

Rome Must Perish

#Chapter 11 Pillaging the Farmstead - Read Rome Must Perish Chapter 11 Pillaging the Farmstead

Chapter 11: Chapter 11 Pillaging the Farmstead

In fact, without Maximus needing to remind them, everyone had already spotted the conical peak rising abruptly from the plains to the south, towering into the clouds. Its upper half was dark and obscure, while the lower half was lush and verdant. Faint wisps of smoke hovered around the summit...

The group stood dumbstruck, staring at the renowned and peculiar peak of Italy. Even the bold Cross couldn't help but swallow nervously, saying with slight unease, "Is this Vesuvius?"

"Yes," Spartacus responded in a hushed tone, as if he feared disturbing something. "That's our destination—Hevistos's forge."

Although they could see Vesuvius, there was still quite some distance to cover. By now, it was dusk, and the gladiators were unwilling to travel through the night. Spotting a farmhouse nearby, they rushed over.

The farm had a courtyard that wasn't particularly large, surrounded by a fence made of densely arranged wooden slats interwoven with short shrubs. It was merely a marker of territory to keep strangers out, yet it proved no obstacle for the fearsome gladiators. They crashed through the fence, kicked open the wooden door, and found seven or eight individuals trembling in terror in the courtyard. They hadn't scattered but instead stood protectively around a young man in their midst.

One elderly man, summoning his courage, shouted, "Who... who are you?! How dare you... trespass on Master Dionysius's land!" His voice barely faded before an earthen dog nearby began barking even louder.

Without hesitation, Cross stepped forward and delivered a kick. The dog yelped in agony, flew into the wall, and collapsed to the ground with its legs twitching. The people in the courtyard turned pale as ashes.

Spartacus looked at them thoughtfully and asked, "Who's Dionysius? Judging by the name, sounds like a Greek?"

The young man, as if humiliated, trembled as he spoke, "My... my father is a Roman citizen, an important councilman in Napolet. He has enough wealth to pay for my ransom. But if... if you dare to harm me, he will surely send Napolet's army after you—"

"Think Napolet's army is stronger than Capua's?" Cross sneered dismissively, triggering a burst of laughter among the gladiators.

Spartacus, however, responded earnestly, "We are not bandits. We are warriors waging war against Rome, fighting for freedom!"

Though the young man tried desperately to conceal his emotion, his gaze toward Spartacus carried the air of someone looking at a joke.

Spartacus appeared unbothered and scanned the others. "Are all of you slaves?"

Surprisingly, the elderly man forgot his fear and proudly declared, "I'm a Roman citizen!"

"I... I'm a freedman," two others answered together.

The remaining four hesitated before nodding, admitting they were slaves.

"Would you be willing to join us?" Spartacus asked them gently, his tone becoming kind. "That way, you'll gain your freedom and no longer have to fear being oppressed."

The four slaves exchanged glances, then lowered their heads without saying a word.

"Don't kid yourself. They're all... family members of my household. They won't leave to be bandits—" The young man couldn't help but interject but was promptly punched in the face by Cross. He fell backward, blood streaming from his nose.

"Shut up, brat, or I'll be sure you lose your miserable life!" Cross threatened vehemently before turning back to the slaves. "If you keep staying silent, I'll chop you to bits and feed you to the dogs!"

The terrified slaves trembled all over but still shook their heads in refusal.

Enraged, Cross drew his short sword and swung twice in the air in their direction. "Ungrateful bastards! What use is keeping you alive?"

The slaves immediately knelt on the ground, pleading desperately for mercy.

"Enough, Cross." Spartacus's face darkened, but he suppressed his anger and said sternly, "Our brothers have worked hard all day and are both hungry and exhausted. Hamilcar, you and Maximus take these people and make sure they prepare food. If they refuse to cooperate, you may deal with them as you see fit."

Spartacus then looked at the young man lying on the ground and continued, "Antonix, take this guy inside. We need to have a proper chat with him."

Antonix walked forward, grabbed the terrified young man, and lifted him as if he were just a chick.

"What... what are you going to do—" The elderly man stepped forward to block Antonix but was shoved to the ground with a single push.

