

remember is waking up in bed at home and immediately retching a foul black paste on to the bedclothes. When the room ceased to spin around me, I saw Cytheris who whispered, "I fetched our master from the Senate," and pointed to where he stood with my mistress at the end of the bed. They beamed, and my mistress said quietly, "You did a brave and fine thing, Iliona. We shall not forget this."

DAY XXV OF AUGUSTUS

Today my mistress received a letter from her brother, a legionary commander stationed on the outer edges of the empire. He is on a big cold island called Britannia, somewhere far to the north. It is farther even than Dacia, where Cratinus fought. And he does not like it.

The letter started an argument between my master and mistress. When she took her brother's part — that Britannia is cold and the people ignorant and not worth ruling — my master shrugged. "You forget, my dear, that

Rome grows strong by conquest. From these new provinces we get slaves and treasure. It's true that Britannia is, so far, a disappointment, but from Dacia, Trajan brought back half a million pounds of gold and double the weight of silver. And if the emperor had not defeated the Dacians, they would grow bolder. Soon they would be attacking Rome itself."

DAY XXVII

On the way to school I asked Cestius about Rome's provinces, and before our class started, he pointed to a map pinned on the wall. "Look, here is the known world — Rome rules the part coloured red. How much is left?" I had to admit that most of the map was red.

When Cestius returned, he led us a different way home, through the Forum. When we reached a food stall, he pointed to everything on sale, saying, "Look: the grain comes from Egypt, the oil from Spain, the salt pork from Gaul — all Roman provinces." Next door, at a hide and