

## MILVIAN BRIDGE

Written by

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# MILVIAN BRIDGE

Radio Script by

Dundas Keating and Andy Luke

Runtime: 1 hour

19 scenes

## CHARACTERS

CONSTANTINE: Manipulative ruler of the North (40)

HELENA: The imaginative and controlling mother (60)

THEODOROUS: The second: a fighter, cunning, and adaptable (40)

CMDR. JULIUS: Enthused Christian, loyal to Constantine

MAXENTIUS: Put-upon and impetuous emperor of Rome (40)

CMDR. ADAM: Loud brutal warrior; skeptical; self-confident

## MINOR ROLES

NARRATOR

SERVANT

AGRIPPA

CROWDS / SOLDIERS

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### SCENE 1

EXT. BRESCIA, THE FORUM. FLUTE AND LYRE  
PLAY IN THE BUSY MARKET IN THE DISTANCE.

NARRATOR: (V.O.) July, 312 A.D. The war of emperors has thrown Roman society into disarray. Maxentius controls Italy and Africa from the palace in Rome. His rival, Constantine, marches from the north, aiming to re-take the capital.

JULIUS: Clear the way for the Emperor of España, Gaul and Britannia!

CROWD: All hail Constantine! All hail Constantine! Constantine the Great!

CROWD CHANTS CONTINUE. FOOTSTEPS OF A  
HEAVY GUARD APPROACH. MUSICIANS FADE.

HELENA: They love you as much as they did in Milan, my son.

CONSTANTINE: I am their liberator.

CROWD: All hail Constantine!

CROWD #1: Chosen of Apollo!

HELENA: How did you say it in your speech? That your right to rule was 'no chance agreement of men, nor some unexpected consequence of favour.'

THE GUARD MARCH FROM THE MAIN ROAD. THE  
CHANTING CROWD FADES.

CONSTANTINE: Our ages old pact with the Italian Celts has stood Brescia well. A half dozen temples; baths and aqueducts... They call this The City of Hercules.

HELENA: It would be fine to camp here a while.

JULIUS: HALT!

### SCENE 2

#### INT. HALLWAY OF A STONE BUILDING.

CONSTANTINE: It is a civilian outpost. We can stay another week before we lay siege to Verona.

HELENA: Good.

CONSTANTINE: My Augustus Theodorous has many informants throughout our empire, including in Maxentius's ranks.

### SCENE 3

#### INT. LOUNGE ROOM.

HELENA: You trust Theodorous?

CONSTANTINE: I trust him with my life. His information has been sound in every step of our campaign.

HELENA: He was once in the employ of Maxentius. I would caution you, do not put too much faith in any soldier, especially one with his own ambitions.

CONSTANTINE: (teasing) You caution me, do you?

HELENA: I only offer help, which you may accept or decline.

CONSTANTINE: I am told Maxentius offers provincial autonomy to Verona in exchange for their loyalty. However, the people will turn on him as they did in Turin.

HELENA: Is that the word of your sources, or Theodorous's sources?

CONSTANTINE: Most Romans and their Latino descendants spurn his approaches. Many in the West openly pledge loyalty to me.

HELENA: Maxentius may be one of the most powerful men in the empire, but he is the most hated. The emperor of Africa and Italy? In Rome they mock him, to his face! He isn't fit to hold the office.

CONSTANTINE: He has the support of the senate.

HELENA: I am confident you will succeed. Your army is ready. With the conquests ahead, it will gather in number. (PAUSE) Yet still you are troubled. Here... a penny for your thoughts?

HELENA TOSSES HIM A COIN,

Well caught.

CONSTANTINE: On my desk there are two books laid open. Tell me what you see.

HELENA: Are these the texts I shared on the man-son of Yahweh? Oh! Oh, my. The exchequer's ledger. From Rome?

CONSTANTINE: A copy smuggled out before Maxentius tore down the bridge. His African grains have the city well stocked.

HELENA: While the costs of maintaining our armies run high.

CONSTANTINE SIGHS.A CHAIR CREAKS AS HE SITS.

CONSTANTINE: Maxentius has tried to recruit among Gauls, Basques and Catalans. All have turned him down. I am confident of taking Rome. However, inflation threatens as fiercely as an assault. The people may turn on me if starved.

HELENA: What of your empire on Britannia?

CONSTANTINE: This pretty coin in my hand bears the image of its emperor and Apollo. The northern Celts appreciated this. While there, we quelled the dragon worshipping Druids. However, many on Britannia and Hibernia worship one God.

HELENA: Have you given more thought to the matter?

CONSTANTINE: Perhaps something minted in gold.

HELENA: I meant this worship of a single deity. Have you studied the bible I provided?

CONSTANTINE: The Gospel of Matthew? I dipped into it. So far, it seems to be a re-writing. New versions of the tales of Sol and Apollo, with less nuance.

HELENA: According to the scholars of Alexandria, it's over two centuries old.

CONSTANTINE: I admit some of the dialogue intrigued me, though their Messiah preaches subservience. And the plot structure, it's all over the place!

HELENA: The teachings have a growing readership. By using a shared religious identity, all in the empire can be Roman. These 'Christians' are the answer.

CONSTANTINE: Are you mad, woman?

HELENA: Am I a woman or your mother? Decide, then never speak to me again with such disrespect.

CONSTANTINE: You are both, but as a woman you would not be here now. As my mother, your presence and counsel are always welcome.

HELENA: My learned counsel comes from observing the men of Rome. As a woman, I know these religious texts intimately.

CONSTANTINE: Understand the magnitude of replacing the pantheon with one God!

HELENA: My son, listen. There are too many immigrants in Rome. They will flock there when Maxentius is deposed. You must keep people out but have them contribute to the wealth of the empire. True? Then they must believe they are Roman.

CONSTANTINE: With a Jewish God?

HELENA: A god we take from the Jews by fulfilling their prophecy.

CONSTANTINE: (laughing) So, you'd have me ally myself with these, what, gnostic gospels of under-whelming miracles? One God, who was a man, and rose from death?

HELENA: And you cannot see any benefit in adopting that story? A powerful man to be believed as the son of the only god. Maybe you should think about that.

HELENA PLANTS A KISS.

RECEDING FOOTSTEPS.

CONSTANTINE FLICKS HIS COIN IN THE AIR. IT FALLS ON THE STONE FLOOR.

CUT TO

SCENE 4

EXT. RAVENNA CAMP, OFFICER'S CANTEEN

FADE IN

A BUSY SITE: DRUM BEATS, CARRIAGES AND HORSES; CARTS AND SELLERS. RAUCOUS MALES WITH EUROPEAN ACCENTS. SPLASHES AS BODIES DIVE INTO THE RIVER. DISTANT CHEERS FROM THE THEATRE.

NARRATOR: (V.O.) Summer's end. Constantine's men sweep through the northern cities to the sea-port of Ravenna. From there they control the Via Flaminia, the main road to Rome.

CONSTANTINE: Servant, more wine! Sit, Theodorous, sit! We rule the Northern plains: a half dozen cities reclaimed from Maxentius the Coward! Aquilia and Mutina and our magnificent harbours here by the Adriatic Sea.

A SERVANT POURS TWO DRINKS.

THEODOROUS: The taking of the crossroads and water-ways mean we can march on Rome without aggravation.

CONSTANTINE: Servant, pick six pebbles from the ground. Theodorous and I desire a game.

SERVANT SCRABBLES BELOW FOR STONES IN GRAVEL AND SETS THEM UPON THE WOODEN TABLE.

CONSTANTINE: How about... terni lapilli? Threes in a row, Yes, terni lapilli it is. Fetch a board.

