How old were you? What did you talk about?” we pressed.

“Ah, my curious daughters interrupt? This story is long enough. Hold your questions until the end.” Father shrugged, and sighed an exaggerated sigh before restarting his saga:

“A lifetime ago, when I was twelve and your mother ten, I worked with my two older brothers and my father managing the cattle and doing the lowliest farm

chores. That was when we started raising sheep, cattle, goats, and pigs, and growing cabbage, lettuce, fennel, and olives. There was always much to do.

“While bringing two sheep home to Mother, I passed through the crowded market where this spunky girl was selling fish. Her disheveled hair hung over a white tunic but, when she turned, I recognized her as Bionca, the victim of my many pranks. She and her father were well known to our family.”

Before continuing, Father looked to see that Mother Bionca approved his recital.

“The girl insisted one bronze coin apiece was right for her two puny fish. ‘Why does the young girl of Cures rob her neighbors? Your fish are the size of tadpoles,’ I quipped. Bionca tilted her head pensively. ‘Hmm, prankster shepherd boy. Tell me how much you charge for your scrawny mutton?’

“When I answered ‘two silver pieces,’ she feigned fainting. ‘Tell me, shepherd boy, why do you overcharge for sheep the size of mice?’ I wrapped my arms around one heavy sheep and asked, ‘Do my plump sheep look like mice to you?’

“‘If my fish are tadpoles, your sheep are mice. My fish have added value because I scoured the river and wrested them from the toothy jaws of a vicious alligator to bring them to market for you to buy. Even a lazy shepherd boy can see my price is right.’

“‘Ha! Ridiculous! Gather round, good people of Cures, to see this witch who parades two tadpoles as fish in our marketplace!’ I called to the square.



“The alligator conqueror tightened her fists; but before she could pick a fight, Fabricius, her father, returned from the river. Noticing his daughter’s ferocity, the fisherman inquired, ‘Why does my child squint her eyes and scrunch her nose at our neighbor?’

“Bianca described our disagreement with great animation. When she concluded, Fabricius winked at me. ‘Enough squabbling, my children. We have made our share today. Tomorrow waits. Take these fish, young Corrado. Share them with your family so that Bianca’s bravery does not go wasted,’ he laughed.

“The ferocious alligator conqueror kept grumbling until Fabricius suggested we take our mid-day meal together. I quickly seized the opening and invited them home.”

At this point in his story, Father paused so that we could absorb the scene. We begged him to continue.

“My daughters should know that it was either because Bianca’s mother had died young, or because Fabricius had raised her as a son, but either way she was a rough cut: pretty and cute, but with jagged edges. On the way home, Bianca’s incessant flirting blinded her to my adoration.

“At home, Mother welcomed our guests but gave Bianca a quizzical look when she was presented with the tadpoles. Thankfully, Fabricius added a few real fish so that Mother could set about preparing our midday meal.

“While my daughterless mother cooked, she questioned Bianca. ‘My girl, why is your hair unruly?’

This is no way for a young woman. Come here. Let me dress your hair.'

"Fabricius sighed. 'My girl grows so fast. She has no teacher for womanly things. She can fish and pull her weight, but...'

"Worry not, Fabricius. Your Bionca can come to me anytime. I shall teach her and care for her. She is pleasant but she must soon become a woman so that when the time is right, Bionca will marry my young shepherd, Corradeo, and become my daughter.'

"Fabricius gasped. 'Wonderful! This would be a dream come true! And, when Bionca bears a child for the Avitus family, I shall build an eternal temple to honor the goddess Minerva.'

"My heart leapt with anticipation, but I posed the obligatory protest. 'Me and this seller of pricey tadpoles? Surely my mother is not serious!'

"Thankfully, Mother could not be swayed. 'My son, Bionca is a special girl. In the name of Quirinus, you must promise Fabricius and me that you will always honor and care for her.'

"That day I pledged to the world to be kind, gentle, and protective of Bionca, my beautiful wife, your mother. When my father and brothers returned from the fields, we ate well on fine fish, lamb stew, and cabbage – a fitting celebration filled with harmless teasing."





## Chapter 3: Romulus and Remus

The shepherd's barge did not sink; instead, it stalled downstream against a clogged pile of logs. When the children awoke, they wailed so loudly that they were discovered by a she-wolf who was searching for her missing whelps. Drawn to the newborns, the wolf used her paws to pull the vessel ashore where she welcomed her new litter by licking their faces.

