

## **Across the Rhine (Roman to Germanic Warriress TG)**

**By FoxFaceStories**

### **A Commission for CreepyJ**

Gaius is a common soldier in the mighty Roman legions beneath the mighty Princeps Octavian. It is circa 4 AD, and the commander of his legion, Legatus Septimus, is a cowardly figure who fails to prevent his troops from being ambushed. But when Gaius is captured, he is not killed, but subjected to a strange pagan ritual that transforms him into a German warrior woman. Determined to get revenge on her cowardly Legate, the former male must deal with her new gender, new culture, and new role within her adoptive Germanic tribe, all while plotting revenge. But will revenge be enough? Will her body and soul want more?

### **Across the Rhine**

The Angrivarii were once more testing the strength of the mighty legions, and crossing the Rhine with impunity. The age of Pax Romana had been secured now for as long as most young soldiers had lived; Augustus reigned as Princeps, and the Senate was restored to its seeming primacy. The civil wars had ended, and with a leading man at the helm maintaining traditional Roman values, the corruption of the old Republic had been rooted out, and its best elements kept in place beneath Augustus' stern gaze. But now, everything threatened to spill out: the barbarians that mighty Caesar himself had recognised would best be barricaded against along the mighty Rhine were looking at Rome with jealous eyes. They coveted its wealth, its prosperity, its knowledge, and its women. Numerous raids along the borders had been conducted, by the Bructeri, the Chatti, even the strange Marsi tribe. But none were more persistent than the Cherusci and the Angrivarii, and it was the latter that were most organised.

It put a chill to the heart of young Gaius Fabius, as much as the winter air of the Rhineland border. He was a loyal servant of Rome even if he had never seen its walls or tasted its fine wines and breads. Its light was but a mystery to him, but the twenty three year old had been fed a steady diet of tales from his late father about Rome's *virtus*, the honour and glory upon which their mighty civilisation was founded. His father had fought for Octavian himself as a sailor at the great Battle of Actium, and had a coin with its celebration marked from the triumph over Antonius that had followed. Gaius Fabius wore that coin always beneath his armour, cold against his breast, savouring the taste of victory that perhaps he too would one day savour over the Germanic tribes that threatened Roman rule.

Unfortunately, attempts to root them out had been less than satisfactory.

“It is pathetic,” he said, as they gathered for warmth around their legionary camp fire. “We should be crossing the Rhine before winter. Constructing bridges across the thin spaces and burning them all out of the forests these barbarians hide in. Instead, we are waiting on Legatus Septimus to grow a set of balls.”

Marcellus chuckled. He was Gaius’ best friend, but was always amused by Gaius’ desire for action. Not for nothing was Mars his favourite God. Mars and Victoria. He too prayed often to the same gods, but it was capture of loot that interested Marcellus more.

“You’re not wrong, Gaius. But orders are orders. It is what separates us from the pagan fools, is it not? Besides, we’re getting paid.”

Gaius shrugged, drawing closer to the fire. He was a limber man, with corded muscle and the cropped black hair of a true Roman soldier.

“True, you’re not wrong there. But there is no honour, no valour in sitting around while the Germans make fools of us. Think of the glory of pacifying these tribes as Caesar did. Making allies of some, subjects of others, and pitting them against each other.”

Marcellus just shrugged. “I’d rather make raids against their cities than pursue them through the cold misted forests. At least there is loot there. Loot, slaves, and women.”

Gaius rolled his eyes. His friend was a soldier’s soldier, but unlike Gaius, it was the deliverance of denarius that kept his loyalty more than anything. Gaius doubted his friend would ever be a revolter given the prosperity under the Princeps, but Marcellus’ genuine love for Rome was still less than his genuine love for money. Still, he was an enthusiastic soldier when necessary, and utterly loyal to his fellow legionaries, and that was acceptable in Gaius’ view. Most legions were comprised of the same. He had long recognised that his idealisation of Roman civilisation itself, and the soldier’s place within it, was something that few truly possessed. His father had been most adamant in passing on that sense of duty.

Only duty was dreadfully, unbearably *boring* lately. Their local Legatus was a fool of a man, promoted more due to his local political influence than merit, and it rankles the soldiers continually. Unfortunately, no revolt had come to overthrow him, nor orders to replace him. Gaius would push for no rebellion, but he would not oppose it; it was a Roman duty to cull the corrupt and cowardly from its legionary ranks, but Septimus was no fool; the older man spread the wealth well among his supporters, and so everyone *wanted* to be a supporter. Even Marcellus, who disliked the fool, had no interest in acting against him.

“Surely we must receive orders soon,” Gaius said. “Augustus cannot have eyes everywhere, but even he must know of the threat of this coalition by now, and its incursions across our borders. Surely Septimus will be forced to act?”

Marcellus grinned, and pointed behind his friend. It was mid-morning, and the frost and mist was still high around the edge of their camp, but even then it was easy to see the group of messenger horses galloping towards the edge of the fortified village they were

located outside of. The official message service of the Roman empire were swift and well-regarded, and they were headed right for Septimus' co-opted city estate in all its absurd opulence.

"Well, well, my omen-reading friend, it seems that the guidance of Minerve is with you, and all of her foresight too. It seems orders finally come from above."

Gaius beheld the sight with hope.

"Finally, someone has seen reason."

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"We are to march across the Rhine!" their commander shouted to the assembled legion. "We are to break the back of this confederacy of German barbarians, and return order and safety and eternal peace to our eternal Rome! And, of course, gain all the pillage and plunder and women and slaves we desire too!"

A great cheer erupted from the troops, and from Gaius too. Even he was swept up in the excitement of it all, the blood rush of being ready to take on the enemy. Of a great campaign finally being unfurled beneath him. But the excitement vanished mere moments later, when Septimus continued to talk.

"The Angrivarii and the Cherusci and their other unwashed filth wish to strike us from the shadows, but we will force them into a great battle! We will be going off our standard patrol routes and tracking them down across their lands, so that they know that *no* part of their territory is safe from our retribution. And then once their armies are utterly destroyed, we will march on their cities and take our plunder."

There was a mix of cheers, but less enthusiasm. Marcellus and Gaius exchanged a glance beside one another.

"*Caenum!*" Gaius hissed beneath his breath. "He'd have us explore unknown territory while *they* have the lay of the land and the ambush advantage? This is insanity."

Marcellus winced also. "Not to mention delaying the assault on their cities. What promise of loot do we have circling about in the cold forests? And this before winter? What if the campaign goes on too long; there'll be no plunder at all!"

Whispers of these complaints made it down the line and across the camp in the following hours, even as Legatus Septimus ordered his sub-commanders to prepare the troops for battle. He was a wide set and proud man, with a thick neck that merged into his shoulders. He was no soldier, but neither was he small: he had a bullish quality that contrasted Gaius' own lithe manliness and boyish features. And it was that bullish aspect that helped him corral the troops into line. That, and his cruelty.

“Watch out,” Lucanus whispered into their tent as he had the previous ones down the line, “Septimus is threatening crucifixion to any traitor who refuses to follow orders.”

“You must be joking,” Gaius said, fixing his armour up and ensuring his javelin was sharpened. “No commander has threatened crucifixion so readily since Crassus. And we all remember what happened to him in the end.”

Lucanus chuckled. “Would that we had the Persians upon the Rhine to pour gold down Septimus’ mouth.”

“He’d found a way to sour it down to lead before croaking, I’m sure,” Marcellus piped in. “And claim it as tribute, too, the coward.”

But Lucanus shushed them both. “This is just a warning. The Legatus has powerful friends and has kept their bread buttered. Word is he wants a loot train that one of the captured Germans alluded to. That’s why he’s only pushing for this now, even after the Imperial message.”

“That bastard wants us to walk into potential ambush for a quick grab of the coin in his hand,” Gaius spat. “It is without honour or sense.”

“I bet he has wide latitude to act from the orders,” Marcellus said. “This is how he’s chosen to interpret them.”

“Remember, I’m just a messenger. We march in less than ten days’ time. I’ll be with you, and tell you if anything comes up, but you didn’t hear it from me, right?”

“Of course not, Lucanus.”

The man grinned and fled to the next tent, to continue the warning. It put a grim feeling in Gaius’ stomach.

“This is how soldier revolts start,” he said. “Or worse.”