SERVANT: (murmurs) Yes, Caesar.

RECEDING FOOTSTEPS OVER GRAVEL.

CONSTANTINE: The new recruits you brought me are outstanding fighters. Look, (raises voice) to the canal!

LOUD SPLASH OF A BODY DIVING INTO THE WATER. CONSTANTINE AND THEODOROUS LAUGH.

CONSTANTINE: Was that Commander Julius?

THEODOROUS: I believe it was! He makes good speed.

CONSTANTINE: He has an incredible body. Fine leg and arm actions.

THEODOROUS: (concerned) Those men at the banks... they are not wrestling. It is a baptism. (shouts) You there, stop that at once!

CONSTANTINE: Sit down, my friend.

THEODOROUS: I know that man. I'll see him crucified!

CONSTANTINE: There's no need. It is proof word has spread of my vision.

THEODOROUS: When you fought Maxentius's father, and you saw a cross in the sky?

CONSTANTINE: (LOW) These pebbles, one can hardly tell them apart!

CONSTANTINE SCRATCHES ONE PEBBLE UPON  
ANOTHER, TWICE, HE IS MARKING A CROSS ON  
THE FIRST OF THREE PEBBLES.

CONSTANTINE: I saw a cross, gold like a trophy and brimming with light. And this time the words, 'In Hoc Signo Vinces.'

THEODOROUS: 'In this sign thou shalt conquer?'

TWO DEEP STROKES OF ONE PEBBLE UPON  
ANOTHER.

CONSTANTINE: There was a cross above the sun itself. And Theodorous, I dreamed of it again last night.

FOOTSTEPS AS SERVANT RETURNS. HE SETS A  
SLATE TILE OF STONE ON THE TABLE.  
CONSTANTINE MARKS HIS THIRD PEBBLE.

CONSTANTINE: In this sign thou shalt conquer! You. Take this message to the flag-makers. Tell them I want to see designs for a Chi-Ro Christogram as part of a military standard. A cross on cloth for a labarum and – are you paying attention?

SERVANT: Yes, Caesar.

THEODOROUS: Straighten up wastrel!

CONSTANTINE: I want drawings for banners and sashes. The Christogram appearing above three medallions. This is to be their only priority. Have you got that?

SERVANT: Yes, Caesar!

CONSTANTINE: Make sure that you have. The lions are especially famished.

THEODOROUS: Dismissed!

SERVANT QUICKLY WALKS AWAY.

CONSTANTINE: Notice the crosses I have made on my stones to differentiate them in our game of threes. When we're done here, instruct Julius to order the building of three large crosses. We'll go into battle under this sign. Now, let us play.

THEODOROUS: Crosses... on our banners? Is that such a good idea?

CONSTANTINE PUTS A STONE UPON THE SLATE.

CONSTANTINE: Your move. (PAUSE) Careful now.

THEODOROUS SWALLOWS

THEODOROUS: Emperor Constantine, if you may permit me to speak freely?

CONSTANTINE: Your face does so and I become weary. Keep it brief.

THEODOROUS: Why should the might of Rome throw in our lot with this Hebrew messianic sect? They are vermin. Beneath us!

CONSTANTINE DRINKS.

CONSTANTINE: You and I both know their Yahweh is our Apollo, our Mars and Jupiter. One named God to a pantheon. A single resounding note: one God for all men. Who better to teach this than the great families of Rome?

THEODOROUS: I see.

CONSTANTINE: Make your move.

THEODOROUS: It is a good plan. It may ensure Rome's prosperity for a long time.

THEY DRINK TOGETHER.

CONSTANTINE: (sarcastically) Now that I have your approval, you may speak freely about military matters.

THEODOROUS: The illegitimate emperor's greatest strengths are his food stocks and buildings: the villas and circus; the incomplete basilica; the temple of Romulus.

CONSTANTINE: Will he try to remain in Rome until the end?

THEODOROUS: In every war Maxentius has waged, his tactics have been the same: bring in provisions, fortify, and prepare for a siege. He still controls the praetorian guards and the impregnable walls. The rugged mountains are around him. Milvian Bridge is the only way into the city and it is down.

CONSTANTINE: You tell me Maxentius is no fool. Do you believe he is gullible?

THEODOROUS: No Emperor, I know he is gullible. His great weakness is he believes in himself more than he merits. He is quick to act, unable to contemplate his own fallibilities.

CONSTANTINE DRINKS.

CONSTANTINE: We will approach, slowly, on the main road to Rome.

THEODOROUS: A slow march on the Via Flaminia for the last assault will stir fear into him. Each report he receives will cause him to act increasingly irrationally.

CONSTANTINE: (LAUGHS) Oh, good, very good! You have a tactical mind as sharp as my own. Our game has reached a stalemate, but it was a good game! Let us drink to the future of the great Roman Empire!

FOOTSTEPS ACROSS GRAVEL. HELENA JOINS THEM.

HELENA: Son. Theodorous.

THEODOROUS: Helena.

HELENA: Back from your meetings with the Celts of Britannia and Hibernia, I see.

THEODOROUS: Dalriada on Hibernia. But I think we should incorporate into a new province and call it Ulster.

HELENA: I beg your pardon?

THEODOROUS: Ulidia in our Latin tongue, referred to as Uladh in theirs. These people believed in one God before the Jews did.

HELENA: Who are you to set policy?

CONSTANTINE: (giggles) O-ho!

HELENA: Show respect when addressing the mother of the Emperor. Men have been killed for less. And Constantine, wipe that damn smirk off your face.

CONSTANTINE: Join us, mother!

HELENA: I think not. I would speak with you privately.

CONSTANTINE SIGHS. THE BENCH CREAKS AS  
HE STANDS.

CONSTANTINE: Until later, my brave friend!

THEODOROUS: (fading) I will speak with our informants!

CONSTANTINE: (calling) See that you do! Make it so!

FADE OUT

SCENE 5.

EXT. PUBLIC ROAD, RAVENNA.

BEYOND THE CANTEEN, SOFTER MUSIC: LYRE  
AND FLUTE. ROOSTERS CROW. DOGS BARK.  
GENTLE TRILL OF THE SEWERS. HELENA AND  
CONSTANTINE WALK UPON THE GRAVEL  
TRACKS.

HELENA: How dare you shame me in front of him.

CONSTANTINE: Oh mother. Theodorous was joking. If I thought anything else, he'd be breathing his last.

HELENA: You trust him?

CONSTANTINE: I trust his loyalty to me. He has proven himself in bringing soldiers, and his information is sound.

HELENA: What did you speak of?

CONSTANTINE: He is my second. We spoke of the preparations to take Rome.

HELENA: Word has spread you are being guided by the messiah of the cross. Did he have an opinion on that?

CONSTANTINE: He agreed it needs attention to detail and the indulgence of all Romans. With careful implementation the people will follow. In fact Theodosius was most enthusiastic. He called the plan visionary.

HELENA: He said that?

CONSTANTINE: His exact words were, 'It will make Rome great again.'

THEY STOP SUDDENLY. GRAVEL CRUNCH.

HELENA: You need to be very careful what you think about that man.

CONSTANTINE: Release me, mother. I sicken with your petty aspersions. Casting doubt once more upon my Theodosius —

HELENA: (CLOSE) I heard. I heard!

CONSTANTINE: What? What did you hear?

HELENA: (CLOSE) Earlier in the palace; two captains discussing a rumour Theodosius plans to join Maxentius.

CONSTANTINE: No.

HELENA: (CLOSE) One said he has already betrayed you. That his loyalty was always questionable.

CONSTANTINE: What else did you hear them say?

