

Act One

Fifty years of fighting had come to an end. Time had passed, its effect showing on all the exhibits of the Museum of Natural History. A few diorama rearrangements here and there, since their trip to Britain, and the return of the tablet to its proper home. The year was 2025.

Octavius, now no longer a man, was no longer allowed in the Roman army. They had honorably resigned before they came out. No longer did the legions of Rome stand at attention beneath Octavius's feet, instead up towards their emperor, Hadrian. They kept their name, to honor who they are meant to represent, but their heart was their own.

Theirs, and Jedediah's.

Jedediah was always himself, but only Octavius knew the truth. A self-made man in the most literal sense of the word, binding his chest and taking testosterone to transform his body's features. Only Octavius had the honor of seeing Jedediah without such binds, free to breathe and hold and love like a man is meant to. Every once in a while, Octavius could hear their midnight cowboy's voice crack, and it made their heart soar to hear the man they loved changing into a form he wanted. His laugh alone could cure the saddest melancholy or the hottest rage.

Tonight, the couple laid on their backs in the planetarium, stargazing. The stars stayed the same, but it was something to do. The constellations played in the false sky, acting out their roles as pictures in space. Orion chased Taurus with his hounds, the Pleiades on the bull's back. Hydra writhed in the sky. Cassiopeia ruled the stars from her upside-down position.

Jedediah broke the quite comfortable silence.

"We've been like this for so long, Octavius. I... I wanna move this along."

"Move this along? What do you mean?"

"Y'know, us. We've been together for so long now, I just... I think it's time for the next step."

"Next step... I'm afraid I don't follow."

"...I don't know how to say it proper-like, so I'll just say it. I wanna start a family."

Octavius sat up. "A family?"

"Well, yeah. We can do it, I think."

"Will the magic allow us to?"

Jedediah laughed a bit. "Not the first question I expected outta your mouth." He sat up alongside them. "I ain't seen it done yet, but I think it'll let us try."

Octavius brushed a lock of hair out of Jedediah's face, tucking it behind his ear. "And when that little one grows up, you know we'll still be her parents forever, right?"

"As long as that tablet brings us to life, yeah."

"And you're okay with that?"

"It'll be an adventure. And it'll be one with you. I'm always ready for that."

Octavius smiled, and gently pressed their lips to Jedediah's cheek.

"You've given this some thought, it seems."

"I ain't gonna rush into this, Ocky. I've been thinkin' about this for at least a year."

Octavius laid their head on Jedediah's shoulder.

"I know Augustus was a parent in his time. He... wasn't the best. Exiled his eldest daughter."

"Yeesh."

"I... I want to be better. I want to do better than he did."

Jedediah put his arm around their shoulders.

"And you will. You ain't an emperor, and you ain't a soldier. You're just Octavius."

They looked up to Jedediah, for a moment.

"And that's the best thing you've ever been, sugar."

Subdued moans echoed in Octavius's domus. Jedediah had one leg over Octavius's shoulder, the other wrapped around their waist. They were deep in him, their cock lubricated with olive oil rather than lube. The most sacred of acts, the joining of two bodies that were changing by choice. Two souls that love themselves enough to morph their bodies, and brave enough to want one another's, no matter the changes. Jedediah stroked his clit with one hand, stimulating the sensitive nerves as Octavius slammed into him.

"Fuck, Ocky, ah, you're, you're doin' great," he encouraged as he felt his clit throb beneath his fingers.

Octavius bent over Jedediah, using one hand to support themselves and the other to grasp one of Jedediah's breasts.

"You're so beautiful, *carissime*, ah," they shuddered.

Sweet and gentle, the two kissed, tongues clashing for an instant before Jedediah pulled away.

"Octavius...! I, I'm—!" was all Jedediah managed to say before orgasm rippled through him. Octavius watched their lover's face contort in bliss. His legs twitched, his breathing shook, his vagina contracted and released around Octavius's cock. Octavius kept up their rhythm as Jedediah finished.

"Who allowed you to look that cute when you cum, Jedediah?" They asked half-joking.

Jedediah only laughed a little, and moved his hand away from his clit, letting both arms rest around their shoulders.

"Shaddup and breed me already," he said with a smile.

Octavius used the moment between that demand and the climax to kiss Jedediah's neck. With a throb and a shuddering moan, Octavius came, thrusting deep, nearly against their lover's cervix. Jedediah bit Octavius's shoulder, not too deep to break the skin, as he felt their cock twitch inside him. Their seed was warm and sticky, and it pleased some primal part of Jedediah to have this kind of sex. Raw, unprotected, warm and gentle, with his most trusted partner. Octavius pulled out from Jedediah's cunt, now flaccid and spent. They laid next to their lover, holding him in their arms.

"Are you all right, *carissime*?"

Jed nodded as he held his partner back. "I'm wonderful." He gave Octavius a gentle kiss on their cheek. "We'll keep doin' that 'til I know I'm pregnant."

Octavius blushed again. "I doubt I'll have that much energy, honestly."

"...thank you."

"Hm?"

"Fer doin' this with me. All of this."

Jedediah held them close. His breasts pressed against their ribs as he let his head rest on their chest.

"Fifty years. Most of it spent fightin'. Now we're tryin' for a baby."

"If you'd said that to me thirty years ago, I'd have called you insane."

"Same here, sugar." Jedediah could hear their heartbeat return to a normal pace.

Gently, they placed a kiss on Jedediah's head, just between those red locks.

"I love you."

Jedediah gave one back, just to the chin.

"I love you too."