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No revolt came, though soon many felt it should have. Septimus was nothing if not convincing in his speeches about the promise of glory and riches once the Germanic enemies were slaughtered. Moreover, he had gained the service of a number of auxiliary legions and Germanic cavalry who were loyal to Rome’s pay, and these corralled the troops quite effectively. After a mere four days of preparation the camp was on the move, crossing the Rhine in its chill at its thinnest points, relying on the quick establishment of temporary bridges. Gaius and Marcellus and their fellow legionaries worked quickly to continue the hard pace that Septimus pushed, but it soon became even clearer the kind of leader they possessed.

“Damn you all!” the Legatus cried more than once. “We must be faster! The Angrivarii know these trails, and we must learn them too. Keep moving at full pace, or I’ll have the whips at your backs!”

“Easy for him to say,” Marcellus hissed. “When our ‘brave’ commander is leading from the back himself!”

It was true. While most commanders would be located further in the middle of the cohort, Septimus maintained a perfect escape route from the very centre of their convoy. It only made the march more disorganised; the German forests were cold, thick, and heavily misted. Soldiers were already catching sickness, but still were forced off the known map and around in circles. They were getting disgruntled. After just two weeks of marching without sight of the barbarian armies, several had already been executed for talk of revolt, and one beaten so severely he had died of a skull fracture for refusing to obey orders.

“Let that be a lesson to the rest of you!” Septimus had exclaimed. “I expect good Roman order!”

Unfortunately, ‘good Roman order’ was not present in their battlefield preparation. Gaius was no leader of men, but his father had known a great deal himself about war, and he recognised the failings of their march. They were tracking through mud, hill, and thick jungle. Their supply lines were stretched. Their wagons were struggling. Their quick pace meant that their scouts could not effectively do their job. Which was why he kept his guard up, and recommended the others do so as well. Already, there was tension along the lines, and something was about to snap. And the cataclysm finally arrived on a cold, misted mid-morning when morale was at its lowest.

They were being force-marched through a hilly forest that still had a swamp-like quality in it due to recent rain. Movement was slow and difficult, but still Septimus pushed them on: the sighting of the loot wagon from recent Angrivarii and Cherusci raids was nearby, and his eyes were practically flickering gold in anticipation. This was his undoing, however. It was all their undoing. The Germans were counting on this.

“MOVEMENT!” someone shouted, pointing up the hillside from their swampy lowland position. Gaius looked up to see numerous shadowy figures moving through the jungle, merging with the treeline. For the merest moment he was frozen, as if these were shades from the Underworld, but then he remembered his training.

“SHIELDS!” one of their sub-commanders yelled, but only half got their shields up in time before the rain of arrows began down upon them. Gaius and Marcellus were knocked down into the mud by their force, and still more came.

“FORMATIONS! MANIPLES, NOW!”

The last voice was Septimus, and only half the order was proper. They were being ambushed from high ground, and maniples would serve little use in the boggy footing they

currently possessed. Only a rapid countercharge could take the enemy by surprise. But the Romans were used to obeying orders, mostly for good but here for ill, and so their maniples were formed up into tight boxes.

Just in time for the Germans to roar as they collapsed down upon them from the opposite side. They cried out in their guttural language as they cut men down, butchering the rear veteran lines first of all, and collapsing many of Rome's best.

"We're surrounded!" one man screamed, running for it. He was cut down at the legs, blood spraying across Gaius' face. He flung his javelin at the attacker, slaying him, and switched to his gladius. His own maniple was falling apart.

"Quick, form a line and charge!" he said. "They can't get our wagons!"

With the command line devastated, the others followed his orders, Marcellus amplifying them. They charged forward, and their own training kicked in, allowing them to make short work of the front Germanic lines. They kept their shield wall rigid, but arrows came from behind, and Lucanus was having difficulty on the other side.

"Where in all the Gods' names is Septimus!?" Marcellus shouted. "We need an orderly retreat!"

Gaius cut down one foe and turned his head for a moment, only to simmer with anger. The loyal Germanic cavalry on the Roman side was already in retreat, as were the auxiliary troops around Septimus. His most loyal forces were also pulling back, but nothing was being done for the troops in the thick of the fighting. No relief, not even any orders.

"Bastard! He's abandoning us!"

"That bloody coward!" Marcellus called. "I bet he has Persian in his blood!"

They began to fall back as well, but without clear leaders, Gaius could only attempt to try to lead. But he was not recognised in the chaos, and the German tribesmen were upon them, preventing their every attempt. To Gaius' left, Marcellus was cut down. He screamed in roaring rage, felling one more enemy soldier, but soon he was overcome. Gaius rallied, taking another life, but he was beaten back, unable to help his friend, who was quickly speared though.

"Marcellus! NO!"

But it was too late: the remaining troops were being obliterated. What was meant to be a hunt and destroy campaign had led to ruin. Gaius collapsed into the mud, seeing more of his comrades fall. Several Germans grabbed him, and his sword arm became useless, searing with pain as an enemy hacked at it with an axe. He began to feel lightheaded as blood left him. Drained. Already he was one of the few survivors, but life was leaving him. Marcellus was dead. Lucanus was dead. Others he had trained and known for years now were dead.

And Septimus, the rank coward, was alive.

It was the last thing on his thoughts as he lost consciousness in the mud. If he could come back to life to do but one thing, it would not be to revenge himself on the barbarians, but on the cowardly general who had betrayed his own people.

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Gaius woke, bound in thick ropes and carried by brute men speaking in a sharp, guttural tongue. His sword-arm was in agony, and he had been stripped of his armour. To his horror, his coin was gone too; the one given to him by his father that celebrated the victory at Actium.

"Where are you taking me?" he demanded, though his voice was coarse. What little he had been left to wear was little against the cold.

The men laughed, and several responded with what must have been taunts in their language. One pointed, and he managed to twist his head enough to see a large village within the thick woods. Numerous goats, sheep, and areas of farmland on the far side were evident, and the walls were thick loggerheads reinforced with heaped stone. Not the marvellous fortifications of Rome, but strong enough to hold against a minor siege for a time. He was brought beneath the gate, and the townspeople within - including the children and women - lined up to cheer their victorious men and boo at their captive. As far as he could tell, he was the *only* captive, though he could not tell why. His heart burned to be killed. He did not wish to be tortured, nor to take honourable suicide, much as he knew it would be right. His body was carried through this procession and up to what looked like some barbarian temple to the strange gods of the Germanic tribes. His stretcher was placed down before an altar that contained a carved visage of some forest deity, and then the men left, bowing deeply and kissing the floor as they did so. Gaius was left in confusion, until a raspy voice carried from the darkness behind the altar.

"So, you are the surviving Roman I foresaw in my visions."

Gaius twisted his head to see an older woman, roughly in her late forties, with wild chestnut hair that fell over her back. She was garbed in thick priestess' vestments with numerous trinkets. This was a curious sight to Gaius, for the only priestesses in Rome were Vestal Virgins, and there were only ever six of those, and none of them in Gaul. It was practically sacrilege just to see.

"Who are you? How do you know my tongue?"

"We are not the brute barbarians you think we are. The Angrivarii are a proud people, and learned, if not literate. But we know many tongues, including your Latin. At least, those who need it do. I am Uote, priestess of the Matronae. The mother goddesses speak through me and give me visions. It is for this sole reason that you are alive: I foresaw the foolishness

of your commander, and your own perilous survival. Make no mistake, young Roman boy, you are *dying*. Your wound is infected, and you are surrounded by your enemies. But the Matronae offer you a chance for what you wished most in your hour of near-dying before my people heeded my omens and pulled you from the swamp. You wished most for the death of your commander, the one known as Septimus.”

“How did you know?” Gaius stammered through the pain.

The woman smiled. “I have just told you. Keep up, young one, for your time is short. I offer you a choice. The altar to our goddesses requires either blood, or change. Either will do, and will do soon.”

Gaius stilled. The woman had a dagger in her hands. It was ancient, and stained red with the blood of what must have been many sacrifices of old. She placed it on the stone floor, then produced a cup, one that appeared to steam from the hot drink within. She placed that too on the floor next to the dagger.

“Drink, for change,” she said. “Or bleed, for death. One will grant you life, but it will be a different life. But one that will produce death to your cowardly commander. The other will bring you death, and nothing more. But Romans do so like their honourable deaths, do they not?”

Gaius still did not speak. There was something mystical about his place. He was a Roman, and so civilisation and the light of it were important to him. But like all Romans, he was also deeply, *deeply* superstitious. The energy of this temple truly did have some foreign power. Something that *thrummed* in the core of him.