HELENA: They thought he was wiser than to align himself with Maxentius.

CONSTANTINE: (CLOSE) They believed my own Augustus would abandon me; side with my enemy to fight against me?

HELENA: They were very clear. They also discussed your replacement for him.

CONSTANTINE: I cannot believe this.

HELENA: Maxentius has a record of trying to bribe his opponents' generals. Maybe their relationship is closer than you realise.

CONSTANTINE: Mother, we've known one another since our school days!

HELENA: He's known Maxentius for just as long.

JULIUS PASSES BY.

JULIUS: (CALLING) Emperor! Helena!

CONSTANTINE: (CALLING) Julius!

HELENA: Commander Julius, a moment, please.

FADE OUT

CUT TO

SCENE 6

INT. GALLERY

CONSTANTINE: I left orders with Theodorous to reach you. I am troubled he has not done so. What do you make of my mother's account?

JULIUS: I first heard these rumours uttered from the foul breaths of petty criminals. Then from the rank and file. I am shocked senior officers give credence to the tale.

HELENA: Will you believe me now?

CONSTANTINE: Do you believe them, Julius?

(PAUSE)

HELENA: Commander, like myself, you are a devout Christian.

JULIUS: With due respect Lady Helena, I don't know what you mean.

HELENA: Oh you know. You are among friends. What does your God tell you about Theodosius?

(PAUSE)

CONSTANTINE: As per your rank, I granted special dispensation to practice whatever religion you want. You may speak with candour. Now answer my mother's question.

JULIUS: The Lord has not been clear and I do not know. Theodosius is an ambitious man, and cunning. Yet he prefers bravery on the battlefield to the savagery of politics. My instinct is to trust him.

HELENA: Didn't he take Maxentius's coin in the war against Severus?

CONSTANTINE: That was five years ago, and he joined me nine months later. (sighs) Very well. I will not leave myself exposed to a strategy dependent on his information. While I have you here, Julius, a question. I have been studying these 'religious' texts. The prophecy states the dead will rise from their graves. It sounds implausible.

JULIUS: The Lord Christ already ascended to Heaven. When he returns, those who believed in him will indeed rise.

CONSTANTINE: But not the Jewish.

HELENA: They were responsible for his death.

JULIUS: They did not acknowledge him.

CONSTANTINE: If only their thinking was as versatile as model Romans such as yourself. That is the dream. You are dismissed, Julius.

JULIUS: Yes sir.

JULIUS DEPARTS.

CONSTANTINE: Mother, I think you embarrassed him with your knowledge.

HELENA: Some of the other generals have taunted him about his religion. There is a gesture indicating harm. Watch. You move one finger up, then from the left to right. The crucifixion.

CONSTANTINE: Were they see an insult I see a symbol of power. You think I doubt you, mother, but I do accept your counsel. Your plan to co-opt this young Hebrew splinter group was a good one. As our dominion expands, I will learn more of it and we will take what we need. Then, the next stage of Rome's evolution will begin.

SCENE 6EXT. THE ROMAN PALACE, NIGHT.

NARRATOR: (V.O.) Late September. Rome is quiet at night: the bridges over the Tiber have been dismantled; grain has been stockpiled and Emperor Maxentius drinks, safe behind the palace walls.

QUIET, JUST CRICKETS. THEN, TWO SETS OF FOOTSTEPS - ADAM AND AGRIPPA - DRAGGING A THIRD BODY - THEODOROUS - UPON THE GRAVEL. HE STRUGGLES AGAINST THEM AS HE IS PULLED.

SCENE 7INT. MAXENTIUS'S PALACE.

ADAM: Get off my leg! Move, cur!

GRAVEL BECOMES CONCRETE. THEN THEODOROUS ON HIS FEET, IS SLAPPED AND GIVES A SHORT GROWL THROUGH GRITTED TEETH. TWO LOUD KNOCKS UPON THE EMPEROR'S DOOR.

ADAM: Emperor Maxentius.

MAXENTIUS: Come!

ADAM: Wait there, Agrippa.

THE DOOR OPENS QUICKLY.

SCENE 8INT. MAXENTIUS'S THRONE ROOM

THEODOROUS IS THROWN TO THE GROUND,  
SLIDING AFTER IMPACT.

ADAM: Theodorous, my Lord.

THEODOROUS MOANS IN PAIN. MAXENTIUS  
LAUGHS.

MAXENTIUS: Theodorous, Constantine's Augustus! I haven't seen you since we served together in North Africa. What was the right hand man of my enemy doing swimming alone in the Tiber? Calling out on the bank, waiting to be captured. Adam says you didn't even have a weapon.

THEODOROUS: If my intent was murder, I would not have been caught and a sword would be in my hand.

MAXENTIUS: Adam, pour him a drink. You are alive because you told every guard you have a message for me.

ADAM'S FOOTSTEPS CROSS THE FLOOR.  
THEODOROUS GETS TO HIS FEET.

THEODOROUS: I have a proposition. For you alone. It is urgent. May we sit and talk as fellow soldiers?

MAXENTIUS: You and I, we would talk, as equals? Adam...

ADAM CROSSES BACK OVER THE FLOOR.  
HE GRABS THEODOROUS'S HEAD AND POURS A

CASKET OF WATER INTO IT. THEODOROUS PANTS HEAVILY.

ADAM: How do you like that, mongrel? No?

ADAM SLAPS THEODOROUS HARD.

ADAM: You'll go back to the river soon enough! Stay on your knees. This a true emperor.

ANOTHER BLOW IS DEALT. THEODOROUS SQUEALS.

ADAM: A small head. Easier for the courier.

THEODOROUS: Kill me and you will never know what Constantine plans.

MAXENTIUS: Adam, check his binds and wait outside.

ADAM: Anything you admit I will hear of eventually.

ADAM EXITS. THE DOOR SLAMS SHUT.

MAXENTIUS: Well, Constantine's Augustus. What do we have to talk about?

THEODOROUS: I have come to help your cause.

MAXENTIUS LAUGHS.

THEODOROUS: Constantine threatens us all.

MAXENTIUS: You wish to join me against the man you would succeed?

THEODOROUS: Does that not illustrate the enormity of the danger before us? We must work together for the defence of the empire.

MAXENTIUS: Should I call Adam back? He would enjoy this.

THEODOROUS: In the morning you will receive a message. It will say Constantine desires a battle in the hills over the river. The same messenger will tell you he sent word of this challenge all along the Via Flaminia.

MAXENTIUS: Yes. I have spies of my own.

THEODOROUS: It is a bluff. He will position soldiers on the highest ground to get the drop on you. The people along the road have been told you are too cowardly to battle on the plains.

MAXENTIUS: How convenient. When is this battle?

THEODOROUS: A month's time. October 28th.

MAXENTIUS: October 28th. The sixth anniversary of my reign. Ha! The bloody fool. I consulted the oracles. On that day the enemy of the Romans will die. The man who enslaved my sister. The man who pretended to be an ally of my father and murdered him in his sleep!

MAXENTIUS WALKS TOWARDS THEODOROUS.

MAXENTIUS: He spread word it was an act of suicide. Perhaps I should do the same to you, Theodorous. Call you a traitor when your body lies with the worms.

THEODOROUS: Emperor Maxentius. I pledged loyalty to your father and see; I am still on my knees.

MAXENTIUS: Well, get up. You should die on your feet. (PAUSE) Stand up!

THEODOROUS: Constantine is a dangerous man.

MAXENTIUS: Why would you betray him? Do you want money? Rank?