After a time, the she-wolf placed the boys on the cloak and dragged them to her cave, positioning them favorably for the sun but keeping them invisible to invaders. For nourishment, the twins suckled her, enjoying wolf milk for the first time.

The mother wolf cared for Rhea Silvia's cubs like they were her own. Birds sang to the twins during the day and owls watched over them by night. By their first birthday, the twins had bloomed healthy and strong.

The she-wolf decided it was time for the boys to receive parenting from humans. Stealing a lamb from a nearby farm, she lured farmer Faustulus to her cave. When the farmer discovered two children, he assumed the she-wolf had not only stolen his lamb but had also abducted the children. Faustulus swung his ax and decapitated the kidnapper.

The farmer wrapped the infants in the cloak and hurried them to his farm, where his wife, Acca Larentia, warmed and

fed the boys. Believing she recognized the cloak, Acca asked, “Is this not the cloak of priestess Rhea Silvia?”

While the couple argued about how to manage their discovery, their own twelve children interceded and convinced the parents to reverse their inclination to return the children to Amulius. The parents agreed, but stipulated that the origin of the new arrivals must remain a family secret; the true identity of the twins must never be divulged.

So it was that Acca Larentia claimed the boys and named them Romulus and Remus.





## Chapter 4: Ronica and Zolia

Mother Bionca joined us on the floor and Father Corradeo continued his narrative.

“After our engagement dinner, I showed your mother our farm and our plump livestock. ‘Corradeo, my future husband, why was your price two silvers for those sheep?’

“Bionca, for those sheep, I fought a lion and pried them from his belly. My price was fair.’

“My future wife grinned. ‘Ah, Corradeo, you are a storyteller like me! We will indeed be happy together.’

“Mother Bionca has loved our farm ever since that day when she playfully chased my favorite white-and-black goat until we lay on the grass, watching a brilliant sunset. Pointing to an early star, Bionca whispered, ‘My father says that star is my mother. When I look at her, I see how beautifully the other stars are aligned, but Mother is the only one who always smiles upon me.’

“Feeling Bionca’s sadness, I tried to change the conversation. ‘You know, future wife, I can dress your hair.’

“‘You do not like my hair? Worry not, shepherd boy. Soon enough, my hair will brighten your every day. Now that I have met my future husband, I shall be well spruced from this day forward. But—’

“She shook her finger at me. ‘Do not misunderstand me, Corrado. You may not touch me before our marriage. If you try, I shall complain to Father,’ she teased, fitting into my chest. ‘Perhaps, this one time, we could be cozy.’ We cuddled innocently and Bionca whispered, ‘We shall marry, Corrado, and I will make you always proud.’”

“Every day thereafter, Bionca came to work and learn maternal things with Mother. Our family treated her as our own, and my love for the pricey tadpole seller grew... and still grows.”

Father looked to see that we had absorbed his story and his commitment to Bionca, our mother, before he continued.

“Occasionally, Father Avitus would take us hunting. My daughters should understand that Mother Bionca was a fearless hunter. It was right that we arrived at love together. When it was time to marry, the sun, star, and moon gods were content.

“When your mother was pregnant with Ronica, Fabricius fulfilled his promise. He built a temple for Minerva in the same spot where Bionca and I had embraced to enjoy the stars. The temple was forty paces square and housed a statue of Minerva. Four oil lamps rested in the corners. The open roof allowed the gods from the skies to consult Minerva.

“For the temple’s consecration we invited the town’s young Sabini priest, Cnaeus Augur, who wore a lengthy white cloak under a black vest. The cloak’s hood covered his head. The head of his gold-coated staff was engraved with a spear, a bow with a mounted arrow, a bolt of lightning, and a strand of wheat. The augur blessed the temple with water from the Tiber Valley. After Father sacrificed a heifer, the priest dispersed the animal’s blood around the temple.

## Goddesses



“Cnaeus Augur then closed his eyes to ask Semo Sancus, the tribe’s principal god, for a revelation. When the priest opened his eyes, he solemnly addressed the assembly.

“Semo Sancus declares that Minerva will be divided into two halves that will be born to Corrado and Bianca. The daughters will arise, fight, and shine as bright as the stars. Until the death of both daughters, the goddess Minerva will remain in the land of the Sabine. Upon the passing of the sisters, Minerva will be carried away from these lands to other empires and will be a forgotten memory here in her homeland.’