“What kind of change?” he found himself asking.

The woman smiled, blue tattoos and markings changing with the expression. “The kind that will make you not a soldier, but a *warrior*. One who can land not a javelin, but a *spear* through the heart of Septimus.”

“Why do you care so much about him?”

“We do not. He is a cruel and weak. But my omens tell us he will be part of a major attack on our people in the years to come. Haruspicy does not lie, the bones and offal have fallen and have been read. He is a weak point that we can strike, but we will need someone who knows Roman discipline.”

“I will not betray my people.”

“You already have, by not dying. The borders will know peace for some time, once this last battle is fought in a place called Teutoburg. My people and our fellow clans will not submit to Roman rule, but the Romans too will not overextend themselves, and so will enter a shining age of prosperity for a great time. This I have seen. This you can help ensure. Now choose. You are bleeding. Time grows short.”



Gaius Fabius thought deeply. He knew he should take the dagger, and allow the woman to slay him. But he couldn't shake the thought of Marcellus' death, the image of it, from his mind. Nor the image of Septimus fleeing.

"The drink," he said, "and quickly, witch. Before I change my mind. I will fight to kill Septimus, and *only* him. I will excise that cancer that weakens great Rome."

The woman did not reply, only grabbed the cup and brought it to his lips.

"It will not hurt, but it will be . . . uncomfortable."

And then she poured it, and he drank. The liquid was hot and acrid, like he was drinking in the very fumes of a lit flame. And it scorched within him, burning at his very essence. Only when he had drunk it all done did the priestess work to unbind his ropes. By that point, he was squirming on the ground pathetically as his stomach lurched.

"By the G-Gods, what have you d-done? What is in this foul drink?"

"The blood of the Matronae themselves, come to work their change upon you, as they do upon the lands and the fates. Let it change you now, Roman boy. Let it make you a warrioress."

Gaius barely had time to take those words in, because soon his entire body felt like it was on fire, burning away. The priestess began chanting, waving her arms about and beseeching her foreign gods, all while he writhed in response to the alien sensations. She had spoke true though; despite feeling like fire, it was a fire of rebirth. He did not feel pain so much as a truly strange discomfort.

"Nghhhh! Aghghh! By the T-Triad! Ahh!!"

It became too much, the pressures, the sensations, everything. Something gave way in his core, as if his very spirit - his soul - had flipped, converting to something else. He coughed, expelling part of his old essence, and from there the change the priestess had promised was inevitable. Gaius' form began to rapidly alter in ways he could never have imagined, all accompanied by a fascinating and humiliating mix of discomfort and, now, *pleasure*. His manhood hardened, his nipples too, as his form reduced in size, softening everywhere. He was wearing little more than a tunic and loose grey trousers, and so the changes were easily accommodated - and more obvious. His rear expanded, becoming larger and rounded, shaping itself much like Persian peaches. His waist pulled in, compressing together in a vice-like grip until it was undeniably thinner. As this was occurring, his hips expanded, the bones shifting and flesh cascading to become wider. Quite wide, in fact. The kind of hips that Gaius had liked to see upon the camp follower girls, and had taken his pleasures from when he had coin enough.

"N-no! This change - stop it! I didn't want - oohhhh!"

The priestess said nothing, simply continued to sing her strange song of adulation to her gods. The changes accelerated, growing ever more invasive. Gaius' shoulders shrank

down, his entire frame thinning. His limbs also became much more fine, though they maintained enough muscle to be impressively strong. What was doubtless was the loss of hair; his chest, his arms, his legs all lost their body hair, while the hair upon his scalp surged outwards, flowing like a river from him. It briefly obscured his vision, revealing itself to have become a flowing blonde like so many of these northern outlanders.

Gaius was terrified. He began to roll upon the stone floor, desperately trying to escape. His muscles twinged as things continued to reshape; his jaw cracked, reforming to become thinner and finer. He gasped as his throat also softened, taking on the slender appearance of a woman's neck. It was not the only thing.

"Stop this! Change me back! Give me the dagger!"

He reached for it, but the priestess kicked it away with a fluid movement.

"Hush, child!" she finally said. "Let the changes come. Your mind will follow. Fear not, you will not be lost, but you will gain our tongue, some knowledge of our ways. You will be able to adapt, if your will is strong. And I believe it will be."

But Gaius felt far from strong. He was physically weakened, and still the changes were coming. The transition to womanhood was undeniable, particularly as his groans became higher, more feminine.

"You c-can't! I will not be unmanned!"

But already that very reality was occurring: his member was pulling back into his body as if in reverse of when the last girl in that far-off brothel had coaxed it forth with her ministrations. He tried to grab it, literally pull it back out, but he may as well have been fighting the very wind or ocean. It withdrew between his thighs entirely, leaving a moist slit that was all wrong to the touch, sitting upon its Venus mound as it were.

"Ohhhhhhh," he moaned, voice rising even higher, now unmistakably female.

As if finally given permission to change more fully, his transformation hastened to its end. His thighs remained strong, even thicker than before, but his legs developed a shapely and appealing manner that repulsed him. His hair continued to grow down his back, his lips becoming fuller, his nose softer, his features more beautiful, though he knew not that last part just yet. His hips spread to an extent that most would consider excellent for childbearing, while the former male's chest burned with the promise of further change.

"N-no," he whispered, but it was too late: his chest blossomed forth, nipples expanding beneath the thin dirtied tunic. Two wonderful, terrible breasts followed soon after. They were not small, rising like bread from the oven to form a twin set of mounds that pressed together as they pushed out his shirt. They were large, and sensitive, though not too big to be absurd. Certainly bigger than most women he had seen, though he had heard Germanic women were most well-endowed he never imagined *he'd* be one of them.

And he *was* a Germanic woman now, that was obvious. Not just from the pale blonde hair and lighter skin and prominent cheekbones, but the very *language* that now coursed through his mind. *Her* mind.

"I know your language," she said. "I am a woman. A woman of the Angrivarii."

She winced, pushing back against this mental intrusion, but there was no damming this flood, no pushing back against its implacable tide. Her Roman past was still her own, and her identity as well. But now it shared space with a second identity that was bonded to the very core of her new Germanic people. It rankled her, but it could not be put away, only denied.

"Latin. I must still be able to speak Latin. You cannot take this from me!"

She stood, wobbled on her legs, unused to her lower centre of gravity, nor the wobbling chest she now possessed. She was, somehow, taller than before. The Germanic people were indeed impressively tall, and she now a grand specimen of such. Her hair flowed down her back, long and magnificent, and with each breath her impressive breasts rose and fell, the cleavage prominent courtesy of the dip in the ripped tunic she now wore.

"Turn me back," she pronounced. "I am not meant to be Angrivarii. I am Roman."

But Oute just shook her head. "You are one of us now. I know you feel it, you who were once called Gaius. But no more. You shall have a new name, and a place in our tribe. You will learn our ways, though some will already be familiar to you thanks to the change. And you will help us, in order to fulfil your revenge."

"But why a woman? I demand my manhood back!"

She gestured to her very female form. The distinct absence between her legs was utterly unnatural, as was the way her hips contoured, not to mention the way her voice sounded: strong and authoritative, yet still beautiful to the ears. Like a powerful birdsong.

Again, a shake of the head from the priestess.

"What has been done, cannot be undone."

The woman once known as Gaius swallowed. Then she swept down, stealing the knife and lunging forward to strike the priestess.

"Then I shall kill you and escape!"

"Go on. Take my life.'

Gaius tried to, but her hand was stayed by some invisible force she could not understand. Her mind screamed at her; *Do not kill your own. These are your people. You are Angrivarii. They are yours to protect, not hurt.*

She dropped the knife to the floor, and then dropped to her knees herself. It was all too much. The tears came freely, her new femaleness dominating her emotions. She sobbed pathetically, and did not even fight when the priestess embraced her, holding her tightly. The bottom of her world had fallen away, and she was off the map. Rome was a distant memory.

Germania was all around her, and within her.

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For a time, the new woman was nameless. It took her weeks to become fully accustomed to her new self and her new ways and compulsions. The magic has sown deep into her soul, but just because her mind was now female did not mean she lacked for struggle over that fact. The first day after her change she awoke confused at the sensation of heavy breasts upon her chest and an absence between her thighs. She explored her body only briefly before embarrassing herself at its sensitivity. She had been shown herself in a mirror taken from a raid into Roman territory, and her new wild beauty was undeniable. Somehow, though, feeling herself over had not produced that as a sight to be aroused by. In fact, even thinking of the brothel women back over the Rhine produced nothing. She cast that thought aside, and focused on other things.