THEODOROUS: Nothing is more important than the future of Rome. He declares himself a God above all other Gods. He wants to abandon Jupiter, Minerva, Apollo, all of them!

MAXENTIUS: He plans to make himself a God? Like Nero did?

THEODOROUS: He wants the empire to embrace belief in the Jewish saviour, supposedly the son of Yahweh. By seeding new temples, he wishes to re-construct what it means to be Roman.

MAXENTIUS: Are you afraid of the Jewish God?

THEODOROUS: No. I fear if Rome foregoes the gods, the gods will forsake Rome. Who would save us then? Right now, Constantine marches on the road with crosses in front of him.

MAXENTIUS: Adam!

DOOR OPENS. ADAM RE-ENTERS,  
APPROACHES.

MAXENTIUS: Constantine intends for our empire to worship a resurrected Jewish messiah. Theodorous says his army carries crosses with them.

ADAM: The Chi-Ro symbol is upon their banners. Three crosses are held at the vanguard of the advance.

THEODOROUS: He may claim one of these is the true cross the King of Jews was crucified upon. This worries me, as it should every Roman.

ADAM: More of his lies of dreams and visions.

THEODOROUS: Yes, yes! This is to tempt your men to flee. If they fight they'll be crucified. If they surrender, they'll be crucified. There will be no quarter.

MAXENTIUS: Would he really do this to soldiers of Rome?

THEODOROUS: This is his way. Brother torturing brother.

ADAM: He kills the fathers, enslave the sons, flog the mothers and rapes the daughters. Your emperor is a tyrant.

THEODOROUS: He would be, but my emperor is you, Maxentius, if you will accept me?

ADAM: Hold on a bloody minute. Do you think I believe any of this?

THEODOROUS: I can believe you wonder what other holes there are in your security.

MAXENTIUS: The prisoner is free!

ADAM GROWLS.

ADAM: Where is my dagger?

THEODOROUS: This dagger?

THEODOROUS TOSSES ADAM'S DAGGER  
ACROSS THE FLOOR.

ADAM: This is some trickery!

ADAM MOVES QUICKLY ON THEODOROUS. AN  
ALMIGHTY CRASH AS ADAM HITS THE GROUND

THEODOROUS: You'll need co-ordination to take on our foes.

ADAM GETS TO HIS FEET; UN-SHEATHES HIS SWORD.

ADAM: I'll cut you limb from limb!

MAXENTIUS: Adam, stop! If he wished this man might have killed me: due to your incompetence! Put your sword down. Theodorous's words are plausible and well considered. You know already of the pressure on me to give the Christians a bishop. You will hear him out.

ADAM GRUNTS; RE-SHEATHES HIS SWORD.

MAXENTIUS: We are Romans first. Theodorous, speak. What is his strategy?

THEODOROUS: Constantine's first battlefield is that of public opinion. He does not expect you to take the initiative. Meet his challenge with a challenge of your own. If you were to rebuild Milvian Bridge...

MAXENTIUS: The only other way for him to get here?

THEODOROUS: If he has the guts to meet you before the city. You will be on home territory. Keeping the conflict away from the hills protects Rome. Show him up!

MAXENTIUS: If we engage them head-on... he will not expect it. What do you think Adam?

ADAM: It's a trap. Hills or roads, it doesn't matter. We have the drop on him behind these walls.

MAXENTIUS: We have protection. I'd quite enjoy seeing him fall; up close. The realisation in his eyes that he's not blessed. We shall war under Apollo in the light of day.

ADAM: It'll be a wide open front.

MAXENTIUS: If we receive Constantine's messenger tomorrow, detain him. There'd be a wooden pontoon to build where Milvian once was. Adam, you're going to lay him down and nail him onto it. We'll fill that front with a corpse pile like a new wall. He also thinks Rome is divided. Such nonsense. We have a hundred and fifty thousand men. He has forty thousand. I have an idea...

ADAM: Emperor...

MAXENTIUS: We circle around. Attack over the hills; on his rear and at his front!

ADAM: Dividing our forces.

MAXENTIUS: We have four times the number he has; for both assaults.

ADAM: Do we?

THEODOROUS: Or do battle only upon the bridge. Rome is well fortified.

MAXENTIUS: No. A two-pronged attack is better.

ADAM: This is madness! WE SHOULD divide and conquer THEM, NOT OURSELVES.

MAXENTIUS: ENOUGH! The soldiers will leave for the hills in a few weeks. These Gauls think they are above me? They would know what a siege is like.

ADAM: And would Constantine face you?

THEODOROUS: He will be well guarded. He will be behind the Latinos, who carry the crosses at the vanguard.

MAXENTIUS: Latinos. The sons of soldiers. We awarded them the coin of citizenship for their service in our army. They marched to Rome to demand better recognition. We build them baths, roads, arenas and irrigate their lands. What more do they ask of me? Lesser Romans! No match for my trained professional army.

THEODOROUS: The crosses are to be pivotal in his tactics.

ADAM: His Latinos are not strong fighters. If his crosses are so important surely his best soldiers will carry them.

THEODOROUS: True, but Constantine considers the Latinos expendable.

ADAM: I will order my men to seize them and these heathens can soil their togas. We'll hang them by their three crosses. One for Constantine, one for his wench mother and one for his Commander Julius!

THEODOROUS: He wants to lure you into taking the crosses. His second wave includes his most able soldiers.

MAXENTIUS: His centurions would strike, for the purpose of symbolism? Theodorous, how would you suggest that we proceed?

THEODOROUS: Don't wait for him to come to us. Attack the moment the crosses appear. Burn them in full sight of his army.

ADAM: That is sound.

THEODOROUS: Instead of falling back, we will carry on and smash through the line. His forces will lose heart. We will demoralise them as they see their plan go up in flames.

MAXENTIUS: He underestimates me. There is a supremacist arrogance that deludes Constantine.

THEODOROUS: For all to see. Who would, given the choice, risk his life for two burning planks of wood? He never considers a plan of his may fail. He is a sadist.

ADAM: He is reckless.

MAXENTIUS: It is our responsibility and duty to stop him. He will be slain, and discredited. His nightmare ended before it begins. (PAUSE) Adam, at first light take a battalion over the hills to the Via Flaminia. Find Constantine's emissary. While you're there, verify Theodorous's description of this army.

THEODOROUS: Thank you, Maxentius.

ADAM: If you are true to your word, the Emperor might give you a bigger cell.

MAXENTIUS: If your information is accurate, we shall send you back to Constantine to maintain the ruse.

ADAM: That would not be popular among my men. I could not guarantee he'd get out of this camp alive. The presence of a high-profile defector, here, might inspire them.

THEODOROUS: Adam is right. I am happy to tell your men Constantine pledges allegiance to a dead Hebrew.

MAXENTIUS: This idea has merit. His soldiers will think twice when they see his Augustus fights alongside me.

THEODOROUS: My calling is to serve the interests of Rome before any Roman.

MAXENTIUS: Good. We already have a strategic advantage. You will help me plan for victory. We have four weeks to prepare. Then we shall scatter his rabble and crush them.

SCENE 9EXT. CAMP CONSTANTINE, NIGHT.QUIET BUT FOR THE CRICKETS.

NARRATOR: (V.O.) On the morning of the battle in a camp just a few miles from Rome, Commander Julius stands watch over Constantine's tent, gazing to a sky full of stars.

FLAPPING TENT FOLDS. CONSTANTINE STEPS OUTSIDE, COLLIDING WITH JULIUS.

JULIUS: Apologies, Emperor.

CONSTANTINE: You did not expect me to be awake. Nor did I, Julius. Do you know where I have just come from?

JULIUS: Your tent, sire?