“The audience became agitated. One elder inquired, ‘What misdeeds have we done to cause Minerva’s abandonment?’

“The augur answered, ‘You have done no wrong, but the cries of Minerva’s unborn daughters disturb her. To preserve our spirituality, she will divide in two to allow us more time.’

“I knelt before the augur. ‘Do you say we will have two daughters from Minerva?’ He touched my head. ‘Yes, Corrado, you will sire the two mighty female warriors of this earth. Minerva’s soul will be bestowed upon them. Your two mothers of bravery will be marveled at by all generations of an empire that is yet to be born.’

“With the augur’s prophecy deemed true and divine, the town began to offer daily prayers to Minerva. And so, my curious daughters, this is the true story of how your mother and I met and how we came to know that you, Ronica and Zolia, would be here to share our story.”







## Chapter 5: Roma

Romulus and Remus reached adulthood as a farmer's sons, meaning they were vigorous, hard-working, and respectful young men who honored the gods. Faustulus taught the boys to hunt, work, pray, and live together. The twins became known for bravery while protecting the cattle and chasing down thieves who stole their livestock.

The farmer was mindful of the pair's obvious leadership qualities. Romulus developed loyal followers known as Quintilii, while followers of Remus were called Fabii. On Palatine Hill, the two shepherds and their followers tended flocks owned by Amulius while other herders tended flocks owned by Numitor on neighboring Aventine Hill.

As time went on, the brothers recognized the advantages of Aventine Hill due to its favorable exposure and abundant full grasses. This motivated the twins to try grazing their flocks on the richer hill, but Numitor's vigilant shepherds quickly chased the gatecrashers away. The incident caused King Numitor to plot the capture of the trespassers.

Not long after the first incident, Romulus was summoned to Caenia for a sacrificial tribute to the gods. During his absence, one of King Amulius's finest lambs mysteriously disappeared. Remus suspected a kidnapper.

When he spotted the lamb tethered to a rock on Aventine Hill, Remus became incensed and set out to rescue the animal. He crawled to the hostage, cut the rope, and prepared for his return. But Numitor's shepherds sprang from behind tall rocks, overcame the trespasser, and promptly led their captive to Numitor, who had instructed that no mercy should be afforded any burglars.

Aware of the irony, Faustulus appeared at the court saying, "My only lord, King Numitor, I beg you to spare this boy."

"What say you, shepherd?" asked Numitor. "Why would I set such a dangerous precedent and spare the life of your trespassing son?"

"My king, this boy is not my son. He is Remus, one of two true sons of your departed daughter Rhea Silvia."

The king studied the trespasser with new interest. Recognizing the possibility, Numitor ordered that Faustulus explain what had transpired. After hearing the shepherd's fantastical description of the wolf, the cave, and the discovery of the twins, the king demanded proof.

Faustulus quickly produced the torn but unmistakable cloak of Rhea Silvia. The king clutched his daughter's cloak and came to see her face in his captive. "The boy has the eyes of my princess!" proclaimed Numitor. "My grandson, come close to your true king... your only grandfather."

Guards unshackled Remus, who knelt before his king to receive his grandfather's attention. Shortly afterward, Numitor asked the whereabouts of Remus's brother. At that moment, Romulus and a squad of fighters charged into the chambers. The king quieted Romulus by asking, "Where have you been, my son?"

Puzzled, Romulus looked to Faustulus for an explanation. When satisfied, he responded to his grandfather. "I have just returned from Caenia to free my brother. Forgive my ignorance in this treacherous game, but I am now here for you, my king and grandfather." Romulus laid down his weapons and knelt beside his brother.

Numitor stroked the faces of his newfound grandsons. "My sons, you resemble your mother, who was only briefly known to you. It is not right, but at long last Rhea Silvia has returned to her home." The king rose from his throne. "My faith in the gods never waned. I asked for my only son to be resurrected, and my prayers brought the sons of Rhea Silvia, my grandchildren, home. Now I leave it to my ancestor's gods to steer my course."

Romulus and Remus lifted Rhea Silvia's cloak to their grandfather and assumed seats next to the king. All members of the court scorned Amulius and sensed the need for vengeance. The twins only needed direction. "We await your command," said Romulus.

