



# THE CENTURION

by Lucia Cox

THE CENTURION: Salvete! Greetings all! My name is Cornelius. Thirty-nine years old and a centurion these twenty years in the VIth Legion of the Roman Army.

Agh - it's cold tonight, up here by The Wall. They built it in the time of Emperor Hadrian. Keep the Barbarians out. Defend the border of the Roman Empire. Us on one side, them the other. That's what we hope anyway. I'll be glad when we get away from here – finish the repairs and then back to the fort. It's a tough life but we get on with it, knowing that one day, if we're lucky, we can eventually retire with a little money.

Eighty men I command. Not always the same men of course. Some die, some grow old and one or two run away. Try to go home to their families. Families. I have a family. My daughter Galla, her husband and her son...my grandson...

This wall is getting old now - like me! We're here to make repairs, keep everything as it should be, make sure the Barbarians can't get across. Can't get at us. We march, set up camp and repair, march, set up camp and repair, march, set up camp and, well, you get the idea. Seems to be working too - there hasn't been any fighting for many months. Makes the men a bit restless though. I tell them it's only a question of time before something kicks off again...that these peaceful moments will not last so they better try to enjoy them while they can.

They like staying up late, my men. Sitting by the fire and drinking wine, telling stories of the battles they've taken part in. 'The Good Old Days' they say. But I've seen too many battles - hard and long and bloody they are. Makes me uneasy being here tonight...we fought a battle on this part of The Wall some years back...



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(Flashback:)

The Barbarians. They don't have much in the way of weaponry or strategy. Just a rabble really. But they're brave...and fierce.

They caught us by surprise. Charged us. But we have strong men; lots of them – and artillery. We turn the onager at them. It's a huge catapult for throwing rocks. And then the ballista, like a giant crossbow that shoots bolts. Can spear the enemy even through his shield.

My men are also trained infantry. They don't just repair walls! They know how to fight. So then we're up and at them - each man fighting with two spears. Takes a lot of training because the spears are long – longer than the men are.

And then it's the short sword. The men are highly skilled with the sword and they like to get up close and personal with the enemy. Do some real damage. Hand-to-hand combat.

It's hard and bloody, but finally we're taking control, beating the Barbarians. And we're just about to finish the job when...one of our own horses kicks me square in the ribs! I just heard something crack and then I fall and can't get up. Too painful. My men have to carry me away because I can't walk. Later they told me I passed out.

(Flashback ends:)

Broke my ribs that horse did when he kicked me. The medic gave me a recipe of herbs and plants. Told me to crush them with a stone and boil them in water and then drink it when it was cool. It was horrible! Horrible! I don't even know if it worked. My wife used to make potions for my ailments but at least she'd sweeten it with honey or sweet flowers. My wife, the most beautiful woman in my village. She's dead now. But at least I have my daughter Galla. I can't wait to see her and my grandson. I've never even met him.



The men are tired. Nearly ready to turn in. We've worked fifteen hours today mending The Wall. They've spent the last few hours setting up the camp for tonight and now they're finishing up their meal. Stew made with a few hares – the skinny wild ones you find in these parts – and roots and oatmeal and whatever herbs we can find.

If I could I'd retire tomorrow and go and stay with Galla and her family. They live in Camulodunum – a big town in the south. I visited once before my grandson was born. It was after that horse kicked me. The doctor said I couldn't fight and anyway my ribs wouldn't mend in this cold climate. So I was sent south for a month to be with my daughter.

There's a lot to see and do in the city. And at night I go to sleep on a bed that's so comfy you just know you'll have the sweetest dreams. But not round here, out on the moors, middle of nowhere.

So, time to turn in for the night, but not before I set the night watch – a few soldiers who'll be awake through the night, keeping an eye out for the enemy. Making sure they stay on their side of The Wall, making sure they don't surprise us. We've had enough of that before...

I'll get about three hours' kip before the early rise and the march back. But in those three hours, I'll dream of retirement, of Galla and my grandson and a lovely warm bed in Camulodunum. And another night's sleep is another day closer to that dream.

So - valete! Farewell to you all!