CONSTANTINE: From a dreaming. Mere minutes ago I was in the presence of the Christ Messiah.

JULIUS: He is not dead!

CONSTANTINE: Once more there was the cross against the sun and the words 'En toutoi nika'. 'By this, win.' Jesus told me his sacrifice was a sacrifice for Rome. Our people shall re-born and live forever!

JULIUS: He walks with us.

CONSTANTINE: The Nazarene explained my past visions and how to triumph in today's battle. He said our foot men should charge through

his line on the re-constructed bridge. They should not stop until they are on the other side. The cavalry on horseback shall follow, breaking their ranks further.

JULIUS: The Latinos and Hispanics with the crosses wear their traditional white robes. By lowly men, we shall bring about the coming of Christ again.

CONSTANTINE LAUGHS.

CONSTANTINE: No! They shall wear the common red tunics at the vanguard. Centurions shall dress in white as custodians of the crosses. I allowed messages to be intercepted that suggest Latinos protect them. Maxentius will obsess about taking the symbols of our army. He would risk his war to win a battle.

JULIUS: When the cross-bearers do not fall, won't he become suspicious?

CONSTANTINE: By then it will be too late! I saw this in my dream, Julius. Angels in white, striking like a spear into the heart of the devil who beguiles with false gods!

JULIUS: The light of the saviour. Please, my emperor, let me carry one of these crosses.

CONSTANTINE: Oh no. My new Augustus, look at what you wear now.

JULIUS: The commander's cloak. I am already dressed in the white!

CONSTANTINE: Maxentius may even assume you or I guard the crosses. He will act foolishly.

JULIUS: It is brilliant, sir.

CONSTANTINE:

These are the tactics essential to fulfill the prophecies and ensure his return. Let us pray together.

(PAUSE)

CONSTANTINE: Lord, we thank you for the revelation you have given me this night. The directions we shall act upon to liberate Rome. Our victory will be your victory, following the plans you have set. Lord, guide Julius to fight in your name, loyally, as he did in Verona and Ravenna. Bless and keep your brave soldiers of Rome and the cross. And forgive Maxentius and Theodorous their wickedness. We pray they survive the encounter to renounce their sins and live new lives serving you. For his name's sake, amen.

(PAUSE)

Do you feel better now?

JULIUS: Yes, Emperor. I do, for I believe in you. The Lord will have heard our plea.

CONSTANTINE: Other generals are not as faithful as you.

JULIUS: They do not see why we should go into battle under the cross. How... how many should we crucify?

CONSTANTINE: Lord no, none! We need every trained Roman soldier for the future growth of the empire.

JULIUS: Oh, but, I thought, never mind... The generals say you place a lot of faith in the messiah.

CONSTANTINE: I do. Through our messiah, civilisations can be Roman. What other objections are there?

JULIUS: The men cannot understand why, as they put it, 'a Jewish God' would help us.

CONSTANTINE: This god does not belong to the Jews! The Messiah was very clear. As He helps Rome, so shall we be seen to serve Him. What are the names of these officers?

JULIUS: ... ah, Cato, Felix, Atticus. Galen. They want to know when you think the messiah will return.

CONSTANTINE: Questions, always questions. A new holy Roman empire will provide eternal life after death. They only need to have the faith that you have. If they cannot do that, tell them to trust in Maxentius's idiocy. We will beat him, by this sign.

(PAUSE)

JULIUS: Emperor! The sign of the cross will not win favour with the Messiah!

CONSTANTINE: The sign of the cross is the symbol God has given me! The forehead represents the father; and to the left and right, the holy ghost.

JULIUS: I was not aware of this. I may have been a negligent Christian. Or your mother has taught you well.

CONSTANTINE: She has. She guided me to the Christ. Now, when our horses have gone in, those with sword and arrow will divide Maxentius's forces wider. We will push them back to the river, where he and his men can be reminded of Jesus's miracles.

JULIUS: So as to be given an opportunity of a new life in Christ. And what if they do not choose his way?

CONSTANTINE: Then they choose their own. (SIGHS) I pray he surrenders, but I know he will try to escape. In that case, we will not stop him.

JULIUS: You would let him live?

CONSTANTINE: It is not what I wanted which comes first. The messiah told me He will decide the fate of Maxentius. This will show that the Christ and I are tolerant leaders.

JULIUS: Maxentius would not be as merciful towards you.

CONSTANTINE: When the battle turns against them, a generous path is to be left on the bridge for him to flee to Rome. Commander, it is my order he is not to be followed. They should also spare Theodosius.

JULIUS: Emperor! He is a traitor! I do not know if I have it in my heart to forgive him.

CONSTANTINE: Well you must. If you find officers who refuse to do so, tell them I would desire a quiet conversation at the gallows.

JULIUS: Understood. How close should we get to Maxentius?

CONSTANTINE: Close enough that he can see you. But not so close that he cannot see his own men on the other side. Our brigades to the rear will leave a generous escape path to flee. When they do so, clear the bridge.

JULIUS: (SWALLOWS) So they have their choice.

CONSTANTINE: And if they refuse, we will encircle them on the other side.

JULIUS: Yes, Emperor, I will order that Maxentius be taken alive.

CONSTANTINE: Keep the faith, Julius.

JULIUS: The men will bravely safeguard our crosses and capture Maxentius for God.

CONSTANTINE: This battle is more than it seems. When our soldiers awake, make sure all mark their shields with the sign of the cross. Today we fight to create Romans all around the known and undiscovered world. Go now, get some sleep.

JULIUS: As you command, Emperor.

JULIUS DEPARTS. A PAUSE. HELENA ARRIVES.

HELENA: Good morning, son. Judging by the hour, you had the conversation which we talked about.

CONSTANTINE: Julius is fulfilling Theodorus' responsibilities well. The reasoning I gave him will be sufficient to keep the loyalty of most officers.

HELENA: And those who would make the objections?

CONSTANTINE: I have a list of names, and their arguments, which will spare me from having to listen to them prattle on.

HELENA: Good. It is important they buy into it, and Julius's belief is a tool we can use. Victory today will build confidence in your uniting the Roman empire.

CONSTANTINE: We will secure our future. Onward toward a new Rome, more powerful than Romulus could have foreseen.

SCENE 10EXT. CIRCUS MAXIMUS, ROME.

NARRATOR: (V.O.) Day breaks on the city side of Milvian Bridge, where legions gather at Circus Maximus in Rome. Maxentius's soldiers await their orders.

CHARIOTS ROLL TOWARDS US IN THE  
BACKGROUND. LARGE CROWD: TENS OF  
THOUSANDS OF SOLDIERS, NOISE BRIEFLY  
SUBSIDING AS ADAM SCREAMS AT THEM.

ADAM: Your Emperor has arrived! You will respect Maxentius with your silence!

THE CROWD CALL OVER ADAM.

CROWD: All hail Emperor Maxentius!

ADAM: I said silence for your Emperor!

CROWD: Maxentius, ruler of Italy and Africa! All hail Maxentius!

ADAM: Silentium! Silence!

THE NOISE SUBSIDES, BUT FOR ONE LONE  
VOICE IN CONVERSATION.

AGRIPPA: I couldn't get the boots on, and then I thought, laces!

ADAM: Oy! Agrippa! So help me I'll show you how boots are worn.

A RIPPLE OF LAUGHTER, WHICH STOPS  
SUDDENLY.

MAXENTIUS: Soldiers, loyal soldiers. We are gathered here six years since I took office, and it will be a day to remember. Today we fight to keep this city safe. The gods will be with us: Jupiter, Mars, and Quirinus. Vesta and Janus. What manner of fool would abandon them? One unworthy of Rome and a Roman army. You have heard that Constantine... (PAUSE) the day dreaming emperor...