Members of the court rose, calling out, "Down with Amulius! Let Romulus and Remus lead us to freedom. Defeat the demon king!"

"So be it!" declared Numitor. "My sons Romulus and Remus will lead the assault and assert their rightful claim to the throne. My grandsons will take whatever force and weaponry are needed to slay Amulius, the murderer of their mother and uncle."

Engrossed in his sinister existence, Amulius was unaware of the vengeful plot. When Romulus and Remus approached the citadel with Numitor's brigade, the surprised forces of Amulius offered little resistance. The victory was swift.

Staring at defeat, Amulius bribed a captain of Numitor's *militaris* and escaped. But as he fled, his requests for shelter were ignored by his abused subjects. Exhausted, defeated, and with no hope of reclaiming his throne, the king fell to the ground, where Palatine shepherds clubbed him to death.

Alba Longa rejoiced that the patient, peaceful king had regained his throne, his kingdom, and his grandsons on the same day.





## Chapter 6: The Sisters

Zolia and I now understood that our parents had started their lives peacefully together, with cattle in the field, fish in the river, and soothing wind music blowing through the trees.

When I was born, the augur's prophecy inspired Father to host a grand feast to celebrate my birth. According to tradition, all people of Cures enjoyed their measure. Cnaeus Augur blessed and anointed me. "With Ronica the Revolter, one half of Minerva has fallen from the skies."

My parents wrapped me in fine clothes and carried me around the temple first to the right, then to the left, and then to the right again before carrying me to the Sabini hilltop where the sacred stone of Semo Sancus rested.

After many rituals to our tribal god, Father hosted an unforgettable festival. Town musicians played lyres, salpinxes, and psalteries. Young and old villagers danced and rejoiced. Small flower girls presented peace offerings of hyacinth and larkspur to Bionca. Town elders proclaimed this the first birth festival ever celebrated with such ceremony. When Titus Tatus, king of Sabinium, sent presents and gifts, there was due cause for my birth festival to be recounted for decades.

Word of the augur's prophecy had spread to other Sabini towns. Visitors from Reate, Trebula, Mutuesca, Nursia,

Amiternum, and Eretum came to Cures to see Minerva's first daughter. It was a happy time for the town and for my parents.

When sister Zolia the Crusader was born two years later on during the earliest days of spring, I loved her from birth. Cnaeus announced, "The remaining piece of Minerva is born in Cures. The future of Minerva and of our town is balanced on the shoulders of the two mothers of bravery." Zolia's birth celebration was even more historic than mine.

While we grew up, our parents stayed righteous and caring. Mother groomed us and combed our hair, always putting our best front forward. Zolia shared Mother's thick, long, black mane and soon gained her favor. From the outset, I was Father's daughter. His first gift to me was a pole for catching fish.

With hair that reached her hips and perfectly accented her ash-colored eyes, Zolia grew to be strikingly beautiful. Always high-spirited, outspoken, and insatiably curious, my sister's disposition bordered on provocative. We tried not to notice, but her personality was hard-charging from birth.

I was the opposite. Curly yellow locks flowed to my shoulders but my face was thinner, my nose more delicate. I was a gentler spirit but, as different as we were, every eye turned our way when we walked the town. Father proudly took us to market, where old women pinched our cheeks and said, "May Tiber Valley overflow with your beauty." Ever contentious, Zolia would mumble, "If the Tiber overflows, the flood will drown the town. Do my grandmothers forget it is in their best interests that Minerva's daughters live long lives?"

We suffered our first disagreement after Zolia turned five. At dawn, we rushed to see a newborn cosset. The pink lamb was small, hardly able to open its eyes, barely able to

suckle her mother's milk. Zolia and I cleaned the newborn and covered her in a small blanket, but we argued over who would name the cosset.

I resented that Zolia always named our newborns and stubbornly rejected her choice, "Blandina," in favor of my more thoughtful selection, "Vita." When Mother overheard the argument, she favored my choice for the first time in memory.

Zolia stormed away, crying her way home. After she left, I realized the cosset's mother should name her daughter. As the day in the fields unfolded, a heavy sadness overcame me. When Father and I returned home, Zolia stormed into our bedroom, unwilling to face me.

Seeing my distress, Mother looked to Father, who reported my day of sulking. At dinner, I faced east and Zolia west. We endured a silent soup and vegetable dinner until Mother asked. "Will you talk to your sister, Zolia?"