The comfortable silence returned, at least for a while.

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## Act Two

The moon was full when Jedediah started to feel sick. He couldn't stand straight, his legs trembling as his gut lurched. The moment his muscles turned from plastic to flesh, he stumbled his way towards a bush to vomit.

"Oh, shit, Jed, you good?" Javier made his way over to pat him on the back. "You look like hell."

Jedediah spat a hunk of acid out to speak. "Yeah, I'm fine. Just... just need a glass of water."

*Did it work? Is this really happening? Am I...?*

In the saloon, Jedediah sipped his water slowly, trying not to make anything else come up.

"It's been a week, Jed, and you haven't been getting any better," Javier said. "I think you should see Sarah."

Jedediah only nodded. "Yeah. That's probably the best idea."

Javier rubbed his jaw as he picked up the glass. He was a kind enough soul, full of love and light, but people instinctively kept a distance from him. The radiation that killed him still had its grip on his body. Bring him too close to the tablet, or any shenanigans its magic got up to, and his teeth would crackle like a geiger counter. Made him very useful when things got weird.

"Just let me know when you're ready."

After their waters were empty, Jedediah found two soldiers from next door out front. One hiding behind the other.

"Trajan? Septimius?"

Septimius waved to Javier. He was the taller of the two, his long locs tied by a white ribbon that matched the tunic beneath his armor. "*Salve*, Javier. We're here on a wellness check-up."

Trajan peeked out from behind Septimius. His red hair was tied with a black headband that matched his tunic. When he spoke, his Welsh accent still cloaked his words, whether Latin or English. "Octavius sent us. They would have come themselves, but the senate preoccupies them."

"What's with the hidin'?" Jedediah asked, putting his free hand on his hip.

Trajan caught the eye of the woman behind the bar for a brief moment. He saw that malicious glint in her gaze and ducked back behind his fellow munifex. "The barkeep promised my jugular on a platter if I stepped foot in her bar again."

Septimius nodded. "We don't even know what that is."

Jedediah snorted, covering up a laugh. "What did you do to piss her off?"

Septimius pointed at the other end of the porch, which had beautiful new woodwork and a fresh coat of paint. "He blew off half the deck with our flying machine."

"You mean that bottle rocket you nabbed from the New Year's pile?"

"The very same! He was the one that brought it to demonstrate it. I was off running an errand for *Imperator*, so I was spared her wrath."

Jedediah shook his head. "Octavius ain't your general anymore, you two. You can just call 'em their name."

Trajan piped up again, "They are the one who trained us! Militant or no, they are highly important to us!"

Septimius cleared his throat. "In any case. Jedediah. Has your health improved as of late? Are you still suffering your illness?"

Jedediah nodded. "Yep. Hacked up my guts again this mornin'. Javier's takin' me to see Sarah, see if she can't figure out what's wrong with me."

"Allow us to assist!" The two soldiers lifted the cowboy from the deck, placing him atop Septimius's shoulders.

"Woahshit! Hey!" Jedediah tried to keep his balance atop the munifex.

"We shall take you to her posthaste! Come along, Javier!" Septimius called as he began to run to the doctor's office where Sarah worked. Javier wasn't far behind, arms tucked beneath his poncho.

Trajan would have been right behind them, but froze.

He had passed the threshold.

Turning slowly, he noticed the bartender's gaze affixed on his neck.

With a childish squeal of pure terror, he skittered off after the three of them as a shot glass crashed on the pillar closest to his head.

"Hm." Sarah hummed as she examined Jedediah. "Doesn't seem to be any infection or anything like that."

In the office, the group was set as such. Trajan, Javier, and Septimius sat in chairs near the door. Sarah had Jedediah sitting on a table, taking his vitals. Qiu was using the old phone they kept in the office to look up symptoms like a giant screen from a sci-fi movie.

"Vomiting and nausea, that could be anything," she mused. "Anything in particular happen lately, Jed? Eat anything weird, or touch anything unusual?"

The gears turned in his mind. He felt a dread in the pit of his stomach.

*Oh. Oh, I think I know what this is.*

"Jed?"

"Huh? Oh. No. But..."

The group turned to him.

"...I think it's morning sickness."

Silence.

No one really reacted.

"Octavius and I, we've been. Well. We've been trying for a baby," Jedediah admitted, his face red as he spoke. "I didn't know if it'd take, 'cause we're plastic n' all, but... I wanted to try."

Javier raised a brow. "Is there a way to check?" He uncrossed his legs, only to recross them with the other leg on top. "Can't exactly get a pregnancy test this small."

"I shall get us some wheat and barley seeds at once," Trajan offered. "That is how we shall know!"

"I am *not* pissin' on some grains to find out if I'm carryin'," Jedediah stated.

"Guys," Sarah spoke. "Let me do my job."

The men at the door shut up.

"Jed, honey, when was your last period?" She asked as she held up the end of her stethoscope to his chest.

He flinched as the cold metal touched his skin. "I ain't had one of those for a long time, Doc. Testosterone's made 'em stop, for the most part."

She nodded. Her brow furrowed for a moment as she adjusted the bell's position, to rest on his belly. The room was silent, save for the breathing of those in the room. After a moment, and one last movement, her brow rose and her pupils narrowed.

"Oh, my god."

She looked up at Jedediah.

"There's a heartbeat. One that's different than yours."

Jedediah did not respond. No one did.

Tears dripped onto Jedediah's jeans.

"You, you ain't lyin' to me, are you? You really...?"

Sarah nodded, taking the bell off his bare skin.

