

The Emperor's men came at midnight.

Juba heard the banging on the distant front door as his mother shook him awake.

'Juba!' she cried. 'You have to leave. Now!'

In the flickering light of a bronze oil-lamp, he could see that she was wearing his father's winter cloak even though it was a warm summer's night. Her tawny hair — the same colour as the cloak — was loose, making her seem much younger than her thirty three years. She pulled off Juba's sheet, helped him sit up and thrust his baby sister into his arms. Baby Dora was fast asleep, wrapped in his mother's blue palla.

'What's happening?' he yawned.

His mother quickly fastened a leather travelling belt around his waist, then knelt to put on his boots.

'Why are you putting on my boots?' He looked around groggily. 'Where's Tutianus?'

'The slaves have gone,' she said, standing up.

'Gone? Where?'

'Away. And you must, too.'

She pressed something into his hand. At first he thought it was a clay oil-lamp, then he saw that it was an ampulla: a baby's feeding bottle. It was made of black-glazed clay and was decorated with a grinning actor's mask to keep away evil. The nozzle end and the filling end were both sealed with beeswax, but he could still smell milk. It was full, and heavy in his hand. He stared at it stupidly.

'I don't understand. Why are you giving me Dora's feeding bottle?'

'Because I can't go with you.'

His mother took the ampulla and put it into the neck of his tunic so that it slipped down and was caught where the belt cinched his waist.

'Keep it there,' she said. 'Your body will help it stay warm.'

Then she took the tawny cloak from her shoulders and put it on him.