



Roman Britain

The secret mine

One sunny morning in 90 AD, Marcus Flavius rode past Nipius Ascanius's lead¹ mine and into the forest along a path he did not know. He loved riding in the hills west of Deva (today's City of Chester). The countryside was always so quiet and beautiful. But this morning Marcus soon felt cold in the dark forest. He thought of the warm baths in Deva and decided to go back.

Suddenly he noticed something behind the trees. It was another mine. 'Why is it so carefully hidden?' he thought to himself, and then he heard a noise. Two men, one fat and one thin, were driving a cart² full of stones out of the mine. Marcus couldn't see very well but he was sure that the fat man was Nipius Ascanius, the richest man in Deva and - it was said - the most dangerous.

'I should leave before they see me,' Marcus thought. But as he was riding away, his horse kicked a stone. The two men looked up, and then Nipius Ascanius shouted his name: 'Marcus Flavius!' Marcus didn't stop but rode away as fast as he could.

Marcus had a rich uncle in Eboracum (today's City of York). And although he was only 20, he ran³ a farm in Deva for his uncle. Marcus enjoyed being a farmer. All the work was done by slaves⁴ so he had lots of time for riding and the baths. But today there was no chance of spending the afternoon there. Nipius Ascanius had a secret lead mine in the hills. Mines had to pay taxes⁵ to the Empire but this one did not, Marcus was sure. That was why it was hidden in the forest. 'Nipius Ascanius won't be pleased that I've discovered his secret,' Marcus thought. 'It might be a good idea to go out of his way for a while and visit my uncle in Eboracum.'



At the farm his slaves packed a bag for him and he was soon ready to leave. He opened the door and was walking out just as two large men came into the garden from the road. They did not look very friendly.

'I'm Otho,' began the first.

'And I'm Rautio,' finished the second. 'Nipius wants to see you.'

'Nipius?' Marcus asked.

'Nipius Ascanius,' said Otho.

'Oh, Nipius Ascanius. Well, I'm sorry,' said Marcus, 'but tell him I'm terribly busy, so ...'

'Now,' interrupted⁶ Rautio. 'He wants to see you now.'

'And he hates waiting,' added Otho ...

'You were in the wrong place at the wrong time, Marcus Flavius, weren't you?' Nipius Ascanius had a cold voice, as cold as ice.

'But I won't tell anyone about the mine. I really won't,' Marcus said.

'You won't get the chance of telling anyone, Marcus Flavius. You see, you're going on a journey - to Luguvalium (today's City of Carlisle). The Selgovae⁷ live near there, on the other side of Hadrian's Wall⁸. That's why the wall was built. It's best to keep tribes⁹ like the Selgovae out of the Empire. You'll see that when you're a Selgovae slave. It's funny, but their slaves must like it there - they never come back ...'



Words:

lead	<i>a very soft, dark-grey metal, used especially in the past on roofs and for pipes and also for protection against radiation (x-rays)</i>
cart	<i>a small vehicle with two or four wheels that you push or pull to transport large or heavy objects on</i>
to run	<i>to be in control of</i>
slave	<i>a person who is owned by someone else and has to work for them</i>
tax	<i>money you have to pay to the government</i>
to interrupt	<i>to stop a person from speaking for a short time by something you say or do</i>
tribe	<i>a group of people, often of related families, who live together, sharing the same language, culture and history, especially those who do not live in towns or cities eg. a tribe of Amazonian Indians the Masai tribe</i>
Selgovae	<i>a tribe that lived in northern England across the border of the Roman Empire</i>
Hadrian's Wall	<i>a fortification wall built by the Romans in northern England to keep the tribes away from their territory</i>

Task:

1. What did Marcus Flavius do one sunny morning?
2. How did he feel?
3. What did he see at the hidden mine?
4. Who was Nipius Ascanius?
5. What did Marcus want to do because of Nipius Ascanius?
6. What did Otho and Rautio do?
7. What did Nipius Ascanius plan for Marcus?

Notes:
