



Epilogue The Founding of Rome

ACCORDING to legend, Aeneas did marry Lavinia, and named his new city "Lavinium" in her honour. Three years later, after seeing his Trojans well settled in Latium, mixing freely and peacefully with the Latins, Aeneas died.

For thirty years his son ruled in Lavinium, and then, as had been foretold, founded a city of his own, called "Alba Longa". Three hundred years went by, and still the descendants of Aeneas reigned secure in Alba Longa, king after king, for twelve generations. But at last serious trouble arose in the kingdom.

When King Procas died, the throne should have passed, by custom, to his elder son, Numitor, a man with several sons and one daughter, Rhea Silvia. Numitor's brother, however, a ruthless and ambitious man called Amulius, was eager to make himself king. Gathering some followers together, Amulius forced Numitor to give up his throne and go into exile in the country.

The next step Amulius took was to murder all Numitor's sons. This left only the daughter, Rhea Silvia. Amulius was not afraid of this young girl, but he wanted to make sure that she would never marry, for if she did, her husband or sons might one day seek the throne. He thought of a foolproof plan.

There was in Alba a temple sacred to the goddess Vesta, whose holy flame was tended night and day by a group of dedicated priestesses. These women lived in the temple, shut away from men, and were strictly forbidden to marry. Amulius, pretending that he was doing his niece a great honour, enrolled her in this order of Vestal Virgins, and then settled down to enjoy his reign.

The gods, however, cannot be stopped so easily. Rhea Silvia was visited secretly by Mars, the god of war, who could enter the temple, despite locked doors and solid walls. They fell in love, and before long Rhea Silvia had given birth to twin boys.

Amulius was appalled by this news: "It is a disgrace for a Vestal to bear a child. The infants must be destroyed, and the sinful mother put in prison for life."

Servants were ordered to fling the double cradle into the River Tiber at once. They did so and left quickly, glad to be free of their unpleasant duty. They did not notice that the cradle floated on the stream, and soon came to rest in the reeds by the muddy riverbank.

The hungry babies cried, and a she-wolf, coming down to drink in the river, put her head in the cradle to investigate. She lifted the babies gently out and suckled them like her own cubs.

Before long a herdsman called Faustulus, who looked after the royal flocks, came upon the astonishing sight. He exclaimed in surprise, and the wolf darted away at the sound of his voice. Faustulus took the twins home to his wife, and there, in a humble cottage, the boys grew up.

Faustulus had heard rumours about Rhea Silvia and her sons, and it did not take him long to guess that his adopted

children were King Amulius' grand-nephews. When the boys had grown into stalwart youths, he told them the story of their birth and their uncle's crime. "Your blood is royal," he said. "Your names are Romulus and Remus."

The young men led a simple, hardy life in the woods and fields, and with a band of friends, took to hunting game and chasing robbers and brigands, whose loot they seized and shared amongst themselves. In time they came to the notice of Numitor, who lived in exile not far from their haunts. Numitor, in delight, recognized the twins as his long-lost grandsons.

Together they plotted against the wicked king. With the support of their friends, they attacked the palace, captured Amulius, and put him to death. The people of Alba were not sorry to be rid of him, and welcomed Numitor back as their rightful king.

Romulus and Remus, now that their grandfather was restored to the throne, soon grew tired of living as princes in the court at Alba. They decided to build a new city by the Tiber, at the very place where Evander had first greeted Aeneas and where they themselves had been rescued as babies. Many citizens of Alba were eager to follow them, for that city was already too small for its growing population.

Unfortunately both Romulus and Remus wanted to rule as king in the new city. Their rivalry grew bitter. "The gods favour me," said Remus. "I saw six vultures in the sky, coming to salute me."

"That is nothing," retorted his brother, "Twelve vultures were sent to greet me, so it is clear that the gods favour me twice as much as you. I will be king!"



“King of what?” scoffed Remus. “These city walls are so low I can jump over them!” And he leapt over the half-built foundations. Romulus lost his temper. Seizing his sword, he killed his brother Remus.

Romulus completed the new city, and named it after himself. And that was how a descendant of Aeneas came to found the city of Rome, which rose in splendour and power to be mistress of the world.