FORCED LAUGHTER.

You have heard his army carries crosses. They think to frighten you: intimidate you into surrender. He will not spare you, this, this obsessed cruel leader... His own men do not respect him. He would make us all Jewish if he wins.

HOWLS OF DERISION.

AGRIPPA: (CALLS) No! We're going to keep our foreskins!

LAUGHTER.

MAXENTIUS: In the previous weeks many of you have spoken with Commander Theodorous. Once the closest ally of Constantine, this man also listened to the gods and bravely chose our side. Before he joins us on the battlefield, I would like him to say a few words. Listen well, for he knows how the enemy think.

THEODOROUS: Brothers, the future of Rome lies in your hands. Nay. As the shining capital of the Empire, the whole world depends upon us. We are brothers. No matter whom, how or where we served, we are Romans. Constantine is not. He declares himself God of the Gods. We will take and burn his crosses. We will prove he is mortal. Great stories will be told of your heroics here today.

AN OUTBURST OF CHEERING.

MAXENTIUS: (LOW) Adam, he is a little too motivating. See that he falls before the battle's end.

THEODOROUS: Your legend will be eternal. For thanks to you Rome's might will be unrivalled and inspirational. They will recall your names. They will tell stories of your bravery and selfless devotion. The men who saved Rome.

MAXENTIUS: You heard him. Our victory today will be remembered, celebrated by your families for generations to come. Save Rome from Constantine. They are no match for you. Slay his minnows then we celebrate in Rome. To the bridge!

MORE CHEERING.SCENE 11EXT. VIA FLAMINIA, OUTSIDE ROME

THE CHEERING TRANSFORMS INTO THE ROAR OF BATTLE. CONSTANTINE'S FORCES ARE ADVANCING: HORSES HOOVES, THE CHARGE OF FEET, SEVERAL CHARIOTS, ORDERS SHOUTED. MEN SCREAM. SWORDS CLANG.

CONSTANTINE: Their forces are weakened: half of them are in the hills prepared for an army that doesn't exist. Strike! Through their wide formation, like a spear!

JULIUS: Run the gauntlet onto the bridge! Standard bearer, fall back slowly!

THE FIGHTING IS CLOSE AROUND THEM.  
ARROWS SPEAR TORSOS. OTHERS ARE  
LODGED WITH FIRE, SETTING THE CAVALRY  
ALIGHT AND MEN SCREAM IN TORMENT.

JULIUS: Close the ranks! [Advance!]

CONSTANTINE: A few of the infantry are almost through to the far bank.

JULIUS: Behind you!

THE THRUST OF A SWORD AS A MAN SCREAMS  
HIS LAST.

JULIUS: Tell your evil master he cannot stand! Emperor, are you...

CONSTANTINE: I am fine, Julius. (CALLING) If you want these crosses then come and get them! Cavalry, advance!

JULIUS: Cursu mina, charge!

BEHIND THEM, HORSES GALLOP, AND TAKE OFF  
INTO THE DISTANCE.

## SCENE 12

### EXT. MILVIAN BRIDGE

HORSE'S HOOVES ARE HEAVY UPON THE  
WOODEN BRIDGE. ARROWS WHIZZ FROM THEIR  
BOWS AND PIERCE BONES. SHIELD BATTERS  
SHIELD. DAGGERS ARE PLUNGED AND MEN  
WEEP AND SHRIEK. THE GENTLE FLOW OF THE  
TIBER IS PUNCTUATED BY SPLASHES OF

FALLING BODIES. THERE IS THE NEIGH OF A HORSE, THE SOUND OF A CHARIOT'S WHEELS STOPPING. ITS DOOR OPENS.

MAXENTIUS: Adam, report!

ADAM: The battlefield now engages nine to ten ranks of each vanguard. We shall soon join those already over the bridge.

MAXENTIUS: Why is he sending more forward? How many of the crosses remain?

THEODOROUS: All of them. The crosses fall further back as his army advances.

ADAM: Please Emperor stay in your carriage!

THE CARRIAGE DOOR SLAMS SHUT.

THEODOROUS: They are all around us. Ugh!

SWORDS CLANGS AND ONE THRUSTS INTO FLESH.

ADAM: (laughs) You fight well for a man trained by a fraudster.

THEODOROUS: (low) As do you.

ADAM: Bloody hell, they are faster than the usual Latino. Braver, too. And they try to surround us. (calls out) Archers, lancers, hold a protective line. The ones in the white hoods: burn them to a crisp! Bring down those damn crosses!

AGRIPPA: We are over the bridge, we are —

*AN ARROW WHIZZES THROUGH THE AIR AND STRIKES AGRIPPA DEAD.*

ADAM: (CALLING) Do not break formation!

A HORSE WHINNIES. THE CARRIAGE WHEELS STOP. ADAM LAUGHS MADLY.

ADAM: Come on then. I'll slaughter every one of you! They lack the stomachs for battle.

FURIOUS CLASH OF SWORDS. MEN SCREAM THEIR LAST.

ADAM: Look, no stomach! We fill the River Tiber with their blood! See them run.

THEODOROUS: Go on men! We do this for Rome!

ADAM: Over there! Julius, the next to taste my blade!

THEODOROUS: Adam! To your rear!

ADAM: Another sacrifice? Well, bring it --

THE SHARP CRUNCH OF A BLADE ON SKULL.  
ADAM FALLS WITH A THUD.

THEODOROUS: (LOW) Rome can only have one head, Adam, and now you have none. (CALLING) Soldiers, haaaaalt!

SCENE 13EXT. VIA FLAMINIA.

CONSTANTINE      Julius! The centurions hold the crosses well. And here come our boats, loaded with reinforcements. What do you have to report?

JULIUS:      Their army has crossed the bridge but are unable to re-group. We have pushed a great many down to the north bank.

CONSTANTINE:      They have no ground to stand upon.

JULIUS:      They fight bravely but are outflanked. We can press home the advantage.

CONSTANTINE:      No. Order our men on the bridge to fall back.

JULIUS:      Maxentius's carriage is right there!

CONSTANTINE:      Too much blood has spilled. Give the order.

JULIUS:      What of our men stranded over the bridge? Are you mad?

CONSTANTINE SMACKS JULIUS'S FACE.

CONSTANTINE:      I know what I do. I would kill you where you stand but for having to endure my mother's shrieking.

A HORSE NEIGHS, IS CUT DOWN, FALLS.

CONSTANTINE:      We will hold the line on the Via Flaminia road. There are dead aplenty as a warning that Rome must depose Maxentius.

SCENE 14EXT. MILVIAN BRIDGE

ALL AROUND, SOUNDS OF FIGHTING. THERE IS A RAP ON THE DOOR OF MAXENTIUS'S CARRIAGE.  
THE DOOR SWINGS OPEN.

THEODOROUS: Emperor Maxentius, we are close to being trapped. We have given the order for withdrawal.

MAXENTIUS: You've done what? A retreat? Why are his men not closer in pursuit?

THEODOROUS: Please! It's not safe!

MAXENTIUS: Get inside.

SCENE 15INT. MAXENTIUS'S CARRIAGE

THEODOROUS: We make no forward progress. They are to the front and rear of us.

MAXENTIUS: As we are to them, Theodorous. We stay and fight.

THEODOROUS: We lose and die. The plan is failing. It is time to regroup, conserve your army and prepare a new offensive from Rome.

MAXENTIUS: Godless Constantine!

THEODOROUS: Adam and I agreed. To win you must live to fight again. Our men need to catch a breath.