"I know what I heard. You've got a young'n. My estimate's about eight weeks."

He met her gaze, tears still in his eyes, and hugged her. "We did it. I can't believe we did it."

Sarah shot a gaze at her wife as she patted Jedediah on the back. "Easy, tiger."

Septimius shot up from his seat. "Trajan, come at once! We must inform Octavius of this news!"

Trajan followed suit, rushing out the door with the other munifex to tell Octavius of the good news.

Javier got up, and approached Jedediah. "I didn't think this'd happen, honestly." He rubbed his jaw again. "But it makes sense as to why my teeth have been hurtin'. You got an *awéé'* on the way." Javier gave Jedediah a pat on the back.

"*Ná bąą hózhó.*"

Jedediah didn't speak a lick of Dine, but he got the gist. He hugged Javier as well.

"Hope you don't mind bein' Uncle Javier, kemosabe," he said with a grin as he let his friend go.

Octavius let out a rattling sigh as they left the senate. Of all the new responsibilities they held as Hadrian's veterans advisor, being present at the senate meetings was the most dull. Just a room of men arguing about things they don't care to understand.

"*Imperator!*"

"*Imperator Octavius!*"

Two voices called to them from the cobblestone streets. Septimius and Trajan came to a stop just before the steps.

"Oh, you two. What went wrong this time?" They asked lovingly. Their antics were a source of welcome entertainment.

"It is Jedediah! We have found, found the source of his ailment!" Trajan said between breaths.

Octavius's pupils narrowed.

"Is he well? Am I needed?"

Septimius shook his head as Trajan caught his breath. "He is not ill, *Imperator!* He is with child!"

That sentence rocked Octavius to their foundation.

*We did it? We actually did it?*

"Take me to him."

Octavius wept tears of joy as they twirled with Jedediah in their arms, held off the ground.

"Venus has blessed us, Jedediah!" They called to the sky as they held him close.

"Easy there, hoss, I'm the one with the baby here!" Jedediah laughed in their lover's embrace.

"Oh, we will need to think of a name, and construct a nursery, and we shall shower them with all the love our gods can give!"

The group stood around the two, watching them bask in the joy.

"I had some of our boys on the railroad bring the car around. Guess we should tell ol' Nick and the rest of 'em, right?" Qiu spoke up.

The two lovers nodded. "They must know!" Octavius proclaimed as they set Jedediah back on his feet.

"You're WHAT?!" Nick said with shock in his voice.

"Yep! We're addin' another cowboy! Don't gotta order one this time," Jedediah said with pride in his voice.

"How is this possible?" Ahkmenrah asked the two miniatures. "I did not think the tablet had this power to create new life."

"We didn't think so either! But we wanted to try regardless," Octavius replied, "and we have succeeded! Rome shall expand yet again!"

"My congratulations, to the both of you." Teddy held out a finger to shake, which Octavius took. "The next few months will likely be very difficult, for all of us. If there is anything we may do to ease your worries while carrying this child, do not hesitate to let us know."

"My appreciation, Sir Roosevelt."

Nick held his head in his hands.

"Is something wrong, lad?"

Nick dragged his hands down his face, his lower eyelids dragging with them before snapping back into place. "We're gonna have a mini Jed running around in a few months. One was enough!" he complained in a tone that wasn't meant to be taken seriously.

The group laughed at Nick's mock despair.

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The full moon passed twice more.

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"That's it, pet, just like that."

Jedediah helped his lover move up and down on his strap. The toy he'd chosen today had a particular curve, one he knew would massage Octavius's prostate the way they liked. From the noises they were making, he'd chosen correctly. The softest moans escaped their throat, gentle and soft as they slid up and down the silicone cock.

"Jedediah, *domine*, ah, *mentula sentit bonum*, ahh," they moaned as they rode their cowboy.

"That's right, pet, just keep riding. You don't need to think, you just need to ride."

Octavius kept up their work, hands clasping Jedediah's to keep their balance. His hands were so calloused, despite the gloves. They weren't on now, of course, both lovers only sporting their naked forms. Jedediah's body had begun to change with the pregnancy, now sporting a visible bump in his center, around four months along. Octavius had taken to shaving more often, their skin smooth and carefully groomed. Still, on occasion, Jedediah could find spots unshaven and growing. He didn't care how much hair his lover had, he cared that they were happy. And they seemed very happy riding his cock like a professional.

"*Do-, domine!! Te, te amo, veni-, venio-!!*"

Octavius's back arched as they came. Their legs let the toy bottom out in them, compressing their prostate as the orgasm crashed through their muscles. The strings of seed leaked from their sex onto Jedediah, their hands shivered in his. Their breathing shuddered with the orgasm as it came to a close. One last rope of semen shot from their cock, connecting the skin of the two lovers for a moment, before it collapsed.

Jedediah let out the softest laugh.

"Look at you, pet, you've made a mess."

He gently put a hand on Octavius's cheek, stroking their cheekbone with his thumb.

"*Ig-, ignosce me, domine*," they begged, panting.

"I will, pet, if you clean up."

With a nod, Octavius rose off Jedediah's strap. He took a moment to unhook the harness, letting it fall off the bed to the floor. He'd clean his toy later. For now, his pet had a job to finish. Carefully, they knelt to affix themselves between his legs, licking up their seed from his underbelly. Of course, they began to move downwards. Slowly, gently, they maneuvered their mouth to a spot just above his clit. Jedediah grasped Octavius's hair with one hand, the other grasping his own.

"Good pet, you did so well. You may have your reward."