He scrambled to his feet and kowtowed repeatedly. "Please, I beg you to spare my young master! Please—"

"Work hard and do what you're told. If you do well, we might consider sparing your young master." Hamilcar replied coldly.

The elderly man saw a glimmer of hope and quickly stood, ingratiatingly saying, "Please instruct us; we will do our utmost!"

"How many sheep do you keep?" Hamilcar asked, glancing toward one side of the farmhouse. Even though the gladiators caused quite a commotion when flooding into the courtyard, the sound of bleating sheep was unmistakable.

"Forty-five," the elderly man answered.

"Who's skilled at slaughtering sheep?" Hamilcar asked again.

The elderly man pointed to two individuals.

"Slaughter twenty immediately and cut them up for stew."

"Twenty?" The elderly man hesitated, clearly unwilling. "These are prized Attica sheep that produce fine wool—"

"Want me to slaughter all of them instead?" Hamilcar's eyes widened menacingly, silencing the man into submission.

Hamilcar instructed several gladiators to bring the two slaves to the sheep pen behind the farmhouse to conduct the slaughter. Turning to Maximus, he explained, "Typically, eight people can barely manage with one fat sheep. But for us gladiators, with our appetite and today's exertion, three or four could take down a sheep. These twenty won't be enough, but feeding everyone to the brink after such a long absence of meat might actually make them ill. Soup is the best option."

Maximus listened intently to every word.

"Who's the cook here?" Hamilcar demanded.

"...The women are inside." The elderly man hesitated briefly before pointing toward the kitchen.

"Ha, so you've hidden women here!" Some gladiators cheered with excitement, heading eagerly toward the kitchen.

Spartacus roared, "Stop right there! Are you a bunch of stallions who've never seen mares? You harm those cooks, and who's going to make your meals?"

Though Spartacus typically treated others kindly, his temper was formidable when he erupted. The gladiators froze in place, too scared to make eye contact or retort.

"Hold yourselves back for now," Spartacus softened his tone, then smiled and added, "Once we're settled and have made a name for ourselves, what kind of women couldn't we find? You seriously want a cook tougher-looking than a man?"

Laughter rippled through the courtyard.

Hamilcar quickly led the others into the kitchen, asking as they walked, "Do you have flour ready here?"

"Yes," the elderly man replied.

"Enough to make round loaves for each of us, two apiece?"

The elderly man looked around at the gladiators crammed into the courtyard and said hesitantly, "...It should be enough, but with so many people, it will take a while to prepare."

"No rush. Just take your time; we've got plenty of it."

Hamilcar's words sent a chill through the elderly man's heart. It was clear these bandits had no intention of leaving tonight.

Inside the kitchen, two women huddled in hiding. They weren't nearly as terrifying in appearance as Spartacus suggested, but they weren't particularly attractive either. They were wives of two freedmen, and only after Hamilcar promised, "As long as you prepare dinner, you and your husbands will be spared," did they reluctantly begin boiling water for porridge, washing vegetables, and cooking fish...

The others, under the elderly man's supervision, busied themselves—some chopping firewood, some stoking flames, others kneading dough, fermenting, and baking...

Hamilcar paced solemnly within the cramped kitchen, supervising their efforts, much as he had done earlier that morning in Flora's rear temple kitchen.

Maximus stood silently at the kitchen door, watching as Hamilcar orchestrated everything to perfection.

Chapter 12: Chapter 12 About Slaves

When the food was almost ready, Hamilcar did not immediately take it out. Instead, he had Maximus call in a few of the more respected gladiators, like Antonix, Enomai, and Torquato, to distribute the food.

"If we take this food out ourselves, the brothers who are already starving will surely swarm us, and it will turn into chaos. But if Enomai and the others distribute it, no one will dare to snatch it. In the army, it's usually the centurion who leads the team's slaves to distribute food among the soldiers. We just got out, and haven't established any rules yet, but it will get better in the future," Hamilcar patiently explained to Maximus.

Maximus couldn't help but ask, "I remember Spartacus once said that you used to serve in the Roman Army?"