"Ronica has a new sister named Vita. I am without a sister."

Father raised his voice. "Hush, my daughters. You waste each other. Behave like good sisters."

Zolia sipped several spoons of soup, pushed her bowl aside, and announced, "Everyone tells me what to do because I am the youngest, but you will all watch me fly!" she declared, defiantly stomping off to our room.

Mother cast me a look. "Are you happy now, Ronica? Why are you not nicer to your sister?"

"But Mother, Zolia always names our animals. This is my time. Why are you angry with me?"

Father lifted me in his arms. "My Ronica is right. Why does Mother's little tadpole misbehave and pout?"

Mother feigned anger. "My Zolia is of the alligator. Do you forget? Never call her a tadpole again, or Ronica will be known as the mouse."

Our laughter quickly lured Zolia to Mother's side. Sister's brilliant smile warmed Bionca, but her narrowed eyes burned into Father and me.

That night, Father slept at the farm and I bedded with Mother, who patiently explained that the older sister bore eternal responsibility to care for the younger one. She suggested I apologize to my sister.

Gathering myself, I went to Zolia, who was turned to the wall and had burrowed under piles of sheepskins. I slipped next to her and started massaging her neck, untangling her hair with my fingers.

"What are you doing, Ronica?" she whispered, in her most melodic voice.

"Taking care of my little sister," I told her sincerely.

"I thought your sister was that cosset."

"Zolia, you will always be my only sister. There is no one better than you. When I fry the cosset for your breakfast, you will know how dear you are to me."

Wide-eyed, Sister swiveled to face me. "No, Ronica, you must spare the newborn! I could not bear her death."

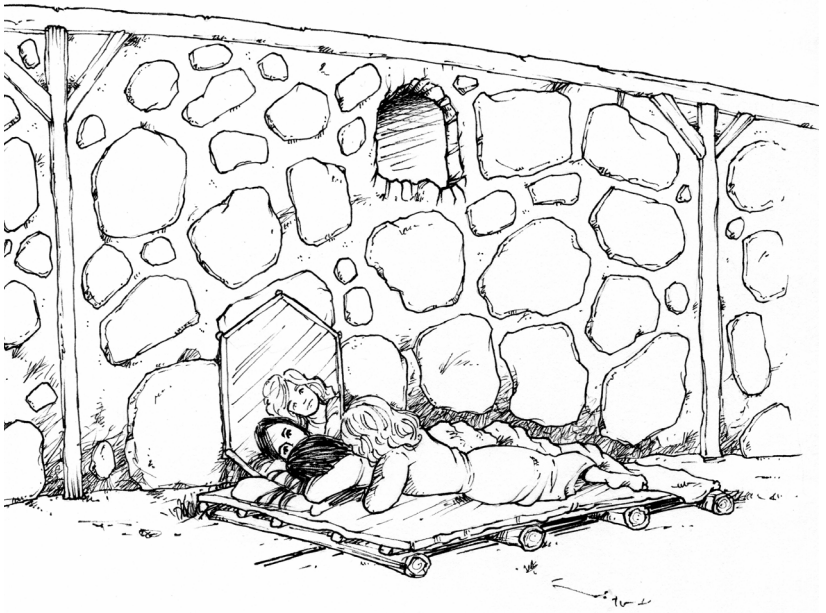
"So be it. But understand that I will destroy anything that dares come between us," I answered, squeezing her for emphasis.

Zolia's intensity bore into me. "Tell me, Ronica. Are you still my true sister?"

"Always, Zolia. Your true sister."



## Reflection



“What will you name the cosset?” she lamented.

“The cosset was not born to us, so her mother will decide her name.”

Zolia lit up. “How smart my sister is! She makes the best decisions. The babe is not our daughter,” she said, and then hesitated before going on. “Tell me, Sister Ronica. When the time comes, what will you name your daughter?”

“Zolia.”

“My name? But why?”

“Because there is no sweeter or stronger person on this earth than my sister, Minerva’s other half.”

She giggled. “Will my sister be my mother, too, Ronica?”

Bringing her face to my chest, I answered, “I am your mother, your father, and your sister, who will protect you as long as I breathe.”

Mother, who listened at the door, leaned in to ask, “Then, who will be my mother, my daughter?”

“Me!” we gleefully shouted in unison.

