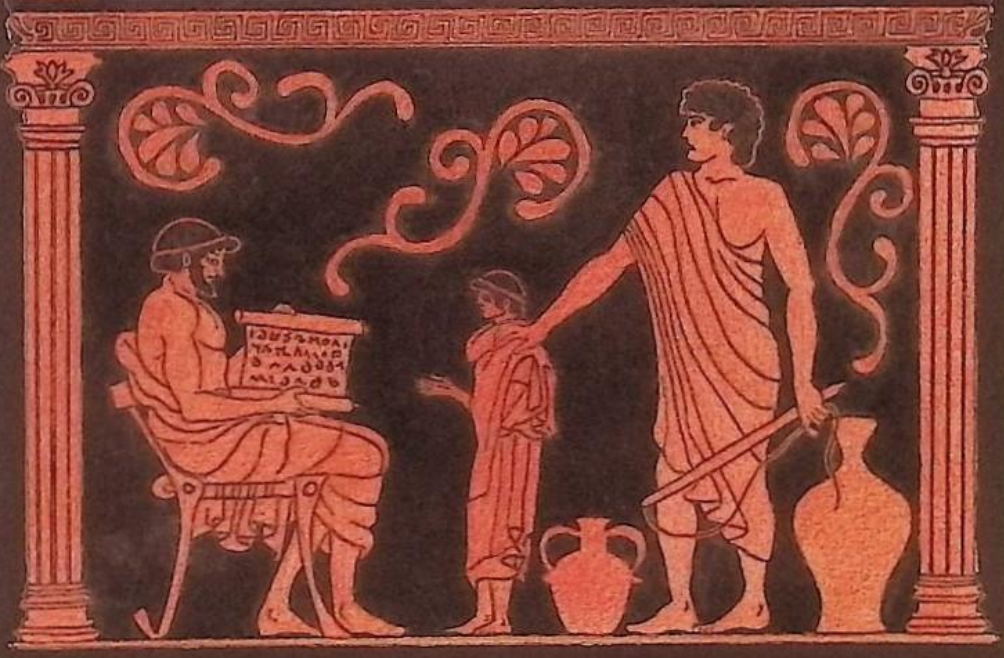
A Triumph for Flavius



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I

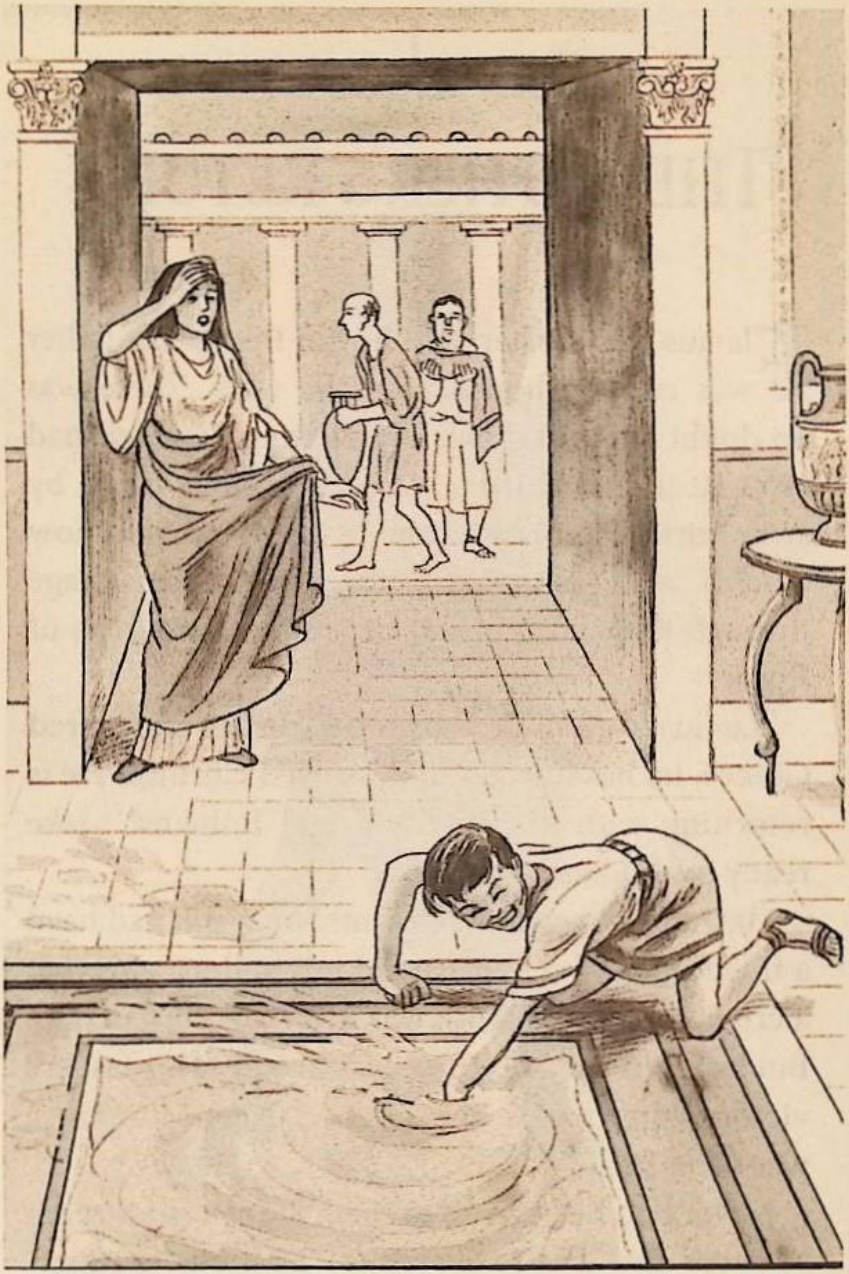
THE FATHER'S RETURN

Flavius was the happiest boy in Rome. His father was coming home from the wars. There was no doubt about it. Ships with strong oarsmen had brought the word from Greece, chariots drawn by swift horses had carried the news inland, and now heralds with trumpets were crying the message through the streets of the city to the seven hills of Rome.

"Lucius Mummius is coming! He has conquered Greece, he has burnt and destroyed Corinth! He is returning with his mighty army! Romans! Make ready for Lucius Mummius!"

Flavius did not know Corinth, or that it had been a freedom-loving city. He did not understand what a cruel, destroying work was meant by conquering. But he knew that all Rome was proud of his father's victory—so Flavius, the son of Lucius Mummius, was proud, too.

Never had he been so excited. He ran from room to room shouting to everyone, "Father is coming!" He ran into the atrium and splashed both hands



in the central pool. The water flew and sparkled in every direction.

The atrium was the most important room in the house, so naturally Mummius would be welcomed there. Mother herself was taking charge of the decorations. She had been coming in and out all morning, followed by slaves with arms full of flowers. Now the slaves were hurrying to get out fresh garments for everyone. Lucinda, Secunda, and Theodora, the little sisters, were already bathed and dressed, standing serenely by the pool. Mischievously, Flavius splashed his hands hard in the water that sparkled in the sunlight slanting through the open roof above it. The little sisters squealed and ran to avoid the shower, while their mother came instantly to reprove Flavius.

"It is all very well to be glad," she said. "But you—a Roman—ought to have some dignity. Look, you have splashed the water quite over to the shrine where the little gods stand. I am ashamed of you!"

But she, too, was excited. Her face was flushed. Beads of perspiration stood on her forehead. She was ordering the slaves this way and that. Some to set the banquet table. Some to go to the market to buy food. Some to deck the whole atrium with flowers.

A few hours later, Lucius Mummius and his immense army arrived outside the walls of Rome.

Here he waited while the Senate was meeting to vote whether he should have a Triumph. They decided a unanimous "yes!"