Hamilcar was silent for a moment before speaking in a heavy voice, "That's right. We were once recruited because we coveted Roman money, but that greed led to the destruction of our entire tribe!"

Hearing the coldness in Hamilcar's voice, Maximus felt his hair stand on end and dared not press further. Instead, he asked, "According to the standards of the Roman Army, how many people would it take to prepare dinner for a group like ours?"

Hamilcar thought for a moment and replied, "In a Roman legion, each ten-man team has two slave soldiers who handle miscellaneous tasks, and they are mostly responsible for preparing food. For our group of about 250 people, according to their standards, we would need fifty people to prepare a meal. But the Roman legion is demanding; for us, twenty people are enough to do the job."

At this point, he looked at Maximus with satisfaction. "I'm glad you asked this question. It shows you're seriously thinking about the issue of feeding us, unlike those guys this morning. When I asked them to help out, they were all so unwilling. All they know is how to kill—they're utterly useless at anything else. You're different!"

Maximus modestly responded, "I just think that no matter how brave we are, if we can't eat our fill, we won't have the strength to defeat the enemy."

"You're absolutely right. A unit's food supply is crucial! The Romans are despicable, but their efforts in this respect are unmatched by any other force."

Hamilcar sighed with emotion. It was rare for someone to take an interest in his thoughts, so his enthusiasm grew. He immediately pulled Maximus to sit by the kitchen door, had a slave bring over two bowls of lamb soup, and tore off a large piece of hot bread. As they ate, he continued, "What I just mentioned is a rough estimate. The actual number of people needed to prepare food for an army depends on the circumstances. If there's no danger nearby, and the kitchen and food are ready, like they are for us now,

ten people can handle the needs of over 200 people because we have time to prepare slowly. But if we're on the march or in enemy territory, it's a whole different situation..."

Maximus listened intently to Hamilcar's explanation, learning much about the intricacies of logistics. For instance, why armies transported wheat instead of flour—it was easier to store. This was why Roman Army slaves often carried hand mills for grinding grain...

Though Hamilcar was usually amiable and not much of a talker, Maximus's questions hit a nerve with him. Once he began, he couldn't stop. Eventually, a gladiator came to inform him that Spartacus needed to discuss something with him. Only then did he reluctantly stand up and say, "Maximus, I'll leave things here to you. Is that okay?"

"No problem," Maximus replied readily. After Hamilcar left, he turned to look at the people inside the kitchen. They had been working non-stop for over three hours and were all drenched in sweat. Antonix and the others had stopped coming to urge for food, suggesting the gladiators were likely full.

"Take a break, everyone. Eat something to regain your strength," Maximus said. As soon as his words fell, the people in the kitchen immediately dropped their utensils and grabbed bread to eat.

After filling their stomachs and easing their hunger, they no longer devoured their food like wolves. Maximus walked over to one slave he had been observing—the hardest worker among them. "Why didn't you want to join us earlier?"

The slave looked up blankly.

"You're a slave, driven every day like cattle and sheep by your master. If you join us, no one will dare boss you around. You'll have lamb soup to drink and bread to eat every day. You'd be free. Why wouldn't you want that?" Maximus asked in confusion.

The slave lowered his head and, after a long time, muttered, "...I don't want to be nailed to a cross by the Romans."

Maximus didn't get angry. Instead, he turned to another nearby slave—the one who had been the laziest, warned several times by Hamilcar. "What about you?"

"Me..." The slave's eyes darted around before he answered, "My master treats me very well. I don't even feel like a slave. Why would I leave?"

Maximus was half-skeptical about his response.

At that moment, an old man nearby looked at Maximus and spoke seriously. "I was a slave too, raised in the household of Dionysius. My master truly treated me like family. After that great war decades ago, the Romans recognized all Italians as Roman citizens, and Roman Law extended to all Italian towns, including Napolet. My master

spent his own money to purchase my freedom. Years later, when I met the qualifications, my master applied to the city council to make me a Roman citizen—"

Here, the old man straightened his back. "After that, my master even let me oversee this farm, paying me handsomely each month. Now I have a wife, children, and even grandchildren. These two over here—"

The old man pointed to two freedmen. "They were also slaves. With our master's permission, they were granted their freedom three years ago. And you lot, don't worry. Work hard, and one day you'll be just like us."