Mother snuggled into bed, hugging and kissing us so many times our cheeks nearly went numb. With the passing of our first sisterly argument, our bond tightened, as it would after every disagreement for the rest of our lives.





## Chapter 7: The Hills

For several years, Romulus and Remus followed their grandfather's lead until they wished to build their own towns. "And where will my grandsons construct their towns?" asked Numitor.

"On Palatine Hill," answered Romulus.

"Aventine Hill for my site," added Remus.

"And why do my grandsons choose these two hills?"

"These hills are where we grew up. We understand the soil, the pastures, the grasses, and the forests."

Numitor approved the reasoning and granted permission for the construction of the twin towns, thus fulfilling the three-hundred-year prophecy.

For the daunting projects, Romulus and Remus began with their most rugged followers: mostly pioneers, shepherds, and hunters. As development of the hills progressed, pirates, robbers, and warriors added more muscle to the workforce. It was natural that competition ensued and eventually spilled over to the brothers themselves. The dispute intensified as a debate over which hill, Aventine or Palatine, would house the capital city.

Desiring a peaceful resolution, Faustulus offered his stepsons an ancient solution. "When we want to settle debates like this, augurs cast birds for answers." The proposition was

confirmed by Numitor, who added that the practice was derived from the Etruscans. So, the brothers agreed to resolve the debate in a traditional way.

Romulus took his followers to Palatine Hill, where he used his crooked staff to delineate sacred space on the hilltop. This would be where he would receive the vision of his birds. Remus led his group to Aventine Hill, where he prepared the hill's sacred space.

On the eve of the competition, heavy clouds covered the sky and blocked the moonlight. To mask their anxiety, Romulus and Remus covered their faces with cloaks. At dawn, clouds still hid the sun; but as the skies crept open, Remus spotted his birds and shouted, "I see six vultures in the sky. The augury favors me!"

"Remus has found six vultures. The augury favors Aventine!" shouted his followers on Aventine Hill.

But when the sun broke through, Romulus bellowed from atop Palatine Hill. "Twelve vultures fly to me and Palatine Hill! Victory is mine!"

Romulus's followers roared approval. "We will build the capital on Palatine Hill, and it will be known as Roma in honor of Captain Romulus!"

Faustulus confirmed that the auguries favored Romulus and the new capital city would be built on Palatine Hill. Remus bitterly suffered defeat and began a sustained strategy of defaming his twin.

It was amidst this tense brotherly conflict and resentment that Romulus and his loyalists founded Roma. The new town was not far from Cures and the Sabini region, and it was

vowed that no unclean entity would pass through Roma's gates.

At the city's festival of Pales, country people took to purifying themselves with fire and smoke, cleansing themselves with spring water, and drinking milk mixed with the juice of grapes. When the smoke settled in the stalls, the burning sulfur, incense, rosemary, and firewood purified the livestock. The loyalists of Romulus lit a giant bonfire of hay and straw and danced wildly to music of cymbals, flutes, and lyres.

To plan the construction of Roma, Romulus and Faustulus sought advice from learned Etruscan priests. The builders forged a large circular pit from the earth's hard clay. Into the pit Romans threw in their "first fruits" and other earthy objects. An altar was erected and the pit burned as an offering to the gods, thus consecrating the new center of the city.

Romulus instructed his men to draw boundaries around Palatine Hill and to use a bull and a heifer to till a deep moat. When Romulus's plow reached the city gates, it was discovered that the furrow had been dug inwards, toward the city. Despite structural flaws and the random path of the plow, the moat was considered holy ground by Romulus, whose prayers had been answered by Jupiter.

It was a new day. The ominous prophecy of the sow was fulfilled. After three hundred years, Alba Longa gave way to the new Roman kingdom and its new king. Those two changes caused alarm among the enemy on the other side... among my people, the Sabini.





## Chapter 8: Young Warriors of Sabinium

Our young grew to be respected warriors. The fearless prowess of Cures warriors was rooted in a long tradition of discipline and training. At seven years of age, boys attended the school of martial arts. Children who preferred reading, writing, or the arts pursued these skills but were still required to practice sword handling, spear throwing, archery, or martial arts for at least a part of every day.

Girls in Cures could choose gardening, flower arranging, cooking, or dancing classes. Some girls, like Zolia, preferred more masculine pursuits. Sister's training was as rigorous as that allotted to our young men. An understandable desire for boys and girls to compete interchangeably arrived at early ages.

