

# Weird Tales

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# A CERTAIN SOLDIER



**I** MET Lee Clayton in Rome. The attraction was a mutual one, for we discovered that we had much in common; both students of history, fond of travel, and possessing an insatiable thirst for the uncovering of forgotten and apparently insignificant historical data that might throw light upon questions of dispute.

At the end of three weeks we had covered the city of the seven hills from the Flaminian to the Appian Way, reveling especially in those relics that gave us any knowledge of the dead past. Dead? Can the past ever really die? I believed, and

I think my friend Clayton agreed with me, that the past lives today. It is immortal, but in its changed form it is manifest in influence and posterity. These two in a stream of continuity render the antiquity of Rome a vital fact in the Twentieth Century A. D.

One warm evening Clayton and I returned to the hotel veranda after an interesting day among the ruins of the Roman Forum. To our ears came the characteristic sounds of Italian life; a snatch of song in melodious tenor, a sharp staccato exclamation, the rumble of cab wheels over cobblestones, and the occasional

bleating of goats whose milk supplied the native quarter. To our right the yellow thread of the Tiber was faintly visible.

Clayton smiled understandingly and waved a hand toward the streets below as he sank luxuriously into a comfortable chair.

"Great thing for a rest, Ebson," he remarked. "It's a change from the hurry and bustle of the average American city. I like it."

"Yes," I agreed, "and a change always means rest. Although we are both young we've been living strenuously in a modern business world, and can't help appreciating the contrast."

We sat for some time in silence, the while I noticed Clayton's features displaying a growing pensive mood. His former joviality was disappearing. I made no attempt to encourage conversation, for I felt that it would come when the time was ripe.

"Friend Ebson," said Lee Clayton at length, dropping his listless mien and leaning toward me, "for many years the repetition of a certain dream has troubled me. The vision first appeared when I was in high school and followed me throughout my entire college career, its vividness increasing with the passing of the years. It pertains to the solution of the mystery surrounding the ambiguous expression in the Greek, Latin and Jewish scripts where the incendiary of the temple of Jerusalem is invariably referred to as 'a certain soldier'. In my constantly recurring dream I seem continually on the verge of discovering the identity of this 'certain soldier', but always I awake just before solving the mystery. My trip upon this occasion to the Eternal City is to find out, if possible, who threw the flaming torch into the temple at Jerusalem when the legions of Titus took the city of the Jews. If it is ever

possible to bring my haunting dream to a consummation it should be here amid the relics of its original enactment."

I must have gazed at him incredulously, for he continued hastily. "In all sincerity I mean what I say, my friend. Either here or in Jerusalem I should be able to ascertain the identity of that 'certain soldier' who threw a lighted torch into a window of the sanctuary. Why, man alive, think of the responsibility of that act!"

Had the heat of a semi-tropic sun or the fatigue of daily sight-seeing affected my friend's mind? I hesitated before voicing a mild rebuke, and in that moment of pause the spirit of adventure, tempered with tolerance for the incomprehensible whims of another, possessed me. My answer must have surprized him.

"There's a quest worthy of some time and effort!" I answered with more enthusiasm than I really felt. "The Forum Romanum has already disclosed to us a few of its secrets, and why not this one? We'll show the world yet that Tacitus and Josephus and a few others of the ancients didn't get exactly the right dope on all this."

My light mood did not affect Clayton. He continued seriously, his eyes showing a dreamy expression.

"You must remember the historians, Josephus and Tacitus, were both contemporaries of Titus—and—and this 'certain soldier'. They had first-hand evidence and certainly ought to have been more explicit in their details. As a matter of fact," he added, "they are more evasive in their narrations of the events connected with the siege of Jerusalem, of which they must have been eye-witnesses, than they are regarding historical occurrences preceding their era."

"Yes, that is strange," I agreed. "How do you account for it?"

## 2

Clayton was about to reply when I noticed that a pallor spread over his features and he leaned forward with eyes intent upon the hotel entrance. Following the direction of his gaze I saw the well-tailored back of a gentleman disappearing through the doorway. I turned with a glance of inquiry to my friend. His manner showed agitation, and I did not press him for the explanation, which I knew would be forthcoming shortly.