The old man's words sparked a memory deep within Maximus's mind. He remembered Roman Law indeed allowed slaves to gain freedom and even become Roman citizens. Yet, for a slave to save enough money to buy their freedom, it was impossible without their master's permission. However, the Romans appeared generous in this regard. One of the reasons was rooted in their ancient patronage tradition.

Patrons protected their clients politically and in daily life, while clients supported their patrons politically and militarily. This relationship was not one of absolute dependency but mutual aid and progress. The Romans upheld this ancient tradition as an unspoken rule, creating relative social stability. When slaves gained citizenship, they naturally formed a stronger patron-client bond with their former masters. Since the Roman civil war decades ago, all Italians had become Roman citizens, making this tradition prevalent across Italy, including in Napolet.

Maximus's original master had invested money and effort into elevating a lowly household slave like him, likely for the same reasons. But tragedy struck—the master's entire family was killed, leaving Maximus in his current plight... If all slaves in Italy were treated as well as those on this farm, with hope for the future and an upward path, would they still choose to rise in rebellion?

Contemplating this, Maximus felt uneasy. If that were true, could Spartacus ever ignite a full-scale slave uprising?

A whirlwind of thoughts churned in his mind, his expression alternating between light and dark. The old man, seeing this, thought Maximus might be angry at him for discouraging the slaves from joining them. Hastily, he added, "Actually, the only reason my master takes such good care of us is that there aren't enough hands here. He even has the young master come and help out sometimes, so everyone is valuable... But it's not the same on those large estates. Their fields are vast, and they own many slaves, most of whom are newly acquired. To keep them in line, the masters employ multiple overseers, sometimes even enforcers, who whip and beat the slaves daily. A few years ago, there were even riots on some of those estates..."

Chapter 13: Chapter 13 Settling in Vesuvius

Maximus had a sudden thought: "These large farms you're talking about, are they in the Vesuvius Volcano Region?"

"Yes, exactly there!" The old man intensified his tone, affirming, "Those large farms occupy almost over a thousand acres of extremely fertile land, with hundreds to thousands of slaves, countless grain and livestock, and even some beautiful female slaves—"

"Hey!" Maximus interrupted him, rudely saying, "Old man, are you trying to incite us to rob those large farms?"

"No... no, I just want to tell you the truth." The old man shook his head in denial.

Maximus sneered, and the old man's words stirred the memories of the original owner in his mind: "Facing competition from these large farms, can this farm's wheat and wool be sold? And at what loss?"

The old man fell silent.

Though there were no large farms around Capua, the market there was basically dominated by agricultural products from these large farms. According to what the original owner's master said, the owners of these large farms were mostly Roman Nobles who exploited the fertile soil of Vesuvius, and the many cheap slaves, to grow better wheat, better grapes, better olives... They sold these agricultural products at the same or even lower prices, so naturally, the public flocked to them. Even the original owner's master, who owned several hundred acres of land, often lamented that his own goods couldn't sell. The owner of this farm probably isn't faring much better, not to mention the commoners...

Considering this, Maximus regained his composure and said to everyone in the kitchen: "Have you all finished eating? Then keep working and bake another three hundred loaves of bread."

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Early the next morning, after drinking porridge and eating bread, the gladiators released everyone from the farm and prepared to continue heading south.

Having interrogated the young man last night and understood the surrounding situation, Spartacus ordered the gladiators to advance fully armed.

Hamilcar and Maximus exchanged the farm's donkey cart for a horse cart, which increased the number of carts in the group to six, more than enough to carry weapons, food, and the wounded.

As an occasionally erupting active volcano, Vesuvius's ash covered a vast area exceeding one hundred and fifty square kilometers, so shortly after leaving that farm, the gladiator group entered the Vesuvius Region.

Along the way, in addition to the lush fields of wheat, vineyards also increased, with a noticeable rise in the number of farmers working in the fields. Occasionally one could see overseers with whips and dressed in long robes shouting loudly, while slaves wearing shackles and covered in wounds trembled...