Mother Bionca, the best cook in Cures, proudly taught me her secrets. I learned to season meat, flavor vegetables, make soft breads and cakes, and measure delicious spices, salt, and olive oil. Zolia and Father loved my cooking.

Sister avoided domestic chores, instead pursuing dance and soldiering with equally determined fervor. After her first day at dance school she set her sights on winning Coelus le Terpsichore, the most prestigious dance contest in Sabinium. The contest was celebrated on every year some twenty days before the summer solstice. A stage would be erected in Cures

center, and townswomen and children would spend many days adding colorful trimmings.

The competition was open to any Cures girl age eighteen or older with the stipulation that competitors were only permitted one attempt in a lifetime. The stakes were high; only the winner would be allowed to continue dance classes. As with all Cures competitions, victors continued training and losers took up another skill. Defeated dancers tended to shoulder more domestic responsibilities, a most unappealing consequence for Zolia.

For Coelus le Terpsichore, dancers drew one of five cards, each of which bore the name of a Sabini god. The dancers would perform their most interpretive dance as testimony to their chosen god. Spectators came from near and far to behold the contest. The grand prize was awarded by King Titus Tatius himself.

Just as important, the winner was deemed a worthy bride for an eligible prince from a royal family. It was an outcome that most young girls in Cures fancied, but an option that repulsed the Crusader. For Sister, the idea was simpler: to win.

Given her usual determination, victory seemed inevitable. When the Crusader set her eyes on the prize, only a matter of time remained before she achieved her triumph. That was one reason why the girls and boys in Cures shied away from Sister.

Though it was never spoken of, other children were wary of Zolia's physical strength and mental toughness. Sister had an uncanny confidence that encouraged her to say what she felt, regardless of time or place.

Zolia and I shared only one skill, and that was archery. Father started us early, insisting we practice on the farm in a large hut where bows and arrows were stored. Our targets were made of finely tanned goatskin that presented concentric circles with a dot in the middle. Zolia was a sharpshooter and much more skilled than her domesticated sister. I was not equal to either her skill or her tenacious will.

Even as a child, the Crusader pursued archery, swordsmanship, and dance with Spartan drive. Her competency became known in the far corners of Sabinium, and Sister competed on an equal footing with the young men of Cures. As her confidence flourished, her courage soared. Whatever she undertook, Zolia only saw herself as the best. Her days were filled with dance and martial arts.

Meanwhile, I helped Father with the farm and helped Mother with the home, learning what I could about life's subtleties.







## Chapter 9: Great Orgy of Roma

With triumph in his heart, King Romulus started building a wall around Palatine Hill. Tents for laborers and a palatial stone residence for Romulus and Remus sprang from the ground, and Roma's busy workforce started their labor with a strong sense of purpose.

But Romulus's design was poorly executed and the wall was uneven and weak. Remus, who bitterly ridiculed his brother's crooked wall, and his followers were disenchanted. As resentment between the twins mounted, Romulus came to realize that his brother was undermining both his authority and vision.

One afternoon, Remus taunted his brother by leaping over the flawed wall. Romulus lost his temper, quickly grabbed a spade, and repeatedly struck his brother's skull. Remus fell to the ground, forever subdued.

"What have you done, captain?" asked Commander Fabius. "Your brother's blood is on your hands!"

"Yes, his blood is on my hands. Roma is my vision and will be a powerful, eternal empire. From this day forward, any person who leaps her walls or undermines my vision will perish."

## Fratricide



Fabius was assigned to administer funeral services and bestow false honors on Remus. Romulus and Fabius conspired to blame the murder on Celer, a migrant worker who hastily escaped to Etruscan lands. Romulus convinced his subjects that his brother's death validated his own divine powers and the wisdom of his own vision.

As construction progressed, a massive fort, several citadels, and altars for the gods rose from the landscape. Foreigners, many of whom had loathsome pasts, arrived to join the effort. To house the misfit workforce, Romulus built a new and larger asylum.

Rife with endless opportunities for trade, Roma was soon flooded with gold and silver. The city's imposing infrastructure spread across the five hills of Capitoline, Aventine, Caelian, Quirinal, and Palatine.