MAXENTIUS SIGHS.

THEODOROUS: You have food stockpiled and the soldiers returning from the mountains.

LOUDER CRIES FROM THE BATTLE.

MAXENTIUS: Very well. We must set about winning back the favour of the Gods.

THEODOROUS: I will give the order to form a shield to let the carriage turn.

MAXENTIUS: And you will join me as we regroup?

THEODOROUS: Shortly. At first behind then to your right hand side, protecting your escape. I must wait for Adam and his soldiers.

MAXENTIUS: When you see Adam ask him for the location of the equipment to bring the bridge down. It is nearby. When our men are across, order it demolished.

THEODOROUS: That's it, be positive! We hold victory in the face of defeat.

THEODOROUS EXITS CARRIAGE, AS BATTLE SOUNDS RISE AGAIN. THE DOOR SLAMS SHUT.

THEODOROUS: (shouting) Driver, turn your Emperor's carriage then take him back across the bridge. Await me on the other side!

HE BANGS THE SIDE OF THE CARRIAGE TWICE.  
THE HORSES START.

SCENE 16EXT. MILVIAN BRIDGE

THEODOROUS: Protect the emperor, keep it tight around the carriage!

THE HORSES NEIGHS. SWORDS CLASH. THE CARRIAGE WHEELS TURN. THEODOROUS IS MOVING FORWARD ACROSS THE BRIDGE.

THEODOROUS: By Maxentius's decree, retreat! Your city needs you! Go! Go!

JULIUS, IN THE DISTANCE, GETTING CLOSER.

JULIUS: (CALLS) Fall back from the bridge! Hold the line against Maxentius at the Via Flaminia!

THEODOROUS: Do not engage! Rome is in danger! Reverse the front!

JULIUS: More archers to the banks!

THEODOROUS: Transmuta! Withdraw!

THE SWING OF A BLADE.

SCENE 17INT. MAXENTIUS'S CARRIAGE

MAXENTIUS HAMMERS THE WALL OF THE CARRIAGE WITH HIS HAND.

MAXENTIUS: (to himself) The fools, they leave us to fight again. I relish luring Constantine to battle around Rome's Aurelian walls. Driver, more haste over this bridge. I will hear our horses hooves upon its wooden frame.

DRIVER: Get! Faster! Get!

CARRIAGE WHEELS ROLL AND SHORTLY, THE CRACKING OF WOOD UNDERNEATH, GETTING LOUDER. OUTSIDE THE CARRIAGE, MEN CURSE ASTONISHED.

DRIVER: The bridge, lord!

MAXENTIUS I hear it. Driver, quickly. Before it collapses.

DRIVER: At once Emperor!

MAXENTIUS: By the Gods. Faster, driver, get me to safetttyyyy.

SOUND OF THE BRIDGE COLLAPSING. WE DRAW BACK, SO THE FULL EXTENT IS AUDIBLE, AS THE MIGHTY STRUCTURE AND THE SCREAMING SOLDIERS AND PANICKING HORSES UPON IT SLIDE AND PLUNGE, SPLASHING INTO THE TIBER. THE RIVER ERUPTS WITH THE IMPACT OF A HUNDRED BODIES. THEN THE WEIGHT OF THE BRIDGE ITSELF. AFTER THE EXPLOSION STOPS RINGING WE CAN STILL HEAR MEN SCREAM AND HORSES CRY OUT.

### SCENE 18

#### EXT. STREETS OF ROME

WE OPEN WITH THE ACAPELLA SONG OF THE OXYRHYNCHUS HYMN PLAYING OUT IN THE BACKGROUND, DECREASING IN VOLUME.

NARRATOR: (V.O.) It is two days since the momentous battle, and Rome celebrates in the streets around the palace.

THE HYMNS DESCENDS INTO THE DISTANTLY,  
TRIUMPHANT CROWDS; GONGS; CLANGING  
CYMBALS, BEHIND FOOTSTEPS UPON THE  
MARKET STREET. CELEBRATORY SOUNDS.  
THESE CELEBRATORY SOUNDS CARRY ON  
MUFFLED INTO ACT 2. THROUGH IT ALL,  
HELENA'S FOOTSTEPS INTO...

SCENE 19

INT. THRONE ROOM, PALACE OF ROME

THE SOUND OF KNOCKING.

HELENA: Hello. I am looking for the new Emperor of Rome. Is he here?

CONSTANTINE: Mother! It is good to see you.

(BEAT)

HELENA: I spoke with Julius. Building a new holy empire will not be cheap.

CONSTANTINE: The Senate endorses my decision to build new roads.

HE POURS WINE INTO TWO SILVER GOBLETS.

HELENA: There is no turning back from this journey now. Everything has worked out well for you my son.

CONSTANTINE WALKS ACROSS THE ROOM AND  
OPENS A DECANTER AS THEY SPEAK.

CONSTANTINE: I still need your help.

HELENA: You know you have it. I will gladly be your governor in Jerusalem.

CONSTANTINE: Maybe you will find the one true cross. Reports of it exist in Golgotha, Sinope and Alexandria.

HELENA: A beggar tried to sell me one not an hour ago! It will be a miracle if I find it.

CONSTANTINE: Yes. A miracle.

THEY LAUGH. CONSTANTINE WALKS BACK  
ACROSS THE ROOM.

CONSTANTINE: And what a magnificent story your quest will make! I need to know more about this religion: its Hebrew origins and how Rome can take ownership of it. Now, a toast: to the liberation of Rome and the new Governor of Jerusalem!

THEIR GLASSES TOUCH. HELENA STOPS HIM.

HELENA: Ah, ah-ah. For I received from the Lord Jesus what I also delivered to you, and he said, "This is my blood which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me."

CONSTANTINE: Cute.

THEY DRINK.

HELENA: This is what they do, son. According to the words of one of the books of Paul.

CONSTANTINE: Rome makes the holiest of wines.

HELENA: I am serious. The Christians have their own books with stories written in the names of some who followed Jesus. One is ascribed to Mark, who founded the Coptic church in Alexandria. It is headed by a man with the title, Pope.

CONSTANTINE: That's a good title. 'Pope'.

HELENA: There are also writings in the name of Luke; someone related to Jesus, called John; the books of Paul...

CONSTANTINE: How many different books are there?

HELENA: Many.

CONSTANTINE: Draft versions.

HELENA: Son?

CONSTANTINE: We shall identify what Rome can use, discard and rewrite. Could we say one of His followers was asked by Jesus to build His church here in Rome?

HELENA: Two specific followers might fit that purpose. A man named Peter. There are no records of books in his name. But we can't be sure Peter was ever anywhere near Rome.

CONSTANTINE: Claiming he was preaching here, freely, suits our purpose as a tale to be passed on. Peter can feature in the revised book of Matthew. Who is the other?

HELENA: One of his critics turned convert. Paul. There's much written about him. He caused a ruckus around the empire, but he always proudly asserted his citizenship. He spent his last days, likely happier, here in Rome.

CONSTANTINE: Perfect! Perfect!

HELENA: Not quite. A recent account says Nero crucified him, as well as Peter, at the altar of Aius, beneath Vaticanus Mons.

CONSTANTINE: Ah.

HELENA: With regards the story of Paul, the offending author is named Eusebius, a resident in the province of Syria Palaestina. He can be dealt with, loudly.

CONSTANTINE: No, no. We'll burn his books but let's have him brought to us alive. We will have need of writers with an interest in this to serve one god under Rome. A holy empire will be so much easier to control, cheaper and more efficient.

HELENA: There are copies of this literature in Alexandria. It is home to the most organised of the messianic cults.