"That man," Clayton explained in a husky voice, "is an enemy—and possibly not without reason," he added reflectively. "Two years ago I was fortunate enough to win as my wife the girl whom we both loved. Shortly afterward the company in which we were both financially interested elected me to the presidency, a position to which each of us had aspired. Since that time my dear wife died—but the business concern in which that man and I are mutually interested is prospering. Although my two victories have been won solely by fair means, the man whom you saw disappearing within the doorway has proved a determined enemy whose obsession is to avenge his defeat in love and war."

I was a little disquieted, though I sought to cover my uneasiness with cheery words.

"Never mind, old chap. We are living in the Twentieth Century. No one can stoop to revenge in these days and get away with it. Now if we were living in 70 A. D., for instance, you might have cause for alarm. Life was held pretty cheap at the time Titus laid siege to Jerusalem, and one had to live warily, but things are different now."

He smiled wanly. "Speaking of Titus, let's begin tomorrow to solve the mystery of the 'certain soldier'."

"Agreed!" I replied heartily. "I'm in my element when it comes to finding an explanation for the inexplicable."

SLEEP seemed to have forsaken me completely that night. The full moon shining in at my window caused me to abandon all further thought of rest. I arose, dressed myself and stood gazing out across the silvery landscape. The moonlight softened objects below that in the glare of day stood out in too bold relief.

I stood for some time in a troubled and hesitant mood.

"Why not?" I exclaimed, half aloud.

Once resolved upon my course of action I sought the streets below without eliciting any surprise from the sleepy concierge at the desk. The streets were silent and deserted, the pavement echoing with the ring of my footfall until it seemed to me that all Rome must be apprized of my nocturnal sally. Soon I spied the ancient grandeur of the Colosseum as it rose tier on tier above the stone ruins and cypress trees that nestled in its shadow. I was approaching the familiar territory of the once busy mart of ancient Rome. The Arch of Constantine rose before me, sublime in its architectural beauty. Then I turned fascinated eyes down to the ruins of the Forum, which lie several feet below the level of the present city.

I know it was surprise, though not untinged with fear, that possessed me as I became aware of the presence of another figure not fifty feet ahead of me. It was that of a man, and he was agilely descending the steps to the lower level. I instantly recognized Lee Clayton and watched him with fascinated gaze. What could the man be doing alone among silent ruins in the dead of the night? Then I thought of myself and my own intentions and I nearly laughed aloud. Well, I would not spy on my friend! I quickened my pace with the intention of making my presence

known, when further progress was arrested by the changed demeanor of Lee Clayton.

No longer did he walk as a man alone, but rather as one who wends his way in and out among a crowd. Occasionally he paused and gazed fixedly at some object apparently visible to him, then his head turned as though following the course of something in motion.

The effect was most uncanny, and I pinched myself to make certain I was not asleep. The somnambulist, if he were such, strode with dignity in the direction of the triumphal Arch of Titus, and there he paused. Strange words were wafted to my ears, phrases in an unknown tongue. Unknown? Had I studied Latin for six years not to recognize it when I heard it, even in this fashion? Occasionally Clayton paused, apparently to lay his hand upon the shoulder of an invisible associate. Some of the things he thought he heard were mirth-provoking, and his laughter rang out weirdly shrill in the white silence around us.

"Jumping Jehosaphat!" I exclaimed, wiping my perspiring brow with my handkerchief. "That's a wow of a dream all right!"

He must have heard me, for he looked in my direction and smiled as if in friendly greeting. Tremblingly I smiled back. I racked my brain for one intelligent sentence in Latin.

"'All Gaul is divided into three parts' won't do upon this occasion," I mumbled disconsolately.

The only other words that came to my muddled brain were the Latin version of 'Twinkle, twinkle little star.' I tried them and was greeted with a burst of uproarious laughter from Clayton, the incongruity of which at this time caused me to tremble with fear. He said something about *vinum nimium*, and then turned his attention to the Arch of Titus, talking off and on the while

as if engaged in conversation with many around him.

For an hour the apparent monologue continued while I stood spell-bound. Finally he turned abruptly and proceeded in the direction of the Colosseum. He strode so rapidly that I had difficulty in keeping a desirable distance behind him. I intended to see that he returned without harm to his rooms at the hotel.