The gladiators were eager to act, but Spartacus and Cross restrained them, as the primary task now was to reach the foothills of Vesuvius and find a foothold.

However, Spartacus did not want trouble, yet trouble found them.

The free-spirited gladiators walking through the fields inevitably trampled the wheat seedlings, and when an overseer from a large farm discovered this, he immediately rushed over with his men to stop the group.

It seemed that the news of Spartacus leading the gladiators in a revolt had not yet reached here, as these people mistook the gladiator group for the City Guard, arrogantly declaring that the owner of this farm was a Roman Elder from Rome, demanding the gladiators compensate, otherwise, the distinguished gentleman would make them regret it.

The gladiators laughed wildly, drew their short swords, and cut them down one by one.

The other overseers and thugs, realizing the visitors meant harm, were frightened and fled. Many slaves wanted to escape too, but they were shackled and could not run fast. Some slaves remained, watching curiously.

"We are gladiators who cannot endure Roman oppression and have started a revolt. Do you want to join us, fight against the Romans, and pursue freedom?!" Spartacus shouted loudly.

The slaves who were watching hesitated for a moment, then dragged their shackles, staggering forward.

The leader, speaking in broken Latin, said loudly: "We... are Celts from Iberia... The Romans conquered our tribe... brought us here..."

"Welcome to join us! Once we defeat the Romans, we will do our best to help everyone return home!" Spartacus promised with a smile, feeling relieved at today's easy recruitment of these Celts compared to the slaves in the farm last night who refused to join. It seemed the decision to come to Vesuvius was correct.

The gladiators even caught up with the farm manager, cut him down, obtained the keys, and helped the slaves release their shackles, causing them to cheer excitedly.

Driving the horse cart, Maximus also heard the slaves speaking, stirring his heart: in his previous life, when researching the history of Spartacus's uprising, he vaguely remembered that Rome was engaged in two wars during this period, one in Little Asia and the other in Iberia. The "Great Pompey" should be in Spain then!

The addition of the slaves did not change the route of the gladiator group. As the group progressed, the terrain became uneven, gradually rising towards Vesuvius, entering the foothills where wheat fields almost disappeared, replaced by vineyards.

The long-weathered volcanic ash soil of Vesuvius was particularly suitable for growing grapes, producing the best wines in Italy: Falernia, Statania, and Calania. The Romans certainly made good use of every piece of land here. Although there were no more wheat fields, there were more slaves, as tending the grapes required more meticulous care than planting wheat seedlings. In this season, besides plowing, fertilizing, and watering, the main tasks were pinching seedlings, pruning branches, and building trellises, which also saw some female slaves working in the gardens.

The acts of cutting down overseers and thugs and inviting slaves to join were incidental for the gladiators on their march. By the afternoon, when the group stopped moving, the number of slaves joining had reached a hundred and fifty, a third from Iberia, a third from Little Asia, and a third from Northern Greece, all new slaves who had been here for less than three years.

The leaders, Spartacus, Cross, and others, primarily focused on observing the terrain and finding a good place to settle. They unanimously favored a large farm.

It was situated on a gentle hillside, with the terrain behind it becoming steep, like a screen shielding the back of the farm, accessible only by a narrow path.

Both Spartacus from Thrace and Cross from Gaul were mountain people, and with the Roman Army potentially attacking at any moment, living by the mountain made them feel safer. Thus, capturing this large farm and establishing the camp here became the leaders' unanimous decision.

The farm had over two meters high walls, and there were several guards inside. Seeing the unfavorable situation, they had early on closed the wooden gate, assuming a defensive posture, with the manager climbing up the wall warning the approaching gladiators to leave immediately, otherwise, the wrath of the Roman Elder would leave them without resting place in death.

Spartacus ignored him and issued the order to attack.

Although the farm had walls, fig trees were planted outside, with grapevines climbing over them to form so-called grape trees, an integral part of the trellis system. The gladiators used these fig trees to easily climb onto the walls and enter the courtyard, cutting down all resisting guards and overseers, quickly occupying the entire farm.