Oute introduced her to the large village and its ways. It was called Argbuld, and had a population of several thousand, all of whom seemed to know who she used to be. A number of the soldiers she had fought against whistled in her direction, or made other crude comments on her beauty, but at a gaze or snapping comment from Oute they stopped; here, it seemed, women could hold great power.

"This is torture," Gaius said as Oute gave her the tour. "They will never accept me, and I will never be truly one of them."

"You will, when you prove yourself, and gain your tattoos."

"I shall do no such thing."

"You will, if you wish to face Septimus."

And that was what kept Gaius determined, and kept her from collapsing into a black pit of despair. She was turned over to the women of the village, mothers and wives and even hunters and female warriors. This was still a patriarchal society, but less rigid than Rome, and it astonished the new woman to see it. In some ways she was thankful, because a great deal of effort was put into teaching her the important private lessons of womanhood, many of which were as necessary as they were embarrassing. These ranged from how to deal with her monthly bleeding to how to tightly bandage one's breasts, to the acceptable roles of women in society and how to refuse a man's proposition. Gaius had no desire to take a man, though to her disgust the men didn't seem to have the same complaint; they actively seemed to enjoy her presence even more when she was clothed in her linen garment with its fastening brooch for her wolf-pelt covering.

"I would slay them all if I were part of even a half-Legion," she muttered under her breath, the language of the Angrivarii sliding easily off of her tongue.

“Perhaps,” Hilgarute, one of her ‘tutors’, a mother and apparent warrior in her own right, responded, “but you are not Roman anymore. You are one of us. So Oute has said, and so it shall be.”

“You all place too much faith in her. I feel ridiculous.”

“But not *too* ridiculous, yes? She has told us that part of the transformation was of the soul. Your essence is now that of a woman, is it not?”

“. . . yes, it is,” she responded after a pause, filled with irritation. “I cannot think of myself as anything other than a woman. I cannot think of myself as anything other than Angrivarii. Even these people, and you, I see as my kin. It is most infuriating. I should have let myself die an honourable death.”

Hilgarute laughed heartily. She had more spirit than Roman women would ever be allowed in public, and far less modesty; her hair was fiery red and wild, and she had a beastly humour that Gaius found oddly endearing, reminding her of her old soldier buddies in the legion. “An honourable death may still come, my new female friend! After all, you could still end up on the end of a Roman spear when you claim Septimus’ life. Though perhaps, in the meantime, you might enjoy a German spear, hmm?”

She gestured to one of the finest soldiers of Argbuld, a young and powerful nobleman named Theodard. He had been one of the few men not to make awful taunting comments in her direction, comments such as, “what a fine beauty the Roman has made!” or “I’d like to get our new Angrivarii acquainted with her impressive tits!”

Instead, he had watched her with interest from a distance, never judging or making comments, simply watching with a sort of stoic half-smirk, arms folded as she practised with the Germanic weapons, particularly their spears and battle axes. His hair was black, and he possessed the square jaw and impressive beard of his people, though given his higher rank it was styled more elegantly, just like his garb was more regal.

“I have no interest in *his* spear, or any other,” she said sourly. “I only stay alive and a woman to kill Septimus. Then I will know satisfaction.”

Hildagrute chuckled. “Well, if you wish to know how to work our weapons and ambushes best, you will have to talk to the owner of the spear eventually.”

“And why is that?”

“Because *he* was the one that planned the ambush against you. Try not to kill him, not that you can, wild wolf.”

She saw Theodard with new eyes from that day, recognising the intelligence of them. Funnily enough, though, she did not hate him. Gaius was not stupid; she wanted revenge upon Septimus for betrayal and cowardice, not for failing in battle. Even Caesar had lost to Pompey at Dyrrhachium before the victory at Pharsalus. She bore no ill will to Theodard for planning an ambush. That was the nature of war, all things considered. But her former

Legatus for stumbling into it like a fool and then running, leaving his men to die?

Unacceptable.

Still, she did not talk to him for some time. She had to learn the rituals and rights and Gods of the tribe, and become accustomed to her body and dress. Slowly, she became more used to bathing her body, even if it meant occasionally daring to feel its pleasures. Oute and Hildagrute both had made amusing comments to the effect that some baths were much . . . longer than others. And also had splashes.

“What do you expect of me? You made me this! I cannot help but feel a woman’s urges now, thanks to you!”

“Ah, well, this is true,” Oute said. “Though I can’t imagine you’ll leap at finding other ways of satiating them. At least not yet.”

“Revenge is all I want. For my friend Marcellus. And for Lucanus. And many others.”

“Then speak to Theodard. He will train you.”

She sighed as she dressed herself. Already, she was more used to being naked in front of other women. Even Hildagrute’s wild beauty did nothing for her. But her mind occasionally lingered on Theodard. He had a presence, that was for sure.

Something about it intimidated her in a way she didn’t want to confront.

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It was a month after her change when she finally worked up the courage to approach him, after she had established that he was alone. He was training with spear and shield by himself beyond the training yard, in the cold chill of the forest. Winter was now setting in full, and any conflict between Rome and German tribes would be frozen. It was a literal cold comfort of sorts, but her heart was ablaze with fire as she approached. Theodard turned, his stature even more impressively tall than her own. Again, his gaze was curious, and just slightly amused.

“Our nameless woman,” he said. “You finally approach me.”

“My name is Gaius. Or at least it was.”

“Would you have me call you Gaius?”

She paused. He was right; it sounded all wrong. “No. But I would have you teach me how to fight, the German way. The barbarian way. I know you planned the ambush that killed my comrades.”

He folded his arms. “And you would revenge yourself upon me?”

“I blame you not. It is the nature of war, after all. But I must know how it was achieved, if I am to fulfil this new destiny and be complete. Otherwise . . . otherwise I am just a pathetic woman.”

It was a sad admission, but a true one. She was much more athletic than a Roman woman, to be sure, but still weak against a man. And her new bodily configuration made her legion style of fighting impractical and awkward. But Theodard's next words surprised her.

"I see nothing pathetic about you, as a woman or a potential warrior. We do not have the same prejudice as you so-called civilised Romans do. Men are natural warriors and leaders, to be certain, but exceptional women can still rise."

Gaius wasn't entirely certain about that. She'd never seen a real female warrior in battle, and had only heard the legends of such. Roman women's virtue lay in their modesty, in their spinning and weaving and childbearing. The birthing bed was the only battle they truly belonged to, and even a commander bringing his wife along in camp was often scandalous. And yet . . . the chance to be a warrior, if not a soldier, was the one thing keeping her together. When she bound her breasts, or washed her shapely body, or put up with the crude comments on the men of her new tribe, Gaius could at least focus her mind on this.

"Woman or not, I intend to have my revenge. You must teach me the way of your weapons and how your tribe fights. Then I can teach you how my people fight. Not to kill them, but to get to Septimus. I will not fight for the destruction of Rome, only to prevent her weakness."

Theodard smiled. "A shame. A woman of your passion could crack that great empire in half, I'm sure. Come, I will show you the spear and the axe. The training will be vigorous. You have much to learn, good warrioress."

His voice had that slightly amused quality, but it was not mocking. She felt strangely on edge around him, but still accepted the spear as he offered it . . . only for him to toss it in the air. She caught it in a fumbling manner, causing him to laugh. She spun it around to try and catch him off guard, but he easily parried with his arms, pulling her towards him. She collapsed against his body, and for just a moment felt the hardness of it, the taut readiness of his muscle and his own practiced stance. She stumbled back, a little aghast.

"Not bad!" he said, earnestly. "You tried to rally quick, but a spear is not an up close weapon. That is the axe. Nor is it a javelin. We'll train, and I will show you how to become a warrioress."

"Just a warrior," she replied, frowning.

"You may become a warrior," he admitted, "but you are a woman too, don't forget that."

"How can I forget, when I have these damned tits on my chest and a space between my thighs where my manhood should be?"

It was enough to catch the man off guard entirely, and at that she launched another attack. He dodged it, but only just, tackling her back to the ground and ending up on top of her squirming body.

“Now *that* was not unimpressive!” he said, chuckling. “I’d say that’s an anger you can use.”

And then, to her own surprise, Gaius laughed.

“Oh, and she laughs? You may yet find a place in the Angrivarii, once you are initiated.”