At the foot of the flight of steps leading to the level of present-day Rome, Clayton paused and passed a hand across his brow. He gazed about him in apparent bewilderment and proceeded thereafter with the air of a man in solitude.

Thinking that possibly the knowledge of a witness might cause him some embarrassment I did not make my presence manifest, but allowed him to retire to his apartment before entering the hotel myself.

Was the true explanation of Lee Clayton's night expedition in any way connected with the puzzling dream of which he had told me? Sleep claimed me for the few hours that remained until dawn.

## 3

THE following morning found me in bed at a late hour. My vigilance of the previous night had been more fatiguing than I had at the time realized. I lay for some time pondering the enigma of my friend's behavior. Should I feign ignorance of the occurrence in the Forum, or would it be best to inform Lee Clayton of what I knew? Unable to decide the better course to pursue, I dressed and hastened down to breakfast.

Clayton was breakfasting alone in a far corner of the dining salon. As I took the chair opposite him he looked up with a smile of recognition and passed across the table to me an open volume which he had been

perusing, pointing to a paragraph therein.

"Hebrew!" I ejaculated. "I'm sorry, but I don't know a word of it."

"Then here is a rather free translation of it," he replied, "but I regret that you can not read the original. Some of the author's thought is always lost in the process of translation."

I accepted the proffered script and read the following:

"The secret of the identity of a certain soldier who fired the sanctuary of the holy temple of the Jews lies buried in his bosom. An associate, upon threat of exposure, bids him make record of his deed. This he has done, but so obscurely that nearly twenty centuries shall pass before the mystery shall be made clear."

"Well, that's beginning to get close," I commented, returning the paper to Lee. "Who was the old fellow that wrote that?" indicating the volume.

"That is not known," Lee Clayton replied, turning to the title-page. "It seems to be merely a collection of anonymous Hebrew manuscripts published by a German house in the early part of the Sixteenth Century."

"But why all the secrecy?" I asked. "The 'certain soldier' was merely fulfilling destiny when he obeyed an impulse to fire the sanctuary."

Young Lee Clayton shot me a swift, searching glance.

"If you believe so," he said quietly, "I will not gainsay it, but if you want my personal opinion, the 'certain soldier' was, as indeed all of us are, the captain of his own soul. He was entirely responsible for his deed. You know Shakespeare wrote,

"The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our  
stars;  
But in ourselves, that we are underlings."

"What if he did?" I admitted, warming to the argument. "But if

I remember rightly he is also responsible for these words:

"There's a divinity that shapes our ends,  
Rough-hew them how we will."

"How do you reconcile the two?"

Clayton laughed pleasantly. "It seems to be a case of 'pay your money and take your choice,' friend Ebson, and my choice is made and is unchangeable."

"I admire you for your convictions," I said heartily. "I confess my own are not so unshakable."

He smiled a little pensively, then remarked, "And because I believe this 'certain soldier' to have been entirely responsible for his act of desecration, I wish to ascertain his identity. And now I am going to a curio-shop which I chanced upon yesterday. Will you come too?"

I readily consented, and together we wended our way through the busy streets of modern Rome.

NOT far from the Piazza de Spagna, near the end of a short and narrow street lined with native bazaars and stalls, is a curio-shop of one Antonio Salvucci, dealer in antiques. Although the place was far from cleanly and had a very cluttered appearance, it was not wholly lacking in charm. The proprietor appeared from the rear of the shop as we entered and eyed us appraisingly.

"The American gentlemen wish some Roman antiques?" questioned the Italian eagerly.

"Just looking, Mr. Salvucci," replied Clayton, and aside to me: "The museums have most of the genuine antiques, but occasionally one can pick up something good for very little money."

We walked about the little store looking at and inquiring about various objects. Most of the curios were relics of Coptic art that had been found in and about the catacombs

where the early Christians had met secretly to escape persecution. Occasionally an object that dated back to the Republic was seen, but the majority were identified in some way with the period of Rome's downfall when attacked by the tribes from the north.

"Have you any relic of the time of Vespasian or Titus?" asked Clayton, coming at last to the subject that was nearest his heart.