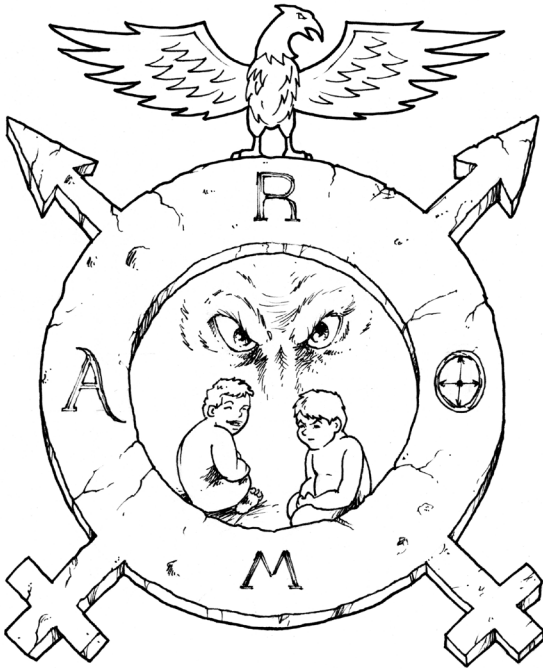
To accommodate a workforce of murderers, thieves, and sexual predators, the king allowed a more permissive society than did his neighboring communities. To strengthen his *militaris*, Romulus divided his soldiers into legions of three thousand infantry supported by three hundred trained cavalry. For governance, the king recruited one hundred noblemen and landowners and declared them patricians or senators.

The face of Roma slowly took shape.

But rumors that the spirit of Remus haunted Palatine Hill persisted. Reports of Remus sightings caused many citizens to stay boarded up in their homes at night. Roma's malaise further intensified when a pestilence swept the city. To lift the cloud from his people, Romulus planned sacrifices and festivals and placed an empty throne for Remus next to his own.

While Roma's labor force expanded, Romulus obsessed over the city's dearth of women. Compensation and residence

# Debauchery



were offered to women willing to service the workforce. Any women willing to participate in the “Magna Surrexerunt Ludere de Roma” or “Great Orgy of Roma” were assured profit and abundant opportunity. Soon, prostitutes willing to accommodate the lustful workforce arrived by sea, carriage, and on foot from Greece, Africa, Babylonia, Egypt, and Persia.

When the female population swelled, Palatine Hill became known for notorious public orgies. City streets, public baths, gardens, parapets, and landmarks steamed with so many bodily fluids that outsiders joked the mountain fog and snow had disappeared.

To stimulate libido, men and women used herbal powders and added bull and goat testicles to their soup. Sexual predators were so active during the Great Orgy that no Roman claimed innocence. Even King Numitor succumbed to repeated fellatio administered by trollops from Egypt, Africa, and Mesopotamia, as well as from Urnfield in the distant west. The orgy lasted seven days and seven nights. Romans lost track of their partners until Romulus addressed his exhausted subjects on the last day of faceless sex.

“We have proven there are no differences between Roman men,” said King Romulus. “We have shared our women as brothers. Our kingdom signifies unity, strength, courage, and power. Hail Holy Roma! Long live Roma!”

Almost immediately, prostitutes bearing caches of gold and silver began to depart the city. Only handfuls of women chose to remain. Bewitched by the powerful penises of Roma, the remaining harlots either procured wealthy husbands or stocked Roma’s infamous whorehouses.





## Chapter 10: Corrado's Family

Father's oldest brother had three sons and two daughters. The sons were Neuro, Iulius, and Julius, and the daughters were Ableasia and Memmia. Father's younger brother had two daughters – Domitia and Sulpicia – and one son, Naevius.

Of our eight cousins, Memmia, Sulpicia, and Naevius were our age. Our strongest cousin was the eldest, Neuro, a fearless hunter and warrior known throughout Sabinium.

Father often took our cousins with us to hunt boar, wild cattle, and birds. Father stressed that good hunters were not only good marksmen but were patient, ever aware of their habitat and prey.

As an average archer, I relied on my senses more than my skill. My kills were more a measure of my discipline than my marksmanship. On the other hand, Zolia relied on her archery prowess to overcome her impatient hunting style. She and Naevius shared charging styles.

One afternoon, Sister's unfettered brashness put our hunting party in jeopardy. Father had cautioned that we should never shoot at one of the wild cattle while it was in the herd. So, when our party came upon a grazing herd, we busily prepared traps.