With a smile, Octavius began to run their tongue inside the folds of Jedediah's vulva. It was his turn to moan, his toes curling as he wrapped his legs around Octavius.

"Ohh... good pet, that's so good, ahh..."

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The full moon passed twice more.

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The route into Javier's tent always weirded Jedediah out. The scissor blades, broken glass, and toothpicks jammed into the soil of his yard in random directions, the reflections of passers-by moving in all sorts of ways, constantly making one turn their head... it almost hurt to be in the space. Javier wanted it that way. He didn't like to be disturbed when off the clock. His

tent was a shade of green that made Octavius feel sick to their stomach. An old gray cat sat perched on one of the shards closer to the entrance. It let out a rattling meow as they approached. "Well, hello to you too, Geiger," Jedediah snarked at the old cat, Octavius giving the beast a gentle scritching under the chin. Another old meow came from Geiger as he let the former general pet him.

Javier poked his head out of the entrance flap as he heard them approach.

"Hey, guys! C'mon, we're just starting," he called as he held the flap open for them.

Jedediah had to duck down a bit to get into the tent, which proved difficult with his center of gravity thrown off. Octavius helped him keep his balance as they entered. Six months had passed, and six months were showing. He didn't care to bind anymore, not when the little one was pressing his lungs into half their capacity. He'd started growing facial hair, finally, so at least that comfort was still there.

A small gathering was sat in Javier's tent. Javier himself was set on a hacky sack near the door. Qiu and Sarah were side by side in small chairs. Septimius and Trajan were on the floor, rummaging through a small pile of boxes and bags next to Javier's loom.

"Is this an intervention?" Jedediah joked, his tone showing that he obviously knew what this was.

Qiu giggled and looked at her wife.

"No, silly. It's a baby shower," Sarah joked back. She was one of few with a wit sharper than him.

"I'm afraid I'm not familiar with this custom," Octavius confessed as they sat in one of the free chairs. Jedediah sat in a chair opposite the entrance, the one that had his name on a little card set in the seat. It was Javier's recliner, in fact.

Jedediah turned back to Javier, his eyes watering. "You ain't gonna sit in your chair?"

Javier shrugged. "You're the one with the baby. You need the cushioning."

Jedediah sobbed with a big smile on his face. Octavius placed a hand on his shoulder. "Love? Are you all right?" They asked as they helped him sit down. Jedediah nodded. "Yeah, I'm, I'm good, I'm just grateful, is all," he blubbered out between the tears. Sarah shook her head. "I thought the testosterone surgically removed all your capacity for crying," she snarked at him, "but this pregnancy brought it right back." Jedediah laughed as he wiped the tears from his eyes. "Aw, shut it," he said without malice.

"So, this baby shower, what is the purpose of this custom?" Octavius asked, moving their chair next to Jedediah.

Septimius poked his head out from behind the pile of gifts. "We give stuff to you and Jed, *Imperator!* To help with the baby!"

Trajan held one of the boxes in two hands. "Thing is, we're the only ones that know about this! Everyone else wasn't invited."

"Trajan!" Javier hissed. "I don't need you spillin' my dirty laundry!"

"But your hamper's over there."

Qiu snapped her fingers to make the two men stop their argument before it spun out of control. "He's right, though. We didn't want half of Rome showing up. It'd stress you out," she said to Jedediah, "and you deserve as little stress as possible."

Octavius met Jedediah's gaze, for a moment.



"Rome didn't have a ceremony like this, held before the baby was born," Octavius spoke, holding Jedediah's hand in their own. "The *dies lustricus* was the closest thing we had, but that was at least a week after-,"

They were interrupted by the two munifexes jumping in from either side.

"Can we host one?!"

"This child is a Roman, they deserve a proper-!!"

"Boys!" Sarah's voice rang above their excitement. "Back up from the new parents, you're gonna give 'em a heart attack!"

Septimius and Trajan slinked back into their chairs, opposite Qiu and Sarah.

"So," Jedediah said with a clap of his hands, "who's goin' first?"

Qiu raised her hand. "I'll take that honor."

She got up from her seat, and distributed the gifts to those who brought them. She'd brought two, one in each hand. "One for the papa, one for the parent." She said with a smile, giving one box to each of the couple.

Jedediah ripped the blue wrapping off his gift, and lifted the lid from the box. Inside was a small onesie, bright blue like his shirt. It was simple, not having anything special about it, save for the shining gold thread used to sew the seams.

"Oh, wow, this is so pretty..." Jedediah ran his fingers over the stitching.

"I made that one with some fabric Javier gave me. Should be perfect for the little one."

Octavius did the same with their own box, revealing its contents to be an infant-sized red tunic, much like their own. The same gold thread was used to stitch the piece together.

"Cochineal dye. Can't get that red anywhere else but the States."

"Qiu, this is... this is wonderful."

"Well, can't exactly have the baby wearin' nothing, now, can we? So I threw those together."

Carefully, the gifts were placed to the side.

"My turn, you two." Sarah placed her gift in front of them. It was the largest by far. Both members of the couple tore the paper off the gift, revealing a leather bag. Jedediah unzipped it, revealing its contents to be a more practical gift for a baby shower - diapers, bottles, formula, and the like. Things a parent needs, things that are always a safe bet.

"Oh, these are going to come in handy," Jedediah said as he held up one of the bottles.

"Well, they should! Made 'em myself in the train's engine."

Octavius's brow rose. "You blow glass?"

Sarah nodded. "Learned how a few years back. Burnt the shit outta my hands a few times, but Mama didn't raise a quitter," she said with a slap to her elbow. "Those'll be useful for years to come."