He got off of her before she could feel too strange about it, though she couldn’t help but notice his gaze linger on her.

“Initiated?”

“Our rite of passage,” he said. “Once ready, you must accept your tattoos and war paint, and take a new name. You must swim in our cold river, and prove your strength.”

Gaius considered the weather. “In the winter? That’s madness.”

“No,” Theodard replied, drawing forth his own spear to teach her with. “It is Angrivarii.”

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It was another two months before Gaius was ready for her initiation. Hildagrude and Oute had continued to be by her side, the former increasingly as an ally and friend, the latter as a more distant teacher. The former man still had so many regrets, and at times it was a daily battle to accept her new Angrivarii nature, let alone her feminine one. She began to socialise more with the tribe, and even visited other nearby towns and villages when Hildagrute took her hunting or to trade furs and supplies. Oute too showed her more of their ways, including their arts of haruspicy and augury, the latter of which was familiar to Gaius. She trained everyday, focusing her anger on Septimus, remembering her fallen friends Marcellus and Lucanus, honing her muscles so that her reaction times improved and she could parry and return strikes against Theodard.

Unfortunately, there were times when training was off the proverbial table. She had to learn how to weave, not dissimilarly from how Roman women did. And then there were more natural occurrences that were entirely unnatural to her. Her first bleeding was utter torment. The pain was not enjoyable in the least, nor the feelings of uselessness and lethargy that accompanied it. One of the women, Jarquilla, actually *laughed* at the apparent ‘high drama’ that Gaius demonstrated. But it was more the embarrassment of literally undergoing a woman’s monthly period that shamed her, and that fact that she’d go through it again and again; her body was quite young. Of course, as Oute was keen to remind her, “one day you



may yet bear young for our tribe, and that will spare you the pain for a full nine cycles of the moon!”

“Not even if Rome were to fall and Agrivarii to topple the walls of Palatine Hill,” Gaius spat. “You will never see me bear a child, even if this ridiculous body is capable of it.”

And certainly, it *looked* capable of it. Kalker, an able-bodied man in his early thirties whose back was riddled with battle scars, had made that point quite often when he Gaius trained in sight of him.

“Stop fighting, girl! You won’t be one of our warrior women! We all know who you used to be! Better to breed us some strapping sons to fight on your behalf!”

Thankfully, Theodard put a stop to him, barking an order for silence that the man immediately obeyed.

“Sorry, my lord,” he said. “But the girl is not one of us.”

“Aye, she is not. But she will be. I will hone her, and I alone will be her judge in battle, just as Priestess Oute and the Matronae through her will be the judge of her as an Angrivarii and a woman. Do you dare speak against the words of a priestess?”

Kalker shook his thick head, his wild brown hair shaking with its toss. “No, I’ll say none against the priestess, nor our gods. But this one must prove herself.”

“I will,” she said, speaking up and tossing her axe into the dirt. “You will see, brother.”

She hadn’t even meant to say it, but the words came so readily. She *did* need to prove herself, just as her father had decades ago. And if that meant undertaking her initiation, then she would. The next day, she sought out Oute in the temple. One advantage was that women could visit the Matronae temple freely, whereas men - like the ones that had first dumped her there - had to either invited in, or given instructions to enter after an omen such as they had. The older woman was on her knees, bowing before the effigy, and seemed to know what Gaius was going to request before she even spoke.

“So, you are ready for your initiation? To fully become Angrivarii?”

Gaius halted at the threshold of the doorway, not quite knowing what to say. To hear it spoken aloud by another highlighted the sheer traitorous act she was undertaking. Could she really shed her Roman skin and take on a Germanic one fully? Would it not be a betrayal to Marcellus and Lucanus and her other comrades in the fallen legion? It occurred to her that her rush to take on this rite of passage was more a response to Kalker’s taunts. She wanted to fight him, or alongside him, to show that she was indeed a soldier still.

“I - I am not sure, Oute,” she said. She fell to her knees, and as had happened during her bleeding, the tears came more freely than a stoic former-Roman would ever want them to. She folded her arms beneath her annoyingly impressive breasts and choked back those tears.

“I do not know what I am.”

Oute placed a gentle hand upon her shoulder. "You are a warrior. Warrior woman, true, but a warrior all the same. Think of this as your proving. Your chance for revenge and redemption. Your new chapter."

"I don't know if I want a new chapter. I should have died a Roman. Each day I am confronted by my womanhood, Oute. Hildagrute is a great comfort to me, a good friend, but even she cannot lift my spirits entirely. I am forced to deal with this body, and the way men look at it, and how I cannot find attraction in women anymore, and my new weakness. There is no *virtus* in this."

"Then find new virtue. Seize it, Gaius. Take a new name, and with it new purpose. Is there not a phrase for this?"

Gaius chuckled. "There is one that Horace wrote, yes."

"Then follow advice of both Roman and Angrivarii. Take control of your destiny, and do not be its victim. I changed you for a good reason. The Matronae have a great destiny for you, to our benefit, and to the benefit of your empire that will forestall its end. But you alone can take the leap."

Gaius swallowed. The wisdom of Oute's words comforted her like a warm fur blanket, and already she knew she had to clothe them around herself for what was to come.

"Then I will take the rite," she said. "As soon as I can."

Out smirked. "You can take it right now. I shall gather those who are needed."

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The river was not frozen over, but it was frigid. Gaius was freezing cold, stripped down to just an undergarment and a bandage around her breasts, giving her the barest hint of modesty. Men lining the banks looked to her with clear lust and amusement, but Hildagrute was among them, cheering her on, as were other women she had befriended. Theodrard was also there, his usual part-stoic, part-smirking self, but his expression was enough to give her encouragement. Oute was beside her, fully garbed while Gaius shook.

"You must dive into the river and be reborn in the cold chill of the winter waters. You will swim to the other side, and when lifted forth our Lord Theodard will receive you fully as one of the tribe. You will take on a name of your choosing. You will also be very cold."

"I am aware of that," Gaius said, observing the chilling waters from the snowy bank. "I am not the most able swimmer."

"It would not be a test if it were easy. The Matronae watch over you, and the spirits of the land also. None will interfere in what happens next."

Gaius stood there, observing the impressive width of the river. It was not without its current, which itself was partly strong. This was the moment that would decide everything.

She looked into the waters, observing her reflection. Her wild Germanic features were startlingly beautiful, and yet her expression reminded her of her old self; determined, dutiful, steadfast.

"I'd almost forgotten," Oute said, interrupting the thought. "I think it is time you were given back *this*."

She passed a golden coin on a necklace to Gaius, who took it gingerly.

"My father's coin," she marvelled.

"Some things we can keep with us when we make the transition," Oute said, smiling. "And the lessons of our former life, as well."

Gaius nodded, understanding. She placed the necklace over her head, and gave a gentle prayer to the Gods; the Roman and the Angrivarii ones both.

And then she dove into the water.

Instantly, the chill hit her. It was like having all the air sucked out of her lungs. For a moment she flailed, but then her muscles, practised from months of training, kicked in. She did not have a man's strength, but she had a warrior's resolve, and so she surged forth, baptising herself in the frigid waters like those strange Christians who were emerging from the far eastern Empire and making trouble across it. Her skin ached, her heart beat furiously. Her fingers and toes were without feeling. She began to sink, but the coin on her neck lent her the strength of her father, the strength of Rome, even as she pushed forward to embrace the very different strength of her new Germanic kin. Darkness swept in, and they were so hard to see on the other side. Even the men were no longer jeering but roaring, cheering, calling for her to continue on. Calling for her to become one with the tribe. She made one final kick forward and reached out an arm.

Theodard pulled her out of the water, and Kalker too, surprisingly.

"HA!" he roared, slapping her on the back while Hildrgrute covered her in warm furskins and placed her near a campfire. "You are indeed a warrior! A true Angrivarii!"

Theodard silenced him as she warmed herself.

"Is it so?" he asked. "You are to be Angrivarii?"

"If you will it, my lord," she said, knowing her part in this play.

"Then kneel, warrior of the tribe, and become one of us."

She did so, experiencing the cold once more. She was shaking like a palsied old man, but she could still sense the flash of cold steel - a valuable sword - being pulled from a scabbard and planted in the ground between them.

"I proclaim by all the gods of the lands and waters and skies above that the man known as Gaius Fabius is no more. He is now a warrior woman of the Angrivarii! Welcome her, brothers and sisters!"