"Titus—Titus," repeated the foreigner as if trying to recall some long-forgotten fact. "Wait, I see."

He vanished through a rear door, but reappeared some minutes later bearing in his arms a miniature restoration of the famous Arch of Titus which had been erected in honor of the Roman conquest of Jerusalem in 70 A. D. This facsimile was two feet at its greatest length, and the other dimensions were proportional.

We were delighted with our find, but feigned indifference. I perceived, though, that it was all Lee could do to keep his hands off it.

"What price do you ask?" I inquired casually.

"Twenty-five dollar," answered the Italian promptly.

"Nothing doing," I replied, turning toward the door, "I'll give you five for it."

"Oh,—but, *signor*, I have four *bambini*. I must make a living," he pleaded with characteristic Italian pathos.

"I'll give you ten," said Clayton somewhat harshly.

The sale was eventually consummated at the sixteen-dollar figure, and we bore our trophy away with exultation.

Back in the hotel and safely ensconced in Lee Clayton's rooms we studied the little arch minutely. It was a very perfect reproduction in Pentelic marble like the original, and showed a faithfulness to detail

that was nothing short of marvelous.

There were the faces in bas-relief of Titus the son of the emperor Vespasian, a number of triumphant Roman warriors, a line of Jews in bondage, and a reproduction of the seven golden candlesticks which had been seized from the Holy of Holies when the temple at Jerusalem was plundered. The chiseling of the faces was unique, each one displaying its characteristic individuality.

"Do you notice," I observed, "that the sculptor has differentiated between the Jews and the Romans? The facial characteristics of each race are quite in evidence."

"Yes—only—hold on a minute, Ebson!" cried Lee in excitement. "He's made one error. Unless I'm very much mistaken he's got a Jew among the victorious Romans!"

"To be sure!" I exclaimed, my excitement equaling his own. "That figure near the middle certainly belongs to the conquered race. But there were Jews who were Roman citizens," I added; "and the chances are they were even more numerous in 70 than in 40 A. D."

"That is very true," Lee answered a little abstractedly, I thought, "but it is very poor taste for the artist to be so realistic in a symbolic creation where comparatively few figures are represented. I think he showed decidedly bad judgment—unless," he added, "the Jew in question was a man of considerable importance."

"That explanation sounds plausible to me," I said. "The torch-bearer is undoubtedly a man of fame whose portrait is indispensable to an accurate depiction of the triumphal entry into Rome."

## 4

NIGHT and a full moon shedding its ethereal light across the eternal city prove a combination irresistible to lovers of beauty and romance.



Lee Clayton and I left the hotel at sundown and wandered on the Roman Campagna amid the venerable quietude of its ilex and cypress trees. The beauty and serenity of the scene were not likely to be soon forgotten. When the moon hung low we returned to the city seeking that part which is rich in historic associations. We saw plashing fountains, old altars, partly demolished statues of ancient origin, picturesque arches and shattered pillars, their outlines softened and half concealed by flowers and vines.

After the moon had disappeared we retraced our steps to the hotel. I had just locked my door preparatory to retiring for the night when I was forcibly impressed with a possible solution to the enigma of the Roman soldier who was a Jew! I unlocked my door, locking it again behind me, and stepped into the hall. There was light in Lee's room and the door was slightly ajar. I rapped lightly but received no response. Upon the center table stood the small replica of the famous arch, and it seemed to me as I gazed ruefully at it that the handsome features of the mysterious Roman Jew regarded me with amusement not untouched with contempt.

I left the room and descended to the first floor.

"Did Mr. Clayton leave the hotel?" I inquired of the desk-clerk.

"He passed this way just a moment ago," the man replied.

My mind was made up. Without a moment's hesitation I left the hotel and stepped into the quiet of a semi-tropic night. For an instant my eyes, unaccustomed to the darkness, saw nothing, but gradually, as objects became faintly visible, I discerned the figure of my friend as I had seen him upon the previous night, striding rapidly toward the site of the Forum of ancient Rome.