So in the evening, Lucius Mummius with a great company, arrived at his house. Very tanned he was, from the Grecian sun, tired and hot from the journey, but so glad to see everyone that he embraced them all, and greeted the slaves who stood in a crowd in the atrium bowing before him. The house was full of people.

Mother's eyes beamed.

"Oh, Lucius, you have been gone so long!"

"It's good to be home," Father said, and drew himself up with great pride. "The Triumph will be in two days," he added.

Flavius knew what that meant.

There would be a procession through the streets of Rome ending on the Capitoline Hill. It would be in honor of his father, and he, Flavius, the only son, would march in it. Victorious generals were sometimes given such a Triumph. It was the crowning glory of those who received it.

With the army outside the walls were many, many captives. But Father had brought twelve, who were especially handsome, to the house with him.

"You can have as many more as you wish, Tertia," he said to his wife. She looked pleased, but did not reply.





Turning to Flavius, he touched the shoulder of a slender young man who had come with him.

"Flavius," he said, "here is my gift to you. Ariphron is the finest slave of the lot. A man offered me seven hundred sesterces for him right on the battle field. But I reserved him for my son. He is descended from kings."

The strangest look came over the slave's face, as Mummius pushed him forward. Flavius could not tell whether it was fear or hatred. But as the man knelt and bowed before him, Flavius saw that his back and shoulders were trembling.

As Ariphron rose, his eyes met Flavius's eyes, and the look seemed to pierce Flavius so that he was afraid. The eyes were blue like flame. Flavius had never seen really blue eyes before. But his hair was Ionian black.

"Ariphron is to be your pedagogue," Father was saying. "He will wait upon you in every way and take you to school. He will sleep in your room at night."

"Lucius," Tertia said in a low voice, "are you sure that it's safe?"

"You need not lower your voice, Tertia!" Mummius answered. "The man knows nothing but Greek. I don't want Flavius to be afraid of a slave."

"But he looks so resentful—so hostile," said Mother. Mummius smiled scornfully. "They all have

that look at first—especially Greeks. They soon stop it when they see it does no good." He gave Ariphron a meaningful look.

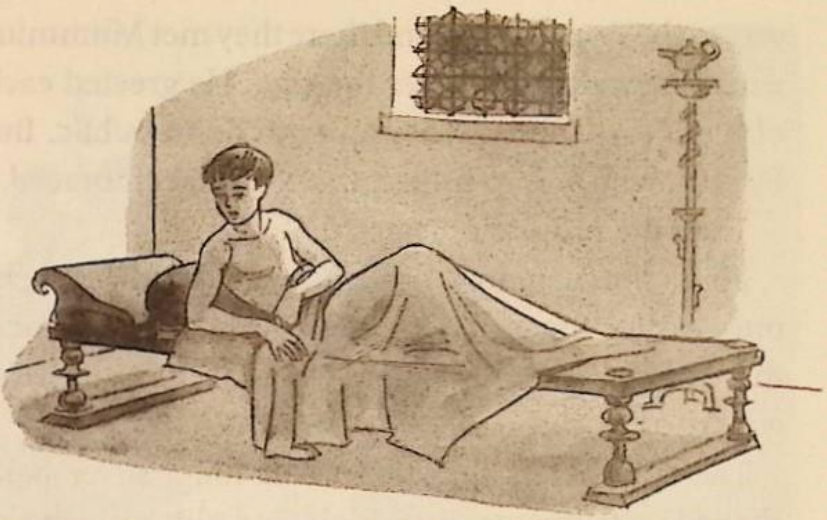
Then Father went back to his army. He was not supposed to be in Rome until he entered for the Triumph procession.

Flavius did not know whether to be pleased or only frightened by this gift. When his mother showed Ariphron to Flavius's little room, he dropped down as if tired to death and stared into space. He had a great gash on his chest and his right arm showed another sword wound.

That night, Flavius could not sleep. He didn't remember that ever happening before. Ariphron lay on the floor on a rough blanket. Flavius could hear him turning and twisting. It did not occur to Flavius to be sorry for him.



It was all very well for Father to say his son must not be scared. Flavius was scared. The boys at school



often told scare-stories of dreadful things the salves did to their masters. And Flavius knew of one man who lived on the Esquiline Hill, who had been found dead in the morning, murdered by his slave. The slave, himself, disappeared. Some said he had drowned himself in the Tiber. But maybe he hadn't.

Suddenly he began to tingle with fright. There was a step in the room. But it was only Mother coming in with her little silver lamp.

It was a long time before Flavius fell asleep.

The next day was so confused and filled with preparations for the Triumph that Flavius did not think of Ariphron. Of course there was no school that day.

Early the following morning, Flavius with his mother and his little sisters, and all the household slaves started out for the Triumph. They made their

way to the Appian Gate and there they met Mummius where he waited to "enter the city." He greeted each of them formally as was proper to do in public. But Flavius, who was to inherit his glory, he embraced.

Then the procession started.

First the senators, magnificent men clad in pure white togas. With them were the tribunes, the censor, and the consul—all the officials who governed Rome.

The trumpeters followed, their long, silver bell-shaped instruments lifted high, and glittering in the sun, then litters and carts of all sorts carrying the spoils and booty of war. Never again was anyone to see such a treasure of beautiful things as these that Mummius had stolen from Greece. There were vases, jewels, crowns, golden vessels from the temples, paintings, pictures of gods and men, statues. Now they would all be scattered carelessly in Rome.

The crowds broke into murmurs of admiration, and cheer followed cheer. As the applause increased, Mummius was remembering all the other treasures that had been thrown away—the statues in Corinth that his soldiers had broken, the pictures they had used for draught boards in the street. He began to wish he had not destroyed so much, or sold so much to the King of Pergamum. Rome would have paid him better.



As for Flavius, never had he seen such booty; he was having a hard time keeping up with everything. He wished the procession would move more slowly. The most beautiful thing of all, he thought, was a chariot edged with ivory, with gilded pictures all over it, drawn by two prancing black horses.

But then he saw the pure white bulls for the sacrifice. Their horns were gilded. Nothing could be more beautiful than these, he thought, watching the priests who came carrying long knives with which they were to kill the bulls.

Ten-year-old Flavius had almost everything a boy could wish for. His parents belonged to the Roman aristocracy, so they lived in a beautiful house almost as luxurious as a palace on the top of the Palatine Hill. Flavius went to the finest school where he was treated like a young prince and even had his personal slave or "pedagogue" to carry his schoolbooks for him. He also had his own horse to ride, the best horse in Rome, he thought.

Today, the proudest day of his life, he was riding in a procession in honor of his father who was returning, a Conquering General from the wars in Greece.



Flavius did not know about all the cruelty and destruction that went with conquering—but even if he had, he would not have thought it wrong. It was just "the custom" and in ancient Rome the custom was almost a religion. Whipping slaves for any small mistake was another custom that Flavius did not question. But after the handsome Greek captive, Ariphron, becomes his friend as well as pedagogue, he sees the other side of conquering, and in the dramatic climax when his father is about to whip Ariphron, Flavius discovers a new kind of triumph.

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