The crowd let loose their roars, and it warmed the former male more than she would have cared to admit. Oute appeared at her side, having been rowed over on a small boat. She already had the ointments hanging above the fire, the hot inks ready to form the tattoos.

"The Matronae approve your rite," she said. "What name do you take, young one?"

"I shall be Gytha," she said.

The priestess raised her hand above her head. "Welcome our new sister, Gytha of the Angrivarii!"

Again, another cheer. Gytha was led back to the village and into one of the central halls, where a sideroom with a fire awaited her. Cold air ran through the open doorway to the outside within that space, forming a contrast of heat and cold.

"It is time to welcome you, in the cold breath of winter," Oute said. "Its chill will thaw your heart to violence, but the boiled ink will warm you to the passion of true German. Hold still, child."

The cold slowly falling from her body under the wonderful heat, Gytha remained as still as she could. Oute saw to her tattoos, the males retreating from this process, though Theodard was the last to leave, his face curious until Oute shooed him out - she was the only one with the power to do so. The other women, including Hildagrute, stayed to see to her warmth, drying her until the ink could be properly applied. It was painful, and yet Gytha bore it out all the same, accepting this part of the ritual with the combined stoicism of a true Roman, and the grim readiness of a Germanic warrior. Her two natures came together as one while the blue ink was applied slowly but surely by the priestess and her attendants, first upon Gytha's left forearm and right upper arm, and then upon her left cheek and over her right forehead and eye. The blue swirls were both beautiful and tribal, a statement of ferocity and yet oneness with the Matronae. And for just a moment, when the work was finally finished beneath the light of the afternoon sun, she could have sworn she felt the presence of those watchful goddesses. But only for a moment.

It was enough to feel utterly reborn.

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The years passed as Gytha trained. She was a member of the tribe now, fully-fledged and fully-blooded. She became one with them, familiar with their ways. The spear and axe and small shield were her allies in battle, and she did indeed participate in skirmishes, gaining battlefield experience as a female warrior under the command of her Angrivarii peers, including Theodard, who was a minor noble. These were not battles against Romans, sure, she refused these until she faced Septimus, but they were against rival Germanic tribes who did not partake in the wider coalition of clans. She even worked alongside the Cherusci, who

claimed to have one of their own working with the Romans as a trusted guide, though she doubted this to be true.

Instead, her focus was on continually readying herself for her dance of death with Septimus. Her desire to slay him had not faltered but instead only grown across the years. Her dreams were haunted by the betrayal, and the knowledge of what she had given up in becoming Gytha only made her path more clear. She *had* to kill the man who had taken everything from her, and in doing so better Rome from without, even if she could never truly be part of it again. Her steadfast devotion made others concerned, such as Hildagrute.

“Are you sure you do not wish to enjoy some of the pleasures of life, friend?” she said, rubbing her own stomach. “I am a warrior too, but as you can see, womanhood has its own blessings!”

But while Gytha was happy that her friend was blessed with child, she had no desire to make one of her own, even if her body was damnably attracted to men. It was hard, when sparring with Theodard, not to stare at his bare muscles during the spring and summer heats. Even Kalker was quite the strong man, though now that he no longer taunted her, his boisterousness was an irritation of its own.

Oute simply watched her experiment, occasionally giving advice, but slowly stepping away from the mentor role and simply becoming a trusted woman of advice.

“You are nearly ready,” she said, several years after Gaius had become Gytha. “The battle is not too far off. A large incursion will come our way. You will have a chance to see Septimus once more.”

“Good, I shall kill him.”

“We will see. But if you are successful, what then?”

Gytha paused. She hadn’t truly thought about it. “Then . . . then I will return to Rome.”

“Do you believe that? As what, a slave?”

Gytha sagged. “No. I suppose I shall remain here, in truth. I know its customs as much as my original ones. But it will not be a fate worth thinking about. Better to die on the battlefield after Septimus’ death. Yes, that will be the way.”

“Is there nothing more after the battle? Nothing you can foresee?”

Gytha looked out from the temple doors and saw Theodard walking down the central village pass. He did not walk as a cowardly lord, but a man of his people, directing them with assurance rather than barking orders. It made her smile, though she suppressed it moments later.

“None,” she said. “Besides, you are the woman of foresight.”

Oute nodded. “Even the Matronae do not tell me everything. And choice is still a chaotic element. Perhaps you will choose a different path.”

Gytha looked down at her female body. She was well used to it after the years, but some parts were still denied. She had come to savour the feelings she could produce from it, but never allowed a man to touch it. It was too . . . strange to even think of. Especially the notion that it could create life, not just death.

“My path ends with Septimus,” she said.

At that very moment, a war horn blew. A rider emerged from the treeline, racing to give word to Argbuld.

“The Romans have crossed the Rhine!” he shouted. “The Romans have crossed the Rhine and are on the march! Arminius sends word from their camp!”

Oute grinned at Gytha’s surprised reaction.

“It is time then, to face him,” she said.

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The Cherusci has spoken true; there was a Germanic guide in the Roman camp, and his name was apparently Arminius. He was one of theirs, and had their fool leader Varius with the wool over his eyes. Septimus had joined his strength to the man to bolster his strength and further aid the expansion of the empire. Troops numbering nearly twenty thousand in number. The various Germanic tribes could only muster an equal amount of squabbling forces, but they would have the element of surprise and ambush. It sickened Gytha to think of it, and she could only cling to Oute’s words and omens, which had steered true so far; Romans and Germans would die in the coming battle, her own brethren on both sides slaughtered. But it would establish a true border for centuries to come. The border would not be peaceful, and it would know many raids. But it would not collapse the empire, and would give it clear boundaries, just as it would allow Germanic peoples to remain their own masters.

“It had better be true,” she told herself again and again. “I will not have my original people fall, even if I have my new ones.”

Hildagrute placed a hand upon her shoulder, the other warrior woman ready with a spear in hand for the violence to come. “I cannot pretend to love the Romans as you do, sister. They have committed great atrocities towards us, while we only raid them. But . . . I hope Oute’s omens have been spoken true. Not for their sake, but for yours.”

“Thank you, sister.”

“And also because having you be so depressed would suck a lot of joy out of life. Nearly five years of hard training and I still laugh at the fact that you used to be a man.”

“Ugh, do not remind me,” Gytha groaned, rolling her eyes. “I hate having to squat just to take a piss. At least my bleeding is past.”

“Ah, to live the glamorous life of a man. But men can only take life, not create it. I fight for the life I have created.”

Gytha ignored the hint. “I only want revenge. I may be a woman, even see myself as one now, but that does not mean I have use for a womb. My spearhead is all I require.”

“I could make a good joke about the kind of ‘spearhead’ you need to calm your nerves, sister, but I doubt you’d like it. Well, I think you *would* like it, but I won’t make the joke. Your actual weapon will need using soon. The Cherusci are gathering, and this ‘Varius’ figure is leading troops through Teutoburg.”

Gytha nodded. She knew the area from some hunts and raiding actions two years earlier against another tribe. It was swampy terrain, prone to harsh rains and difficult sightlines. The perfect place for an ambush. She would have to weep for the Romans later, but Septimus would be among them as one of Varius’ most trusted sub-commander. The Legatus needed killing. He *deserved* it.

“I swear, by my old gods and my new ones, I will have this revenge,” she said. Ignoring the presence of her female friend, she drew forth her dagger from her side and cut lightly across her palm, smearing the blood across the corners of her mouth. This was not a Roman ritual, but an Angrivarii one; a blood mark to indicate no turning back. Hildagrute did not make a joke for once, simply made a guttural noise of affirmation.

“We should be moving,” she said. “The ambush will not be long away. Arminius will slip from the Roman lines soon, and then the signal will come. I’m sorry, Gytha, but I intend to slay Romans today. They took my first husband from me.”

“It is war,” Gytha said. “But do not relish their deaths.”

“Can you avoid celebrating Septimus’ death?”

Gytha had no answer to that. In fact, she had not even considered what celebration she would have, if any. Her heart had been cold for some time.

Thankfully, Theodard’s rallying cry ended the conversation.

“Warriors!” the handsome Germanic noble yelled, thrusting his axe into the air. “We are to move at once! Today will be a day of Roman defeat and Angrivarii triumph! The Confederation will provide its worth this day, and we above all. Even the Cherusci will envy our prowess in battle!”

A great cheer went up, and Gytha found herself cheering with him. His eyes briefly locked on hers, despite her being up on a hillside and him further down in the plain where the rest of the men were established. The gaze lingered longer than was natural.