But his pace was too rapid for me, and I knew that unless I dashed madly after him, running the risk of arousing suspicion, I could not hope to catch up with him. Instinctively I retraced the route of the night before. In a breathless condition I espied the familiar ruins of the great Colosseum and the arch of the first Christian emperor, Constantine, flanking the mammoth pit of the ancient Forum wherein clustered pillars, like tombstones of a bygone age, gleamed palely.

Fatigued to the point of exhaustion I seated myself on a boulder and mopped my perspiring brow. The night seemed to be growing warmer—and a faint glow of suffused light pervaded the landscape.

"But the moon set an hour ago," I murmured in bewilderment.

Then I stared with gaping mouth and bulging eyes. The Arch of Constantine was growing hazy and transparent while I gazed. I turned to the Colosseum and saw that the familiar sloping sides where Time had put its stamp of demolition were fast fading away and in their stead the outline of the vast arena became more distinct in its pristine splendor.

"Merciful heaven—am I going mad?" I exclaimed, passing a hand across my eyes in perplexity.

When I looked again for the Arch of Constantine, it was gone! Something seemed to snap in my brain, and then—

## 5

"BY THE Gods, Pliny, you are missing the fun. Our new emperor, Titus, is marching with the legions through the triumphal arch which is just completed. His route is through the Forum, as it was nine years ago upon his return from Jerusalem while his father, Vespasian, yet wore the purple."

I looked up from the rock upon which I was seated to see a familiar face regarding me affectionately.

"I shouldn't want to miss that, Quintilian," I replied in the fluent Latin in which he had addressed me.

I cast a hurried glance at my attire, thinking how incongruous a figure I must appear in a suit of the Twentieth Century. But my alarm was short-lived, for I perceived that a spotless toga draped my body in graceful folds.

My companion plucked my sleeve, and I arose and turned toward the Forum.

"See," exclaimed Quintilian, "the soldiers are already passing the Temple of Vesta. Hurry!"

Stretching before me beneath an azure sky lay the busy Roman market-place of the First Century, its pure marble fanes and statues reflecting the brilliance of a mid-afternoon sun. Throngs of white-robed people intermingled with young men in military accouterments who were scattered singly and in groups about the great mart.

My sensation was a most peculiar one. While I recognized my identity as Paul Ebson, of Cleveland, Ohio, at the same time I was cognizant that as I stood here with my good friend Quintilian, the famous rhetorician, I was Pliny the Elder, noted naturalist of Rome.

We forced our way through the crowd and stood before a statue of two figures, symbolic of the conquest of Judea by Rome; as beautiful a piece of statuary as I had ever seen, comparable to the works of the most noted Greek sculptors rather than to this decadent period of Roman art. Alas that the Twentieth Century had never seen even a remnant of this masterpiece of sculptural art!

I was about to comment upon this creation when the cheers of the populace directed my attention to

the approaching procession, at the head of which, mounted upon a richly caparisoned steed, rode young Titus, emperor of Rome. He was followed by a body-guard of stalwart men. Following this came a cohort of Roman soldiers, and immediately behind, long lines of captive Jews, eight abreast, their heads bowed to the yokes of the conquerors. Then followed the legions of Rome, their spears and shields clattering rhythmically as they marched toward the great triumphal Arch of Titus.

A youth of eighteen years came up to my side and greeted me with a friendly salutation. He was my nephew, Pliny the Younger, who shared with me the joys of scientific research.

"Uncle," he cried, his eyes sparkling with excitement, "I wish I had been old enough to have gone with the legions of Titus to Jerusalem like Flavius over there; but see, they have passed through the arch and some of the soldiers are rejoining the rest of us. Look, here comes Tacitus. Isn't he handsome?"

I looked at the stalwart young soldier who was nearing our group. Yes, it was Tacitus, who, though young, was establishing for himself quite a reputation as an historian.

"Tacitus—Tacitus," I repeated under my breath, but I knew that the youthful historian and soldier was Lee Clayton.

Tacitus regarded me with an enigmatical smile.

"Is your ire still aroused, Pliny, that the portrait of my fellow historian appears upon the arch and mine does not?" he asked. Then he added, "You must remember that his years number more than mine and that his reputation in the chosen profession of both of us is already established."