Javier raised his hand. "Guess I'll go next." He handed the couple a small bag. "Made this for ya." Octavius took the gift this time.

Carefully, they reached in to reveal a small blanket. It was a bright red, with the Two Grey Hills pattern woven in blue and gold in the center. The material was soft to the touch, but felt sturdy.

"You made this?" Octavius asked, running their fingers along the design.

"Yeah. Knew the little guy was gonna need a blanket, so I whipped that up real quick. Took me the better part of five weeks." Javier spoke from his bean bag, petting Geiger with one hand and scritching Sandia under her chin with the other.

Octavius handed the blanket to Jedediah, letting him feel the soft fabric. "Wow, Javier... it's perfect for the baby. It's so soft." Jedediah folded it up and placed it back into its bag. "You're real sweet, kemosabe. Thank you."

A soft blush came to Javier's cheeks. "Shucks," he said, looking off to the side with a smile.

"Ooh, me, me next!!" Septimius hopped in his seat, holding a small box. Jedediah shook his head with a smile. "Always the excitable one, ain'tcha, Sep?" He asked as he carefully took the box from Septimius's outstretched hands. It felt much heavier than it looked, at least twenty pounds. "Jeez, Sep, did'ya already bronze some baby shoes?" Jedediah joked. "Well, there's some bronze involved!" The soldier joked back. The small thing wasn't wrapped properly, and its bow was askew. Carefully, Jed undid the wrappings, revealing a small metal device. It had no other details, save for a large button at the center.

"What is this, Septimius?"

The munifex scooted back a bit. "Press the button," he said with a giddy smile.

Octavius and Jedediah looked at each other for a moment, worry in their eyes. Hesitantly, Jedediah pressed the button. Nothing happened.

"Now just set it on the ground!" Septimius instructed.

Jedediah couldn't bend over, so Octavius did the honors. The moment the device's underside rested on the floor, a whirring came from the box. It began to unfold itself, rising off the ground on four metal legs. Bars lined the sides of the forming creation. After about ten seconds, the movement ceased. Septimius rose from his chair to present his gift with some panache.

"The instant cradle! No assembly required!" He announced, wiggling his hands as though a performance was over. Indeed, a bronze cradle rested in the center of the gathering, complete with an engraved design on the headboard - a laurel, wrapped in rope. In the center, written in Latin and English, was the phrase "Bene dormias/Sweet dreams", separated by a small infinity symbol, half of it laurel and the other half a lasso.

"What!! You built that without me?!" Trajan asked with stars in his eyes.

"Well, most of it was already prototyped with our instant catapult. I just took out the launching bits and kept the self-assembly part!" Septimius stood proud as he explained to his fellow munifex.

"Septimius, this is... this is beautiful." Jedediah laid his hand on the edge, pulling the cradle closer. "You made this all yourself?"

Septimius looked back to Jed with a smile on his face. "Of course I did! Hardest part was the engraving, actually. Took me a few tries to get it right, I'm not too good with the artistry part of things, but I know I'm good with- OKAY."

Septimius was interrupted when Jedediah hugged him.

"It's wonderful. Thank you." The cowboy sobbed into Septimius's shoulder.

Septimius gave him a pat on the back. "And if you want to put it away, all you gotta do is press the button again," he said, reaching under the cradle to press the button beneath the

headboard. With another round of whirring and clanking, the cradle folded itself back into a small, heavy box with a button on top.

The group's gaze drifted to Trajan.

"Well, how am I supposed to follow that up?!" He whined. Flustered, he held out his own small box.

Jedediah took it, and removed the lid. Inside was a small collection of pacifiers, at least five.

"Oh, these are so practical!" Jedediah commented, picking up one of the pacifiers.

"Made 'em myself. Rubber's tough enough that the little one won't eat through it when they start teething."

Octavius took the box from Jedediah. They looked at the designs on the end, forged from bronze. In each one, there was a different design. One held a hat that resembled Jedediah's. The next, a galea reminiscent of Octavius's former armor. The one Jedediah held, a lasso and two pistols. Another, a pair of swords. The one at the center was the most intricate, depicting the story emblazoned on the bulla, a charm given to children to give them good luck into adulthood.

"Trajan, these designs, they're so intricate. How did you manage them?"

Trajan blushed a little, looking at the ground. "I used a pin to make the markings in the molten metal."

Octavius was the one to hug the soldier. "Thank you, Trajan. These will be useful in the coming months."

Trajan hugged his former general back. "You are welcome, *Imperator*."

Jedediah gave his thanks once more, making sure everyone got a hug. Usually so averse to touch, he cast it aside for a moment to make sure his friends knew the depth of his appreciation. Even Javier wasn't spared a good squeeze.

"I'm so grateful for this, y'all. Thank you so much."

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### Act Three

"Ngh..."

Jed groaned in pain as he changed back into his living form. The diorama rearrangement had put him with his back to the museum viewing window, set at a table on the porch of the saloon. Good thing too - the bump in his center was at its apex, a week overdue, and that would be difficult to explain to any patrons that noticed. Javier shuddered to life in the seat next to him, and immediately grabbed his jaw.

"Shit!" he hissed as he tried to massage his crackling teeth.

"What? Is somethin' goin' on?" Jedediah asked.

Javier tried to look at him, but the crackling intensified as he did and his eyes had to close.

"It's you. Magic's acting up."

Jedediah laid a hand on the bump in his center. "Then it's time."

Javier nodded, and managed to get far enough from Jedediah to take a deep breath. He looked back to his friend, and nodded.