“Today, we shall have our revenge!” he yelled, meaningfully. “Let us hope it tastes as sweet as we have been promised.”

Gytha looked away.

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The tension bristled in the air. It was a waiting game. The dark murk of the forests kept the many thousands of the Germanic alliance concealed, but even then it was only a matter of scouts finding them before chaos erupted. And yet, this Varius must have been as incompetent as Septimus, or as trusting. There were little scouts, and his army moved through the swampy region trusting Arminius' word, as if the Latin-speaking Cherusci were truly loyal. But small chaos had begun to trickle down the lines; the man had disappeared, and the leading Roman general was in the middle of realising something was wrong. Very wrong.

Gytha was pressed squat against the earth, spear at the ready alongside Hildagrute. Kalker and the other powerful men of the tribe would be the forward vanguard; even in the more lax Germanic tribes, the women would never be on the frontline straight away, and were still a clear anomaly. They were among the only ones, and the Cherusci appeared to have no female warriors at all, judging from how many were looking in Gytha and Hildagrute's direction. She made a crude gesture in their direction.

"Pigs," she said. "Be careful in the aftermath, friend. They will want to fuck anything that moves."

"I will spear them before they spear me," Gytha said.

"Hm. That was almost a joke, my former Roman."

But then they fell silent. The Romans were loud, their movements less coordinated than they should have been. Gytha kept her eye out for where Septimus could be, scanning when she could from her position further up the hill. Her anxiousness rose. What if he was not here? Had she become a woman, lost her manhood and gained breasts for nothing?

But then she spied him, and relief flooded over her, mingled with righteous fury. He was, as she had suspected he would be, at the rear of the formation, in a position able to flee when necessary. He had a horse this time, and his followers had not changed. Moreover, it was clear that the partial raiding they had conducted already had gained him considerable wealth, judging from the heavily-laden mules.

"I have you," she said to herself.

But her words were drowned out by the sounding of the warhorns. The Romans cried out, instantly alert as the Germanic raiders poured down the hills, Kalker and others among them. Already they were at a disadvantage, numerous arrows falling down upon them. It was a grisly repeat of the ambush Gaius had experienced, only now Gytha was seeing it from the other side, and on a much, much larger scale. Horrid screams were already filling the air as the legion was suddenly surrounded. But she could spare little thought to it, or the distaste it put in her soul: she had her target.



Gytha had trained rigorously for nearly five years now. She moved with alacrity, taking advantage of her lithe female form to race over the hills at lightning speed, hefting her handaxe and spear alongside her. She ignored the greater battle. Her purpose was clear: kill Septimus. The storm and fury erupted about her, the death and terror and excitement of battle. She remembered it well; the rush of power, the manly camaraderie. It didn't exist nearly as much for her now, if at all. Perhaps it was something peculiar to men. All there was, was urgency. A desperate need to reach her target in time. Already, Septimus was turning, yelling orders even as he gave personal commands to his immediate guard. It was clear he was going to make another escape, and be a richer man for it. The mules were already facing the other way, and the men he ordered were cutting a line that would lead to a safe passage back across the line.

"Oh no," she growled as she ran, "not again. NOT AGAIN!"

She bounded forth, muscles straining. Her bosom bounced in her tight bandage, feeling like it would snap open from the sheer pressure she was exerting upon her body. But she was getting closer, even as the Roman lines collapsed, as soldiers on both sides died around her, as her former people were suffering a clear defeat in the making. She ignored it all. There was only Septimus, and her spear.

She reached a hillside, dodging arrow fire. She readied her spear, focusing all her training on this one moment. On what Theodard had taught her.

She flung it forth. It sailed through the air and right into the side of Septimus' horse where it was unarmoured. The beast reared up, flinging him off. Victorious, she ran forth, practically manic. She threw her handaxe into the head of a guard. It embedded in his face, and he fell, instantly dead. Another she stabbed repeatedly through familiar gaps in the armour before they could take stock of her. But by then others were rallying. Septimus was crawling in the mud, so close, but they closed around him. She had one axe remaining, and used that to take the life of a Germanic cavalryman loyal to the Roman side.

"MY QUARREL IS NOT WITH YOU, ROMANS!" she screamed in Latin, her very voice a bestial howl as the rain descended upon her. "HIS LIFE ALONE IS WHAT I WANT. FLEE WITH YOUR GOLD OR SUFFER THE WRATH OF MY GODS!"

The men retreated back, shocked by this savage woman who appeared entirely unnatural with her blue tattoos and dripping blood marks. Some fled, a few others went for the mules. Three remained. She could not take them, she knew. But at that moment Hildagruete arrived, along with two other warriors.

"REVENGE!" the other woman shouted, spearing one in the side by surprise, and soon the guards were overrun. Gytha nodded in thanks to her friend before moving forwards.

Now there was only Septimus. The rain pounded down, making it impossible for him to get out of the swamp quickly. Just as he was rising she kicked him to the ground. He had

aged in the last five years, but was still the fat, broad-faced tyrant he'd always been. Which made it all the more surprising when he whirled about quickly, grasping his gladius and scything it in her direction. It cut at her arm, sending a river of blood into the water. She barely managed to react in time, smashing his hand to one side and pressing a dagger against his throat.

"Finally, I have my revenge," she said in her old Latin tongue. "Septimus."

His beady eyes went wide. "You know me?"

"I do. Oh, I do, Septimus."

"I have gold. Riches. I can pay a king's ransom if-"

She cut his throat. "No, you will die without even knowing who I am. This is for Marcellus. I doubt you know who he is either. Or Lucanus. They will remind you in the afterlife, snake."

She let him fall back into the water, clutching his throat in his death throes. The battle continued to rage all around them. Hildagrute and the others rejoined it, bringing blood to the Roman side. But for Gytha, a great emptiness opened up within her, a void that could have swallowed the world entirely. All about her were dead Romans and the occasional dead barbarian. This was no victory. This was just bloodshed and horror, just an ambush that made a mockery of the dead. Everywhere men screamed for their mothers. This was not what her father had spoken of when he told her of the glory of war. Perhaps, being a woman, she did not have the right blood for it anymore; Gaius would have leapt into battle once more, loving the fray. But here and now, with Septimus dead at her feet, she felt nothing but sorrow.

"I should have died," she said.

Gytha took the dagger and placed it against her breast. But once more, she could not bring herself to end it, no matter how much she had lost and changed, her life was still a life, the only one she had.

It was Hildagrute that found her after the battle was done, and the Romans destroyed. Gytha was weeping, and her friend comforted her for a long time.

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It was several months later, and Gytha still had not found much in the way of new purpose. She was Angrivarii now, and had long accepted that, and so she had returned to Argbuld, though she had not taken up the spear again, nor trained except to work out her frustration and remain fit. To even the surprise of her fellow women, she had asked to better learn spinning and weaving and other womanly arts. She approached these with no great passion, but they did at least provide a sense of numbing peace that warfare and revenge had not

given her. For a long time she had wondered if she had not simply committed revenge in the wrong way, or made the right taunts to the dying Septimus, and this was the reason for her malaise. But as Oute had told her when she sought guidance at the temple of the Matronae; “revenge is a dish that smells sweet but is little more than ash. Once tasted, it cannot satisfy.”

Her words were true; Gytha was glad that he was dead, and would gladly murder him again, but there was no joy in the aftermath of it. Just a recognition that her purpose was gone. While the other members of her tribe celebrated the defeat of the Romans and an establishment of a hard border across the Rhine that ended the great Princes’ ambition, she simply . . . existed. Even Hildagrute’s humour and Kalker’s boisterous displays and retellings could not fill the hole within her.

That was, until Theodard visited her one morning. Gytha lived in the hut by the temple, but Oute was away in a nearby village, leaving her to clean and ensure the candles of the temple were lit. When she answered a knock upon the door, she was surprised to find the handsome Germanic nobleman on the other side of it.

“My lord,” she said, bowing slightly to recognise his superior station.

“Please, let’s have none of that, Gytha. You did not bow when we trained together, and I would not have you bow now. May I come in and speak?”

She allowed him in. “The Priestess is not here.”

“It is not the Priestess I came to see, but you, Gytha. I have not had you come to train with me in some time, nor seen you about the village much. I am told you are spinning and weaving. Good, womanly occupations, though your zeal in doing so is almost . . . Roman.”

He smirked just slightly, and she did so without meaning to.