CONSTANTINE: How does Rome traditionally get what it wants or needs?

HELENA: By force?

CONSTANTINE: Alexandria is a sandy wasteland. If the lands were irrigated they would be productive and taxable. In return for an agreement to donate to their collection. Matthew's gospel could use a rewrite to say Jesus favoured Peter.

HELENA: Paul's gospels might be edited to include information already in the book of Matthew. We can't have contradictory accounts.

CONSTANTINE: It is agreed then. The Coptics can become prosperous while we fulfill the prophecy.

HELENA: Do you know Egypt's desert hermits use knotted ropes to count prayers to Jesus?

CONSTANTINE: (LAUGHS) This is just the start. These paintings around us... they will be replaced to depict sacrifice and worship. We'll remake Rome. Maxentius's architects will build new temples. Archways and sculptures. The Tiber, place of his defeat, will become a site for baptism.

HELENA: The new religion and church of the universal Roman.

CONSTANTINE: Yes, yes. The Roman candle will reflect reverence, not torture. A symbol of blessing and celebration. No sporting event will begin without prayer.

HELENA: Everyone will be members of Rome in their heads and hearts.

CONSTANTINE: My image and the words of the one true God on the coins in their pockets!

HELENA: The hidden hand of Rome. Have you thought of a name yet? Latin sounds holy. *Universalis rōmānus*.

CONSTANTINE: Should a universal identity not have a common or shared language? Greek is our language of culture. I even heard the plebs in our amphitheatres trying to converse in the tongue

HELENA: You know the word, *catholicos*? The Greek for Universal.

CONSTANTINE: Yes. 'Catholicos Roman.'

HELENA: My son. It sounds like a sauce to accompany pasta.

CONSTANTINE: Roman Catholicos? Yes, Rome first. Roman Catholicos. Rome has already existed for over a millennium. This will see it last for at least another.

HELENA: Yes, my son. How did you become so wise?

CONSTANTINE: I had the best teacher known. If you will excuse me for a few minutes, I must freshen up. Maxentius's severed head leaves for North Africa tonight, and we must see him off.

HELENA: I will wait.

CONSTANTINE'S FOOTSTEPS DEPART IN ONE DIRECTION. A DOOR CLOSES. PAUSE. FROM THE OTHER DIRECTION, THERE IS A BANG LIKE A CHAIR KNOCKED OVER IN A SIDE ROOM, NOT THE ONE CONSTANTINE HAS WENT TO.

HELENA: (LOW) Something feels unnatural.

ANOTHER LOUDER BANG.

HELENA: Constantine, is that you? Who is there? Hurry up, reveal yourself!

THERE IS A COUGH FROM BEHIND THE WALL IN THE ADJOINING ROOM, AND THEN A VOICE.

THEODOROUS: Excuse me, ma'am.

HELENA: Quickly, show yourself now.

FOOTSTEPS.

THEODOROUS: Helena, mother of Constantine the Great. Fear not I bear you no harm.

HELENA: The traitor!

THEODOROUS: (CALM) I am here to greet my Emperor.

HELENA: Your Emperor is lost and you hide in the shadows!

THE SOUND OF HER GOBLET HURLED  
CRASHING ACROSS THE ROOM, THEODOROUS  
JUMPING OUT OF THE WAY TO AVOID IT.

HELENA: My son, bring guards! Theodorous is here to kill you!

CONSTANTINE APPROACHING FROM THE SIDE  
ROOM, WHISTLING 'ONWARD CHRISTIAN  
SOLDIERS'.

HELENA: You have come in a vain attempt to seize Rome for yourself?

CONSTANTINE ENTERS.

CONSTANTINE: (WHIMSICALLY) Has he harmed you?

HELENA: Not yet, but he is here to finish us both!

CONSTANTINE: Don't worry, mother. Theodorous bears us no ill will.

HELENA: He is a duplicitous snake and cannot be trusted

CONSTANTINE: You young rascal. The plan worked well.

THEODOROUS: Knocking out the bridge's foundations was easy!

HELENA: What?

CONSTANTINE: Mother, Theodorous only played the role of the betrayer. Long enough to gain Maxentius's trust and ensure he met his fate in the Tiber.

HELENA: But the battle? The fall of the bridge?

THEODOROUS: Its collapse was inexplicable, apparently miraculous.

CONSTANTINE: As if by the hands of the Gods themselves?

THEODOROUS: You mean The God? Unless the plan has changed? (laughter)  
You might say Maxentius got carriaged away!

THE MEN LAUGH.

CONSTANTINE: He was too big for his own bridge!

HELENA: (ANGRY) I still do not understand.

CONSTANTINE: Maxentius was forever trying to bribe my men to turn on me, a fact we made use of.

THEODOROUS: I counselled the tyrant to re-build Milvian Bridge for the purpose of meeting us in battle. It was a challenge his ego couldn't deny.

CONSTANTINE: Once night fell, my brother weakened the structural supports on Rome's side, ensuring the bridge would collapse in sufficient time.

THEODOROUS: When the other end was weakened, Julius gave the signal for our forces to return to the road. I am glad he did not kill me on sight! A hefty pull by a mere twelve men brought the bridge down.

CONSTANTINE: I have much to thank you for.

HELENA: And you kept this from me? You duped everyone?

CONSTANTINE: Come here, Theodorous, let your Emperor give you the warm embrace of a grateful Empire, for your loyalty.. Mother, as I told you once I would trust Theodorous with my life.

THEODOROUS: Emperor I am honoured; humbled to hear your words and feel your embrace.

AS CONSTANTINE SPEAKS, WE HEAR HIM UNSHEATH HIS DAGGER.

CONSTANTINE: Trust with my life...

THE DAGGER IS THRUST DEEP INTO HIS SIDE.

THEODOROUS SCREAMS.

THERE IS THE CRUNCH OF BONES AS IT IS TWISTED. HELENA GASPS.

CONSTANTINE: ...but not with the future of Rome.

A LOUD THUD AS THEODOROUS FALLS TO THE FLOOR.

CONSTANTINE: Your sacrifice is essential. I swear I will not forget you.

THEODOROUS: (GASPING) Why? I proved my loyalty!

THEODOROUS IS HEARD STRUGGLING TO GET TO HIS FEET, COUGHING UP BLOOD.

CONSTANTINE: You did. And the Christ messiah will reward your bravery in the afterlife.

THEODOROUS STRUGGLES TO FORM WORDS. HE FALLS BACK DOWN AND SPEAKS HIS LAST.

THEODOROUS: You know I am no traitor.

CONSTANTINE: We did this for Rome. There can be no risks taken with the empire's future.

HELENA: And now only we two know the truth. Except those who helped destabilise the bridge. I presume they are dead, or will die soon?

CONSTANTINE: We have bought their silence. All are being generously indulged, with new families, far away from here.

HELENA: It is easier to accept a new reality when it lavishes you with opportunities. That will be true for this is history you are writing: faith as fact.

CONSTANTINE: Beyond provincial identity, the people of the empire pledge their loyalty to me.

HELENA: Son, your leadership will be the standard for all future rulers. They will sing your name in praise.

CONSTANTINE: I hope this is true. Where-ever our authority is bestowed, citizens can take pride in their identity, exactly as if they were here.

HELENA: For all in the empire?

CONSTANTINE: Yes, the universal Roman.

HELENA: Roman Catholicos.

CONSTANTINE: As our dominion expands we will learn, and take what we need. The recent victory shall bring unimaginable wealth, freedom and security. Today is just the beginning. Tomorrow, a new Holy Empire gathers to be born.

END