"I'll let the doc know."

Jedediah hissed as another contraction snaked its way through his abdomen. "Fuck..." he groaned under his breath.

"We've got you, honey. You're gonna be okay," Sarah comforted as she led him into a tent outside the doctor's office.

Inside there was a bed, a tarp on the floor, a curtain, a sink, and a table that sported a cabinet beneath with surgical equipment resting atop. Qiu was inside, holding a medical gown in her hands.

"Get outta your clothes, honey, we don't have much time," Sarah said as she took Jed's hat and hung it on a hook near the entrance.

As she did, a certain munifex poked his head into the tent.

"Pardon me, I haven't seen this tent before-" he was interrupted with another hiss from Jedediah. His legs strained to keep him up as he tried to undo his shirt.

"Oh. Oh, by Jupiter. Is it...?" Septimius asked, looking to Qiu, who only nodded as she helped Jedediah keep his balance.

Sarah pointed a finger at Septimius, who, seemingly on instinct, stood at attention.

"Septimius, you've got the fastest legs in Rome. You need to tell Octavius what's going on."

Septimius nodded. "They're in a meeting right now, what should I...?"

"Interrupt them! This is far more important!"

With another silent nod, Septimius took off, his footsteps fading into the distance. Sarah turned back to Jedediah, who Qiu had helped get into a gown. "Why do I gotta wear this?" He asked as Qiu sat him down on the bed. "Keeps you decent until it's time." She handed him a glass of water. "And keeps the water from gettin' on your jeans when it breaks."

Trajan peeked his head through the tent's front flap.

"I heard from Septimius. Do you need any help?" He was uncharacteristically serious, for once. Qiu smiled, and left Jedediah on the bed with a nod.

"Trajan, I need you to take this," she reached into a cabinet near the entrance and pulled out a small tub, "and fill it with boiled water. Not *boiling*, *boiled*. It needs to be sterile. There's a stove in the saloon. Tell the bartender that it's time."

Trajan took the tub and nodded. "I'll be back as quick as I can."

Qiu smiled as he left, and turned back to the one in labor. Jedediah was beginning to hyperventilate, his hands shaking.

"Hey, hey, look at me. Look at me," Sarah said with the gentlest voice. "You're gonna be okay."

"I, I want, I want Octavius, I need 'em, I need 'em here with me," Jedediah trembled.

"And they will be. Septimius is getting them right now."

Javier was running towards the end of the West. He gave a particular whistle when he reached the railroad.

"Everyone, it's time! Jed needs us! Where's the car?!"

Trajan was running as fast as he could to the saloon. He burst through the doors and faced the one behind the bar, who was already preparing to shatter a bottle and gut him.

"You've got a lot of goddamn nerve stepping foot in here."

Trajan took a moment to catch his breath. "Qiu, Qiu sent me here, for, for water."  
Her brow furrowed.

"Jed's hav-, having the baby," Trajan continued as he placed the tub on the bar.  
Her heart dropped into her stomach when she saw the munifex's serious gaze.  
"Oh, shit," she said from her position behind the bar.

Septimius burst through the doors of the senate meeting hall, out of breath. The senators turned to face him. One of them raised his voice, "How dare you interrupt this meeting, *munifex*! Explain yourself at once!" Septimius held up his index finger as he caught his breath at last. He looked at Octavius, their gazes meeting.

Without missing a beat, they understood, but Septimius said it anyway.  
"Jed's having the baby."

The RC hummer screeched to a halt before the front desk. "Jedediah? What brings you here so-?" Nick was interrupted by Javier sticking his upper body out the driver's side window.

"Nick! It's about Jed, it's time!"

Nick's brow furrowed. "Time? Time for-...?" He stopped himself mid-sentence. "Oh. Oh, shit!" Nick looked around the area. "Showtime, people! Baby's comin'!!" he called in the mostly empty halls. He picked up the RC hummer, with Javier inside, and ran down to the diorama hall.

Septimius ran, leading Octavius to the West. Octavius was suddenly grateful that they didn't have to wear armor anymore, as they remembered how hot it got underneath that armor, particularly during running.

"You know, Septimius, I'm glad you got me out of there!" They called.

Septimius turned back for a moment, showing that he'd heard them.

"I can't stand those damned senators! I'd have taken any excuse to leave!"

Septimius laughed for a moment. "You can't use this excuse again, *Imperator*!"

"I'm not in the army anymore, Septimius, you know this!"

"General or no, you were the one that trained me! I am loyal to you before any others!"

"Yes, to me, and the mother of invention!"

"Sweet necessity!" The two laughed as they kept running, the cobblestones of Rome giving way to the dusty sands of the West.

Octavius entered the birthing tent, out of breath.

"Jedediah! I'm here!" They called between deep inhales.

Jedediah stood at the edge of the bed in a small pool of amniotic fluid. His face was strewn with tears as blood leaked down his legs. "Tavius..." he whimpered, before a contraction ripped through him with a scream.

Sarah was on her knees beneath him, with a gathering of towels around his feet, catching as much blood as they could.

Qiu was on the other side of the room, sterilizing some tools for later in the birth. Trajan was helping her, sporting a bruise on his cheek. He'd gotten lucky with the barkeep, it seems, and was only smacked in the face with a beer bottle's end.

Octavius approached Jedediah as the contraction came to a close. "I'm here, my love, I'm here."

Jedediah continued to hyperventilate. He hurt so much. So, so much. His legs ached from supporting his body. His head was pounding. His pelvic floor felt like it would burst. And above it all-

"Aaaahh!!" He shrieked as another contraction rippled its way down his center.