"I know that, my dear Tacitus," I replied, "but I am convinced that

your narratives adhere more strictly to historical facts than do those of your Jewish rival, and what is more, I don't like a man who can take part in the overthrow of his own people."

Tacitus smiled. "I don't believe the possibility of my becoming his professional rival is worrying Josephus so much as the fact that the fair Julia has consented to become my wife. You know he sought her hand after the death of his Jewish wife, Vashti. His failure in love has embittered him. We have been doing a little work jointly in preparing an accurate chronicle of the siege of Jerusalem. I asked him if he knew who threw the lighted torch into the window of the sanctuary of the temple, as I thought the act of sufficient importance to warrant minute detail in narration, but he was evasive upon the subject, finally remarking that the expression 'a certain soldier' was sufficient information to hand down to posterity; that the deed and not the doer was in this case of paramount importance."

"Well, Tacitus," I said, "I admire your love of truth and detail and I will do what I can to assist in procuring for you the identity of this 'certain soldier'."

## 6

OUR little group of four moved slowly toward the Arch of Titus while around us surged the Roman populace. As we walked we were greeted by friends on this side and that. At length we stood facing the great arch through which the legions of Titus had but recently filed. How familiar it looked! And there in the foreground, sculptured among surrounding notables of pure Roman blood, was the face of Josephus with the same expression of mockery.

I tore my attention from the arch to the scene in the Forum. The crowds were thinning as the shadows lengthened. I became aware of another presence, and turning I encountered the ironic gaze of the historian Josephus. I recognized him to be a man of extraordinary intellect. His lofty brow and thoughtful eyes indicated that. Still there was something about the man I did not like and I was forced to confess to myself that the feeling was inexplicable.

"Well met, Pliny," Josephus said in salutation. "I hear you leave on the morrow for Pompeii. Give my regards to Lucius Sulla and tell him that I will myself be in Pompeii by the ides of next month. And here is my fellow historian Tacitus," he continued, smiling upon the younger man with a patronizing air. "How goes the account of the siege?"

"I am still wanting to put a name in the place of 'a certain soldier,'" Tacitus replied. "Future generations will not tolerate ambiguity."

Josephus shrugged his shoulders and pointed with a smile toward the portrait upon the arch. "Quite an honor for an insignificant soldier, don't you think, my friends?"

"I am of the opinion that your part in the siege may not have been as insignificant as you would like to have us believe," I said.

"What do you mean?" Josephus demanded, his brow clouding.

I did not reply at once, for Quintilian was excusing himself to go to his home. Pliny the Younger was off for the new Colosseum, which had been but recently completed.

When they were out of hearing, Josephus repeated his question with glowering mien, then recalling suddenly the presence of Tacitus, controlled his anger with effort. I knew that he would vouchsafe no information in the presence of his rival historian.

I shot a significant glance into the eyes of my dear friend Tacitus, and remarked casually, "By the way, Tacitus, is it not the fair Julia's daily custom to ride in the vicinity of the Colosseum toward sundown in the chariot of her father, Agricola?"

"You have spoken truly, Pliny. I am to meet her at the hour of sundown by the Golden House of Nero," the young man replied.

"I will say farewell, Tacitus," I called after him, "for I may not see you again until my return from Pompeii."

The latter's reference to Julia did not improve the temper of the Jewish historian, who turned to me with a third repetition of his question.

"I will ask you, Josephus," I replied quietly, "why the portrait of 'a certain soldier' who ignites the sanctuary of his own besieged people is not important enough to appear on a triumphal arch. But there is one objection, his name should appear in the written chronicle."

The historian trembled with mingled fear and rage and his voice was thick as he answered, "Do you dare to identify me with that accursed 'certain soldier'?"

I looked sternly at the wretched man through narrowed eyes and said, "Josephus, if you will write a confession of your deed you will find favor with the Gods, and posterity will hold your records in good repute."

"And what if I have already revealed in writing the name of the soldier who was moved by a divine impulse to throw a lighted torch into the window of the sanctuary?" he asked mockingly.

"Divine impulse!" I exclaimed. "Would you consider it a divine impulse were I suddenly to seize a bar and demolish the sculptural figure of yonder smirking Jew who aids in the overthrow of his people?"

His apparent terror wrung my heart.