“I see no other purpose,” she said. “I did not die at Teutoburg, though I should have. My revenge is done. But revenge is a hollow feast that gives no nourishment.”

“Indeed, as many find out. As I found out, when I was younger. My own father was taking from me by a member of the Marshi tribe. Slaying the man who took him granted me nothing but honours and loot, but my soul was empty.”

She looked at him curiously. “You mentioned this not before.”

“I did not wish to sway you. Besides, would it have?”

“No,” she admitted. “I believed killing Septimus would make me whole, and even make me accept . . . this.”

She gestured at her womanly body. She was dressed as one, no longer as a warrior but in the simple spring tunic of the tribe, a bronze brooch fastening her outfit against her tall, voluptuous frame.

“You mean a woman?”

“A woman. An Angrivarii. All of it.”

“You took the rite years ago.”

“I did, and I felt complete then . . . for a time. But always there was revenge. Always Septimus. Now he is gone, and so easily! No great battle, simply a slaughter. I no longer have a man’s taste for battle, though I can still be a capable warrior if needed in defence of our tribe. But to fight like that? If I can no longer stomach it, then what is there for me?”

She leaned against the wall of her hut, frowning. Theodard made the daring move to reach out and touch her chin, lifting her face so that her eyes met his. He was close, and once more she was confronted with how deeply handsome and manly he was, his beard impressive yet well-kept, his eyes stoic and yet, somehow, *fierce* at the same time.

“There is me,” he said. “I am here for you, Gytha.”

She trembled, swallowed. “You?”

“Come now, Gytha. I have trained you for years, been alongside you, *fought* alongside you. I have gotten to know you, your past and your present selves, and we have shared jokes and philosophies and expanded each other’s understanding.”

“You - you were being my leader,” she stammered, though she did not pull away. In fact, her body was responding as it often did around him; her nipples stiffening, her womanly slit moistening.

Theodard smiled, and it was a full smile, not just his usual smirk. “I am not just your leader, Gytha. I am a man, one who recognised a remarkable and deeply beautiful woman. I have seen your sorrow these last few months and kept my distance, but I can keep it no more. The Romans call us barbarians, but matters of the heart are strong with us. I have desired you for a great time, but promised myself to wait until your revenge was done and you were given time. But I cannot hold myself back any longer. Gytha, I want you. I want you as a wolf wants its prey, as the dawn wants for the rising sun, as deeply as any man has wanted a woman.”

Gytha had no idea what to say. What was there to say? It was unthinkable. She was originally a man. A *Roman* man. And here now, this powerful Germanic noble warrior was professing his love for her. And her body was *responding* to him. She had to take a moment to gather her breath.

“But - who I was . . .”

“Does not matter to me, so much as who you are, Gytha. You are a warrior of the Angrivarii. You are clever, and fierce, and so very beautiful. And I would be blessed by all the gods of all the tribes in the land if you would be my wife.”

She stared into those eyes, and in that moment found something new. A purpose. A life that promised fulfilment. And though ‘wife’ felt like far too many steps away to yet

consider, she did feel something else: love. She loved this man, not just as a comrade-in-arms but as a man to desire and hold.

She kissed him, and with that, his powerful arms encircled her. Their passion stirred immediately, her own lusts rising to the surface as he kissed the nap of her neck and began to work her out of her tunic. She too tore at his clothing, moaning as caressed and played with her full bosom. He freed them from their bandage, and after a moment of gazing at them, he began to lick and suck at her large nipples.

“Mhmmmm,” she moaned. “Don’t stop! Please don’t stop!”

“Never,” he replied. “You are too perfect, Gytha. I have waited years for this. I shall make it worth your while.”

They were not yet wed, but the Angrivarii did not have the same obsession with modesty as the Romans. He placed her down upon the wolf-pelt fur of the flood. Her womanhood was slick by this point, her body aching to be entered, and yet fearful for it at the same time. But she parted her thighs anyway, needing to feel him. They were naked, him atop of her, his thick muscle comforting to play with. She caressed his biceps and shoulders; how were manly shoulders so desirable? It was astonishing!

“You are the most beautiful creature on this earth,” he whispered in her ear, even as he pressed his thick manhood against her entrance. “Tell me you want this.”

“Ohhhhh,” she moaned, clamping her legs around his thick waist. “I do. Gods help me, I do. I need this. I need to feel alive, Theodard. Please, help me feel alive.”

“I shall do my best,” he said. He pressed his cock against her folds. There was a brief pain, a parting pressure, and then he entered her. She whimpered, shivering as his thick girth slid all the way in. Her muscles clamped down upon him, riveting her with pleasure.

“Aahhhhhh, k-keep going! It’s like nothing I’ve e-ever f-felt!”

He did so, slowly pumping in and out of her, even as he groped and squeezed and suckled from her breasts. The pleasure was everywhere, pulses of it inhabiting her very core. She was a woman in that moment fully. As alien and strange as it was, she could not deny her feminine wants. She had played the role of the penetrator before, never the penetrated, but she wanted nothing more than to be fucked by Theodard’s member, and so she bucked her hips in time with him, drawing ever close to climax.

“I’m going to - I’m going to - OHHHHH!!”

She cried out in ecstasy as she came, and he too grunted in an animalistic way, which only served to arouse her further. Her female orgasms came powerfully, sweeping over her in several waves again and again, even as his dick throbbed within her. He poured his seed into her waiting womb, and despite how foreign the sensation was, she welcomed it. Its warmth within her banished the coldness that had seeped into her soul.

He collapsed upon her, and the two cradled one another in their shared love. She had no words for it yet, and would not for some time, but finally Gytha had a connection, a proper reason to go on.

Hildagrute would be so very, very smug.

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Gytha and Theodard were wed just two weeks later. They jumped over the fire together, symbolising their new union. The Angrivarii roared approval, and the feasting halls were drunken and raging that night, even more so when the pair were swept to their marriage bed by the celebrators, and many outside remained to hear the sounds of pleasure within to ensure the deed was consummated. Which it was, most passionately. Theodard was nothing if not a lustful husband, and Gytha realised that her body was most capable at rising to the task. A good thing too; it would be a waste of her beautiful form not to use it often, now that she was willing.

In fact, soon she came to enjoy her womanhood in ways she had denied herself. She wore more vibrant fabrics to suit her higher station, but also began styling her hair and jewellery as the other women did, as well as becoming more sociable in the village. She could no longer remain closed off as the wife of the local noble leader, but part of her would always be a little different, she knew. For one, she continued to wear her father's coin around her neck, refusing to forget the person she had been. Theodard was proud of her for doing so: "I would much rather know the woman I love fully, than only half of her," he said.

She could have loved him forever for that, and for giving her private space when necessary, or simply asking her about her old life when she wished to talk about it. It made her all the more comfortable to be her new self.

True enough, Hildagrute was most smug about her new situation. Her first female friend was still often joking about the hilarity of Gytha's situation, but it was clear she was proud. Hardship was always on the horizon, of course, but for now the women could celebrate peace. They both warrioresses, but unlike the men they did not clamour for war. They chatted more easily as they saw to their households and span and weaved, even if Gytha still retreated to train with weapons occasionally, just in case.

Of course, even weapons had to be put away for a time, eventually. Several weeks after her marriage, Gytha was approached by Oute at the edge of the village. The pair liked to watch the sunrise, and so often caught one another here.

"I am pleased you have seen such changes, young one. Some things are beyond even my perception. I had thought you would die in the battle, or take your own life. What a better ending this is."

“Not an ending,” Gytha said. “A new beginning, I think.”

“More than you know.”

“Oh? And what other futures do you see for me thanks to the Matronae?”

Oute laughed in her cryptic way. “Oh, no Matronae needed. I am a woman, Gytha, and an experienced one at that. I see all the signs I need to read your future. The shine in your hair, the slight exhaustion around your eyes. The extra fullness in that remarkable chest of yours.”

Gytha blushed a deep shade of red. She had suspected as much, but to hear it said aloud made it all the more confronting and real. She lowered her hands to her currently slim belly.

“I am still taking it in. Theodard does not yet know.”

“He will know soon enough, young one!”

“I know, but . . . I never expected this.”

Oute placed a hand around her apprentice’s waist. “Tell me, Gytha, my former Roman. What do you think about it?”

Gytha looked out at the sunrise. It glinted off the coin around her neck. The sun rose over the Roman world and the Germanic one alike, and at that moment she felt at peace with both.

“It feels like a blessing,” she said.

“Then so shall it be,” the older woman replied.

**The End**