...the labor pains might actually rip him apart.

Octavius placed their hands on Jedediah's shoulders. Jedediah did the same to theirs.

"I'm right here. I'm not going anywhere."

Through the tears of pain, Jedediah nodded. "Hurts. Hurts so bad."

He gripped his partner's shoulders as another contraction prepared to rip through him.

"Jed, you have to push, now," Sarah coaxed from below.

With another wail of pain, Jedediah squeezed Octavius's shoulders as he pushed with the next contraction. Tears dripped from his eyes. Every muscle in his body was on fire.

"You're doing great, Jed. Deep breaths."

Octavius led him in the breathing exercises. Deep breath in... hold... deep breath out. Deep breath in... contraction preparing... deep breath out as he pushed again. Jedediah's voice was a hollow rattle as he pushed.

"We're crowning! You're nearly there!"

"Crown, Ocky, wh-, what does that mean?"

"She can see the head. Once you manage the shoulders, she can pull the baby out."

Jedediah's body was still screaming with pain, but his eyes glittered with determination through the tears.

"Time?" Sarah asked Qiu.

"Two minutes, thirty seconds." She said, looking at her pocket watch. "Trajan, get the washcloths ready."

The munifex had a small pile of washcloths next to him, one of which he soaked in a tub of warm water. He nodded at Qiu's command.

"Let's get this over with." Jedediah hissed as his abdominals contracted again.

Another agonizing scream echoed from the birthing tent. Pretty much everyone had come to give their support, big and small. Romans, Mayans, and Westerners surrounded the tent from all sides, their murmurs silenced when they heard Jed's hollering.

"Is he gonna be OK?" Nick asked from the bench. He and Teddy had scooted it closer to the West.

Javier only shrugged. "It's labor, Nick. Anything could happen."

"Breathe, Jedediah. We're almost done." Sarah comforted as she reached her hands upwards to grasp the newborn.

"Ten seconds," Qiu said, preparing the scissors.

"Wh-, what are those for?!" Jedediah asked, knowing he was about to push again.

"The umbilical cord," She said as she sterilized the blades.

"Oh," was all Jedediah managed to say before he pushed again. He felt an excruciating pain, one that he'd never felt before, and locked eyes with Octavius. Tears were forming in their eyes as well, from watching Jedediah in pain.

They finally cascaded down when they heard the crying.

Octavius moved their hands to catch Jedediah as his legs gave out from the pain.

"I've got you, I've got you."

Carefully, Octavius guided Jedediah to the floor, resting his head on their lap. Sarah placed the mewling newborn on Jedediah's chest, still covered in a fine layer of vernix and blood. Reality flashed in bursts of light, but the wailing of the little one stayed constant throughout. Jedediah laid his hand atop the crying newborn.

"Hey, hey, buddy." He managed to say between flashes of the world around him.

And then it all went dark.

Qiu carefully rested the wailing newborn in the warm water. "It's all right, little one. Shh, shh," she coaxed. Gently, she began to scrub the vernix and blood from the baby's skin.

"Where should I cut, Qiu?" Trajan asked, holding the infant's cord as he tied it off.

"Eighteen centimeters from the skin," she instructed as she scrubbed the vernix off the baby's leg.

Trajan cut the cord with a hearty snip, per Qiu's instructions.

The newborn kept up its mewling even as Qiu and Trajan dried their skin and dressed them in a diaper. "There you go, bud," Trajan whispered as he finished drying their head.

Qiu brought the little one over to Jedediah, who'd been laid down in the bed to recover. As gently as she could, she laid them on his bare chest.

Reality faded in as Jedediah heard the scared cries of the little one. Gently, carefully, he put his hand atop their back.

"Hey, hey, it's all right, bud. I'm here," he whispered, tearing up as he did. "I'm here."

In an instant, the wails ceased. The little one's hands were grasped into fists atop Jedediah's chest.

"So? Do we have a boy or a girl?" Octavius asked Sarah.

She was washing her hands of blood in a small sink. "Oh, you didn't hear me announce it?" she asked as she turned off the water. "It's a girl."

The couple looked at one another, tears in their eyes and smiles on their faces.

"We have a girl," Jedediah said as he sobbed the proudest tears he'd ever cried.

"*Hoc est miraculum*," Octavius whispered, giving a kiss to their lover's forehead. "You did such a good job."

Sarah approached the bed, drying her hands with a washcloth. "I'll need to give you a few stitches, Jed, but the bleeding's mild enough that I can give you a few minutes."

Jedediah furrowed his brow and shook his head. "No. I wanna heal properly," he stated. "I don't wanna risk nothin'."

Sarah nodded. "I'll get the nitrous ready."

Jedediah placed the softest kiss on the little one's head. "I'm so happy to meet you, bud," he spoke to the now calmed newborn. "I'm gonna hand you over to your parent, ok?"

Octavius cupped one hand beneath the baby to lift her, the other supporting her neck. She let out a mewl of protest before Octavius placed her on their chest. "Shh, shh, all is well, little one," they whispered to the child.

"Octavius, we'll need you to step out for a while, just during the surgery," Qiu said, her voice soft. "We'll get her weighed and measured," she continued, holding her arms out to take the baby.

Octavius hesitated. "But... but she just got here."

"And she's not going anywhere."

"I don't..."

They felt a hand on their thigh. Jedediah had gently tapped them.

"Ocky. It's only for a few minutes. We'll get to hold her again soon."

Tears still in their eyes, Octavius nodded, and gently handed the little one to Qiu.