"But your confession," I urged in gentler tones. "Where is the written chronicle you mentioned in which 'a certain soldier' is named?"

"In my bosom the secret lies, Pliny, and there it shall stay—yes, it shall be unrevealed till twenty centuries have rolled by. Historians are sometimes permitted glimpses of the future as well as of the past!"

I lunged toward him, but he fled, his prophetic words ringing in my ears. I stood alone in the Roman Forum before the Arch of Titus, gazing at the smug countenance of the sculptured Josephus that seemed gloating over the secret within its breast.

*Within its breast!*

"By all the immortal Gods," I cried, "I understand the words of Josephus, 'In my bosom the secret lies'."

Impetuously I picked up a blunt bar that lay on the ground a few feet away, and cast a hurried glance around me. From behind the Temple of Jupiter Stator a figure was approaching. I recognized it as that of Tacitus returning from his ride with Julia. I lifted the bar for a shattering stroke that did not fall.

The beautiful arch was aging before my eyes. Corners were becoming worn away, inscriptions grew faint, and in some instances were completely obliterated. Weeds and the creepers of vines clambered over the surface, and many of the chiseled features were chipped or worn smooth by the fingers of Time. The face of Josephus was gone completely. For all posterity might know, a typically Roman visage could have topped those shoulders.

I stood aghast, but with undiminished ardor commenced to knock away the marble folds that covered the breast of Josephus. Then I felt

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## A Certain Soldier

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a restraining hand on my arm, and a voice: "Not that, friend Ebson! One does not wantonly destroy the relics of ancient art."

I turned and gazed full into the face of Lee Clayton. "But it is in there," I exclaimed, "the proof of the identity of 'a certain soldier'!"

He looked at me uncomprehendingly. A first gleam of early dawn stole across the city and found its way into the midst of the monuments and pillars that now give but a vague conception of the glory that was Rome when she was mistress of the world.

"The truth is in there," I asseverated, "and the twenty centuries have expired. Come, let us see!"

I seized the bar once again for a telling stroke, but instead dropped it helplessly at my feet as I became aware of the figure of a man observing us with penetrating gaze through the arch.

"Josephus!" I muttered hoarsely.

"That is Joseph Pollard," Lee whispered hurriedly in my ear. "It is he, my enemy, of whom I told you yesterday."

"Nevertheless, behold the 'certain soldier'," I cried triumphantly.

"You are both insane somnambulists!" shrilled the voice of Joseph Pollard, "and if either of you dares to deface this arch, I shall report you to the authorities."

There was a ring of triumph in his voice and a gleam of malice in his eye as he strode through the arch toward us. I caught the glitter of steel as he came through on our side of the monument. Then a distant shout, followed by a confused jargon and the sound of hurrying footsteps, dragged our attention to

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the approach of two officers who ran up to Pollard and seized him.

"You are under arrest," said one of the policemen, "for entering a hotel guest's room and destroying his property."

CLAYTON and I left Pollard in the safe hands of the officers and returned to the hotel. We repaired at once to Lee's room. There, strewn on the table and floor, were minute fragments of what had once been a miniature likeness of the Arch of Titus. I commenced picking the pieces off the floor and Lee proceeded to clear up the fragments from the table, where they lay scattered across the books and papers which in his hurry he had left opened and thrown about.

A sudden exclamation brought me hurriedly to his side. He was staring with bulging eyes at a page of Latin wherein the words *miles certus* seemed to jump up out of the text to meet us, and immediately above the inscription, laid by the careful hand of Fate, was a fragment of the tiny arch; the breast and head of Josephus!"

"The twenty centuries are passed," I said, "and the prophecy is fulfilled. Josephus was right, though he did all within his power to prevent its accomplishment. He was unconsciously a tool in the hands of Fate."

After a silence of some moments I asked, "Why didn't Tacitus correct his version of 'a certain soldier'? Pliny intended to tell him the revelation of Josephus and that would have made it unnecessary for two thousand years to pass before its becoming known."

Lee Clayton smiled. "If you will look up Pliny the Elder in the encyclopedia, you will learn that he died at Pompeii in the famous eruption of Mt. Vesuvius in 79 A. D."