"I'll be back soon, my love," Octavius said to Jedediah as they kissed him on the temple.

Jedediah smiled as Sarah placed the mask over his nose and mouth. She nodded to Trajan, who began to administer the nitrous oxide. They couldn't get anesthesia this small, so they had to improvise with a whipped cream container. Trajan had to dangle from it like a set of pull-up bars. Jedediah's eyes closed as he breathed the nitrous oxide.

"That's your cue. We'll call you in soon." Qiu said, leading Octavius outside.

The crowd became silent in an instant as Octavius stepped out of the birthing tent. No one dared to speak. It seemed that everyone had shown up to give their support, from Rome, the Yucatan, and the West; to the mannequins and statues all around the museum, and of course, the loyal night guard.

"Well?" Nick asked, breaking the silence. "What happened?"

Octavius cleared their throat. "Jedediah is currently undergoing surgery to repair some of the tearing. He did wonderfully, and has given us a daughter."

There was silence again, for a moment.

"Ha! Pay up, your highness!" Javier mocked Hadrian from Nick's shoulder, his voice loud in the otherwise silent area.

The emperor rolled his eyes from his position among his guards. "It seems I have lost the bet, men," he said with humor.

There was laughter and cheering at the news. Some of the Westerners were offering cigars to the Romans. Nick was already a crying mess.

It was Septimius that approached Octavius once more, twirling an unlit cigar in his fingers.

"I don't understand the purpose of these things," Septimius commented, "but the Westerners seem to enjoy them."

He pat Octavius on the back.

"Congratulations, *Imperator*."

---

It was around two in the morning when Qiu announced that Jedediah was awake. Octavius carefully entered the birthing tent again. "*Carissime*, it's me," they said as they approached.



"Hey, toga boy," Jedediah said. He was sitting up now, pillows stacked behind him for support, little one asleep on his bare chest.

"Are you well?" They asked, gently cupping his cheek. The stubble felt scratchy on their palm.

"My pussy hurts like hell," he said with a laugh, "and everythin's sore."

"That's birth for ya," Sarah commented from her station. "On that note, no penetration for six weeks on your end, Jedediah. You need to heal."

The two lovers met their gaze again.

"You take as much time as you need, my love. We've got options," Octavius said with a smile.

Jedediah laughed again. "Looks like you're gonna get more familiar with my collection," he teased as he watched Octavius's cheeks fill with blush.

Sarah closed the curtain, hiding the two from the world. In this moment, there was nothing but each other and the life they'd made together. The two lovers held hands in the secluded spot. The little one stirred, a small squeak coming from her.

"Hey there, sunshine," Jedediah said as he pet her little head, "it's Papa."

She reached one of her tiny fists into the air, and slammed it down on Jedediah's chest, as if he were an alarm clock with the snooze button on his sternum. Octavius laughed as she did so, Jedediah with them.

"She's my little fighter, ain't ya, buddy?"

"Then her name should reflect her fighting spirit."

"Yeah... anything in mind?"

"...Camilla."

Jedediah looked up at Octavius.

"She was a warrior, more powerful than any of her people. She could run across the sea without breaching the water's surface."

Octavius spoke with their hands, making grand motions as though orating for an audience of thousands.

"...At least, that's what Virgil said."

Jedediah gave her a gentle petting on her head. "You like the sound of that, sunshine? Camilla?"

She curled up a little tighter.

"She ain't protestin' it," he laughed. "Now, for her middle name..."

"Something that would sound nice. We'll... we'll need time to think."

Octavius put their hand on their chin.

"...Ocky, what was that ceremony you mentioned at the baby shower?"

They looked back to him.

"The *dies* whatever?"

"The *dies lustricus*. It's a naming ceremony, and she'll officially become part of our family, in Roman terms. Even if I gave her the proper *tollere liberium*, she isn't part of our household in Roman eyes."

"Good thing I had her here in the West," Jedediah said, turning his gaze back to his daughter. "Only qualification for bein' my baby is the fact that we made her."

Octavius held Jedediah's calloused hand, their other palm resting atop Camilla's sleeping form.

"*Salve*, Camilla. I'm so happy you're here," Octavius said as they began to cry.

---

It had been around two months since the day Camilla came to the world. Jedediah needed time to heal, and both needed time to adjust to new parenthood. Septimius and Trajan had stopped by eight days after she was born to perform the *dies lustricus*, and the Western community stepped up to help, bringing food and supplies for the new family. It wasn't a feast, but it'd do. The little one was given her full name - Camilla Jane Smith. She was named for her fighting spirit in both worlds, one for a legendary warrior, the other for the frontierswoman of many a tall tale, Calamity Jane.

She was a happy child, her laughter echoing through the lobby as Jedediah brought her out of the back of the hummer.

"So that's our new addition?" Nick whispered so as to not hurt her ears.

"Yep, this is our Camilla."

"She's got the eyes of a fighter, lad," Teddy commented as she tried to reach up for him. Her little hands were still clenched.

"The spirit of one as well," Octavius laughed. "We have taken many a strike from her small fists."

"When she is a bit older, I must catch her up on my shows!" Ahkmenrah said with a smile. "She will appreciate the regality of the Kardashians, unlike some people," he said with a side-eye to Nick.

"Oh, shut it, Ahk, you can't even play Smash properly," Nick snarked back. There was no malice in either of their voices.

Octavius and Jedediah looked at each other again.

"Sounds like she's got adventures to go on," Octavius said with a smile.

"Someday, Ocky, someday," Jedediah replied.